

08/11/21 Wednesday

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Judge Rejects Attempt by Trump Allies Powell, Giuliani to Dismiss Dominion Voting's Defamation Suits
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

A US federal judge has thrown out an attempt by Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell, two lawyers retained by former US President Donald Trump's 2020 re-election campaign, to have defamation claims against them by Dominion Voting Systems dismissed.

Judge Carl Nichols of the US District Court for the District of Columbia denied Powell's and Giuliani's request on Wednesday, finding that Dominion had brought adequate claims against the them of intent to harm and that they had not adequately proven the court had no jurisdiction over them.

[Dominion filed claims](#) of defamation against both [Powell and Giuliani](#) in January after the lawyers claimed Dominion had participated in a conspiracy to fix the November 2020 US election so that Republican candidate Trump lost and Democratic candidate Joe Biden won. Seeking compensation for money spent on increasing security for its employees and for the loss of future business due to damage done to the company's reputation by their claims, Dominion sued both lawyers for \$1.3 billion each.

The 77-year-old attorney and former mayor of New York [lost his right](#) to practice law in New York state in June, due to his continued claims of election fraud. More recently, the voting machine company has also brought suits against [pro-Trump news outlets](#) Newsmax and One American News for similar claims.

Repeated audits of the ballot counts in several closely contested states have not yielded evidence of fraud, and lawsuits filed by Trump seeking recounts or dismissal of results have all [been thrown out](#) by US courts.

Trump, who lost the November election to Biden by more than 7 million votes, refused afterward to concede his defeat, claiming it was fraudulent and that the election was being stolen from him. The "stop the steal" movement reached its climax on January 6, when immediately after a rally headed by Trump outside the White House, thousands of his followers stormed the US Capitol Building while Congress was in a special session to verify results of the Electoral College's votes, temporarily dispersing Congress but failing to capture or destroy the ballots. Five people died in the assault, including a Capitol Police officer and a rioter who was shot by an officer while breaking down the US Senate doors.

Trump was impeached on charges of encouraging the insurrectionists' actions, but was acquitted in a trial after he left office. He has refused to concede his defeat.

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Texas Schools Defy Abbott's Mask Mandate Ban as Two Judges Block Order Amid Skyrocketing COVID Cases
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Texas medical officials warned state lawmakers in Tuesday testimonies that state hospitals are on the brink of catastrophe, noting the number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients has risen faster than at any point in the pandemic thus far.

A Texas judge has temporarily blocked an order by Governor Greg Abbott that would have banned mask mandates from public schools in the state. Abbott is one of several sharply conservative governors adamantly resisting new safety measures that could limit the spread of the ultra-transmissible COVID-19 Delta variant.

On Tuesday, Bexar County Civil District Court Judge Toni Arteaga sided with Bexar County and the city of San Antonio, which challenged Abbott's July 29 executive order banning state, county and municipal governments from requiring any kind of COVID-19 safety measure from citizens, from vaccination to masking and social distancing.

"[T]he path forward relies on personal responsibility rather than government mandates," [Abbott said](#) in the order. "Texans have mastered the safe practices that help to prevent and avoid the spread of COVID-19. They have the individual right and responsibility to decide for themselves and their children whether they will wear masks, open their businesses, and engage in leisure activities. Vaccines, which remain in abundant supply, are the most effective defense against the virus, and they will always remain voluntary – never forced – in the State of Texas."

However, Judge Arteaga pointed out that children under the age of 12 don't have access to the vaccine, since the Food and Drug Administration has only approved its use so far for certain age groups based on the emergency situation created by the pandemic.

"So, I do find that this is emergent, I do find that it is necessary," Arteaga said, according to local news [radio station KTSA](#), having noted earlier that "I don't do this lightly."

Dallas Blocks Indoor Mask Ban

Judge Tonya Parker of the 116th Civil District Court in Dallas also issued a slightly different block on Abbott's executive order on Tuesday when she ruled that the governor couldn't stop city officials from requiring masking indoors.

"Judge Jenkins cannot be precluded from implementing the mitigation strategies he believes sound, reliable, and backed by scientific evidence on which he relies and must be able to mitigate the damage, injury, and potential loss of life related to the COVID-19 virus," [Judge Parker wrote](#) in the order, referring to Dallas County Judge Clay Jenkins, who brought the challenge to her court.

"Judge Jenkins and the citizens of Dallas County will be irreparably harmed if Judge Jenkins is barred from engaging in mandatory mitigation practices, including face coverings and mask mandates," she added. "Face coverings and masks are an effective mitigation strategy and can further reduce the spread of COVID-19."

In justifying the restraining order he issued on Monday, Jenkins wrote on Twitter that "the enemy is not each other, [t]he enemy is the virus and we must all do all that we can to protect public health ... Ultimately, it is about saving lives and saving and protecting children."

Abbott has long been hostile to mask mandates in particular, and Texas was among the first states to drop them in early March as the US emerged from its worst wave of COVID-19 yet - a move US President Joe Biden derided as [“neanderthal thinking.”](#)

He later [threatened to sue](#) the capital city of Austin if it defied his ending of the mask mandate and when that failed and his order was struck down by a Texas judge, he issued a [new executive order](#) banning “governmental entities and officials from mandating face coverings or restricting activities in response to the COVID-19 disaster.”

The Austin school [district joined Dallas](#) on Monday in introducing a mask mandate in defiance of Abbott’s order, and [Houston’s school district](#) could do the same later this week if the school board approves the move.

Outbreak Outstrips Texas’ Abilities

Meanwhile, Abbott has continued to seek help for state institutions as the latest COVID-19 outbreak presses medical resources past their limits.

On Monday, the Texas governor [directed the Department](#) of State Health Services to appeal to other states for additional medical staff, and that the Texas Hospital Association should ask area hospitals to voluntarily postpone all elective medical procedures in order to maximize availability of hospital beds for COVID-19 patients.

Medical facilities across the state are preparing [overflow facilities](#) in tents as the number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients has exceeded 10,000 for the first time in six months.

According to US Centers for Disease Control and [Prevention data](#), the seven-day average for daily new COVID-19 cases in the state has increased by 280% over the past two weeks, from an average of roughly 4,500 per day in late July to an average of 12,500 per day this week.

Since the pandemic began, 52,471 Texans have died of COVID-19. CDC data shows that 53% of the population, or two-thirds of adults, have received at least one vaccine dose - among the highest in the South, a region that has [become the epicenter](#) for the latest outbreak in large part due to its low vaccination rates.

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The Other Yemen War: Houthi, Government Central Bank Rivalry Threatens Currency’s Collapse

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Earlier this year, the Biden administration stepped up its push for the Houthis to agree to peace talks as Houthi forces threatened to capture Ma’rib, the Yemeni government’s last stronghold in the north and the capital of an oil-rich province.

On Tuesday, the Houthi-controlled Central Bank of Yemen in Sana’a condemned the latest move by its rival central bank in Aden, controlled by the Yemeni government, to delegitimize it abroad. The banks’ ongoing duel has helped drive inflation of the Riyal and amplify the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe.

In civil war-wracked Yemen, there are competing versions of several state institutions, including Yemen’s central bank and state news agency, Saba. The Houthi-led Ansaraallah movement,

which captured the capital of Sana'a in 2014, has claimed inheritance of both institutions, but the government of Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi has duplicated both in the southern city of Aden, its de facto capital.

Rival Banks

According to a statement by the Sana'a central bank carried by the Houthi version of [Saba News Agency](#) on Tuesday, the Aden bank is pressuring foreign institutions to transfer their operations from Sana'a to Aden by creating a list of "non-compliant banks" - essentially, a blacklist.

The Aden central bank reportedly intends to force "all importing companies and commercial establishments" to stop financial or banking operations, including extending lines of credit and facilitating the transfer of goods, with banks it designates as "non-compliant," according to the statement. This, it notes, would harm the blacklisted banks' relationship with "local authorities, banks, external financial and banking institutions and other international organizations."

Hodhod, a pro-Houthi news outlet, [described the move](#) as "a way to increase the financial power of the Saudi-controlled banking system in occupied southern Yemen."

Hadi's government has aimed to undermine the old Sana'a bank abroad since at least 2016, when then-Yemeni Prime Minister Ahmed Obaid bin Dagher appealed to the International Monetary Fund to freeze the Sana'a bank's assets, arguing they were using the country's foreign exchange reserves "in an irresponsible manner," according to the [Wall Street Journal](#). [According to Arab News](#), which is published by the Saudi Research and Media Group in Riyadh, which supports Hadi's government, the Aden central bank set about attempting to bolster the Yemeni Riyal earlier this month by injecting billions into the financial system by reintroducing old bank notes.

Earlier this year, a panel of United Nations [experts accused](#) the Aden central bank of a scheme to illegally divert \$423 million in Saudi money meant to buy food and other goods into the pockets of well-connected corporate investors. However, the same report also accused the Houthis of using \$1.8 billion in aid money to support its war effort.

In 2019, the Houthi government, which calls itself the National Salvation Government, [banned use of newer](#) Aden-issued bank notes in Sana'a and other areas under its control, requiring exchange of one currency for the other at entry points and creating a severe cash crunch that helped set the present crisis in motion.

Inflation Pushes Prices Up

Arab News noted on August 4 that the Riyal was trading at 1,020 to the US dollar in the southern parts of Yemen controlled by Hadi's government, while in early July it had been 980 riyals to the dollar; before the war broke out in 2014, it was 215 riyals to the dollar.

According to Reuters, the inflation is particularly strong in the south. Last month, the news agency reported the price in Aden for the same amount of bread had doubled in a month, helping to amplify the humanitarian crisis in the country.

The decreasing value has also driven up the prices of other commodities, including fuel - a worrisome development, since outrage over the end of fuel subsidies by Hadi's government is what helped build the mass movement that propelled the Houthis to power.

"Aden's central bank has signed contracts with private companies to print 5.32 trillion Ryals over the last six years," Hashim Ismail, governor of the Sana'a central bank, [told Reuters](#). "We can fairly say that it is three times what Sana'a central bank printed in 60 years."

Rafat Al-Akhali, a fellow of practice at Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government, told Reuters the Aden government "continues to use questionable processes in payment of public salaries with no clear payroll for military and security forces."

Hadi's government, by contrast, alleges the Houthis squandered \$4 billion bank reserves on the war, while Sana'a says the money was used to import food and medicine, which have been in disastrously short supply.

Humanitarian Catastrophe

The war has been raging since March 2015, when Hadi was driven from Sana'a and fled to Riyadh, appealing to the Saudi monarchy for help against the Zaidi Shiite Houthis. The Saudis formed an international coalition of majority-Sunni nations, including the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, and Sudan, as well as the close Saudi ally of the United States, launching a disastrous war against the Houthis on air, land, and sea that has killed more than 233,000 people as of December 2020, [according to the UN](#) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) [has described](#) the situation in Yemen as "the largest humanitarian crisis in the world," noting that more than 21 million of the country's 29 million people require humanitarian assistance, especially food and medicine, which has been blocked from reaching the country by a Saudi air and naval blockade.

The US formally ended its support for Saudi offensive operations in Yemen earlier this year after US President Joe Biden took office, although he [stopped short](#) of ending overall military support for Riyadh, and has [continued to station](#) air defense systems in the country to protect against Houthi attacks.

Saudi command of the air gave the coalition a distinct advantage in the early years of the war, but more recently, the Houthis have been able to mount increasingly devastating drone and missile attacks into Saudi Arabia itself, targeting military bases and energy infrastructure, including the petroleum industry that underpins the Saudi economy and world gas prices.

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'Very Much Touch and Go': US Senator Recounts How Taiwan Delegation Hid Trip From South Korean Gov

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

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In early July, two US aircraft quietly touched down on Taiwan carrying parcels for the de facto US embassy in Taipei. Beijing denounced the actions and others like them as "salami-slicing" tactics not worthy of starting a war over individually, but cumulatively becoming more strategically decisive.

A US senator has revealed that she and two other US lawmakers had to deceive the South Korean government in order to make their highly provocative flight into Taipei in June, which

was the first time in four decades a US military aircraft touched down on Taiwan for official business.

On June 6, a lone US Air Force C-17 Globemaster III cargo transport touched down at Songshan Airport in central Taipei carrying US Sens. Dan Sullivan (R-AK), Chris Coons (D-DE), and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL). During their brief stay on the island, the trio announced the US was donating 750,000 of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccines to the Taiwanese government. The Chinese Ministry of National Defense loudly denounced the act as a "[vile political provocation](#)," as Beijing considers Taiwan to be a Chinese province in rebellion. The government in Taipei is all that remains of the Republic of China, which was defeated on the mainland by the communist Red Army in 1949, which then founded the People's Republic of China in Beijing.

Each government requires countries they have diplomatic relations with to reject the other government's claims of legitimacy. The US switched its recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1978, while South Korea switched in 1992.

As a result, [Duckworth told attendees](#) of an event at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) think tank on Tuesday that she and her fellow lawmakers had to sneak into Taiwan from South Korea.

"We got to South Korea and it was very much touch and go. We weren't sure we were going to be able to get to Taiwan. There were no commercial flights. And the administration agreed with us and actually sent a military aircraft and flew us in from a military base in South Korea to a military – to Taiwan. And, in fact, we couldn't even tell the South Koreans that we were going to Taiwan because they would – we would have placed them in a very difficult situation with the Chinese," Duckworth said at the forum.

"So, we had to drive two hours to get to a military base, get on a military flight, go to Taiwan. We're on the ground for just three hours. Never left the airport. Made the announcement, and that just turned everything around in the country in terms of the morale of the people and knowing that they were not being abandoned," she continued.

"[I]t was well worth it because the people of Taiwan deserve to know that they were not – that America would not abandon them," she later added.

The trio weren't the only American political delegation to visit the island recently, however: in 2020, then-Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar and then-Under Secretary of State Keith Krach both visited the island. However, the lawmakers' June trip was the first time a US military aircraft has landed there since official relations were cut in 1978.

Just 15 nations have retained their recognition of Taiwan into 2021, most of which are Central American, Caribbean, or Pacific Island nations under the heavy sway of Washington's will. The issue of Washington's continued support for Taiwan, despite its official recognition of Beijing as the government of China, has become an increasingly sour point for US-China relations. Under the prior presidential administration of Donald Trump, the US dramatically expanded its weapons sales to the autonomous island, with the new Biden administration continuing that trend last week with a new [\\$750 million proposed sale](#) of self-propelled artillery.

China has denounced these sales and other actions, such as [US warship transits](#) of the Taiwan Strait separating the island from mainland China, as encouraging the separatist faction of the Taiwanese government, led by President Tsai Ing-wen. In turn, Beijing has stepped up its

[military patrols](#) around the island with both aircraft and warships, demonstrating its ability to project power into the Philippine Sea using its new aircraft carrier.

"I am very much concerned that the PRC will attempt to take Taiwan," Duckworth told the CSIS conference. "What we have to do is deter them from it." "Once they start, it's much harder to repel them from territory than it is to just let them know and let them make the calculus that it is far too costly for them to even attempt to try".

Last month, she and a bipartisan group of 13 lawmakers from both the House and Senate introduced the [Taiwan Partnership Act](#), which would increase training and cooperation between Taiwanese defense forces and the US National Guard.

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Sen. Manchin Voices 'Serious Concerns' Over Fellow Dems' \$3.5 Trillion Spending Budget by [Evan Craighead](#)

Earlier on Wednesday, the US Senate voted 50-49 to adopt a budget resolution that calls for as much as \$3.5 trillion in social spending. Opponents of the budget blueprint, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), have argued that they will not support a bill with such a steep price tag.

Shortly after [Senate Democrats' budget resolution passed along party lines](#), Sen. Joe Manchin (R-WV) released a statement clarifying that while he voted 'yes,' he is opposed to Congress adding "trillions of dollars more to nearly \$29 trillion of national debt."

"I have serious concerns about the grave consequences facing West Virginians and every American family if Congress decides to spend another \$3.5 trillion," Manchin, a moderate Democrat, wrote. "Over the past year, Congress has injected more than \$5 trillion of stimulus into the American economy - more than any time since World War II - to respond to the pandemic."

The US senator from West Virginia argued that rising inflation rates and the "millions" of jobs that remain unfilled in the US "are not indications of an economy that requires trillions of dollars in additional spending."

He added that it would be "irresponsible" to continue spending at such a level without consideration of the negative effects the growing national debt will have on future generations. The Democrats' budget plan calls for increased spending on a number of key priorities, including immigration reform and climate change. It also seeks to establish new social programs like subsidized home health care for the elderly and universal preschool education.

Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), another moderate Democrat, similarly expressed to the Arizona Republic last month that she will support the procedural start, but not a bill with such a steep cost.

"After reviewing the Senate Budget Committee's outline, I have told Senate leadership and [US President Joe] Biden that I support many of the goals in this proposal to continue creating jobs, growing American competitiveness and expanding economic opportunities for Arizonans," she wrote in a July 28 statement.

"I have also made clear that while I will support beginning this process, I do not support a bill that costs \$3.5 trillion -- and in the coming months, I will work in good faith to develop this legislation with my colleagues and the administration to strengthen Arizona's economy and help Arizona's everyday families get ahead."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) has acknowledged that those within his caucus have varying opinions on the spending bill's price tag.

"I can tell you this on reconciliation: One, we are going to all come together to get something done. And two, we'll have every part of the Biden plan in a big, bold, robust way," he told reporters.

Sinema and Manchin are the only two Democratic senators who have come out against spending toward the higher end of the framework. Their opposition to the increases of social spending mirror that of the Senate Minority Leader, who has said the Democrats' proposal is full of "historically reckless taxing and spending."

"Republicans do not currently have the votes to spare American families this nightmare," [McConnell said during Tuesday remarks on the chamber floor](#). "But we will debate. We will vote. We will stand up and be counted. And the people of this country will know exactly which Senators fought for them."

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German Police Suspect Anti-Vaxx Nurse May Have Swapped Thousands of COVID Vaccines With Saline

by [Evan Craighead](#)

Wilhelmshaven police officer Peter Beer explained during a news conference earlier this week that, based on witness statements, there was "a reasonable suspicion of danger" for those who were scheduled to receive a COVID vaccine jab at a center in Friesland, Germany, earlier this year.

The Lower Saxony State Health Office and local authorities are calling for the re-vaccination of thousands of individuals who thought they were administered the COVID-19 vaccine at the Roffhausen Immunization Center in northwest Germany between April 20 and May 3.

"Today I had a sad duty to inform around 8,600 potentially affected people that it is not possible to rule out that there are also people among you who could have received saline ... instead of their vaccination at their vaccination date," [wrote Friesland District Councillor Sven Ambrosy on Facebook](#).

"I'm totally shocked by the incident. The district of Friesland will do everything possible to ensure that the affected people receive their vaccination protection as soon as possible."

Authorities detailed that an employee at the immunization center recognized something was awry when they saw a nurse fill up six syringes. At the time, the suspect claimed she was attempting to correct a mishap with a vial.

According to investigator Beer, authorities "found a Facebook post written by the accused, who posted extensively" about her anti-vaccine views.

"We then found three or four of her WhatsApp chats from April 21, right before the act, so we suspect that she did it," [he said, as reported by Euronews](#).

Claudia Shroeder, a member of the crisis intervention team, explained that there is "no danger whatsoever" associated with repeated vaccinations, so they are encouraging those contacted to "get vaccinated again just to be on the safe side."

Matthias Pulz, president of the Lower Saxony State Health Office, also issued a similar statement, arguing that this "is the only way to ensure complete vaccination protection" — "even if persons have already been correctly vaccinated twice."

The matter is being probed by a German police unit on politically motivated crimes.

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CDC Pushing Pregnant Women to Get COVID Vax as FDA Reportedly Nears Limited Booster Shot Approval

by [Evan Craighead](#)

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the US' leading infectious disease expert, announced last week that US President Joe Biden's administration intends to procure COVID-19 vaccine booster shots for "vulnerable," immunocompromised Americans "as quickly as possible."

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle Walensky stressed in a [Wednesday news release](#) that all pregnant and breastfeeding women get vaccinated against COVID-19 "as we face the highly transmissible Delta variant."

This comes as the US is seeing "severe outcomes from COVID-19 among unvaccinated pregnant people," she said, without going into detail.

"Evidence about the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccination during pregnancy has been growing. These data suggest that the benefits of receiving a COVID-19 vaccine outweigh any known or potential risks of vaccination during pregnancy," [state the updated recommendations](#).

The CDC emphasized that, at the current moment, there is no evidence to suggest COVID-19 vaccines cause fertility issues in women.

As the US continues to push for unvaccinated folks to get their jabs, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is close to announcing the approval of COVID-19 booster shots for immunocompromised Americans - which make up around [2.7% of the US adult population](#).

"The FDA is closely monitoring data as it becomes available from studies administering an additional dose of the authorized COVID-19 vaccines to immunocompromised individuals," the FDA told Fox News on Wednesday.

"The agency, along with the CDC, is evaluating potential options on this issue, and will share information in the near future."

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Powerful Magnitude 7.1 Earthquake Rattles Philippines, USGS Reveals
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Sitting off the ring of fire, the Philippines is no stranger to seismic activity. One of the most disastrous earthquakes that shook the nation took place in 2012 after a magnitude 6.7 unfolded and led to the deaths of dozens of individuals and prompted injuries to over a hundred others. Many are still considered missing.

A massive magnitude 7.1 earthquake struck the Philippines early Thursday, according to readings by the United States Geological Service.

Although the US agency initially issued a [tsunami warning](#) for the archipelagic country and nearby Indonesia, the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology has [since stated](#) that there is no longer a tsunami threat to the Philippines.

Details released by the USGS indicate that the quake struck at a depth of 50 kilometers at a distance of just 66 kilometers southeast of Bobon, Philippines. Initial readings of the the quake came in at a magnitude 6.1 and later upgraded to a magnitude 7.2 quake, before being downgraded to 7.1.

[Testimonial](#) obtained by the European-Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC) indicate the powerful earthquake was felt strongly in the nearby Lupon municipality, but less intense in Cogon, which sits about 130 kilometers from the epicenter.

"The land was totally shaking," one person situated about 144 kilometers from the epicenter noted in the EMSC database. "I felt badly dizzy and even until now I feel that the land is still shaking."

No reports of injuries or structural damages have yet emerged. The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology has stated that damaged and aftershocks are expected.

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'Everybody Outside the State is B****ing': Newsom Loses His Cool Amid Talks on Recall, State Issues

by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Since the early 1900s, when California lawmakers made it easier than in any other state to initiate recall measures, there have been nearly 200 recall attempts against state officeholders, a statistics that notes every governor for the Golden State has faced at least one such effort. Now, the state's one-term governor is next on the list.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom recently lost his cool while talking to reporters about everything from the state's crime rates, surging wildfires and, of course, the latest Republican-led effort to boot him from the governorship.

The tense moments came during an [August 5 interview](#) held by the Sacramento Bee that involved a handful of local journalists with inquiries about the state's handling of wildfire controls, water management and the ongoing recall effort, among other headlining topics.

At the top of the discussion, Newsom was asked to weigh in on the looming recall election, which is scheduled to take place on September 14, and offer his take on how the initiative may affect future terms should he be forced out of office.

"I think it will be quite pronounced for many, many years. I think it will be felt all across the country," Newsom said of the potential circumstances that could emerge. "I think that people really haven't thought [the recall] through, I don't think they're asking that question, I don't think the national Democratic Party is asking themselves that question."

The governor underscored that the recall push may likely prompt the effective "weaponization of the recall process" in any instance that the head of a state issues legislation that is opposed by a select group of residents.

"[The process] will have profound consequences nationwide, and go to not just politics but to policy and policymaking. ... its repercussions would be felt next year in the governor's race for election and beyond," he added.

However as the roughly hourlong interview continued, Newsom was visibly becoming more passionate about the issues being discussed, repeatedly slamming his hand on a desk. Local outlet [California Globe](#) counted 9 instances in which the embattled governor used the term "damn" during his impassioned remarks.

It wasn't until the very end of the interview, when San Luis Obispo Tribune reporter Stephanie Finucane asked Newsom on realities of the lacking California dream for working-class families, that he went off the deep end and spoke plainly but sternly about the current situation.

"Guys, forgive me, I know I am a little pointed today but I've been taking a lot from you folks for a lot of months. I should be able to express myself, too, but I do it with deep pride in this state, as a Californian," he told reporters on the video call. "I'm a future ex-governor. It could happen in a few weeks, it could happen in a few years. I love this damn state."

Taking a quick dig at Texas and Florida by saying that California tops both in jobs creations, Newsom stressed that his administration has seen working-class Americans in Texas "pay more in taxes than those living in California."

"I don't know why that doesn't get more damn attention cause I care about working folks," he said matter-of-factly before highlighting that tax-paying, middle-class Americans are taking home more money at the end of the day as the state has "tripled its earned income tax credit."

"I'm proud of the fact that three-quarters of tax filers are getting a tax rebate - the largest in American history: \$12 billion," he continued. "I'm proud of the fact that small businesses are getting \$4 billion in grants, not loans. I'm proud of the fact that we paid 100% of back rent... No one comes close."

The heated remarks saw Newsom go on to blast the likes of US Rep. Devin Nunes (R-CA) and fellow GOP members within the state, saying that "it'd be damn nice if our homegrown team started focusing on what's right."

"Everybody outside the state is b****ing about this state because of our success, and I'm proud of it... There's a lot to be proud of," he concluded.

With a little more than a month before the recall election is due to be held, the pool of opposing candidates is continuing to grow. At present, those contending against Newsom include reality TV star and former Olympian Caitlyn Jenner, conservative radio host Larry Elder and former San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer, among dozens of other contenders.

Prior to the latest recall initiative against Newsom, there were five other such attempts that were raised by three different sets of critics who voiced complaints about the governor's progressive stances from policies on the death penalty, immigration, taxes and gun control.

The sixth attempt, which caught on in 2020, gained steam within the state over backlash from Newsom's COVID-19 mandates, his maskless dinner at an exclusive restaurant during the pandemic and the multibillion-dollar fraud scandal at the state unemployment department. Newsom has maintained that the recall effort is wholly driven by a conservative attack on the state's liberal policies.

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Oregon Declares State of Emergency as Devastating Heat Wave Consumes Region
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Between deadly wildfires and sweltering heat waves, residents in Oregon and neighboring states have endured repeated exhaustion from the sun's strong rays amid an unprecedented spike in hot temperatures across the US Pacific Northwest. Now, Oregonians are feeling the heat yet again.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown recently implemented a state of emergency, as the US Pacific Northwest is undergoing yet another heat wave weeks after scorching temperatures forced many to seek refuge at city cooling centers.

The [executive order](#), which was issued on Tuesday, is expected to remain in effect through August 20. The directive had initially stated it would run through August 15 before Brown informed the public on Wednesday of the extended schedule.

"Another heat wave is coming, with triple digit temperatures starting as soon as today," Brown said in a Wednesday address to Oregonians. "I've declared a state of emergency for extreme heat through August 20 to ensure resources are available to all levels of government to keep Oregonians safe and healthy through the coming days."

With a plea for residents to "treat these hot temperatures seriously," Brown further called on family and neighbors to check in on the elderly and vulnerable individuals to ensure they are aware of the nearest cooling centers in their respective cities.

Additionally, Brown reiterated the possibility of wildfires such as the monstrous [Bootleg wildfire](#) that burned hundreds of thousands of acres within the Beaver State, and urged the public to "do their part to prevent fires from starting and to help keep our communities and firefighters safe."

Forecasts released by the National Weather Service's Portland station revealed that northwestern Oregon and southwestern Washington state were going to be smacked with sweat-inducing temperatures for the remainder of the week.

In fact, data suggests that Thursday and Friday are going to be the two hottest days for the region, as temperatures are forecasted to reach a boiling 103 degrees Fahrenheit in some areas. Figures are seen plummeting slightly starting on Saturday.

Although the US Pacific Northwest typically ranges in the 80-degree range weather during the summer months, temperatures have continued to break records in recent years, as well as raise concerns about the state's lack of homes with functioning air-conditioning units.

Earlier this year, when the region was hit with another [unrelenting heat wave](#), many residents died from heat-related stresses. Washington and Oregon previously confirmed that they had recorded over 100 fatalities.

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The One About Friends: Iconic TV Couple Jennifer Aniston, David Schwimmer Are Not Dating, Says Rep
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Earlier reports suggested the on-again-off-again TV couple were in fact romantically together in real life after the actors revealed during the recent HBO Max reunion special that they were into each other throughout the filming of the famed sitcom "Friends."

A representative for American actor David Schwimmer has ruined dreams and trashed the hopes of many "Friends" fans after recently confirming that earlier reports about Schwimmer and former co-star Jennifer Aniston dating are untrue.

An unidentified representative for Schwimmer relayed the hope-shattering revelation to the [UK Sun](#) on Wednesday, underscoring that there is absolutely "no truth" to rumors that the pair of actors were indeed going steady.

Rumors began to surface about the faux relationship on Tuesday after an [unnamed source](#) told the Closer magazine that Schwimmer and Aniston were officially "together" after rekindling a so-called "spark" the two had while filming "Friends," which they detailed during the show's recent reunion special.

"After the reunion, it became clear that reminiscing over the past had stirred up feelings for both of them and that chemistry they'd always had to bury was still there. They began texting immediately after filming and, just last month, David flew from his home in New York to see Jen in LA," the source had claimed at the time.

"They've been spending time at Jen's home, where she's cooked dinners in the evenings, and have enjoyed quality time together, chatting and laughing. They were also spotted drinking wine, deep in conversation, as they walked around one of Jen's favourite vineyards in Santa Barbara, where it was clear there was lots of chemistry between them."

The former "Friends" co-stars initially grabbed the attention of fans on their long-rumored romance during the HBO Max-exclusive reunion, in which both had admitted they were crushing on one another during the show's production, but never sealed the deal on account of being in committed relationships at the time.

Alas, this was not the one where he's her lobster.

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Biden to Call on Congress to Lower Prescription Drug Prices – White House

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden is set to urge Congress later on Thursday to take measures to lower prices for prescription drugs as part of his plan to make medical care more affordable, the White House said on Thursday.

“Today, President Biden is laying out his vision for reducing the high cost of prescription drugs. As part of his Build Back Better agenda, he’s calling on Congress to address this crisis and allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices, significantly reducing costs for millions of Americans,” White House said in a release.

The new plan includes measures to ensure Medicare can negotiate prices for a group of expensive drugs that are not subject to any market competition, the release said.

The new drug price policy will also penalize those drug companies that raise their prices faster than inflation and establish a maximum amount that Medicare beneficiaries have to pay out-of-pocket for prescription drugs each year, according to the release.

In 2019, Senators Chuck Grassley and Ron Wyden reached a deal on a bipartisan bill, which was never passed, to cut drug prices, which limited price increases for prescription drugs to the rate of inflation but did not envisage an option for Medicare to negotiate lower prices.

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US Weekly Jobless Claims Stay Below 400,000 as COVID Headwinds Ease - Labor Dept

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - US jobless claims remained below the key 400,000 mark for a second week in a row, according to Labor Department data on Thursday that suggested continued labor market recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

“In the week ending August 7, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 375,000, a decrease of 12,000 from the previous week’s revised level,” the department said in a statement.

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RPT - Biden Caused Border Chaos by Vowing to End Trump Rules, Surge to Worsen - Ex-Intel Analyst

EL PASO, August 11 (Sputnik) - More than a million migrants were convinced to make the trek to the US southern border after President Joe Biden promised to remove certain Trump-era policies that prevented migrants from abusing the asylum system and the crisis is expected to continue worsening in the coming months, former Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) intelligence analyst Todd Bensman told Sputnik.

Illegal crossings on the US southern border have hit a 20-year high under Biden. In July, the US set another monthly record with 210,000 migrant encounters on the border, according to government data, pushing the total for the previous twelve months to over 1.4 million.

"[The] Biden Administration caused this directly by messaging to the world of aspiring immigrants that it would not remove families and unaccompanied minors, would propose a general amnesty for illegal aliens, and would end almost all deportation operations in the US interior," Bensman said. "Those very public promises launched a million illegal immigrant ships." Bensman expects monthly apprehensions on the US southern border to soon reach 300,000 or more if the current trend continues.

"Once the Biden administration was in office, it immediately followed through on that troika of policies, plus many others removing barriers [Donald] Trump had put in place," Bensman said.

"That very sharply escalated illegal immigration. Since then, the administration has said and done nothing to reverse its policies and reinstitute deterrence-based ones that had been working very well. So the crisis will continue to escalate month by month."

Migrants are only willing to risk large smuggling and travel fees when they are reasonably certain the investment will pay off with successful entry into the United States, Bensman said. Bensman recommends immediately expelling migrants back to Mexico to await their immigration court proceedings, similar to the Trump administration's Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) program, which was terminated in June by the Biden administration.

He also said the administration's mission to address the root causes of migration from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador will likely be ineffective.

"Even if an effort to rebuild three countries in Central America were to work really well and create economic prosperity in those countries for all, many years would be necessary for it to begin deterring emigration," Bensman said. "So addressing root causes in those countries is largely irrelevant to the current border crisis."

Bensman also supports the construction of a new border wall, saying the infrastructure helps stop migrants.

Biden, in one of his first actions as US president, issued an executive order to halt all border wall projects that were carried over from the Trump administration.

Bensman pointed out that the current border crisis also presents a national security threat to the United States.

"Migrants from all over the world are pouring through the border, including from Middle Eastern countries where terrorist groups operate," Bensman said.

Bensman worked with the DPS Intelligence and Counterterrorism Division in concert with US federal security agencies to identify and mitigate terror threats. He is now the Senior National Security Fellow at the Center for Immigration Studies.

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RPT - US Civil Rights Groups Escalate Pressure on Biden to Keep Prisoners at Home Amid Pandemic

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik), Barrington M. Salmon - A coalition of criminal justice activists is upping its campaign to prevent the Biden administration from forcing thousands of inmates to return to prison as COVID-19 infections continue to surge, Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM) President Kevin Ring told Sputnik.

Last week FAMM, along with other civil rights groups, urged the Justice Department to reverse a Trump administration decision to send nearly 4,000 inmates back to prison because they allegedly did not meet home confinement eligibility requirements.

"We sent a letter to DOJ [Department of Justice] but we have more coming in terms of the campaign," Ring said. "We have a six-figure ad campaign [and] Color of Change is doing newspaper ads and we have a national call-in day."

The Trump administration's Justice Department, Ring added, had issued the legal ruling in response to an inquiry from the Bureau of Prisons, which the civil rights groups have argued does not have the authority to grant or revoke home confinement.

Ring said when they found out about the order in January "it sent shockwaves through the community."

"Last year was the worst year I've seen to be in prison. People were stuck in cells for 23 hours a day, there were no visits for a year, prisons were understaffed, some people got no meals and there were a few hundred deaths because of COVID," Ring said.

In addition to FAMM, the letter sent to the Justice Department last week was signed by the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and four other civil rights and advocacy groups.

The United States leads the world in putting its citizens and residents in prison with 2 million people incarcerated at an annual cost of \$80 billion a year. Criminal justice advocates and activists contend that home confinement offers a more humane and economical alternative to overcrowded and under-staffed prisons.

The daily covid case count in the United States has spiked by nearly 400% within the past 30 days, with most infections attributed to the Delta variant affecting unvaccinated individuals.

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Texas Governor Threatens to Sue Schools, Local Officials Who Defy Ban on Mask Mandate

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - Texas Governor Greg Abbott said the state will file a lawsuit against any schools, public universities, or local government officials who defy his ban on mask mandates.

"Any school district, public university, or local government official that decides to defy GA-38 - which prohibits gov't entities from mandating masks - will be taken to court," Abbott said on Wednesday.

Abbott added that the way forward relies on personal responsibility, not government mandates. The Texas Department of State Health Services said there are currently 10,463 individuals hospitalized across the state due to COVID-19. Last week, 10,332 new confirmed cases and 64 deaths were reported across Texas, the agency said.

Earlier on Wednesday, Abbott said more than 2,500 out-of-state medical personnel are deploying Texas to help local hospitals reaching capacity amid a new wave of novel coronavirus cases.

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Texas to Deploy 2,500 Out-of-State Medical Workers Amid Rise in COVID-19 Cases - Governor

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - More than 2,500 out-of-state medical personnel are deploying to the state of Texas to help local hospitals dealing with a new wave of novel coronavirus cases, Governor Greg Abbott said in a statement.

"Over 2,500 out-of-state medical personnel are being deployed across Texas to help hospitals mitigate the recent rise in COVID-19 cases," Abbott said on Wednesday. "This first deployment of personnel will be fully funded by the state through September 30."

Abbott urged Texans to get the vaccine in order to bolster the state's efforts to combat the disease, adding that they are safe and effective.

Texas currently has 10,463 people in local hospitals being treated for COVID-19, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services. The state health agency said healthcare facilities in the state are reaching capacity.

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Trudeau, Von Der Leyen Agree to Coordinate on Belarus Sanctions - PMO

TORONTO, August 11 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen discussed coordination on sanctions against Belarus, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said.

"Prime Minister Trudeau and President von der Leyen expressed concern over ongoing human rights abuses in Belarus, and the leaders agreed to continue to coordinate responses, including through sanctions," PMO said in a readout of the conversation on Wednesday.

Canada imposed its fifth round of sanctions against Belarus on Monday, having already sanctioned 72 Belarusian officials and five entities under the Special Economic Measures Act to

that point. Minsk has condemned the “unilateral coercive measures” taken by Ottawa as well as Washington and London, who imposed similar sanctions.

Trudeau and von der Leyen also condemned the sentences handed down to two Canadian nationals in China.

Earlier in the day, a Chinese court in the city of Dandong sentenced Spavor to 11 years in prison for espionage, a day after a Liaoning province court upheld death sentence for Canadian Robert Schellenberg, who was convicted in China on drug smuggling charges.

“Prime Minister Trudeau and President von der Leyen expressed their strong opposition to the decisions by Chinese courts to uphold a death sentence against Robert Schellenberg, and to convict and sentence Michael Spavor,” the statement said.

The two leaders committed to pressing on with efforts to combat arbitrary detention, the PMO added.

Trudeau and von der Leyen also tackled the issue of climate change following a string of devastating wildfires, floods and heatwaves in Canada and Europe, the readout said, vowing to “raise global ambition” ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow.

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Trump Allies Lose Bid to Dismiss Dominion Voting Systems Defamation Lawsuit - Filing

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - US District Judge Carl Nichols denied a motion to dismiss the defamation lawsuit filed against Trump allies Rudy Giuliani, Sydney Powell, and Mike Lindell, court documents revealed.

Nichols said that Dominion lost profits with adequate specificity and their case has grounds to survive the motion to dismiss, according to the decision filed on Wednesday.

The defendants are all accused of causing damage to Dominion by publicizing defamatory allegations that voting machines produced by the company were involved in a scheme to steal the 2020 presidential election away from then-candidate President Donald Trump.

The lawsuit, first filed against Powell in January, alleges that Dominion employees were stalked harassed, and received death threats due to the conspiracies, requiring them to spend money on remedying the defamation and protecting the lives of its workers, as well as on harm in the form of lost profits and damage to its name, reputation, and goodwill.

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Blinken Urges Poland's Duda Not to Sign Bill Restricting Holocaust Restitution Process

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Polish President Andrzej Duda to not sign a bill passed by the parliament that would restrict the property restitution process for victims of the Holocaust and their families.

"We are deeply concerned that Poland's parliament passed legislation today severely restricting the process for Holocaust survivors and their families, as well as other Jewish and non-Jewish property owners, to obtain restitution for property wrongfully confiscated during Poland's communist era," Blinken said in a press release on Wednesday. "We urge that President Duda not sign the bill into law."

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UPDATE - Huawei CFO Extradition About 'Dishonesty,' Misstatements to HSBC 'Essence of Fraud'— Crown

TORONTO, August 11 (Sputnik) - The extradition request for Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou is about dishonesty in commercial dealings, Crown attorney Robert Frater told a British Columbia Supreme Court judge on Wednesday, stressing that the alleged misrepresentations made to HSBC bank are the "essence of fraud."

Wednesday marked the first day of committal hearings, where Associate Justice Heather Holmes will decide whether or not to proceed with the United States' extradition request. The US Justice Department alleges that Meng committed fraud by misleading HSBC into approving more than \$100 million in transactions that contravened US sanctions against Iran from 2010 to 2014 via the Tehran-based shell company Skycom.

"We say this case is a case about dishonest commercial dealings," Frater told the courtroom, stressing that Meng's alleged misrepresentations to the Bank are the "essence of fraud."

The United States alleges Meng personally assured HSBC executives that Huawei and its partners, including Skycom, were in compliance with international sanctions on Iran. According to a PowerPoint presentation admitted as evidence, Huawei also made assurances that Skycom was no longer under its control, despite the opposite being true.

The meeting between Meng and HSBC executives was spurred by a series of Reuters articles, which alleged that Skycom was selling telecommunications equipment in contravention of US sanctions and revealed the true nature of the relationship between Huawei and Skycom.

"The evidence of dishonesty in the case, we say, is abundantly clear," Frater said, stressing that Meng was "faithful to Huawei's script" regarding the technology giant's relationship with Skycom. When Holmes questioned why a multinational financial conglomerate such as HSBC, which houses departments dedicated to ensuring compliance, would take Meng's assurances at face value, Frater said the executive's stature mattered.

"When you send the CFO to the bankers to try and persuade them that there's no risk, it certainly sends a message," the Crown attorney said.

The British Columbia Supreme Court judge also noted that she had "great difficulty" understanding how the transactions in question contravened the United States' sanctions against Iran, asking whether all financial transactions with Tehran are prohibited by the embargoes.

The US sanctions do not preclude all financial dealings with Iran, Frater explained, conceding that the US Justice Department's records of the case do not clearly define sanctionable

transactions. The lead prosecutor, however, did put the onus on Meng's role, saying that knowing the scope of the limitations is part of the Huawei executive's direct responsibilities. Meng remains under house arrest in Vancouver, although is free to traverse the region in the company of state-imposed guards outside of her 11:00 p.m to 6:00 a.m. curfew.

The final arguments are expected to wrap up on August 20.

Holmes is expected to give her recommendation on the United States' extradition request to AGC and Justice Minister David Lametti later in the fall. Lametti has the final say on the request and has the right to refuse extradition in exceptional circumstances.

Analysts say Lametti's decision could hinge on developments in China, where the fate of multiple Canadians is held in the balance.

The hearings in Vancouver are being held against the backdrop of judgments in China, where a court upheld the death penalty for Canadian Robert Schellenberg for drug smuggling and a separate court sentenced businessman Michael Spavor to 11 years for espionage.

Spavor and Michael Kovrig, the other Canadian national held in China on espionage charges, have been in Chinese custody for over 900 days. Ottawa maintains that the "arbitrary" detentions came in retaliation for Canada's arrest of Meng.

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US Democrats Favor Free College Tuition While Age, Education Divide Republicans - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - US adults generally support making tuition free at public colleges and universities for all US students, albeit with sizable partisan and demographic differences, a new poll by the PEW Research Center revealed.

"Among all US adults, 63 percent favor making tuition at public colleges free, including 34 percent who strongly favor the proposal. Slightly more than a third oppose tuition-free college (36 percent), with 20 percent strongly opposed," a press release explaining the poll said on Wednesday.

Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents overwhelmingly favor making college tuition free for all American students (85 percent). While 63 percent of Republicans and Republican leaners oppose free college while 36 percent support the idea, the release said.

However, Republicans under age 30 are nearly twice as likely as those over 65 to support free college (45 percent versus 23 percent), the release added.

In addition, Republicans with college degrees mostly oppose making free tuition all American students, while the proposal draws more support from Republicans who do not have a four-year degree, according to the release.

PEW surveyed a panel of 10,221 US adults from July 8-18, 2021. The panel is weighted to be representative of the US adult population by gender, race, ethnicity, partisan affiliation and education. The poll has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 1.5 percentage points.

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EU Studying Potential Side Effects of Pfizer, Moderna Vaccines - Assessment Report

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - The European Medicines Agency (EudraVigilance) said in a report that it is looking into whether messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines produced by the pharmaceutical firms Pfizer and Moderna may have caused possible side effects in individuals who received those shots throughout Europe.

Some 330 million doses of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines have been administered throughout countries represented in the European Economic Area, the report said.

"As of 29 July 2021, a total of 244,807 cases of suspected side effects with Comirnaty [mRNA vaccines] were spontaneously reported to EudraVigilance from EU/EEA countries; 4,198 of these reported a fatal outcome," the European drug regulator said on Wednesday.

The side effects include a type of skin rash known as erythema multiforme; kidney disorders known as glomerulonephritis; a nephrotic syndrome; and menstrual disorders.

Pfizer and Moderna vaccines use messenger RNA technology instructing the cells to produce the coronavirus spike protein. However, the spike protein does not cause COVID-19.

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Hunter Biden Claims Russians Stole His Laptop While He Was Close to Overdosing - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - A new video obtained by the newspaper Daily Mail shows US President Joe Biden's son, Hunter, telling a prostitute that his laptop was stolen by Russians while he was close to overdosing on drugs in a Las Vegas hotel in 2018.

According to the video posted online on Wednesday, Hunter Biden said he believes his computer was taken by some Russian drug dealers with whom he partied in Las Vegas. This is the third laptop belonging to the presidents son that gone missing.

At some point in the video, Hunter Biden tells the prostitute the allegedly stolen laptop contained many compromising sex videos of him.

"They have videos of me doing this," he said referring to videotaped sex in the hotel room.

"They have videos of me doing crazy f***ing sex f***ing, you know."

Hunter Biden also replied in the affirmative when the prostitute asked him whether he was worried the alleged Russians would try to blackmail him.

In 2020, Fox News reported that the FBI was in possession of another laptop belonging to Hunter Biden. The media outlet maintained the laptop contained controversial emails regarding Hunter's overseas business dealings after the device was reported found at a local computer shop in the US state of Delaware.

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US Embassy in Afghanistan Could Be Evacuated By End of August - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - The US embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, could be evacuated as soon as the end of this month, Politico reported.

The report quoted three persons familiar with the situation in Afghanistan who said internal discussions are underway about closing the US embassy in Kabul and one claiming the diplomatic facility could be evacuated by the end of August.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik)

US-BELARUS DIPLOMATIC DISPUTE

* Belarus is suspending negotiations on all new joint projects and programs with the United States until trust between the two countries is restored, Foreign Ministry spokesman Anatoly Glaz told Sputnik on Wednesday.

* Belarus has withdrawn its earlier consent on the appointment of Julie Fisher as the United States ambassador in Minsk, Glaz said.

* The Belarusian Foreign Ministry has proposed to the United States to reduce the number of its embassy staff to five people until September 1, Glaz said.

* The United States is disappointed with the state of relations with Belarus and believes Minsk is responsible for the deterioration following the imposition of new limits on the number of US embassy personnel, US Department of State spokesperson Ned Price said.

INTERNATIONAL TALKS ON AFGHANISTAN

* US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad will conduct separate meetings with the Afghan government and Taliban (banned in Russia) negotiations teams in Doha to facilitate dialogue amid escalating violence, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Wednesday.

* Nearly 390,000 people have become internally displaced by the fighting in Afghanistan since the beginning of 2021, with a huge spike in numbers observed since May, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

* The Biden administration does not rely on anonymous reports that claim Afghanistan will fall to the Taliban movement (banned in Russia) within the next 90 days but closely monitors the deteriorating security environment in parts of the country, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

* The Russian Foreign Ministry said it was concerned about the degradation of the situation in eastern Ukraine, as OSCE Special Monitoring Mission has recorded about 1,000 cases of ceasefire violations since the beginning of August, and more than ten residents of the region were killed in these attacks.

* Kiev is trying to create the illusion of broad support for its international drills and often significantly overstate the number of countries participating in military exercises, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

* Kiev's statements about the possibility of deploying US air defense systems in Ukraine are provocative and do not meet the interests of its people, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

US-RUSSIA DEFENSE TALKS

* Russian Defense Minister Gen. Sergei Shoigu discussed over the telephone with his US counterpart Lloyd Austin the results of bilateral consultations on strategic stability, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Wednesday.

* Austin and Shoigu spoke by phone to discuss risk-reduction efforts following bilateral strategic stability talks in Geneva, Defense Department spokesman John Kirby said.

SPY CASE IN GERMANY

* The German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution refused to provide a comment to Sputnik on the detention of a UK citizen suspected of spying for the Russian intelligence, as the investigation in the case continues.

* The Russian embassy in Germany has not yet received any official information regarding the detention of a UK citizen in Berlin on suspicions for collaborating with the Russian intelligence.

* The Supreme Court of Germany ruled to arrest a citizen of the United Kingdom who is suspected of spying for the Russian special services, the German General Prosecutor's Office said.

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US Civil Rights Groups Escalate Pressure on Biden to Keep Prisoners at Home Amid Pandemic

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US Blue Chip, Industrial Stocks Hit Record Highs Wednesday as Inflation Underwhelms

NEW YORK, August 11 (Sputnik) - US blue chip and industrial stocks hit a record high on Wednesday, their second in three days, after underwhelming data on inflation suggested to investors that the Federal Reserve might not be rushed into rolling back the stimulus it provides to the economy.

The S&P 500, which groups the top 500 stocks on the New York Stock Exchange, hit an all-time high of 4,449 before settling at 4,448, for a gain of 11 points or 0.2 percent on the day.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the broadest US equity barometer on the New York Stock Exchange that lists mostly industrial stocks, also made a historic peak at 35,501 points. It finished the session at 35,301 for a gain of 220 points or 0.6 percent.

Big Tech stocks, however, fell as investors dropped them in favor of undervalued industrial-type names on the Dow.

The Nasdaq Composite, which includes tech giants such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, closed down 23 points, or 0.2 percent, to 14,765.

Stocks mostly rallied after the Labor Department reported that the US Consumer Price Index, a measure of inflation widely followed by many economists, grew by 5.4 percent over a one-year period in July - virtually unchanged from June.

"Stock markets are making decent gains, buoyed by the latest inflation data from the US which eased in July," said Craig Erlam, analyst at New York-based brokerage OANDA.

The US economy itself grew by an annualized rate of 6.5 percent in the second quarter of 2021, after a 3.5 percent contraction for all of 2020 due to COVID-19 related shutdowns and other disruptions.

The Federal Reserve believes growth for all of 2021 would remain at 6.5 percent. Its problem though is higher-than-expected inflation as prices of almost everything have soared from the lows of the pandemic. The Federal Reserve's preferred inflation gauge, the core Personal Consumption Expenditure Index, expanded by 3.5 percent in the year to June - its most in 30 years.

The central bank has been providing the economy and markets with \$120 billion in monthly stimulus since the COVID outbreak, and indicated lately that it could taper that provision or even raise interest rates, which have been at a record low of between zero and 0.25 percent.

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Immigration Investigators Find 183-Foot Tunnel Under US-Mexico Border - Homeland Security

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - US immigration agents found a 183-foot long tunnel under the US-Mexico border that was dug by drug traffickers, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Last week, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) special agents, working with Mexican authorities, discovered a 183-foot long subterranean tunnel in Mexicali, Baja California, near the international border," DHS said. The tunnel was discovered inside a residence near the border and is equipped with electricity, ventilation, a rail system, and a hoist. It was dug nearly 22 feet beneath the ground and extends three feet over the border onto the US side, although there is no exit there.

"These types of tunnels enable drug traffickers to conduct illicit activities virtually undetected across the U.S.-Mexico border," Special Agent in charge of HSI San Diego Cardell T. Morant. He said that shutting down tunnels like this one deals major blows to drug trafficking organizations by denying them the ability to smuggle drugs, weapons, and people across the border.

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US Sentences 2 Researchers for Falsifying Drug Trial Data - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - A nurse practitioner and a drug trial coordinator received jail terms of 46 months and 30 months respectively for falsifying data related to clinical drug trials, the Justice Department said on Wednesday.

"As part of their plea agreements, [Eduardo] Navarro and [Nayade] Varona admitted that they conspired with others to falsify data in connection with two clinical trials by, among other things, fabricating medical records to make it appear as though subjects were participating in the clinical trials when, in truth, they were not," the Justice Department said in a press release. Navarro, a nurse practitioner, received the 46 month prison sentence while Varona, who served as an assistant project coordinator, was sentenced to 30 months. The researchers worked for Tellus Clinical Research, according to the release.

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Taliban Think May Assume Power in Afghanistan By Force Contrary to Pledges - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - The continued advance by the Taliban movement (banned in Russia) is evidence its leaders believe they can retake control of Afghanistan by force rather than engaging in negotiations, US Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"The Taliban continues to advance and to assume control of district and provincial centers that clearly indicate that they believe it is possible to gain governance through force, through brutality, through violence, through oppression, which is at great odds with their previously stated goal of actually wanting to participate in a negotiated political solution," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Kirby responded to numerous questions about the Taliban's advance and the role that the United States can play in fixing Afghanistan's deteriorating security situation. He said it is primarily up to Afghan forces, who outnumber the Taliban, to use the resources and advantages available to them to maintain control of the country.

Earlier on Wednesday, the United Nations reported that nearly 390,000 Afghans have been displaced by conflict this year, with a huge spike since May, when the United States initially agreed with the Taliban to withdraw its troops from the country.

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US Updates Policy to Support Non-Citizen Crime Victims - Immigration Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - The US government will help non-citizen crime victims seek justice and also facilitate access to immigration benefits, according to a policy update announced by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency on Wednesday.

"This policy update facilitates victim cooperation with law enforcement, enhances ICE's criminal investigative efforts, and promotes trust in ICE agents and officers enforcing our laws. It is ICE's commitment to assist victims of crime regardless of their immigration status," Acting ICE Director Tae Johnson said in a press release.

Congress created victim-based immigration benefits to encourage noncitizen victims to seek assistance and report crimes committed against them despite their undocumented status, ICE said in an accompanying fact sheet.

The document also cited the US Violence Against Women Act and the Trafficking Victims Protection Act as examples of laws protecting crime victims that apply to both citizens and non-citizens.

When victims have access to humanitarian protection, regardless of their immigration status, and can feel safe in coming forward, it strengthens the ability of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to detect, investigate, according to ICE.

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Cuomo Successor Says 'Far Too Premature' to Discuss His Pardon

NEW YORK, August 11 (Sputnik) - The successor to Andrew Cuomo, Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul, said on Wednesday it was much too early to talk about a pardon for the New York governor who announced his resignation a day earlier amid allegations he sexually harassed nearly a dozen of the women.

"It is far too premature to even have those conversations," Hochul told reporters in her first press briefing since Cuomo named her as his replacement on Tuesday, after saying he would officially step down in two weeks.

The resignation of the 63-year-old Cuomo came a week after New York State Attorney General Letitia James announced that a months-long investigation into the governor's conduct found that he harassed at least 11 women, including a policewoman assigned to protect him and an executive assistant. She said the investigation also revealed that he and a senior aide attempted to retaliate against the victims.

Consequently, President Joe Biden, a long-time political ally of Cuomo, and the majority Democrat New York State Assembly had called on the embattled governor to step down. New York state police also had said they were pursuing criminal investigations in relation to the allegations against Cuomo.

The departing governor maintained on Tuesday that to his mind, he had not done "no wrong", saying there had been "generational and cultural shifts" he wasn't aware of as a person who believed in expressing himself with touches. Some of the allegations that he groped women colleagues, touched intimate parts such as their breasts, were also "false", he said.

Hochul distanced herself Wednesday from any discussions related to ongoing investigations or action against Cuomo, saying "it's very clear that the governor and I have not been close, physically or otherwise".

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California Orders Mandatory Coronavirus Vaccination for School Teachers, Staff

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) – California has become the first state in the US to mandate all school staff to be either fully vaccinated or weekly tested to be allowed to work, Governor's Office announced in a release on Wednesday.

"In order to best protect students and staff as California starts the school year fully in-person, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) today issued a new public health order requiring all school staff to either show proof of full vaccination or be tested at least once per week," the release said.

The new policy will take effect on Thursday while all schools in the state are expected to be in full compliance with it no later than October 15, the release said. The order does not apply to home schools, child care or higher education facilities in the state.

"To give parents confidence that their children are safe as schools return to full, in-person learning, we are urging all school staff to get vaccinated. Vaccinations are how we will end this pandemic," Governor Gavin Newsom said as quoted in the release.

To date, nearly 45 million vaccines have been administered in California with approximately 65 percent of its residents fully vaccinated. California was among the first US states to drop all coronavirus-related restrictions in June.

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Huawei CFO Extradition About 'Dishonesty,' Misstatements to HSBC 'Essence of Fraud'— Crown

TORONTO, August 11 (Sputnik) – The extradition request for Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou is about dishonesty in commercial dealings, Crown attorney Robert Frater told a British Columbia Supreme Court judge on Wednesday, stressing that the alleged misrepresentations made to HSBC are the "essence of fraud."

Wednesday marked the first day of committal hearings, where Associate Justice Heather Holmes will decide whether or not to proceed with the United States' extradition request. The US Justice Department alleges that Meng committed fraud by misleading HSBC into approving more than \$100 million in transactions that contravened US sanctions on Iran from 2010 to 2014 through Tehran-based shell company, Skycom.

"We say this case is a case about dishonest commercial dealings," Frater told the courtroom, stressing that Meng's alleged misrepresentations to the Bank are the "essence of fraud."

The United States alleges Meng personally assured HSBC that Huawei and its partners, including Skycom, were in compliance with international sanctions on Iran during a meeting with the bank's executives. According to a PowerPoint presentation admitted as evidence, Huawei also made assurances that Skycom was no longer under the Chinese technology giant's control, despite the opposite being true.

"The evidence of dishonesty in the case, we say, is abundantly clear," Frater said, stressing that Meng was "faithful to Huawei's script" regarding the technology giant's relationship with Skycom.

When Holmes questioned why a multinational financial conglomerate such as HSBC, which houses departments dedicated to ensuring compliance, would take Meng's assurances at face value, Frater said the executive's stature mattered.

"When you send the CFO to the bankers to try and persuade them that there's no risk, it certainly sends a message," the Crown attorney said.

Meng remains under house arrest in Vancouver, although is free to traverse the region in the company of state-imposed guards outside of her 11:00 p.m to 6:00 a.m. curfew.

The final arguments are expected to wrap up on August 20.

Holmes is expected to give her recommendation on the United States' extradition request to AGC and Justice Minister David Lametti later in the fall. Lametti has the final say on the request and has the right to refuse extradition in exceptional circumstances.

Analysts say Lametti's decision could hinge on developments in China, where the fate of multiple Canadians is held in the balance.

The hearings in Vancouver are being held against the backdrop of judgments in China, where a court upheld the death penalty for Canadian Robert Schellenberg for drug smuggling and a separate court sentenced businessman Michael Spavor to 11 years for espionage.

Spavor and Michael Kovrig, the other Canadian national held in China on espionage charges, have been in Chinese custody for over 900 days. Ottawa maintains that the "arbitrary" detentions came in retaliation for Canada's arrest of Meng.

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US State Dept. Disappointed With Deterioration of Belarus Relations After New Restrictions

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - The United States is disappointed with the state of relations with Belarus and believes Minsk is responsible for the deterioration following the imposition of new limits on the number of US embassy personnel, US Department of State Spokesperson Ned Price said on Wednesday.

Price said Minsk had asked Washington to reduce the number of staff at the US embassy to five people. Belarus indicated the number of its diplomatic personnel in the United States will also be limited to five.

"It is important to remember that all of this and to acknowledge that Belarusian authorities are responsible for the deterioration of US-Belarus relations through relentless repression against their citizens," Price said at a briefing. "We are disappointed to be where we are now in terms of our relationship with Belarus, but we'll continue to work with our allies and partners to promote shared interests."

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US Invests \$45Mln to Research Links of Clean Power Sources to Grids – Energy Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) – A consortium funded in part by \$45 million in research grants will attempt to develop technology and hardware to bring large quantities of solar- and wind-generated electricity into US power grids, the Energy Department said on Wednesday. The effort will be led by the Universal Interoperability for Grid-Forming Inverters (UNIFI) Consortium, which will link the US National Renewable Energy Laboratory, the University of Washington, and the Electric Power Research Institute, with researchers, utilities, and system operators to develop grid-scale inverter technologies, the department said in a press release. “UNIFI will focus on integrating these inverters into electric grids at any scale, to enable high penetration of inverter-based resources, like solar and wind,” the release said. “In particular, UNIFI will conduct and coordinate research, development, and demonstration, as well as create educational- and workforce-training materials focusing on planning, designing, and operating grids with a high level of inverter-based resources.”

Solar panels and most wind turbines create direct current (DC) electricity, with inverters used to convert the power to alternating current (AC) electricity used in power grids.

UNIFI will receive \$25 million from the Energy Department with an additional \$10 million provided by participants, the release said.

The remainder of the \$45 million will consist of smaller grants to support development of additional technologies that contribute to the US goal of a carbon-free electricity system by 2035 and a decarbonized energy sector by 2050, the release added.

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In First, Avenger Unmanned System Follows 'Targets of Interest' - US' General Atomics
WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - An Avenger Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) equipped with a new legion pod has successfully and autonomously followed a target aircraft, General Atomics announced on Wednesday.

“For the first time ever, over the high desert of southern California on July 2, General Atomics Aeronautical Systems (GA-ASI) used an Avenger Unmanned Aircraft System equipped with a Lockheed Martin Legion Pod to autonomously track and follow targets of interest,” the company said in a press release.

The industry-funded demonstration brought US military aviators one step closer to gaining autonomous systems that support manned-unmanned teaming (MUM-T) in joint all-domain operations, GA-ASI explained.

“The success of this Avenger/Legion Pod demonstration represents an important step toward more sophisticated autonomous missions for unmanned aircraft and MUM-T in a complex battlespace,” GA-ASI Vice President of Special Programs Chris Pehrson said in the release. During the flight, Legion Pod's infrared search-and-track system, IRST21, detected multiple fast-moving aircraft operating in the area and fed target tracking information to the Avenger's autonomy engine. The autonomy engine prioritized the targets informing Avenger maneuvers for target engagement, the release said.

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UN Has No Concrete Information on World Leaders Attending UNGA Amid Delta - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, August 11 (Sputnik) - The United Nations does not have a list of world leaders planning to participate in-person in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) high-level week in September, given the fluid situation amid the surge of the Delta strain of the virus that causes COVID-19, UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Wednesday.

"We all have to see what the situation will be in late September. Right now, the format of the GA... remains unchanged," Dujarric said when asked to provide specific information regarding which state officials indicated they will attend the event in person. "I assume that a lot of plans will be made at the last minute because of the changing situation with the Delta variant."

Earlier, the United Nations decided that member states will choose whether to deliver their national addresses from the UN General Assembly podium in New York or sent a pre-recorded video message for the high-level week kicking off on September 21.

Last year, due to COVID-19 concerns and related travel restrictions, the annual gathering was held virtually with world leaders speaking through pre-recorded messages screened at UN headquarters.

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OSIRIS-REx Space Mission Data Gives Asteroid 1-in-1,750 Chance of Hitting Earth - NASA

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - The remote rogue asteroid Bennu has about a one-in-1,750-chance of hitting Earth in the next 180 years, according to a new NASA study using data compiled from the unmanned OSIRIS-REx space mission to the object published on Wednesday.

"Using NASA's Deep Space Network and state-of-the-art computer models, scientists were able to significantly shrink uncertainties in Bennu's orbit, determining its total impact probability through the year 2300 is about 1 in 1,750 (or 0.057 percent)," NASA said in a press release.

The researchers were also able to identify September 24, 2182, as the most significant single date in terms of a potential impact, with an impact probability of 1 in 2,700, or about 0.037 percent, NASA concluded.

Although the chances of it hitting Earth are very low, Bennu remains one of the two most hazardous known asteroids in the solar system, NASA said.

"NASA researchers used precision-tracking data from the agency's Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, Security-Regolith Explorer (OSIRIS-REx) spacecraft to better understand movements of... Bennu through the year 2300, significantly reducing uncertainties related to its future orbit," the release said.

The study, titled "Ephemeris and hazard assessment for near-Earth asteroid (101955) Bennu based on OSIRIS-REx data," was published in the journal Icarus.

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Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech Shares Slide on New Europe Study of COVID Vaccine Side-Effects

NEW YORK, Aug 11 (Sputnik) - Shares of Moderna and BioNTech stocks fell their most in 17 months on Wednesday while those of Pfizer slid as well after reports emerged that Europe's drug regulator was studying for new side effects from COVID-19 vaccinations.

Moderna slumped 17.6 percent to \$376.49 by 2:00 PM in New York (18:00 GMT). BioNTech also fell almost 18 percent to \$341.88. It was the sharpest daily loss for both companies dating back to March 2020, at the cusp of the coronavirus pandemic. Pfizer's stock dipped by 4 percent to \$46.38.

The slide in the shares of the drugmakers came amid reports that European authorities were reportedly studying three new conditions reported by a small number of people after being vaccinated with mRNA COVID-19 shots made by Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech.

Pfizer, and its German counterpart BioNTech, are the largest suppliers of coronavirus vaccines to Europe.

Just over 43.5 million doses of Moderna's vaccine have been administered in the European Economic Area as of July 29, the EMA said, compared to more than 330 million doses of the BioNTech-Pfizer shot.

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Khalilzad to Meet Afghan, Taliban Teams in Doha to Encourage Engagement - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) – US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad will conduct separate meetings with Afghan government and Taliban (banned in Russia) negotiations teams in Doha to facilitate dialogue amid escalating violence, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said Wednesday.

"Ambassador Khalilzad will meet with each negotiating team separately, as we frequently do, to encourage them to engage productively in this [peace] process, and, importantly, not to squander this opportunity, which may be a historic opportunity," Price told reporters during a press briefing.

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US State Dept Spokesman Dodges Questions on Assange, Says Matter Up to Justice Department

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - US State Department spokesperson Ned Price referred a reporter's questions concerning WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and the US position on it to the Department of Justice (DOJ).

"This is the matter for the Department of Justice. It's a matter that the Department of Justice is pursuing," Price said.

When asked whether the State Department's position on Assange's extradition has changed, Price said, "the Department of Justice is pursuing this. I will leave it to them to pursue and to characterize the United States Government's position on this."

The High Court in London ruled on Monday that it would hear the US government's appeal against the decision of a UK district court not to extradite Assange in late October.

The court allowed the US to challenge the previous verdict in early July. During the preliminary appeal hearing held on Wednesday, civic leaders, activists, and politicians, including former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, gathered outside the London Palace of Justice in support of the journalist.

The appeal will be heard on October 27-28, the judge said.

Back in January, UK district judge Vanessa Baraitser ruled against extraditing Assange to the United States, citing health reasons and the risk of suicide in the US prison system. The judge, however, decided that he must wait in prison for the outcome of a US appeal hearing.

The whistleblower, arrested in London on April 11, 2019, for jumping bail in 2012, faces up to 175 years in solitary confinement on espionage charges for leaking classified military documents on US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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US Federal Trade Commission to Monitor, Address High Gasoline Prices - Biden

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is tasked with monitoring and addressing illegal activity in the country's gasoline market behind high gasoline prices, US President Joe Biden said during remarks about the economy on Wednesday.

"Today, my director of the National Economic Council has asked the chair of the Federal Trade Commission to use every available tool to monitor the US gasoline market and address any illegal conduct that might be contributing to price increases at the pump while the cost of a barrel of oil is going down," Biden said.

Brian Deese, the Director of the National Economic Council, wrote a letter to FTC Chair Lina Khan on Wednesday to make the request, citing divergences between oil prices and gasoline prices at the pump during this summer driving season.

Deese said Biden wants to ensure that consumers are not paying more than is reasonable due to illegal or anti-competitive practices.

The letter was also sent to officials from the Justice Department, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, and the National Association of Attorneys General, who Deese said would also be "valuable partners" in the effort.

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UN Team in Guinea Supporting Authorities to Prevent Marburg Virus Spread - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, August 11 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is assisting authorities in Guinea to prevent and control the spread of the Marburg virus disease after it was detected for the first time in the West African country, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Wednesday.

On Monday, Guinea confirmed its first-ever case of the Marburg virus, which causes heavy hemorrhagic fever. Health officials in Guinea confirmed that one man had died from the Marburg disease. The deceased was based in the Gueckedou district in the south of the country, where cases of Ebola were registered earlier this year.

"Our colleagues [in Guinea] tell us that authorities... confirmed the first case of the Marburg virus disease in the country. The UN team led by the resident coordinator Vincent Martin is working to meet urgent needs including the infection prevention and control."

Dujarric said the UN team is also helping to strengthen contact tracing, treatment and cross-border monitoring capacity in the country.

A team from the World Health Organization (WHO) team has been working on the ground to respond through risk assessment, disease surveillance, community mobilization, testing, clinical care, prevention and logistical support.

The Marburg virus shares similarities with avian flu and the Middle East respiratory syndrome, given that the virus is believed to be transmitted from animals to humans. Related to Ebola, the Marburg virus is highly fatal but low in transmissibility.

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US Allows Some Activities in Support of Internet Access in Cuba - Treasury

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - The US government has approved of some activities that support providing access to the internet in Cuba despite having prohibited transactions with that country, the Treasury Department said in a notice on Wednesday.

"While most transactions between persons subject to US jurisdiction and Cuba continue to be prohibited under the embargo, the US government allows for certain activities to support the Cuban people's access to information on the internet," the notice said.

The government t expressed a commitment to promoting the ability of the Cuban people to seek, receive and impart information by highlighting the most relevant exemptions and authorizations, the notice said.

The Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) maintains several general licenses and other documents related to the provision of internet-based services in Cuba in order to provide access for information, the notice said.

The US government has accused the Cuban authorities of oppressing the country's opposition and restricting access to information, including during the recent protests in July.

"In response to these protests, the Cuban regime reacted with violence and repression, including by implementing measures to curb the flow of information over the internet in Cuba," the notice said.

Senior Biden administration official said in late July that the United States is currently in discussions with private sector firms on providing internet to the Cuban people and bypassing censors.

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Clinical Data Show Safety of 3 US Approved COVID-19 During Pregnancy - Health Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - New data from clinical trials of the Pfizer and Moderna coronavirus vaccines, plus earlier trials of the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) jab, demonstrate that the three vaccines approved in the United States are safe during pregnancy, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said on Wednesday.

"CDC released the first US data on the safety of receiving an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer and Moderna) during pregnancy," the agency said in a press release. "The report analyzed data from three safety monitoring systems in place to gather information about COVID-19 vaccination during pregnancy. These early data did not find any safety concerns for pregnant people who were vaccinated or their babies."

Another report looked at pregnant people enrolled in the V-safe pregnancy registry who were vaccinated before 20 weeks of pregnancy. Scientists did not find an increased risk for miscarriage among people who received an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine during pregnancy, the release said.

As for the single jab J&J inoculation, no adverse pregnancy-related outcomes occurred in previous clinical trials that used the same "viral vector" vaccine platform as the J&J/Janssen voronavirus vaccine. The trials inoculated pregnant women in all three trimesters, the release added.

Evidence about the safety and effectiveness of corona virus vaccination during pregnancy, although limited, continues to grow. Additional clinical trials that study the safety of vaccines and how well they work in pregnant people are underway or planned, according to the release.

The release also cited evidence that vaccinations during pregnancy likely builds an immunity in the baby, including the discovery of coronavirus antibodies in umbilical cords.

The body of available data suggests that the benefits of receiving a COVID-19 vaccine outweigh any known or potential risks of vaccination during pregnancy, the release said.

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Biden Says US Made Clear to OPEC Production Cuts Made During Pandemic Should Be Reversed

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that his administration made clear to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) that oil production cuts made during the pandemic should be reversed as the global economy continues to recover.

"We also made clear to OPEC, the major oil exporting nations of the world, that the production cuts made during the pandemic should be reversed as the global economy recovers in order to lower prices for consumers," Biden said.

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UN Chief Strongly Condemns Rebel Attack in Mali Killing 51 People - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, August 11 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres strongly condemned attacks on villages in northern Mali in which at least 50 civilians were killed, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.

Armed militants attacked on August 8 villages in the Gao region, killing at least 51 civilians dead.

"The Secretary-General strongly condemns the attacks perpetrated against civilians on August 8 in the Gao region in Mali where at least fifty civilians were reportedly killed and several wounded," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

In response to the attacks, the UN mission on the ground (MINUSMA) deployed peacekeepers to the area and has increased its night patrols to prevent any further attacks, the spokesman said.

MINUSMA also stands ready to assist Mali in bringing the perpetrators of these human rights violations to justice, Dujarric added.

Mali has experienced insurgency of various armed groups, especially in the northern areas bordering Burkina Faso and Niger.

On August 5, at least 30 people were killed by suspected terrorists in northern Burkina Faso.

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White House Says Engagements With OPEC Ongoing Over Increasing Oil Production

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration's consultations with the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to increase oil production are ongoing but an immediate response from the oil cartel is not expected, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Wednesday.

"This is just an outreach that's just happening over the last couple of days but it's also ongoing, we've had ongoing engagements," Psaki said. "So this is not meant to be for immediate response necessarily, it's meant to be long-term engagement, consistent long-term engagement."

Psaki said the consultations with OPEC are part of an effort to support the ongoing global economic recovery from the pandemic and to keep gas prices down for the US public. The discussions are not about domestic oil supply but about the key role OPEC plays in the oil market place, Psaki added.

Moreover, Psaki said the Biden administration has not asked US oil producers to increase production.

Earlier on Wednesday, a source with OPEC Plus said the oil cartel has not yet discussed the United States' request to increase oil output but consultations on the issue are not ruled out.

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Northrop Grumman Wins 5-Year Contract to Maintain NATO Drones - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - NATO's ground surveillance unit has awarded a five-year contract to service the alliance fleet of drones, Northrop Grumman said on Wednesday.

"Under this contract, Northrop Grumman will provide full life-cycle sustainment including repairs, on-site maintenance and operations support to NAGSF [NATO Alliance Ground Surveillance Force at Sigonella Air Base, Sigonella, Italy]," a company press release said.

The NATO's ground surveillance system recently achieved initial operating capability, the release said.

The system is comprised of five RQ-4D aircraft, which is based on Northrop Grumman's wide area surveillance Global Hawk drone, ground and support segments, and advanced sensor technologies, the release added.

Northrop Grumman did not disclose the amount of what it called a multi-million-dollar contract over the next five years.

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Federal Judge Rules US House Allowed to Access Some of Trump's Tax Records

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - US District Court Judge Amit Mehta issued a decision on Wednesday that will allow the House of Representatives Oversight and Reform Committee to have access to some of former-President Donald Trump's tax records.

The decision holds that the Congress' authority under the Foreign Emoluments Clause to conduct oversight of federal lease agreements authorizes the legislative branch of government to access Trump's tax returns for 2017 and 2018.

"The Court holds that the Committee's asserted legislative purpose of bolstering financial disclosure laws for Presidents and presidential candidates does not warrant disclosure of President Trump's personal and corporate financial records," Mehta said. "By contrast, the Committee's other stated justifications for demanding President Trump's personal and corporate financial records... do not implicate the same separation of powers concerns."

The US House Committee on Oversight and Reform, led by then-Chairman Elijah Cummings, pursued an investigation into Trump's finances beginning in 2019. The Committee's investigative demand for tax records is what initially sparked the lawsuit at hand.

Mehta said that congressional subpoenas for the financial records of former presidents do not require the same level of judicial scrutiny as those of sitting presidents because burdens imposed on the president by a subpoena are "greatly diminished, if not eliminated entirely" upon departure from office.

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UN Says Nearly 390,000 Afghans Internally Displaced in 2021 With 'Huge Spike' Since May

UNITED NATIONS, August 11 (Sputnik) - Nearly 390,000 people have become internally displaced by the fighting in Afghanistan since the beginning of 2021, with a huge spike in numbers observed since May, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Wednesday.

"Since the start of the year, nearly 390,000 people have been newly displaced by conflict across the country with a huge spike since May," Dujarric said.

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US Does not Trust Anonymous Reports of Kabul Falling to Taliban Within 90 Days - Psaki

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration does not rely on anonymous reports that claim Afghanistan will fall to the Taliban movement (banned in Russia) within the next 90 days but closely monitors the deteriorating security environment in parts of the country, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Wednesday.

"We don't rely on anonymous assessments. We rely on the intelligence assessments made by the US government," Psaki said during a press briefing. "We are closely watching the

deteriorating security conditions in parts of the country, but no particular outcome, in our view, is inevitable."

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White House Says Engagements With OPEC Ongoing Over Increasing Oil Production

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration's consultations with the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to increase oil production are ongoing but an immediate response from the oil cartel is not expected, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Wednesday.

"This is just an outreach that's just happening over the last couple of days but it's also ongoing, we've had ongoing engagements," Psaki said. "So this is not meant to be for immediate response necessarily, it's meant to be long-term engagement, consistent long-term engagement."

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Technology Firm Accenture Hit By Ransomware Attack With 'No Impact' on Systems - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - Technology firm Accenture was hit by a cyberattack from the hacking group Lockbit that has had no impact on their operations or systems, the company told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"Through our security controls and protocols, we identified irregular activity in one of our environments. We immediately contained the matter and isolated the affected servers. We fully restored our affected systems from back up. There was no impact on Accenture's operations, or on our clients' systems," Accenture said.

Lockbit posted a countdown clock on their leak website Tuesday night that would purportedly publish all of the hacked information when time ran out on Wednesday, according to tech news outlet ZDNet.

According to the publication, the post included a note saying that Accenture is "beyond privacy and security" and that the hackers hope their services are "better than what I saw as an insider," suggesting that the leak was internal. "If you're interested in buying some databases, reach us." It is not currently known where the leak came from.

The company's stock fell sharply Wednesday morning following reports of the hack, having since shown signs of recovery following their assurance that operations and systems remain unaffected by the attack.

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US Oil Consumption Wanes Amid Sliding Summer Demand - Energy Agency

NEW YORK, August 11 (Sputnik) - Weekly drawdowns in US crude oil and gasoline were less than expected last week, data from the Energy Information Administration (EIA) showed on Wednesday, as energy demand slid toward the end of the summer and amid a renewed increase in coronavirus cases.

US commercial crude oil inventories fell by 448,000 barrels in the week to August 6, the EIA said in its Weekly Petroleum Status Report. Analysts polled by US media said they expected a drawdown of 750,000 barrels instead.

Gasoline stockpiles also fell less than expected, drawing down 1.4 million barrels against a forecast 2 million, the EIA data showed.

Distillate inventories were the outlier, drawing down by almost 1.8 million versus an expected 500,000 barrels.

"These numbers are on the bearish side," economist Adam Button said in a post on ForexLive. The broad slide in oil demand was evident with just six weeks left until the end of the summer season, which officially ends on September 22, as autumn begins. Energy consumption also appears to have slid as some US states put in new coronavirus precautions amid a spike in infections.

The EIA had reported huge drawdowns in the previous 11 weeks, with crude oil consumption alone taking a net of almost 50 million barrels off the market over a nine week period.

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UN Refugee Agency Says Concerned About New US Practice to Expel Asylum Seekers to Mexico

UNITED NATIONS, August 11 (Sputnik) - The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) expressed concern over the new US practice to expel asylum-seekers and migrants to southern Mexico under the health order aimed at preventing the spread of communicable diseases, UNHCR Representative to the United States and the Caribbean Matthew Reynolds said on Wednesday.

"These expulsion flights of non-Mexicans to the deep interior of Mexico constitute a troubling new dimension in enforcement of the COVID-related public health order known as Title 42," Reynolds said. "Individuals or families aboard those flights... risk being sent back to the very dangers they have fled in their countries of origin in Central America without any opportunity to have those needs assessed and addressed."

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Iraqi Army Evicts 91 Families From Village Once Ruled by Islamic State - US Rights Group

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - Iraq troops illegally forced 91 families to leave their homes in a northern Iraqi village for a displacement camp, years after those same families fled the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) and were later forced to return, Human Rights Watch said on Wednesday.

The families from al-Aetha had been forced out of their village years earlier during fighting between the government and the Islamic State. Many had previously been forcibly evicted by local and security authorities from displacement camps and made to return to their village, Human Rights Watch said in a report.

"For years Iraqi authorities have claimed they are moving communities into or out of camps for their own protection or best interests," Human Rights Watch Senior Conflict Researcher Belkis Wille said in the report. "But the case of these villagers being ping-ponged between their village and displacement camps is yet again proof that these evictions are often about the authorities' personal or political considerations rather than the well-being of those affected."

On July 14, about two dozen Iraqi army vehicles arrived in the village with a list of names and forced about 19 families out of their homes and onto flatbed trucks, including four interviewed by the Human Rights Watch.

The soldiers told the villagers they were taking them to the one displacement camp still open - in Nineveh, 15 kilometers north - but gave them no reason. Between July 31 and August 4, the army returned and took another 72 families to the camp, including two of the people interviewed, the report said.

The evicted villagers claimed they were victims of an apparent family feud involving a government minister, the report added.

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Ottawa Working to Clarify Deportation Process for Canadian Sentenced in China – Minister

TORONTO, August 11 (Sputnik) – Ottawa is working to determine if Canadian citizen Michael Spavor will serve his 11-year prison sentence for spying then be deported or vice versa, Minister of Foreign Affairs Marc Garneau said on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, a Chinese court in the city of Dandong sentenced Spavor to 11 years in prison on charges of espionage with confiscation of property and deportation.

"I cannot say anything more at this point," Garneau told reporters when asked about his interpretation of the ruling, noting that deportation is standard legal practice for foreigners sentenced in China. "We will continue to analyze, in-depth, the meaning of this and seek further clarification from the Chinese authorities."

Speaking to reporters following the sentencing hearing, Canada's ambassador to China Dominic Barton said he interpreted the recourse as "11 years then deportation."

Garneau stressed that Canada will not give up on efforts to secure the release of Spavor and Michael Kovrig, the other Canadian national held in China on espionage charges, and that the consular cases remain a top priority.

Spavor and Kovrig have been in Chinese custody for over 900 days. Ottawa maintains that the "arbitrary" detentions came in retaliation for Canada's arrest of Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou in 2018 at the request of the United States.

Canada's top diplomat said Ottawa is in contact with Washington, which called for the immediate release of the two Canadians earlier in the day, with the goal being the release of the "two Michaels" – as the pair is referred to at home. However, Garneau refused to divulge any details regarding the talks and remained tight-lipped on whether Canada will pursue any retaliatory action against China.

Canada strongly opposes the upheld death sentence for Canadian Robert Schellenberg, who was convicted in China on drug smuggling charges, Garneau added.

Kovrig is expected to learn his fate in the coming days, according to reports.

Meanwhile, Meng, who is wanted by the US on fraud charges, will be back in a Vancouver courtroom later in the afternoon to attend the start of committal hearings in her case, where the judge will decide whether or not to take up the extradition request.

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US, Russian Defense Chiefs Speak By Phone to Discuss Risk-Reduction Efforts - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu spoke by phone to discuss risk-reduction efforts following bilateral strategic stability talks in Geneva, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said on Wednesday. "Today Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III spoke by phone with Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu," Kirby said in a press release. "The purpose of the call was to support transparency and risk-reduction efforts following the July 28 resumption of the US-Russia Strategic Stability Dialogue in Geneva, Switzerland."

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US, Mexico to Hold Economic Meeting on September 9 in Washington - White House

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and other US officials met with Mexican counterparts to discuss the upcoming economic meeting in September as well as possible solutions to the migration crisis on the US-Mexico border, the White House said on Wednesday.

"President Biden's National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and Under Secretary of State Uzra Zeya traveled to Mexico on August 10 to advance US-Mexico cooperation across our bilateral agenda," White House said in a release. "Given the strong economic ties binding us, the delegations advanced preparations for the upcoming relaunch of the US-Mexico High-Level Economic Dialogue (HLED), which will be held in Washington on September 9."

The US and Mexican officials also discussed opportunities to better integrate the economies of the two countries to make them more resilient and to strengthen supply chains, the release said. The officials agreed to search for a human rights oriented solution of the migration crisis and reaffirmed their commitment to a regional approach to migration, the release added.

The United States has apprehended more than 1.5 million illegal migrants at the southern border with Mexico in 1986, 1996, 1998-2000, according to Customs and Border Protection data.

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US Consumer Prices Up 5.4% in Year to July - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - The US Consumer Price Index (CPI), a measure of inflation, grew by 5.4 percent over a one-year period in June, the Labor Department announced on Tuesday.

"In July, the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers rose 0.5 percent on a seasonally adjusted basis; rising 5.4 percent over the last 12 months, not seasonally adjusted," the department said, breaking down the data.

The CPI was, however, virtually unchanged from June, when it rose by a similar 5.4 percent for its fastest one-year growth in 13 years.

Economists polled by US media forecast a year-on-year growth of 5.3 percent for July, putting what the Labor Department reported just within their reach.

Month-on-month, the CPI increased by 0.5 percent from June.

More importantly, excluding energy and food, often the most volatile components of the index, the CPI rose by just 0.3 percent from June, shy of a forecast 0.4 percent increase and well below June's rise of 0.9 percent.

The US economy itself grew by an annualized rate of 6.5 percent in the second quarter of 2021, after a 3.5 percent contraction for all of 2020 due to COVID-19 related shutdowns and other disruptions. The Federal Reserve has also forecast 6.5 percent growth for all of 2021.

At the same time, the Fed has been grappling with higher-than-expected inflation in the near term as prices of almost everything have soared from the lows of the pandemic. The central bank's preferred inflation gauge, the core Personal Consumption Expenditure Index, expanded by 3.5 percent in the year to June — its most in 30 years.

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Baltimore Will Keep Using 'Violence Interrupters' Following Murders - Police Commissioner

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - The US city of Baltimore will continue to scale up its use of so-called violence interrupters to address a rise in the city's violent crime rate even after two of the interrupters were shot and killed, Police Commissioner Michael Harrison said during an interview with the Washington Post on Wednesday.

Violence interrupters are individuals, often trusted members of the community, who work alongside law enforcement to help defuse gang violence such as retaliatory killings by acting as negotiators.

"While we've had two violence interrupters shot and killed recently – and our hearts and prayers and thoughts go out to them – we want to make sure that not only can we keep them safe, but that we can use a program like this... to protect other people who are at high risk of either being a victim of a shooting or murder or the perpetrator of a shooting or murder," Harrison said.

Like other cities around the US, Baltimore has experienced a rise in violent crime recently, having recorded 190 murders so far this year in comparison to 183 in the same period last year. Harrison did note, however, that nonviolent and property crimes have not been on the rise. The rise in violent crime led Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott to announce an expansive five-year violence reduction plan for the city, which is set to include the continued use of violence interrupters.

"It has worked in many places, I've seen it work personally in New Orleans. It's something we use here now and will continue to use even in this new violence prevention plan... It's very effective, and it's an application that we're going to continue to use, even to scale up, across the entire city," Harrison said.

The Baltimore Police Department essentially received the same budget as last year with no cuts, allowing them to keep all positions alongside normal hiring and recruitment efforts for the force, Harrison said. He added, though, that the city has asked for additional help from the federal government to have more funding and more officials working cases on the ground.

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Pandemic Measures-Related Supply Chain Shortages Hit 60% of US Consumers - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - Six in 10 Americans report they were unable to get a product this summer due with the coronavirus pandemic measures disrupting supplies needed to manufacture consumer goods, a Gallup poll released on Wednesday said.

"Sixty percent of US adults say they have been unable to get a product they wanted in the past two months because of shortages, and 57 percent have experienced significant delays in receiving a product they ordered. Seven in 10 Americans overall have had at least one of these

issues, while 46 percent have had both," according to a Gallup press release summarizing the poll.

From the toilet paper shortage at the beginning of the pandemic to a car shortage today, Americans have experienced firsthand what it means when production constraints or a shortfall of critical manufacturing components means retailers can't keep up with demand, the release said.

The same poll finds that 83 percent of adults have experienced "significant price increases" in the past two months, another byproduct of the coronavirus-related economic disruptions to manufacturing, shipping and labor supply, the release added.

The findings are based on a July 19-26 Gallup survey, conducted by web using the nationally representative Gallup Panel of 3,475 adults. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level.

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US Fires Minuteman III Missile Over Pacific in Test of Re-Entry Vehicle - Air Force
WASHINGTON, August 11 (Sputnik) - The United States launched a Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile equipped with test re-entry vehicle to verify the accuracy of the nuclear-capable weapon system, the US Air Force said on Wednesday.

"This launch involved a Hi Fidelity Joint Test Assembly re-entry vehicle that detonated conventional (i.e. non-nuclear) explosives prior to hitting the surface of the water approximately 4,200 miles downrange near Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands," the Air Force said in a press release.

The launch from Vandenberg Space Force Base in the US state of California took place shortly after midnight on Wednesday, the release said.

Tests of US intercontinental ballistic missiles [ICBMs] demonstrate the readiness of US nuclear forces and provide confidence in the lethality and effectiveness of the nation's nuclear deterrent, the release added.

The release emphasized that missile tests are not a response to world events, with testing calendars prepared five years in advance and preparations for each launch requiring six months.