The New York Times

Bobby Shmurda's New Lust for Life

Afghanistan's Unraveling May Strike Another Blow to U.S. Credibility

Where Dark Skies Draw Star-Gazers, Wildfire Smoke Spoils the View

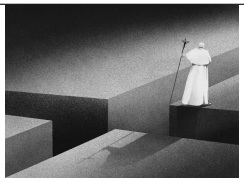
Biden Could Have Stopped the Taliban. He Chose Not To.

A New Era for New York Times Newsletters

What Does It Mean for a Whole Nation to Become Uninhabitable?

Fearing Kabul's Fall, U.S. Officials Implore Afghans to 'Fight'

Where Police Killings Often Meet With Silence: Rural America



Pope Francis Is Tearing the Catholic Church Apart

Behind the Surprising Jump in Multiracial Americans, Several Theories

Judge Permits Biden's Replacement Evictions Ban to Stay in Place for Now

C.D.C. Panel Recommends Third Dose of Covid Vaccine for Immunocompromised

If You Skip the Vaccine, It Is My ‘Damn Business’

I’m a Trans Runner

America Runs on ‘Dirty Work’

Amid Extreme Weather, a Shift Among Republicans on Climate Change

Who Will Take Care of America’s Caregivers?

Don’t Let Inflation Anxiety Undermine Our Future

Dutch-Turkish Novelist Depicts Her Journey to Secularism With No Inhibitions

Genial and Respectful? Why New York’s Next Governor Is a Radical

An Afghan warlord who steadfastly resisted the Taliban surrendered. Others may follow his lead.

Los Angeles and Chicago schools to mandate teacher vaccinations.

On England’s Canals, Boaters Embrace the Peace and Pace of a Floating Life

The Taliban seek to isolate Kabul, the Pentagon says.

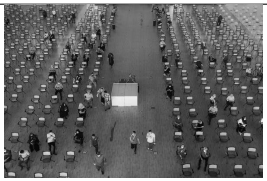
U.S. Asks Taliban to Spare Its Embassy in Coming Fight for Kabul

For a Crime at 14, He Faces Death in a Case Casting Doubt on Saudi Reforms

Afghanistan's Unraveling May Strike Another Blow to U.S. Credibility

Local officials struggled with eviction freeze as cases stacked up.

Looking for St. Mark's Square? You May Find Yourself in a Shipyard Instead.

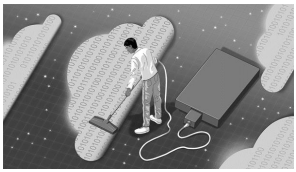


Iran's Health System 'Beyond Disastrous' from Covid Surge

I Joined a Penguin NFT Club Because Apparently That's What We Do Now

How Facebook Failed to Stem Racist Abuse of England's Soccer Players

Reddit is valued at more than $10 billion in latest funding round.



The Lesson to Learn From Apple's Tool to Flag Child Sex Abuse

The Next Chapter in Times Newsletters

'Welcome to the Mesh, Brother': Guerrilla Wi-Fi Comes to New York

Disney+ reaches 116 million subscribers, and its parks division returns to profitability.

The Experts Making High-Tech Storytelling Possible

Alibaba Rape Allegation Reveals China Tech's Seamy Side

California Panel Backs Solar Mandate for New Buildings

Judge Permits Biden's Replacement Evictions Ban to Stay in Place for Now

Amid Extreme Weather, a Shift Among Republicans on Climate Change

C.D.C. Panel Recommends Third Dose of Covid Vaccine for Immunocompromised

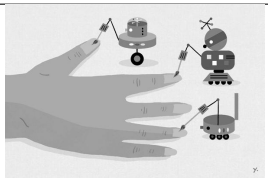
Supreme Court Blocks Part of New York's Eviction Moratorium

6 Issues Kathy Hochul Will Face as New York Governor

The Lithium Gold Rush: Inside the Race to Power Electric Vehicles

Disney+ reaches 116 million subscribers, and its parks division returns to profitability.

The Wedding Business Is Booming, a Short-Term Jolt to the Economy

 Boeing's Starliner Launch Is Delayed, Again, Possibly Until Next Year	 Want Your Nails Done? Let a Robot Do It.	

Weather YOURCITYNAME

SAT		19°C/11°C	Overcast clouds	4%
SUN		25°C/11°C	Clear sky	0%
MON		23°C/13°C	Broken clouds	0%
TUE		26°C/12°C	Broken clouds	0%
WED		22°C/15°C	Moderate rain	100%
THU		18°C/11°C	Broken clouds	12%
FRI		24°C/8°C	Broken clouds	0%
SAT		28°C/16°C	Scattered clouds	4%

Bobby Shmurda's New Lust for Life

Bobby Shmurda has been out of prison for five months, but has yet to release any music of his own.

Bobby Shmurda just can't sit still.

Since being released from prison in February after nearly seven years, the high-energy, loose-hipped Brooklyn rapper born Ackquille Pollard, 27, has made dancing a priority, busting out his trademark shimmies and thrusts anywhere he turns up.

In clips that have lit up social media, Shmurda has jerked and rolled at clubs, exclusive parties and onstage last month at the Rolling Loud festival in Miami, his first concert appearance as a free man. At the studio in New York recently, he showed off a video of himself engaging in a dance battle with an Instagram influencer, but it was nearly impossible to see, because he was wiggling along in real time, shaking his cellphone.

Later, as the rapper's new songs played over the industrial-grade speakers, he kept rollicking, like Elvis in an office chair, an itch he attributed to his Jamaican heritage.

What Shmurda, who pleaded guilty to conspiracy and weapons charges in 2016,

hasn't done in the nearly six months he's been out is release any new music of his own. This slow, deliberate game plan stands in stark contrast to the prevalence of the "first day out" song in hip-hop, with artists and labels alike typically wanting to take advantage of a surge in interest around a finished prison sentence.

"I just knew I had to get my business together," Shmurda said in late June about the delay. "You can't be walking around outside and your kitchen stinks."

But with a freshened-up record deal and a new, top-shelf management team — including the Roc Nation professionals who helped reinvent Meek Mill, post-prison, as an A-lister and activist — Shmurda is about ready to get going. He recently appeared with J Balvin and Daddy Yankee on a mostly Spanish-language drill remix, and he's been working on a pile of his own singles and videos in an attempt to capture some late-summer momentum.

At the mostly empty offices of Roc Nation, Jay-Z's all-purpose talent company, Shmurda was hyperactive yet solicitous, offering around his own water bottle one sweaty evening. In the coming weeks, the rapper will perform at Summer Jam in New York and the Made in America Festival in Philadelphia.

In preparation, Shmurda has recorded with artists like Swae Lee, DaBaby and Migos, but the common denominator is rhythm and movement. "We're going to be dancing 24/7," Shmurda said. "When I dance, it's to show you that I came through the struggle, but I overcame it and we're still overcoming it."

The intricacies of the rapper's life story — and his boundless charisma — made him something of a hip-hop folk hero in absentia. Regarded as part meme, part cautionary tale, part political prisoner, Shmurda saw his legend grow in line with those of once-incarcerated rappers like Gucci Mane, despite the fact that he had released just five songs (plus a smattering of guest appearances) before he got locked up.

Already, Roc Nation is fielding offers from distribution platforms for a documentary or a feature film about Shmurda's saga.

"Hip-hop loves an underdog story and a hero's journey," said Sidney Madden, an NPR Music reporter and podcaster whose series about rap and the criminal justice system, "Louder Than a Riot" (co-hosted with Rodney Carmichael), dedicated three episodes to Shmurda's case. "His rise and fall felt so rapid and a little bit Shakespearean. It really left people wanting more because of the way he got jammed up."

"It felt like he was ripped away from the hip-hop world and the community that made him," Madden added, noting Shmurda's obvious showmanship, which was apparent even when she and Carmichael interviewed him in prison. "I truly hope whoever's around him now can harness that energy."

Shmurda's current position has been hard-earned. Raised in the working-class immigrant community of East Flatbush, his father incarcerated for life on a murder charge from the year after he was born, Shmurda opted for gang life. In and out of juvenile detention as a teenager, he returned from an upstate facility in 2012, hoping to find an off-ramp.

"I was young, wild, bad," Shmurda said. "When I came home that year, they was investigating us, so I started rapping, trying to get out." He recalled detectives who would "pull up on the block, call us by name, take pictures." That's when he started taking music seriously.

It almost worked.

In the summer of 2014, Shmurda released a music video, "Hot Boy" in its edited form, that was equally grimy and catchy, threatening violence even as he rocked those hips and grinned big with his neighborhood friends. One clip, isolated and looped, showed the rapper throwing his fitted cap in the air and doing his trademark Shmoney Dance. It went viral on Vine, and then everywhere. Even Beyoncé mimicked the move.

"Hot Boy" — with lines like, "I've been selling crack since like the fifth grade" — would go on to score Shmurda a seven-figure record deal with Epic, along with agreements for some of his East Flatbush associates, and the song reached No. 6 on the Billboard Hot 100. But its success was too late and, according to the authorities, had not stemmed the violence that continued to surround the rapper.

That December, New York gang prosecutors conducted a sweep, arresting Shmurda at a Manhattan studio and eventually locking up more than a dozen others they said were part of GS9, an offshoot of the Crips. Though Shmurda was not accused of committing the most serious acts himself, prosecutors used racketeering statutes to argue that he was "the driving force" and "organizing figure within this conspiracy," which they said was responsible for multiple shootings and at least one murder.

Nearly two years later, at 22, Shmurda pleaded guilty to two counts — six others filed against him were dropped — and he was sentenced to seven years in prison. While incarcerated, Shmurda was disciplined for violations including fighting and possessing contraband in the form of a shiv, which he later told a parole board was for self-defense, calling Rikers Island "just a crazy place."

When Shmurda hears his early music now, he experiences "love, pain, everything — a bunch of mixed emotions knowing where it took me, where it got me," he said. "You feel all the times that you thought about the brothers who aren't here or who are locked up."

But he wears little of that angst in public, swearing that his relationship with his

parole officer is great — even if he can't yet get a passport because of the terms of his release — and that his prison sentence saved him. The current restrictions on his life, Shmurda said, are "not holding me back from nothing — they're keeping me out of jail."

"I ain't mad about going to jail, because my mind-state now versus my mind-state before — I probably would've been in jail for life before," he added. "The stuff that's going to get you in trouble or put you in that situation, you can see that from miles away."

"When I was young, I used to run towards it," he continued. "I was a full animal. So I feel like being locked up, it made me smarter. It made me stronger. And it made me badder, but in a good way. Instead of saying, boom, 'I want to go in the streets and cause hell,' I'm saying, 'I want to go in the streets and give back.' I feel like that's gangster."

Mike Brinkley, a senior vice president of artist management at Roc Nation, said that Shmurda has been a curious and active participant in plotting his comeback. "He'll ask questions and not just ask but actually comprehend," the manager said. "Meeting him for the first time, you can't even fathom what he went through because he doesn't wear it. He's like, 'I'm here to work, what do you need me to do?'"

Recently, Shmurda had to be caught up on the glut of streaming services and social networks that bloomed while he was gone. "My godkids got me TikToking!" he said.

But he is still finding his voice — which has deepened — and his place in the current rap landscape, with "Hot Boy" having given way to Brooklyn drill and New York stars like Cardi B and Pop Smoke, who was killed last year. Shmurda is even teaching himself how to produce beats, wanting a hand in all parts of his debut album.

The rapper described his day-to-day life, post-prison, as "music, girls, family, music, girls, more girls," but he now only pops over to East Flatbush for brief visits. "Anybody in the streets is looking over their shoulder 24/7," Shmurda said. "And they're also taking a risk. That risk ain't worth it."

But at the studio in Manhattan, an old friend came with a piece of home in hand — jerk chicken from one of Shmurda's former go-to spots. The rapper was instantly transported, and he insisted everybody try a bite.

Afghanistan's Unraveling May Strike Another Blow to U.S. Credibility

Internally displaced families last week in Kandahar. In the last few months, at least 400,000 Afghans have become internally displaced, a number likely to rise considerably.

BRUSSELS — Afghanistan's rapid unraveling is already raising grumblings about American credibility, compounding the wounds of the Trump years and reinforcing the idea that America's backing for its allies is not unlimited.

The Taliban's lightning advance comes at a moment when many in Europe and Asia had hoped that President Biden would reestablish America's firm presence in international affairs, especially as China and Russia angle to extend their influence. Now, America's retreat is bound to sow doubts.

"When Biden says 'America is back,' many people will say, 'Yes, America is back home,'" said François Heisbourg, a French defense analyst.

"Few will gang up on the U.S. for finally stopping a failed enterprise," he said. "Most people would say it should have happened a long time ago." But in the longer term, he added, "the notion that you cannot count on the Americans will strike deeper roots because of Afghanistan."

The United States has been pulling back from military engagements abroad since

President Obama, he noted, and under President Trump, "we had to prepare for a U.S. no longer willing to assume the burden of unlimited liability alliances."

That hesitation will now be felt all the more strongly among countries in play in the world, like Taiwan, Ukraine, the Philippines and Indonesia, which can only please China and Russia, analysts suggest.

"What made the U.S. strong, powerful and rich was that from 1918 through 1991 and beyond, everybody knew we could depend on the U.S. to defend and stand up for the free world," said Tom Tugendhat, chairman of the British Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee.

"The sudden withdrawal from Afghanistan after 20 years and so much investment in lives and effort will see allies and potential allies around the world wondering whether they have to decide between democracies and autocracies, and realize some democracies don't have staying power anymore," he added.

In Asia, the American withdrawal and looming collapse of the Afghan government have been viewed with a mixture of resignation and trepidation.

"Most Asians have already factored it in because it's been a protracted process, not a shock," said Susan L. Shirk, the head of the 21st Century China Center at the University of California, San Diego.

The country expressing the most concern has been China, which shares a short, remote border with Afghanistan, which under the Taliban served as a haven for Uyghur extremists from Xinjiang, the far western Chinese province.

China, which routinely criticizes the United States for acting as a global belligerent, has warned that a hasty American withdrawal could create instability across the region.

At the same time, China's Foreign Ministry offered a public show of support to the Taliban, holding two days of talks late last month with a delegation that included one of the movement's founders, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar.

The issue for America's allies and others, though, is less "credibility," a much misused term, than ability to see commitments through to the end. And the world can seem a more anarchic, less comprehensible place, said Jean-Marie Guéhenno, former French and United Nations diplomat now at Columbia University.

"The military debacle of Afghanistan, coming after the diplomatic debacle of Syria, will make Western nations more inward-looking, cynical and nationalist," he said, "as they feel surrounded by a world that they don't control, but keeps intruding."

Still, Mr. Guéhenno said, Western democracies "must not adopt a doctrine of indifference to the plight of other people."

Afghanistan was never a particularly vital interest for Europe to begin with. NATO went to war there 20 years ago only to show solidarity with the United States after 9/11.

But the suddenness of Afghanistan's collapse is another reminder of what can happen when Europe outsources decisions to Washington.

NATO countries let the Americans call the shots in Afghanistan, even if they complained about a lack of consultation. For NATO, the mantra was always "in together, out together." Once President Biden decided to pull the plug, NATO troops also began leaving at speed; there is little appetite for returning.

Europe's main worries now are a new flow of Afghan migrants and a new safe haven for terrorism. But for a long time now, European terrorism has had its roots closer to home, in North Africa and the Middle East and in domestic disaffection.

The Biden administration has other problems, and Europeans want support from Washington on more important issues, like climate change, Russia and China, said Robin Niblett, director of Chatham House, the London research institution.

"Biden will take some hit for lack of consultation with allies and piggybacking on a flawed Trump strategy," Mr. Niblett said. "But there is a lot more to be gained for American soft power by getting through the corona crisis and focusing on vaccines for the world, than on putting more effort into whether the Afghan government survives."

Allies, especially Britain and Germany, were angry at the way the pullout was announced and saw it as a fait accompli, so there will be some residual damage, Mr. Niblett said.

"But Europe won't give up on a Biden who believes in allies on the big issues that matter," he said, adding: "On these Biden is leading in the right direction."

Europeans have failed to identify their own interests in Afghanistan, which center on regional stability, energy supplies and migration, said Ulrich Speck, a senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund in Berlin. "Europeans ignore geopolitics at their own peril," he said.

For instance, a new wave of migration could destabilize Turkey, which is already hosting nearly 4 million Syrian refugees, Mr. Speck said. That, in turn, he added, could bring new tensions with Greece and the rest of the European Union.

"The Europeans should not play the American role, but at least have consulted with one another about what we could do, even to help Kabul," he said.

Carl Bildt, the former Swedish prime minister, went further, urging the U.S. and Europe to reconsider the wholesale withdrawal.

"I believe the U.S., E.U. and allies should commit to keeping a security force in Kabul until the Taliban agrees to a cease-fire and a political solution," he said in a Twitter post. "To just cut and run is to endorse a military solution dictated by the Taliban."

But there appear to be few volunteers at this stage.

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell Fontelles, issued a statement Thursday night calling on the Taliban to immediately resume talks with the Afghan government in Qatar and to respect human rights. Echoing State Department warnings, he said that "if power is taken by force and an Islamic Emirate reestablished, the Taliban would face nonrecognition, isolation, lack of international support."

But Europe has little leverage. There are obvious worries about how long the Afghan government will last, what will happen to women, girls, judges and the media under a renewed Taliban rule, and about a new wave of Afghan refugees.

Earlier this week, ministers from six countries — Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece and Denmark — called for continuing deportations of Afghans whose asylum claims have been rejected.

But given the speed of the collapse, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark and France have, for now, at least, stopped sending Afghans who do not qualify as refugees back to Afghanistan.

Few expect a repeat of the 2015 migration crisis, when more than a million people sought asylum and the resulting chaos boosted far-right and populist politics. But a large new flow from Afghanistan is likely to feed domestic anxieties, especially in Germany, which has elections next month.

Though the numbers are down, in 2020 Afghans were the second-largest country of origin for asylum seekers arriving in the bloc, with some 50,000 applying, the European Asylum Support Office says. Fully 59 percent of applications from Afghans were accepted.

Some 1,200 Afghans have been returned so far this year, and only 200 of them did not return voluntarily, European officials told reporters on Tuesday. But they said that in the last few months, at least 400,000 Afghans have become internally

displaced, a number likely to rise considerably.

In Britain, which has a long history with Afghanistan and has had the second largest number of casualties after the United States, there is more chagrin and even anger.

Lord David Richards, chief of defense from 2010 to 2013, criticized his government for moving so quickly to evacuate Britons. He told BBC Newsnight that the evacuation "is a tacit, explicit really, admission of a dismal failure of geostrategy and of statecraft."

He said he had hoped to hear "an explanation for why we're in this position, and then, an explanation on how they are going to avert this disaster." Instead, he said, there was just "an admission of failure and a desire to pull people out."

He added: "I'm almost ashamed that we're in this position."

Steven Lee Myers and Monika Pronczuk contributed reporting.

Where Dark Skies Draw Star-Gazers, Wildfire Smoke Spoils the View

Smoke from wildfires in the West stained the normally crystalline night sky at Great Sand Dunes National Park in Colorado on Thursday, where stargazers gathered to watch the Perseid meteor shower.

GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL PARK — The high, lonesome dunes that run up against the Rocky Mountains at 7,500 feet above sea level in southern Colorado are a long, long drive from the closest streetlight, and after dusk, the almost untainted darkness and thin, dry air reveals just how bright the night sky can actually be.

Stars burn fierce enough to cast shadows on the sand. The core of the Milky Way is a blazing arch, soaring over the Continental Divide. Like other remote parts of the West, the dunes are usually an ideal spot to catch the annual summer light show put on by the Perseid meteor shower, which peaks this week.

But not so much this year. The West is on fire, the sky is full of smoke, and on many nights, even in the darkest corners of the West, the meteors that once slashed across the heavens with fiery intensity only pulse faintly through the murk — if they can be seen at all.

"It's been horrible — I've never seen it so smoky as this year," Bob Bohley, a volunteer astronomy ranger who has been giving evening star presentations at Great

Sand Dunes National Park for nine years, said just before starting his nightly ranger talk on Thursday. “Some nights it’s been so thick that even the brightest stars were hard to make out. I would just point in the direction of a constellation and hope folks would see something.”

Great Sand Dunes is one of 27 national parks and monuments, nearly all in the intermountain West, that are designated as dark-sky parks, where light pollution from cities is scant. But in recent years, the fire season — as summer is now often called — has meant that the chance for stargazing depends not just on the phase of the moon, but also on how many square miles are burning upwind.

Climate change has made wildfires more common and more intense. More than 105 large fires in the West this year have already torched a total area the size of Connecticut, sending millions of tons of fine ash into the sky. That ash can stay airborne for months, spreading a smoke screen that acts like a cataract on the night sky over thousands of miles.

Star watchers have noticed a distinct dimming as far East as Martha’s Vineyard in Massachusetts in recent weeks. With vast blazes like the Dixie Fire in California still far from contained, and a forecast of scorching weather for much of the West over the next week, the celestial view isn’t expected to improve any time soon.

To be sure, the clarity of the heavens ranks low on the list of impacts from the fires ravaging the West. Hundreds of people have lost their homes, and smoke blanketing the region has sent increasing numbers of people to the hospital.

Still, the occlusion of that primordial cosmic view, which for thousands of generations has opened minds to the vast potential and fleeting fragility of life, comes with a real cost.

“A natural starry sky is the embodiment of awe,” said Bettymaya Foott, a photographer of the night sky and director of engagement for the International Dark-Sky Association. “When you are faced with the infinite, it’s an incredibly humbling experience.”

Ms. Foott said she would probably miss the peak of the meteor shower this week because of persistent smoke over her home in southwestern Colorado.

Though the association has focused on preventing light pollution, she said, it is starting to realize that climate change also poses a threat to clear dark skies.

“It’s all connected,” she said. “Just as light pollution and smoke don’t respect boundaries, the consequences of how we handle climate change travel far.”

If the stars lost their luster, much of the country might not notice. NASA esti-

mates that only about 17 percent of Americans live in dark rural places where they can see the Milky Way.

Colorado's high terrain and arid climate have long given it a special connection to the night sky. One of the state's official songs, "Rocky Mountain High" by John Denver, was inspired by an August night at a high mountain lake, when the singer was awakened by the dazzling starlight and had a transcendent experience watching the "raining fire" of the Perseid meteors shooting by overhead.

On Friday, a cold front is likely to push some of the smoke out of the Rockies, providing a window of clear viewing. But with major fires still burning on the West Coast, forecasters say the clarity may not last long.

For many visitors to the West's dark-sky parks, the promise of diamond-glittered skies are a key attraction. On Thursday night, as Mr. Bohley, the ranger, prepared for the evening astronomy talk, a man from Philadelphia stopped by to say that he had timed his vacation especially to be in a dark-sky park at the peak of the Perseid shower, and asked the ranger if it was OK to stay out all night on the dunes, watching.

"Oh, yeah, we should see plenty tonight," Mr. Bohley replied. "It looks like we're finally catching a break."

A stiff East wind swept down over the mountains just after sunset, driving the drifting smoke back to the West. The sky over the park grew clear — or at least clearer.

As darkness settled in, a small crowd of visitors gathered around and Mr. Bohley lifted his eyes upward, guiding them to planets and galaxies, white dwarfs and red giants.

The night sky, he told them, is not just a spectacle, but a critical piece of cultural heritage. Peering up at the stars and wondering is as ancient and universal as dance or song or music. It is a part of the essential human experience, he said

Right on cue, a meteor coursed across the sky, leaving a long, silent, silvery tail. In unison, the entire crowd sighed, "Ooooooh."

Biden Could Have Stopped the Taliban. He Chose Not To.

Afghan families fleeing the violence of the Taliban offensive sought shelter in a public park in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Tuesday.

This article has been updated to reflect news developments.

The Taliban is sweeping across Afghanistan seizing more than a dozen provincial capitals in the past week, and is poised to seize more. Afghan defense forces, finding themselves mostly cut off from U.S. air support, haven't been able to stop them, and the Afghan government may not survive for much longer. The United States has all but abandoned the country.

A disastrous Taliban takeover wasn't inevitable. President Biden said his hands were tied to a withdrawal given the awful peace deal negotiated between the Trump administration and the Taliban. But there was still a way to pull out American troops while giving our Afghan partners a better chance to hold the gains we made with them over the last two decades.

Mr. Biden chose otherwise. The way he announced the drawdown and eventual departure of American troops — at the start of the fighting season, on a rapid timeline and sans adequate coordination with the Afghan government — has in part gotten us into the current situation.

Reasonable people can disagree about the wisdom of keeping American military forces in Afghanistan indefinitely, even at very low numbers. I and others have argued that the investment, including the risk to American personnel, is worth it to prevent militant groups from once again overrunning the country.

Mr. Biden believes that further expending U.S. resources in Afghanistan is "a recipe for being there indefinitely." He rightly notes that President Trump had left him few good options by making a terrible deal with the Taliban. That's a fine argument, but it explains neither the hastiness nor the consequences we are now observing: the Taliban overrunning swaths of the country, closing in on Kabul, pushing the Afghan security forces and government to the brink of collapse and prompting the Pentagon to prepare for a possible evacuation of the U.S. embassy.

A responsible withdrawal needed more time and better preparation. History will record Mr. Biden, a supposed master of foreign policy for decades, as having failed in this most critical assignment.

As U.S. military planners well know, the Afghan war has a seasonal pattern. The Taliban leadership retreats to bases, largely in Pakistan, every winter and then launches the group's fighting season campaign in the spring, moving into high gear in the summer after the poppy harvest. At the very least, the United States should have continued to support the Afghans through this period to help them blunt the Taliban's latest offensive and buy time to plan for a future devoid of American military assistance.

American diplomats could have used this time to negotiate access to regional bases from which to continue counterterrorism operations. Simultaneously, the American military should have prepared contingencies in case those negotiations failed. And even that plan would have meant contending with an increasingly brazen Taliban. (A report by the special inspector general for Afghanistan Reconstruction said the Taliban launched its latest offensive after U.S. and coalition forces officially began drawing down in May.)

Adopting a more judicious approach would have required Mr. Biden to accept two things in addition to a longer timeline: the temporary deployment of additional U.S. forces and the slightly increased risk of American casualties.

Sending additional troops into Afghanistan could have allowed the United States to carry out the withdrawal safely without severely disrupting military support. When the president ordered the pullout, there were some 3,500 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. One thousand or 2,000 additional troops deployed for less than a year could have made a significant difference. They would have allowed Gen. Austin S. Miller, the former U.S. commander in Afghanistan, to continue supporting the Afghan security forces while simultaneously prepping the withdrawal.

Obviously, Mr. Biden did not proceed in this manner. Instead, he ordered a hasty withdrawal of the military just as the Taliban offensive was moving into its major phase.

Several weeks after the president's announcement, there was no clear plan for responding to terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan post-withdrawal. It was still unclear if the United States would continue to provide air support to Afghan forces, whether it would have bases in neighboring countries, or how Kabul's international airport would be secured — an element essential to the maintenance of a U.S. diplomatic presence in the country.

Since then, the U.S. military has provided some support to Afghan forces as the Taliban continues to advance. Unfortunately, this support has been too limited and late to save major cities under attack. In addition, several details of the withdrawal appear to remain unresolved, including how to keep the Afghan military operational without the presence of U.S. contractors for technical support, and how to expedite the immigration of Afghan interpreters who risked their lives for U.S. troops. Protecting these people is an ethical responsibility and strategic imperative, but the administration's current Special Immigrant Visa Program is plagued by delays.

To be clear, Mr. Trump did put the Biden administration in a bind with a peace deal that specified U.S. troops had to leave by May 1. Still, Mr. Biden blew past that deadline, so pushing for a slightly longer timeline with some extra troops, even if in theory that goes against the peace deal, shouldn't have been difficult for the administration to accept to permit an orderly, safer withdrawal. The additional financial cost of waiting until early 2022 to complete the retreat would have been bearable with a slightly different budgetary prioritization. (The Senate just approved a trillion dollar infrastructure bill and passed a $3.5 trillion budget plan.)

And then there are the optics of an American retreat. Mr. Biden has repeatedly emphasized the importance of getting U.S. forces out the door, because he was tied to the peace deal and lest U.S. soldiers come under Taliban attack. Is this really the type of fearful, defeatist message a global leader should be sending out to the world?

Both the U.S. and Afghan governments are now scrambling to mitigate the effects of Mr. Biden's specific decisions. Amid the chaos, there is an important lesson to be learned: Whether announced by tweet or speech, decisions made without concrete plans or robust implementation strategies are wrong — regardless of which president or party spearheads them.

Afghans are paying the price of Mr. Biden's decision today as the Taliban seizes cities, assassinates officials and begins reimposing its oppressive ideology on a people who have long fought to be free of it.

The United States will likely also continue to pay for its actions in Afghanistan. There's a real danger that militant groups will reconstitute themselves and once again pose a significant threat to the American homeland. With America's allies left in the lurch, prospective partners will think twice before offering up their support in future conflicts.

They know that this is not how a global leader acts. And most important, so do we.

Frederick W. Kagan is a senior fellow and director of the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute. He was part of Gen. Stanley McChrystal's civilian advisory team in Afghanistan in 2009 and advised three commanders of U.S. and international forces in Afghanistan.

The Times is committed to publishing a diversity of letters to the editor. We'd like to hear what you think about this or any of our articles. Here are some tips. And here's our email: letters@nytimes.com.

Follow The New York Times Opinion section on Facebook, Twitter (@NYTopinion) and Instagram.

A New Era for New York Times Newsletters

This article also appears in the Opinion Today newsletter. You can sign up here to receive it in your inbox each weekday morning.

The Times has been sending newsletters to readers for two decades, but we've seen a particular explosion of interest in the medium in the past few years. Readers have clearly embraced the convenience of Times journalism landing in their inboxes: Our newsletter audience is well into the millions and continues to grow as we've increased our offering to more than 50 newsletters across news and Opinion.

This week, we are announcing the next step in the evolution of newsletters at The Times: A selection of our newsletters will soon be reserved for subscribers. And as part of this new subscriber benefit, we in Opinion are adding exciting new voices to our portfolio.

The linguist and commentator John McWhorter will write about how race and language shape our culture. Kara Swisher, the host of Opinion's Sway podcast, will give readers an inside track on the changing power dynamics in tech and media.

The sociologist and essayist Tressie McMillan Cottom will offer her singular analysis on everything from race to pop culture, from economics to beauty. Tish Harrison Warren, an Anglican priest, will reflect on faith and spirituality in everyday life.

Peter Coy, a veteran business columnist, will explain to his readers how economics underpins, well, everything. Jay Caspian Kang, a wide-ranging magazine writer, will walk readers through many of the day's thorniest issues in politics and culture. And Jane Coaston, host of The Argument, another Times Opinion podcast, will give readers the missing context and history on the most significant debates in sports, politics and more.

The widely read Opinion writers Jamelle Bouie, Paul Krugman and Frank Bruni will also be a part of these subscriber-exclusive offerings.

Among the newsletters produced by my colleagues in the newsroom, On Politics, On Tech With Shira Ovide, On Soccer With Rory Smith, Smarter Living, Well, Watching, At Home and Away, and Parenting will become available only to subscribers.

This is just the beginning. Stay tuned for more additions to our lineup in the coming weeks and months.

One of the aims with this effort is to give Times subscribers the opportunity to dive into subjects they care about through the lens of the Times's singular journalism. Our editors, of course, will continue to do what they do so well: helping guide writers to produce their best work.

I hope you'll sign up for some of them today.

What Does It Mean for a Whole Nation to Become Uninhabitable?

Igloolik, Canada.

Devi Lockwood spent five years traveling the globe talking to people about changes they were seeing to their local water and climates. Here are some of the stories she heard.

A little more than 10,000 people live in Tuvalu. Generations ago, Polynesians navigated here by the stars, calling the sprinkles of land in the vast blue of the South Pacific home. With 10 square miles of total area, less than five miles of roads and only one hospital on the main island, Tuvalu is the fourth-smallest country in the world. Disney World is four times larger in area. Tuvalu's capital city, Funafuti, sits about 585 miles south of the Equator.

By some estimates, Tuvaluans will be forced, by water scarcity and rising sea levels, to migrate elsewhere in the next 50 years. This mass exodus is already happening. Large Tuvaluan outposts exist in Fiji and New Zealand.

I came to Tuvalu with a question: What does it mean for a whole nation to become uninhabitable in my lifetime?

Tauala Katea, the director of Tuvalu's meteorological service, sat in his office near the airport and tilted a monitor to show me an image of a recent flood when water bubbled up under a field by the runway. "This is what climate change looks like,"

he told me.

“In 2000, Tuvaluans living in the outer islands noticed that their taro and pulaka crops were suffering,” he said. “The root crops seemed rotten and the size was getting smaller and smaller.”

Those two starchy staples of Tuvaluan cuisine are grown in pits dug underground. This crop failure was the first indication that something was wrong. The culprit was found to be saltwater intrusion linked to sea level rise.

The last 20 years have marked a period of significant change in the Tuvaluan way of life. Thatched roofs and freshwater wells are things of the past. The freshwater lens underneath the island, a layer that floats above denser seawater, has become salty and contaminated. Each home now has a water tank attached to a corrugated iron roof by a gutter. This rainwater is boiled for drinking and also used to wash clothes and dishes and for bathing.

Imported food is now commonplace. During my month in Tuvalu (from December 2014 to January 2015), I learned what climate change tastes like: imported rice, tinned corned beef, a handful of imported carrots and apples, the occasional local papaya, bananas and many creative uses for custard powder.

There is no normal anymore.

“We can try to adapt to climate change, all these changes,” Mr. Katea said, “or migrate.”

Igloolik, a community on a small island of the same name in northern Canada, is about 1,400 miles south of the North Pole. The only way to get in or out is by passenger plane, dog sled, snowmobile or — for a few weeks in summer, when the sea ice melts — boat. Around 1,700 people live there.

Marie Airut, an elder in her 70s , lives by the water. We spoke in her living room over cups of black tea. “My husband died recently,” she told me. But when he was alive, they went hunting together in every season; it was their main source of food.

“I’m not going to tell you what I don’t know. I’m going to tell you only the things that I have seen,” she said. In the 1970s and ’80s, seal holes would open in late June, an ideal time for hunting baby seals. “But now if I try to go out hunting at the end of June, the holes are very big and the ice is really thin,” she explained. “The ice is melting too fast. It doesn’t melt from the top, it melts from the bottom.”

When the water is warmer, the animals change their movement. Igloolik has always been known for its walrus hunting. But, she said, “I don’t think I can reach them anymore, unless you have 70 gallons of gas. They are that far now, because

the ice is melting so fast. It used to take us half a day to find walrus in the summer, but now, if I go out with my boys, it would probably take us two days to get some walrus meat for the winter."

Ms. Airut and her family used to make fermented walrus every year, "but this year I told my sons we're not going walrus hunting. They are too far," she said.

"I read my Bible every day, and I know things will change," she said. "And I believe both of them are happening now, what is written and what I see with my own eyes."

Francis Piugattuk had worked for 20 years as a wildlife technician at the Igloolik Research Center. When he was a child, polar bear sightings were infrequent.

"Even seeing tracks was an anomaly, a cause for excitement. And if people wanted to harvest polar bears, they would have to go long, long distances," he said.

Mr. Piugattuk noted that up until 20 years ago, the only animals attracted to caches of walrus meat near town were arctic foxes. Now the community is setting up electric fences and trying to extract the fermenting meat before the polar bears can get to it. The bears are moving closer to human settlements as ice patterns change.

Elders, he told me, were able to live sustainably off the land by selling fox or seal pelts in exchange for rifles, boats and other materials. Today it's only those in the wage economy who can afford to buy an outboard motor or ammunition.

"The cost of living is so great now that it's not even viable to try to exist as a hunter," he explained. "Those of us that do not hunt live on pasta and macaroni, rice, soup."

Terry Uyarak, a hunter in his early 30s, has deep tan lines around his eyes in the shape of his sunglasses — the sign of a summer spent out on the land.

When he was younger, the ocean would freeze in late September. Now, come Halloween, he can still go boating. In the past, in late October, he would be driving a snowmobile.

"It's changing quite rapidly. And I'm not old at all. I'm 31," he said.

Tromso, Norway, is often the last stop for researchers before crossing the Arctic Ocean to Svalbard, the northernmost year-round settlement in the world, home to researchers of many nationalities.

Geir Wing Gabrielsen, a senior research scientist in environmental pollutants at the Norwegian Polar Institute in Tromso, has been researching Arctic animals for nearly

four decades. In recent years, his focus has turned to plastic pollution, which, in Arctic waters, has become a symptom of how the warming climate is altering ocean currents and affecting Arctic animals.

In 1987, he started investigating the diet of the fulmar, a bird that can live for more than 40 years in the wild. Of the 40 birds he sliced open, four had plastic in their stomach. When he repeated the study in 2013, 35 did; some had more than 200 pieces of plastic in their stomachs, preventing the uptake of nutrients. In Europe, fulmars have been found on the beaches, starved to death because of the overload of plastic in their stomachs.

Part of the reason there's so much plastic in the Arctic is that ocean currents are changing because of the warming effect caused by the increased concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. This, in turn, pushes more plastic contamination and pollutants into the Arctic from points south.

Plastic is now found not only in Arctic surface waters but also on the ocean floor and in sea ice. Dr. Gabrielsen has witnessed other changes in the ecosystem. Fjords that used to be dominated by polar species now have Atlantic species. Species that used to be farther south, like capelin, herring, mackerel and Atlantic cod, are more prominent than polar cod.

When the Atlantic system drifts northward, pollution also enters the food chain. Fish eat the plankton, the seal eats the fish, the polar bear eats the seal and the toxicity accumulates in the body of the apex predator.

"We all agree to take care of our coastline, but nobody wants to take care of what's going on far away from us, out at sea," Dr. Gabrielsen said.

I wandered into the First Church of Otago in Dunedin, on New Zealand's South Island, where I met Malcolm, who worked in a museum in the church devoted to the history of the congregation.

He told me that in 2006, an iceberg from Antarctica floated past Dunedin's coast. The pieces most likely broke off from an ice shelf in 2000.

"It could be seen by people from Dunedin if they climbed up the hills and looked out to sea," he said. It was white and bigger than a speck, but far enough off the coast that it didn't come ashore.

This ice was a whisper from Antarctica — the faraway, suddenly nearby and in motion. Melting.

"Many people chartered airplanes to fly out over it and look at it," Malcolm said. He pointed to a photograph taken by The Otago Daily Times in which a helicopter,

insect-size in comparison, landed on the surface of the ice. “You can see it’s quite a huge thing,” he said.

I met Ren Hu, a Ph.D. student at the University of Wollongong, when I was cycling through Australia, but the story he wanted to share was about his hometown, close to the city of Nanjing in east-central China.

“When I was a kid, about 7 or 8 years old, in my hometown, the snow in winter could be very thick,” he told me, “and everyone made a very big snowman.” The memory of those winters made him smile.

But a few months earlier, he had returned to his hometown in the winter. Now the snowflakes fall less frequently and often melt without accumulating. Mr. Ren thinks of snow “like an endangered animal, because it’s very rare in my hometown,” he said. “My memories became a fairy tale.”

Devi Lockwood (@devi_lockwood) is an editor at the digital news site Rest of World and the author of the forthcoming book “1,001 Voices on Climate Change.”

The Times is committed to publishing a diversity of letters to the editor. We’d like to hear what you think about this or any of our articles. Here are some tips. And here’s our email: letters@nytimes.com.

Follow The New York Times Opinion section on Facebook, Twitter (@NYTopinion) and Instagram.

Fearing Kabul's Fall, U.S. Officials Implore Afghans to 'Fight'

In Kandahar early this month, before the Afghan city fell to the Taliban.

As the Afghan government lost control of more than a dozen cities in a matter of days, Biden administration officials repeatedly urged its collapsing security forces to demonstrate "leadership" and "will" to defend Kabul, their capital — underscoring the stark reality that the United States has no intention of rescuing them as the Taliban storm across the country.

Echoing several other top U.S. officials in recent days, John F. Kirby, a Defense Department spokesman, noted to reporters on Friday that Afghan government forces had numerical and firepower advantages over the Taliban and suggested they should be able to stop the onslaught if only they tried hard enough.

"We will do what we can from the air, but they have the advantage. They have greater numbers. They have an air force. They have modern weaponry," he said. "It's time now to use those advantages."

A day earlier, Mr. Kirby was more explicit. "No potential outcome has to be inevitable, including the fall of Kabul," he said. "It doesn't have to be that way. It really depends on the kind of political and military leadership that the Afghans can muster to turn this around."

President Biden has spoken in similar terms, saying on Tuesday that Afghan forces "have got to want to fight." The next day, Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said the Afghans "have what they need," but must determine whether they have "the political will to fight back."

But Afghan forces are suffering from shattered morale, diminishing supplies, and the shock of a war they are losing much faster than all but the most pessimistic analysts expected.

And privately, many U.S. officials are growing increasingly doubtful that the Afghan forces can rally to mount a defense of Kabul, which could potentially force a stalemate and an eventual political settlement.

That attitude is reflected by the increasingly frantic preparations underway for the worst-case scenario of a Taliban takeover of the capital city.

U.S. officials on Thursday announced the deployment of 3,000 troops to begin evacuating Americans from Kabul, and are accelerating plans to relocate Afghans who worked with U.S. military forces, and who may be eligible for Special Immigrant Visas to resettle in the United States. Some 20,000 Afghans have applied for the visas, which take months to process, leaving them vulnerable to potential Taliban reprisals while they wait. Many live in Kabul.

People familiar with the planning say that State Department officials have been working virtually around the clock to expedite what U.S. officials have called Operation Allies Refuge.

Nearly 700 Afghans have landed in the Washington area on four flights so far, with most moving on to Fort Lee in Virginia. About 1,750 more are expected to arrive at Fort Lee over the next 10 days, according to the sources familiar with the planning.

The State Department said this month that thousands of Afghans with American ties who did not qualify for the Special Immigrant Visa program, including people who worked for U.S.-based media organizations and nongovernmental organizations, would be eligible for priority refugee status.

But those Afghans must apply for refugee status from outside of Afghanistan — a prospect that has become far more daunting as the Taliban seize control of more territory, roads and border crossings, making it dangerous to try to leave the country. Many of Afghanistan's neighbors have also turned back refugees fleeing the Taliban advances.

Refugee advocates and former U.S. officials who have worked in Afghanistan said they had been inundated with messages from panicking Afghans with Western ties looking for assistance in fleeing the country. The Taliban have been accused of mas-

sacring their political enemies after their battlefield victories.

In another sign of alarm, Politico reported that the staff at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul had been instructed to begin burning documents. A State Department spokesman did not deny the report but said, without discussing specifics, that the embassy was following the standard operating procedure for diplomatic posts worldwide that are ordered to shrink their footprint.

But the spokesman did say that Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken had not urged Afghanistan's president, Ashraf Ghani, to resign during a Thursday phone call that Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III had also joined.

The Taliban have made Mr. Ghani's resignation one of their key demands at peace talks with Afghan government officials that began in 2019, and have thus far proved fruitless.

White House officials said on Friday that Mr. Biden's national security team had briefed him on conditions in the country.

But while the White House has maintained an external sense of calm, officials are keenly aware of the growing sense of political danger for Mr. Biden as cable news networks devote more airtime to the Taliban surge and an increasingly chaotic American exit.

Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky and the minority leader, after a conversation with Afghanistan's ambassador to the United States, Adela Raz, issued a statement on Friday urging the Biden administration to "hammer Taliban advances with airstrikes" and provide "critical support" to Afghan security forces to prevent the fall of Kabul.

The United States has conducted strikes against the Taliban this summer even as American troops make a final withdrawal from the country, but they have proved largely ineffectual.

On Twitter, Ronald Klain, the White House chief of staff, retweeted several posts from others defending Mr. Biden's decision to withdraw troops from the country, including one that cited poll numbers showing strong public support for an exit from the country.

Biden spokespeople have also fended off increasingly painful questions about what might be in store in the coming days and weeks.

On Friday, Mr. Kirby declined to discuss whether the United States might be confronting a repeat of the fall of the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon in April of 1975, a moment that marked the final failure of the American project in the Vietnam

War.

“We’re not focused on the history of the Vietnam War. We’re just not,” Mr. Kirby said. “We’re focused on meeting the requirements we have today.”

Mr. Biden addressed the same question in July, while taking questions from reporters at the White House.

“There’s going to be no circumstance where you see people being lifted off the roof of an embassy of the United States from Afghanistan,” he said. “It is not at all comparable.”

Zolan Kanno-Youngsand Jennifer Steinhauer contributed reporting.

Where Police Killings Often Meet With Silence: Rural America

The truck of Christopher Jacobs, who was killed in a police shooting in Pippa Passes, Ky.

This article was reported and written by The Marshall Project, a nonprofit news organization focusing on criminal justice issues, and the nonprofit Kentucky Center for Investigative Reporting.

PIPPA PASSES, Ky. — The man known all his life as Doughboy had been running from the state police for months: scrambling down a creek bed, flooring it out of a gas station, visiting his children at 2 a.m. when he thought troopers wouldn't be lurking.

Christopher Jacobs, 28, had been charged with manufacturing methamphetamine. He couldn't bear to go back to jail, he told his family, but he also feared the police would shoot him — even though he had been childhood friends with officers now patrolling this remote stretch of eastern Kentucky.

So when a state trooper and a sheriff's deputy — brothers — pulled into the Jacobs family driveway on Hemp Patch Road on Nov. 1, 2017, Mr. Jacobs's first move was to crawl under a mobile home and hide, police records show.

His second was to start yelling, "Don't kill me!" He jumped into his Chevrolet Impala and tried to flee. There was a scuffle, and the officers fired Tasers as he struggled to start the car. Then he rammed an empty police cruiser.

Leo Slone, a trooper who had grown up with Mr. Jacobs and once helped save his life after a drug overdose, shot him three times. Mr. Jacobs died at the scene.

As police shootings have become a flashpoint in U.S. cities, The Marshall Project and the Kentucky Center for Investigative Reporting spent a year examining those urban killings' little-publicized counterparts in rural America.

Officers in rural areas fatally shot about 1,200 people from 2015 through 2020, while in cities there were at least 2,100 such deaths, according to the news organizations' analysis of data compiled by The Washington Post; no comprehensive government database exists.

The data analysis found that, although the rate of rural police shootings was about 30 percent lower than the urban rate when adjusted for population, the rural incidents mirrored many of the dynamics of police shootings that have come under scrutiny in cities.

And even as deadly police shootings decreased overall during this time, according to the data, the decline in rural communities was more modest than in cities: about 9 percent versus 19 percent.

High-profile urban police shootings such as the killing of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Ky., have set off protests, prompted widespread calls for change and led to new policies in some law enforcement agencies. But rural deaths seldom attract attention from the public or the national press. Police shootings in isolated areas are rarely captured on video, and many rural officers don't wear body cameras.

Police and sheriff's departments that each had a single deadly shooting account for hundreds of the rural fatalities. But in a handful of states, including Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Texas, state troopers are responsible for many of the deaths.

Rural shootings by the Kentucky State Police, the agency with the largest number of such deaths in the six-year period, illustrate both what distinguishes these encounters from other police killings and how they fit within broader patterns nationwide.

Kentucky state troopers shot and killed at least 41 people during that period, including 33 in rural areas. To examine these deaths, reporters interviewed more than 100 people and reviewed dozens of court cases and thousands of pages of police investigative reports, in addition to conducting the data analysis.

One big difference was that most of the people killed in the rural shootings, in Kentucky and elsewhere, were white. White people make up the rural majority in nearly every state, and two-thirds of the people fatally shot by law enforcement in

rural areas across the country were white, the data analysis shows; about 10 percent were Black. (In cities, 37 percent were Black and 31 percent white.)

Nevertheless, in some states, a disproportionately high number of Black people were shot and killed by the police relative to their share of the rural population, according to the data. These include Alabama, Virginia and — the starkest example — Louisiana, where Black people accounted for about 20 percent of rural residents but almost 37 percent of rural police shootings.

Other characteristics of the rural Kentucky incidents were closely aligned with both rural and urban police shootings across the country. Most of the people shot in rural Kentucky were men, and two-thirds were armed with guns, according to police records. A majority had drug addiction or mental health problems, including some in the throes of crises that troopers did little to de-escalate, police records show. And many of the shootings occurred in the state's poorer counties.

"We tend to get justice in this country based on whether you have access to money," said Peter Kraska, a criminologist at Eastern Kentucky University and a policing expert. "Rural areas suffer from a lot of the significant problems that the rest of the country does."

Like most other police shootings across the country, those in rural settings seldom lead to indictments or prosecutions of the officers involved, the data show. This holds in Kentucky, where the state police investigate their own shootings without an independent review. That model is changing in many parts of the country, where states and municipalities have set up independent investigative units.

The Kentucky State Police declined to be interviewed but provided a written statement. Without commenting on individual cases, the agency defended its record on public safety, training and the use of deadly force.

The agency takes "any use of force seriously, trains troopers in de-escalation and reviews the use of force to ensure the force is justified to protect the public and the trooper or officer," its public affairs commander, Sgt. Billy Gregory, said in the statement.

He stressed the agency's broad mandate, which goes far beyond highway patrol. Kentucky's 740 troopers police rural communities and assist local law enforcement in what he called "volatile cases": responding to a 911 call, executing a warrant, investigating a domestic disturbance or an armed person barricaded in a house.

More than half of the rural Kentucky shootings examined occurred at residences. About 55 percent of households in the state have guns, according to estimates from the RAND Corporation, which ranks Kentucky 12th for gun ownership. And in at least nine of the 33 rural Kentucky deaths during the period reviewed, troopers

fatally shot someone who had fired at law enforcement.

During that time, one Kentucky trooper was shot to death while on duty. His killing offered a cautionary tale for other officers contending with a frequent reality of the job: working alone.

Cameron Ponder, who had been a state trooper for less than a year, was by himself one night in September 2015 when he pursued a speeding Dodge Avenger with Missouri plates down an interstate highway in rural Kentucky. When the car finally pulled over, the driver opened fire, hitting Trooper Ponder three times, according to police records. He was pronounced dead at a hospital.

Officers tracked the driver's cellphone signal into nearby woods and a trooper shot him at daybreak, police records show. The man had refused to drop his gun, officers told investigators.

Cases like these attest to the dangers of the job, especially for officers working without partners. Sometimes, policing experts said, solo officers may be more inclined to shoot because they feel at risk knowing that backup could be many miles away. Working alone "affects the mind-set of the officer on the scene," said Ralph Weisheit, a professor of criminal justice at Illinois State University who has studied rural policing.

Working alone is one of several challenges the state police face, former agency officials said. Another factor is methamphetamine use, which was involved in about half of the 22 rural deaths for which toxicology reports were available.

"If we had better control over the meth problem, the drug problem in general, if we took better care of our people who were suffering from mental illness, then you wouldn't have these numbers," said Alex Payne, a former deputy commissioner of the Kentucky State Police.

Since 2019, the agency said, it has required training for cadets in "mental health first aid." But it has not adopted practices that some big-city departments now use to try to prevent violence, including having mental health professionals respond to some calls, forbidding officers from shooting into moving cars and employing body cameras.

After a police officer in Ferguson, Mo., shot and killed Michael Brown in 2014, the federal government began pushing law enforcement agencies to adopt body cameras to improve accountability. As of 2016, almost half in the country had done so, according to the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics.

But not the Kentucky State Police. The agency is still considering the idea, its spokesman said. In the meantime, in the absence of video, there have been conflict-

ing accounts from troopers and witnesses about how fatal police encounters played out.

John Casey had a long history of run-ins with law enforcement and had been known to carry guns, according to police records. But when officers investigating an alleged assault tried to question him at his home near the West Virginia border early in the morning of July 31, 2016, Mr. Casey cooperated — at first. According to police records, Trooper Jonathan Rouse spoke with the man, saw that he had an outstanding misdemeanor warrant and decided to arrest him.

About 20 minutes later, Mr. Casey would be dead.

Trooper Rouse, who was not wearing a body camera, later told state police investigators that the man fled into the woods. The officer was alone when Mr. Casey returned to threaten him, he said, throwing a rock that hit him in the head and hurling another that missed. Then Mr. Casey started to pull "something silver" from his pocket, the trooper said, that appeared to be a handgun.

There was nowhere to take cover, Trooper Rouse said, so he fired one shot from his Glock 35. Mr. Casey was hit in the chest and died.

The only item troopers found near Mr. Casey's body was an unopened can of Milwaukee's Best beer, according to police records. A toxicology report showed that he had been legally drunk.

A grand jury declined to indict Trooper Rouse, saying that throwing a rock at an officer could be considered felony assault.

But court records in a lawsuit filed by Mr. Casey's mother, Betty Casey, challenge the trooper's account. A photograph entered into evidence suggested that Trooper Rouse had no injuries to his head, despite his statement to investigators that the rock had struck him so hard he had seen "sparks." And an eyewitness testified that Mr. Casey hadn't thrown a second rock. The lawsuit also argued that the trooper could have taken cover among "abandoned vehicles and heavy vegetation" at the site.

After a federal judge found "genuine disputes" regarding the circumstances surrounding the shooting and the force used, the case settled last March for $175,000.

Trooper Rouse did not respond to requests for comment.

Of the 33 rural Kentucky shootings reviewed, at least 20 were presented to a grand jury. None of the officers involved were indicted.

Critics and even some supporters of Kentucky's state troopers have raised concerns about the training and oversight of the officers, who sometimes have deep roots in

the communities they police.

“Shooting first and asking questions later was the way that a number of these public servants were trained, and that is not a service to them,” said John Tilley, who from 2015 through 2019 led the Kentucky Justice and Public Safety Cabinet, which oversees the state police.

The state police came under criticism last year after lawyers suing the agency discovered training materials that told recruits to see themselves as warriors and “ruthless killers.” Some slides quoted Adolf Hitler.

Officials said the Hitler material was no longer in use, but they apologized and the commissioner resigned. State police officers are now required to take “courses on use of force, implicit bias, race relations and social intelligence,” the agency spokesman said.

The lawyers who discovered the training materials represent the family of Bradley Grant. When officers encountered Mr. Grant on May 20, 2018, he was struggling: After years of sobriety, he had relapsed and — like roughly a quarter of the people shot by Kentucky troopers in rural areas, according to the data analysis — had recently threatened suicide, police records show.

Troopers were looking for a man accused of beating and molesting a child when they arrived at a house where they thought he might be staying. Instead, they found Mr. Grant, pressure-washing the porch. The child’s mother was riding with one of the officers and told him that Mr. Grant was not the abuser, according to police and court records.

Still, when Mr. Grant went inside, the officers followed — even though they didn’t have a search warrant.

There, Detective Aaron Frederick broke down a locked door and found Mr. Grant pointing a shotgun at his own chin and saying, “Shoot me,” according to court records. Detective Frederick later said he had told the man more than once to drop the weapon before firing at him. Mr. Grant died soon after.

Video from a home security system, cited in the Grant family’s lawsuit, shows that 20 seconds passed between Detective Frederick’s kicking down the door and firing the first of four shots.

Detective Frederick declined to comment.

Mr. Grant’s brother, Gary Grant, a forest ranger, said that when investigators interviewed him it seemed as if they had already decided the shooting was justified and were looking for ways to defend the officers.

"When I hung up the phone, I felt like it was a smear campaign against my brother to try and present my brother as a career criminal, as a lifelong addict, a junkie and a piece of trash," he said.

A federal judge dismissed a claim of excessive force, agreeing with the officers that the circumstances justified the shooting. But the judge also ruled that the troopers had violated Mr. Grant's constitutional rights by entering the house without consent or a warrant. The state police are appealing.

Deaths at the hands of troopers in rural Kentucky have not sparked protests or widespread distrust of the agency, according to interviews with more than a dozen friends and family members of those killed. They were more likely to criticize individual officers than the Kentucky State Police.

But families including the Grants have raised concerns about the agency's investigations into shootings by its own officers. The friends and family of Mr. Jacobs, who was killed in Pippa Passes in 2017 while trying to run from the police, said they shared those doubts.

In this community of about 650, named for a poem by Robert Browning, state police investigators spent several months examining Mr. Jacobs's death. They found that he had been hit by Tasers before bullets struck his abdomen and spine.

Trooper Slone, who shot him, told investigators that an informant had said Mr. Jacobs had a sawed-off shotgun and would sooner kill police officers than return to jail. Mr. Jacobs had meth in his system when he was killed, the investigators said, and he was unarmed.

The trooper and his brother the sheriff's deputy, Robbie Slone, did not respond to requests for comment. But in an interview with investigators, the trooper confirmed that he and Mr. Jacobs went way back: "I was raised with him, right in the same community. Went all through school with him."

The evening of the shooting, he and his brother "tried everything," Trooper Slone told investigators. He had to shoot, he said, because he was afraid Mr. Jacobs would hit them with the Impala.

But several witnesses disputed that account, including Daniel Hanson, who said he saw the shooting from his yard across the street. The Impala wasn't moving when the trooper fired, Mr. Hanson said. "They had no right to shoot him," he added.

Less than three months after Mr. Jacobs's death, a grand jury declined to indict Trooper Slone.

Mr. Jacobs's mother, Terrie Jacobs, said this spring that she was still mourning the son who, as a pudgy baby, had so resembled the Pillsbury Doughboy that the nickname stuck until the day he died.

"I'm going to have this hurt with me all my life," Ms. Jacobs said. "Till they bury me."

Alysia Santo is a staff writer at The Marshall Project. R.G. Dunlop is an investigative reporter with the Kentucky Center for Investigative Reporting. Weihua Li contributed reporting. A grant by the Fund for Investigative Journalism supported the Kentucky Center's work on this project.

HOW THIS ARTICLE WAS REPORTED

Using definitions of urban and rural census tracts created by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, reporters filtered police shooting data collected by The Washington Post, which contains detailed location information. There is no federal database of police-involved shootings.

Incidents that occurred in areas HUD classifies as suburban were excluded.

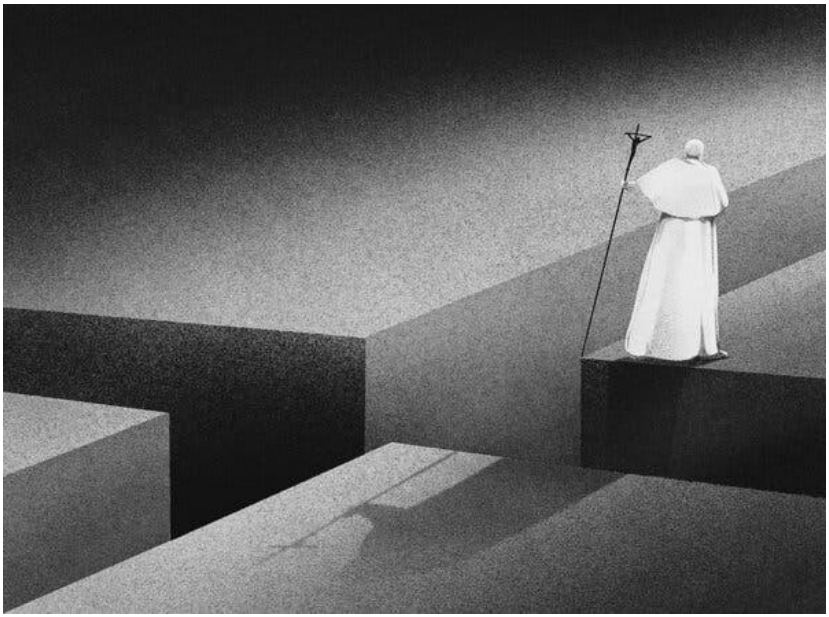
The Post's data does not include names of law enforcement agencies. To look at which police departments were responsible for the greatest numbers of fatal shootings, reporters merged the list of rural cases with another database, Mapping Police Violence, which also provided some geographic information.

To analyze the record of the Kentucky State Police, reporters filed more than a dozen Open Records Act requests, combed through more than 30 state police investigative reports, reviewed dozens of court cases, and interviewed more than 100 people during the yearlong investigation.

Specific findings about the 41 people killed by state police in Kentucky came largely from the agency's investigative reports, including details about locations, weapons, mental illness and toxicology. In eight cases for which an investigative report was not available, reporters relied on other police documents and news reports.

The findings include at least six deaths in which officers from other law enforcement agencies also fired weapons, and it is unclear which bullets were fatal.

Pope Francis Is Tearing the Catholic Church Apart



In the summer of 2001, I drove up to Poughkeepsie, N.Y., to find what we called "the traditional Latin Mass," the form of Roman Catholic worship that stretched back centuries and was last authorized in 1962, before the Second Vatican Council changed everything. Back then, conservative Catholics called people who sought it out "schismatics" and "Rad Trads."

The Mass-goers there weren't exactly a community; we were a clandestine network of romantics, haters of Pope John Paul II, people who had been jilted by the mainstream church and — I believe — some saints.

There I learned that the Latin language was not the only distinguishing feature of this form of worship. The entire ritual was different from the post-Vatican II Mass. It wasn't a mere translation into the modern vernacular; less than 20 percent of the Latin Mass survived into the new.

It took me a month to adapt to its rhythm. But in that thick August air, the long silence before the consecration of the host fell upon my heart, like sunshine landing on the bud of prayer for the very first time.

Years later, Pope Benedict allowed devotees of this Mass to flourish in the main-

stream of Catholic life, a gesture that began to drain away the traditional movement's radicalism and reconcile us with our bishops. Today, it is celebrated in thriving parishes, full of young families.

Yet this Mass and the modestly growing contingent of Catholics who attend it are seen by Pope Francis as a grave problem. He recently released a document, Traditionis Custodes, accusing Catholics like us of being subversives. To protect the "unity" of the church, he abolished the permissions Pope Benedict XVI gave us in 2007 to celebrate a liturgy, the heart of which remains unchanged since the seventh century.

For those of us who travel long distances to participate in it, its perseverance is a religious duty. For the pope, its suppression is a religious priority. The ferocity of his campaign will push these young families and communities toward the radicalism I imbibed years ago in Poughkeepsie, before Benedict. It will push them toward the belief that the new Mass represents a new religion, one dedicated to the unity of man on earth rather than the love of Christ.

In the Latin Mass, the priest faces the altar with the people. It never had oddities, as you sometimes encounter in a modern Mass, like balloons, guitar music or applause. The gabby religious talk-show host style of priest is gone. In his place, a priest who does his business quietly, a workmanlike sculptor. By directing the priest toward the drama at the altar, the old Mass opens up space for our own prayer and contemplation.

In the years after Pope Benedict liberalized the old rite, parishes began to bring back the mystical tones of Gregorian chant, the sacred polyphony written by long-dead composers like Orlando Lassus and Thomas Tallis as well as contemporary composers like Nicholas Wilton and David Hughes.

These cultural offshoots of the Latin Mass are why, after Vatican II, the English novelists Agatha Christie and Nancy Mitford and other British cultural luminaries sent a letter to Pope Paul VI asking that it continue. Their letter doesn't even pretend to be from believing Christians. "The rite in question, in its magnificent Latin text, has also inspired a host of priceless achievements in the arts — not only mystical works, but works by poets, philosophers, musicians, architects, painters and sculptors in all countries and epochs. Thus, it belongs to universal culture as well as to churchmen and formal Christians."

But the Vatican Council had called for a revision of every aspect of the central act of worship, so the altar rails, tabernacles and baldachins were torn up in countless parishes. This ferment was accompanied by radical new theologies around the Mass. A freshman religious studies major would know that revising all the vocal and physical aspects of a ceremony and changing the rationale for it constitutes a true change of religion. Only overconfident Catholic bishops could imagine otherwise.

The most candid progressives agreed with the radical traditionalists that the council constituted a break with the past. They called Vatican II "a new Pentecost" — an "Event" — that had given the church a new self-understanding. They believed their revolution had been stalled in 1968 when Pope Paul VI issued "Humanae Vitae," affirming the church's opposition to artificial contraception, and then put it on ice in 1978 with the election of Pope John Paul II.

To stamp out the old Latin Mass, Pope Francis is using the papacy in precisely the way that progressives once claimed to deplore: He centralizes power in Rome, usurps the local bishop's prerogatives and institutes a micromanaging style that is motivated by paranoia of disloyalty and heresy. Perhaps it's to protect his deepest beliefs.

Pope Francis envisions that we will return to the new Mass. My children cannot return to it; it is not their religious formation. Frankly, the new Mass is not their religion. In countless alterations, the belief that the Mass was a real sacrifice and that the bread and wine, once consecrated, became the body and blood of our Lord was downplayed or replaced in it. With the priest facing the people, the altar was severed from the tabernacle. The prescribed prayers of the new Mass tended never even to refer to that structure anymore as an altar but as the Lord's table. The prayers that pointed to the Lord's real presence in the sacrament were conspicuously replaced with ones emphasizing the Lord's spiritual presence in the assembled congregation.

The prayers of the traditional Mass emphasized that the priest was re-presenting the same sacrifice Christ made at Calvary, one that propitiated God's wrath at sin and reconciled humanity to God. The new Mass portrayed itself as a narrative and historical remembrance of the events recalled in Scripture, and the offering and sacrifice was not of Christ, but of the assembled people, as the most commonly used Eucharistic prayer in the new Mass says, "from age to age you gather a people to Thyself, in order that from east to west a perfect offering may be made."

For Catholics, how we pray shapes what we believe. The old ritual physically aims us toward an altar and tabernacle. In that way it points us to the cross and to heaven as the ultimate horizon of man's existence. By doing so, it shows that God graciously loves us and redeems us despite our sins. And the proof is in the culture this ritual produces. Think of Mozart's great rendition of faith in the Eucharist: "Ave Verum Corpus" (Hail True Body).

The new ritual points us toward a bare table, and it consistently posits the unity of humankind as the ultimate horizon of our existence. In the new Mass, God owes man salvation, because of the innate dignity of humanity. Where there was faith, now presumption. Where there was love, now mere affirmation, which is indistinguishable from indifference. It inspires weightless ditties like "Gather Us In." Let's

sing about us!

I believe the practice of the new Mass forms people to a new faith: To become truly Christian, one must cease to be Christian at all. Where the new faith is practiced with a zealous spirit — as in Germany now — bishops and priests want to conform the religion's teaching to the moral norms of the nonbelieving society around them. When the new faith was young, after the council, it expressed itself in tearing up the statues, the ceremonies and religious devotions that existed before.

I don't know if bishops will adopt Francis' zeal to crush the Latin Mass. I don't know how painful they are willing to make our religious life. If they do, they will create — or reveal — more division in the church. The old slogan of the traditional Latin Mass movement comes to mind: We resist you to the face.

I have faith that one day, even secular historians will look upon what was wrought after Vatican II and see it for what it was: the worst spasm of iconoclasm in the church's history — dwarfing the Byzantine iconoclasm of the ninth century and the Protestant Reformation.

Pope Benedict had temporarily allowed us to begin repairing the damage. What Pope Francis proposes with his crackdown is a new cover-up.

Michael Brendan Dougherty, a senior writer at National Review and a visiting fellow for the social, cultural and constitutional studies division at the American Enterprise Institute, is the author of "My Father Left Me Ireland: An American Son's Search for Home."

The Times is committed to publishing a diversity of letters to the editor. We'd like to hear what you think about this or any of our articles. Here are some tips. And here's our email: letters@nytimes.com.

Follow The New York Times Opinion section on Facebook, Twitter (@NYTopinion) and Instagram.

Behind the Surprising Jump in Multiracial Americans, Several Theories

Kori Alexis Trataros, of White Plains, N.Y., sees generational differences in how Americans think about race. "Our generation is so great at having open conversation," she said.

WASHINGTON — The Census Bureau released a surprising finding this week: The number of non-Hispanic Americans who identify as multiracial had jumped by 127 percent over the decade. For people who identified as Hispanic, the increase was even higher.

The spike sent demographers scrambling. Was the reason simply that more multiracial babies were being born? Or that Americans were rethinking their identities? Or had a design change in this year's census form caused the sudden, unexpected shift?

The answer, it seems, is all of the above.

Multiracial Americans are still a relatively small part of the population — just 4 percent — but the increase over the decade was substantial and, the data shows, often surprising in its geography. The number of Americans who identified as non-

Hispanic and more than one race jumped to 13.5 million from 6 million. The largest increase in non-Hispanic Americans of two or more races was in Oklahoma, followed by Alaska and Arkansas.

Americans who were mixed race recorded a wide range of identities. People who identified themselves as both white and Asian made up about 18 percent of the total number of non-Hispanic multiracial Americans in 2020. Those who reported their race as both white and Black accounted for 20.5 percent. Americans who were both white and Native American were 26 percent of the total, according to Andrew Beveridge, who founded Social Explorer, a data analytics company.

Part of the rise in people identifying as multiracial was simply the growing diversity of the American population. As the newest immigrants, largely from Asia and Latin America, have children and grandchildren, and those Americans form families, they are much more likely to marry outside their racial or ethnic groups than their parents were. Among newlywed Hispanic people who were born in the United States, about 39 percent marry someone who is not Hispanic, according to the Pew Research Center. For Asian people, that number is about the same.

But the increase can also be attributed in part to changing ways in which Americans identify themselves — and the ways the government categorizes them.

Census categories are complicated, because race and its boundaries change over time based on shifts in culture and society. Some argue the census can leave the impression that race is a fixed, naturally occurring category that can be neatly counted. Until 2000, the Census Bureau only recognized one response for race.

For Michael Watson, 38, the son of a Jamaican mother and a Puerto Rican father of Scottish and Bajan descent, one box was not enough.

“A lot of times you are painted in a box where you have to choose,” said Mr. Watson, of the Bronx, who is director of an analytics company and co-founder of a digital media company. “But as a Black man, I felt uncomfortable having to feel as if I had to pick between both sides.”

For the 2020 census, officials tried to more accurately capture the profusion of complexity in American demographics.

Last year’s census form differed substantially from the one in 2010, Rachel Marks, chief of the racial statistics branch at the Census Bureau, said in an interview. Lines were added under the boxes for Black and for white, where respondents could describe in more nuance their racial backgrounds. Coding capacity improved too, capturing far more detail in people’s written answers than before.

Some of those changes, she said, contributed to the rise in the numbers of peo-

ple who identified as more than one race — though precisely what share, she could not say.

"It's not just one thing," Ms. Marks said in an interview on Friday. "We improved the questions. There were new write-in lines. All in addition to the ways that we processed and coded the data."

Demographic change was a factor too, though she said it was impossible to say how much of the dramatic growth it accounted for. Asked whether part of the decline in the number of people who identified as non-Hispanic white was related to the changes in the form, Ms. Marks said she could not "say for sure one way or another."

"We're still digging into the data," she said. "I think these improvements and changes could have also contributed to that. But it's certainly a trend we've been seeing for the past several decades."

The result was a much more nuanced — and accurate — portrait of how Americans see themselves, social scientists said, even if part of the spike in the multiracial category was as much about reclassification as it was about real growth.

Richard Alba, a sociologist who has written about race categorization and the census, said that typically, a large share of Hispanic Americans check the box for white in the race question. Now, he said, they were given the chance to describe their backgrounds more fully, an addition, he said, that could have flipped them into the multiracial category.

"That's not a change in social reality, that's a change in the way social reality is being categorized," he said. "In the long run we will probably be able to say more precisely to what extent is there a real change and to what extent is this a coding change."

However, the coding change was not simply a statistical blip. It was a meaningful widening of options people had to say who they felt they were.

For Mr. Watson, the fact that more Americans were identifying themselves as multiracial felt like a recognition by society that he had long craved.

"I think it shows that there's more depth and breadth to us as people of color," he said. "It's a testament that our society is moving in the right direction. It goes beyond just the color of our skin."

Ruby Herrera, 28, can testify to the frustration of being asked to fit herself neatly into just one racial category. She remembers feeling different from most other children when she was in grade school and had to fill out a form indicating her identity.

Ms. Herrera's mother is white, from Wisconsin, and her father is from Mexico. She loved speaking two languages and knowing that she belonged to two cultures.

But her teacher advised her to just pick one.

"For me as a 7-year-old kid, I was like I can't just pick one," she said. "What do you mean? Which one do I pick? If I pick one, does that mean I'm not the other? None of my classmates understood why I was so upset."

Ms. Herrera and Taylor Clarkson, friends from college, created an online community called Mixed Millennial to bring people of multiracial backgrounds together to share experiences.

As the children and grandchildren of recent immigrants from Asia and Latin America start families of their own, racial categories in America have again become fluid.

One of the big demographic questions, social scientists said, is what will become of the categories. Particularly salient, they say, is that of white. The declining share of white people as a part of the population has become a part of American politics — as a worry on the right and a cause for optimism on the left.

But while white people have long been at the top of the American social hierarchy, and the category has expanded over time to include the immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe who came at the turn of the last century, the profusion of identities in American society and their growing acceptance is raising the question of how much social power whiteness still holds.

"To me the interesting story is not the decline of white people as a supposed group but the historical advantages of whiteness and how they may be changing," said Charles King, a political scientist at Georgetown University. "With the greater power and visibility of people who feel they fit uneasily inside the old census boxes, it's possible to claim a range of identities without feeling you're harming your chances of success in American society."

The one group that was never allowed to cross the line into whiteness, African Americans, may not have as many options.

"The whole racial classification system is going to shift in the next few years," said Douglas S. Massey, a sociologist at Princeton University. "The off-the-shelf standard American is going to be some kind of blend of Asian, Latino and white. The big question always is, how do Blacks fit in."

Kori Alexis Trataros, a school counselor in the South Bronx, said that she sees hope in the younger generation being more open and accepting of interracial couples and multiracial children.

“Our generation is so great at having open conversation and is willing to unlearn certain things that we were taught when we were younger,” said Ms. Trataros, 30, whose father was Greek and mother is Jamaican.

She remembers not being able to date a white boy she liked in high school because he wasn’t allowed to bring home a Black girl. But she thinks there’s less of that kind of pressure on teens of all races today. And access to social media, she said, has made it easier for biracial and multiracial people to see others who look like them, to claim their identities with pride and to connect with one another.

Ms. Trataros said that though her parents were loving and supportive, talking about race and social justice was a taboo in her broader family, which sometimes made her feel like an outsider in her own family.

In recent years she has distanced herself from some white family members who aren’t willing to engage in conversations about racism and social justice.

“It hurts,” she said, “but I’m not surprised at the same time.”

Charlie Smart contributed reporting.

Judge Permits Biden's Replacement Evictions Ban to Stay in Place for Now

Demonstrators protesting against evictions in New York this week.

WASHINGTON — A federal judge on Friday permitted the Biden administration's replacement evictions moratorium to continue, saying that she lacked authority to block such an emergency public-health policy even though she believed "the government is unlikely to prevail" when the matter returns to the Supreme Court.

In a 13-page ruling, Judge Dabney L. Friedrich of the Federal District Court for the District of Columbia expressed doubts about the legality of the policy, which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention imposed on Aug. 3 in counties where Covid-19 is raging.

The ban replaced an expired, nationwide moratorium first imposed last September to prevent a surge of people crowding into homeless shelters and relatives' homes, spreading the virus. The new one is narrower because it applies only where transmission rates are high. Still, that category currently covers about 91 percent of counties in the United States.

Judge Friedrich had in May blocked the nationwide version of the moratorium, but the federal appeals court for the District of Columbia Circuit overruled her, and the Supreme Court let that decision stand in June. On Friday, she ruled that the replacement policy was similar enough to the original one that the earlier appeals

court ruling controlled the case — for now.

"Absent the D.C. Circuit's judgment," she wrote, she would immediately block the government from enforcing the new evictions ban. "But the court's hands are tied."

The Justice Department declined to comment. But in a statement, Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said: "The administration believes that C.D.C.'s new moratorium is a proper use of its lawful authority to protect the public health. We are pleased that the district court left the moratorium in place, though we are aware that further proceedings in this case are likely."

The plaintiffs, led by the Alabama Association of Realtors, are expected to swiftly take the case back to the appeals court in an effort to speed its way to the Supreme Court, where five of the nine justices appear likely to agree with Judge Friedrich that the ban exceeds the government's emergency powers under a broadly worded, but vague, 1944 public health law.

A lawyer for the plaintiffs forwarded a request for comment to Patrick Newton, a spokesman for the National Association of Realtors, which is not a party to the case but supports the landlords. He said the plaintiffs would appeal, adding, "We are confident in our position that this unlawful eviction ban will soon come to an end."

The government's power to ban evictions as part of its efforts fighting the pandemic has raised complex legal and political issues. The Biden administration had signaled that it intended to let an earlier version of the moratorium, which had by then already been extended several times, expire at the end of July after a Supreme Court justice warned that it was likely on legally shaky ground.

But as the Delta variant of the virus surged and Speaker Nancy Pelosi and progressive Democrats urged the White House to reverse course, the administration this month issued a new, narrower moratorium — even as Mr. Biden made clear in comments to reporters that he understood its chances of being upheld by the Supreme Court were dim.

"The bulk of the constitutional scholarship says that it's not likely to pass constitutional muster," he said on Aug. 3. "But there are several key scholars who think that it may — and it's worth the effort."

Signaling that the White House understands the moratorium's longer-term prospects are weak, Ms. Psaki on Friday called on state and local officials to take other steps that could mitigate a virus-spreading wave of mass evictions, including by imposing local moratoriums and by taking more aggressive steps to distribute $46.5 billion that Congress appropriated to serve as emergency rental assistance funds.

A temporary evictions moratorium for the pandemic began during the Trump administration. At times, Congress has explicitly authorized it. But when those periods lapsed, the C.D.C. has issued extensions of it under the 1944 law, which empowers the government to issue rules it deems necessary to slow the interstate spread of disease.

Unable to evict nonpaying tenants, landlords sued, raising the question of whether a nationwide evictions ban fell outside of the 1944 law.

In May, Judge Friedrich ruled that the plaintiffs were likely to prevail and issued an order that would enjoin the government from enforcing the ban while the litigation played out. But she also stayed that ruling while the government appealed it, and the appeals court declined to lift her stay — while also stating that, contrary to her view, the ban would most likely be found lawful.

In late June, the Supreme Court also declined to lift her stay, voting 5-4 against immediately blocking the original evictions ban. But while the government won, the action came with a strong warning: Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh warned that "clear and specific congressional authorization" would be necessary for the moratorium to continue beyond its scheduled expiration at the end of July.

At that point, the pandemic appeared to be waning and the administration thought that tens of billions of dollars appropriated by Congress as emergency rental assistance funds were on the cusp of distribution. Against that backdrop, the Biden administration's legal and policy teams agreed to allow the moratorium to end as scheduled.

But by late July, conditions had shifted. The distribution of the housing assistance funds proved to be dysfunctional, and coronavirus cases were rising. When swiftly passing new legislation proved politically impossible, House Democrats led by Ms. Pelosi pressured Mr. Biden to act unilaterally after all, at a time when his larger agenda made it perilous to alienate any allies in the closely divided Congress.

That push was complicated by the fact that some Biden policy and press officials had in the interim suggested that the Supreme Court's action in June made it illegal to extend the moratorium. Those now-awkward comments were an oversimplification of the more complicated reality, according to officials familiar with internal deliberations.

In fact, they advised, the government could stick to its position that it can authorize an evictions moratorium under the 1944 law because the Supreme Court's action in June was not a definitive, controlling precedent about what that law could be interpreted to mean. They also, however, warned that it was likely that the Supreme Court would swiftly strike down any new moratorium, and such a ruling could also narrow the C.D.C.'s flexibility to act in some future public health crisis.

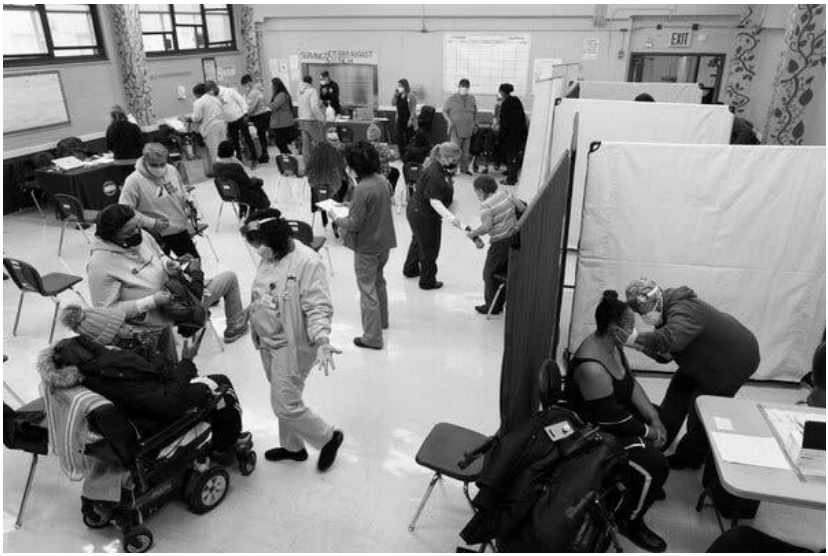
Three days after the nationwide moratorium expired, the Biden administration issued its narrower evictions moratorium until October.

One legal question raised by the case is whether the new facts — the rise of the Delta variant and the narrowed scope of the ban — make the new moratorium different from the old one in a legally meaningful way, or whether the primary issue is how to interpret the 1944 statute.

In her ruling on Friday, Judge Friedrich determined that the replacement moratorium was fundamentally similar enough to the original one that it counted as an extension of it for which the existing litigation could continue, rather than a new policy for which legal arguments would need to start over.

"The minor differences between the current and previous moratoria do not exempt the former from this court's order," she wrote, adding that even though the government "has excluded some counties from the latest moratorium's reach, the policy remains effective nationwide, shares the same structure and design as its predecessors, provides continuous coverage with them and purports to rest on the same statutory authority."

C.D.C. Panel Recommends Third Dose of Covid Vaccine for Immunocompromised



A vaccine clinic set up for senior citizens in the Bronx in February.

WASHINGTON — An independent panel advising the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday recommended third doses of coronavirus vaccine for certain people with weakened immune systems, giving its support to the Food and Drug Administration's authorization of the extra shots.

The F.D.A. on Thursday cleared third doses for people with solid organ transplants and others with similarly weakened immune systems, who face a higher risk of severe bouts of Covid-19.

After nearly three hours of presentations and discussion on Friday, the C.D.C. committee, made up of medical experts, voted unanimously to recommend third shots for people in the category who have already received the two-dose vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna.

While the panel's guidance is nonbinding, it is followed closely by physicians and public health departments. Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the director of the C.D.C., quickly signed off on the recommendation, calling it "an important step in ensuring everyone, including those most vulnerable to Covid-19, can get as much protection as possible from Covid-19 vaccination."

About three percent of Americans have weakened immune systems for a variety of reasons, from a history of cancer to the use of certain medications such as steroids.

Dr. Neela D. Goswami, a C.D.C. official, said the group now eligible for third shots could include those with advanced or untreated H.I.V. infections, those who have undergone certain types of stem cell transplants within the past two years and those receiving certain kinds of chemotherapy, among others.

Those slated for treatments that weaken the immune system should get a third dose beforehand, Dr. Goswami said. Everyone eligible for a third shot should wait at least 28 days after their second before getting it, according to the C.D.C.

Dr. Dorry L. Segev, a transplant surgeon at Johns Hopkins University who has researched the impact of third doses in transplant recipients, praised the C.D.C. for putting out a more detailed guidance on who should receive a third shot.

"It is incredibly difficult to come up with clearly delineated criteria for who should be getting" a third shot among those with weakened immune systems, he added.

Dr. Jose U. Scher, a rheumatologist at NYU Langone Health who has studied the effect of vaccines on the immunocompromised, said that the C.D.C. vote — and the guidance from its experts — would help patients who had been agonizing over whether to seek out a third shot. Previously, he said, when people tested themselves for antibodies after vaccination and came up empty, "there were no tools for us to respond to that."

"We now know that this population was being left behind," he said.

Immunocompromised people will not need a doctor's permission or a prescription to get a third shot, C.D.C. officials said. They will need only to attest that they meet the eligibility requirements for an additional dose. Anyone else, including people with chronic medical conditions, like diabetes or asthma, should not be getting third shots at this point, they said.

Dr. Scher predicted that this honor-system approach could be messy. "I don't know if there's any way of corroborating someone's claim" of being immunocompromised, he said. Requiring some kind of proof, such as a doctor's note, would be a better process, he said.

The updated F.D.A. authorizations do not apply to immunocompromised people who received the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The C.D.C. panel did not offer recommendations on additional shots for that group, which is believed to be small. But the lack of guidance from either the F.D.A. or C.D.C. has left that group in limbo.

"We do understand the challenges here, and because of that we will continue to work very diligently to try to have a solution," Dr. Peter Marks, the F.D.A.'s top vaccine regulator, said at the panel's meeting. The F.D.A. is waiting on more data that it expects to receive this month, including Johnson & Johnson's clinical trial data on the safety and efficacy of two doses.

Dr. Kathleen Dooling, a C.D.C. official, said that patients who qualify for a third dose should ideally seek out the vaccine they already received, but that they could take the other two-dose vaccine if necessary.

Presenting studies that supported giving third doses, Dr. Dooling emphasized that immunocompromised people who receive a third dose should still wear a mask, maintain social distancing with people they do not live with, and avoid crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces. She said that people with weakened immune systems had also been shown to be at greater risk of breakthrough infection.

But Dr. Dooling said that early studies of how some immunocompromised people responded to third doses made clear that there could be some benefit. One such randomized, placebo-controlled study of more than 100 organ transplant recipients found that patients who received a third shot of Moderna's vaccine two months after a second dose showed marked increases in antibody levels.

Dr. Dooling also cited observational studies of solid-organ transplant recipients and patients on hemodialysis, which showed that people who had no detectable antibody response to their initial two doses did have one after a third dose.

Studies have also shown that third doses are safe.

The recommendation from the panel, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, comes as health officials grapple with whether people who were vaccinated early in the nation's inoculation campaign may need booster doses soon, a move that scientists and public health experts argue is not yet supported by data. Officials at the C.D.C. and F.D.A. have been careful to frame the authorization of third doses for people with weakened immune systems as a separate issue.

"Other individuals who are fully vaccinated are adequately protected and do not need an additional dose of Covid-19 vaccine at this time," Dr. Janet Woodcock, the acting F.D.A. commissioner, said in a statement on Thursday announcing the authorization, adding that the agency was "actively engaged in a science-based, rigorous process with our federal partners" to consider whether booster doses may be needed.

Some are taking matters into their own hands. Just over a million people who received a two-dose vaccine in the United States have already received a third dose, Dr. Dooling told the C.D.C. panel on Friday.

If You Skip the Vaccine, It Is My 'Damn Business'

When asked if he had gotten a Covid-19 vaccine, Lamar Jackson, a quarterback for the Baltimore Ravens, declined to answer. "I feel it's a personal decision," he said. "I'm just going to keep my feelings to my family and myself."

Jackson echoed another N.F.L. quarterback, Cam Newton of the New England Patriots, who said much the same a few days earlier. "It's too personal to discuss," Newton replied, when asked if he was vaccinated. "I'll just keep it at that."

Jackson and Newton are not the only prominent people to say hey, it's personal when asked about the vaccine. It is a common dodge for public-facing vaccine skeptics or those using vaccine skepticism for their own ends. "I don't think it's anybody's damn business whether I'm vaccinated or not," Representative Chip Roy, Republican of Texas, told CNN last month. Senator Ron Johnson, Republican of Wisconsin, wrote similarly (albeit less abrasively) in May that vaccination was a "personal and private decision" and that "no one should be shamed, coerced or mandated to take Covid-19 vaccines that are being allowed under an emergency use authorization."

Johnson and all the others are wrong. Wearing a helmet while bike riding, strapping on your seatbelt in a car — these are personal decisions, at least as far as your own injuries are concerned. Vaccination is different. In the context of a deadly and often debilitating contagion, in which the unchecked spread of infection has consequences

for the entire society, vaccination is not a personal decision. And inasmuch as the United States has struggled to achieve herd immunity against Covid-19 through vaccination, it is because we refuse to treat the pandemic for what it is: a social problem to solve through collective action.

From the jump, the federal government devolved its response to the pandemic, foisting responsibility onto states and localities, which, in turn, left individual Americans and their communities to navigate conflicting rules and information.

This approach continued with the arrival of vaccines. Until recently, in the face of a vaccination plateau, there was not even a mandate for federal employees to be vaccinated. States and employers have been left to their own devices, and individuals face a patchwork of rules and mandates, depending on where they live and where they work.

Is it any surprise that millions of Americans treat this fundamentally social problem — how do we vaccinate enough people to prevent the spread of a deadly disease — as a personal one? Or that many people have refused to get a shot, citing the privacy of their decision as well as their freedom to do as they choose?

Consider, too, the larger cultural and political context of the United States. We still live in the shadow of the Reagan revolution and its successful attack on America's traditions of republican solidarity and social responsibility. "Over the past 50 years," Mike Konczal writes in "Freedom From the Market: America's Fight to Liberate Itself From the Grip of the Invisible Hand," "both our personal lives and our economy have been forced ever more deeply into market dependency."

This extends into our political lives — and our political selves — as well. If American society has been reshaped in the image of capital, then Americans themselves have been pushed to relate to one another and our institutions as market creatures in search of utility, as opposed to citizens bound together by rights and obligations. If "there are certain habits, certain attributes of character without cultivation of which there can be no individual progress, and therefore no social progress," as Henry E. Sharpe, a theorist for the Knights of Labor, wrote in 1883, then you could say Americans today are a little out of practice.

Not because they are lazy, of course, but because this is the society we have built, where individuals are left to carry the burdens of life into the market and hope that they survive. This so-called freedom is ill suited to human flourishing. It is practically maladaptive in the face of a pandemic.

That's why families and communities were left to fend for themselves in the face of disease, why so many people treat the question of exposure and contagion as a personal choice made privately and why our institutions have made vaccination a choice when it should have been mandated from the start.

Recently, much has been made of the anger and frustration many people feel toward vaccine holdouts. “Vaccinated America Has Had Enough,” declared the former Republican speechwriter David Frum in The Atlantic, writing that “the unvaccinated person himself or herself has decided to inflict a preventable and unjustifiable harm upon family, friends, neighbors, community, country and planet.”

I share this frustration, as well as the anger at the lies and misinformation that fuel a good deal of anti-vaccine sentiment. But I also know that anger toward individuals is ultimately misplaced.

When you structure a society so that every person must be an island, you cannot then blame people when inevitably they act as if they are. If we want a country that takes solidarity seriously, we will actually have to build one.

The Times is committed to publishing a diversity of letters to the editor. We’d like to hear what you think about this or any of our articles. Here are some tips. And here’s our email: letters@nytimes.com.

Follow The New York Times Opinion section on Facebook, Twitter (@NYTopinion) and Instagram.

I'm a Trans Runner

In the highly politicized debate over whether transgender women should be allowed to play women's sports, opinions tend to divide into two starkly opposing camps.

There are those people — including lawmakers in dozens of states — who argue that the integrity of girls' and women's sports needs to be safeguarded against people assigned male at birth and the physical advantages they may possess. The other side argues that by the very fact of their gender transition, trans girls and women have earned the right to compete as their chosen gender.

But Andie Taylor, a 48-year-old trans woman and competitive runner who has much to gain or lose in this debate, finds herself staking out a more nuanced position, somewhere in the apolitical middle ground.

In the Opinion video above, Ms. Taylor describes how she is eager to compete among women and yearns for inclusion — but only if the scientific research unequivocally shows that her years living as a male did not give her an advantage.

There is little research regarding the performance of transgender athletes, in part because their numbers are so small. Some evidence suggests that trans women retain some athletic advantages after a year of undergoing testosterone suppression. Researchers have also found that those advantages, with time, largely fall away.

As research advances, Ms. Taylor is imploring all sides in the debate to refrain from using the issue for political gain.

"I want to win," she says, "but I only want to win if I know it's fair."

Andie Taylor is a distance runner and transgender woman from St. Paul, Minn.

America Runs on ‘Dirty Work’

After the recession in 2008, Harriet Krzykowski was hired as a mental health aide at the Dade Correctional Institution, a prison in South Florida. Her salary was modest — $12 an hour.

But the low pay bothered her far less than hearing about guards visiting abuse on the mentally ill prisoners entrusted to her care. Some of these prisoners were being starved, Ms. Krzykowski was told. Others were locked inside a scalding shower. Among the prisoners subjected to this sadistic punishment was Darren Rainey, a mentally ill man who collapsed in the stall and died. Autopsy photos later leaked to the press showed that much of the skin on Mr. Rainey’s chest, back and legs had peeled off.

When she learned of Mr. Rainey’s death, Ms. Krzykowski wanted to quit her job. But she couldn’t afford to. She needed the paycheck she drew to support her

family. She also couldn't report what had happened without risking retaliation from the guards, on whom the mental health staff in jails and prisons depend for their safety. So she kept silent.

Ms. Krzykowski could be viewed as an enabler and accomplice. But there is also another way to see her: as a worker performing a function that society tacitly condones but prefers not to hear too much about. I've spent the past few years researching the lives of such workers: mental health aides and guards who patrol the wards of America's jails and prisons, many of which are rife with brutality and violence; Border Patrol agents who enforce America's inhumane immigration policies; undocumented immigrants who man the "kill floors" of industrial slaughterhouses, where animals are hacked apart under brutal conditions in order to satisfy the popular demand for cheap meat; and drone operators who carry out "targeted killings" in America's never-ending wars, which have faded from the headlines even as the number of lethal strikes conducted with little oversight steadily increased under Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump.

To the extent they are noticed at all, the people who perform such functions tend to be harshly judged, denounced for their involvement in or proximity to violence. Such judgments are not necessarily wrong, but they obscure an uncomfortable reality: We are all implicated in this dirty work, even if the people who do it are conveniently hidden from us.

"Dirty work" can refer to any unpleasant job, but among social scientists, the term has a more pointed meaning. In 1962, Everett Hughes, an American sociologist, published an essay titled "Good People and Dirty Work" that drew on conversations he'd had in postwar Germany about the mass atrocities of the Nazi era. Mr. Hughes argued that the persecution of Jews proceeded with the unspoken assent of many supposedly enlightened Germans, who refrained from asking too many questions because, on some level, they were not entirely displeased.

This was the nature of dirty work as Mr. Hughes conceived of it: unethical activity that was delegated to certain agents and then disavowed by society, even though the perpetrators had an "unconscious mandate" from their fellow citizens. As extreme as the Nazi example was, this dynamic existed in every society, Mr. Hughes wrote, enabling respectable citizens to distance themselves from the morally troubling things being done in their name. The dirty workers were not rogue actors but "agents" of "good people" who passively stood by.

Contemporary America runs on dirty work. Some of the people who do this work are our agents by virtue of the fact that they perform public functions, such as running the world's largest penal system. Others qualify as such by catering to our consumption habits — the food we eat, the fossil fuels we burn, which are drilled and fracked by dirty workers in places like the Gulf of Mexico. The high-tech gadgets in our pockets rely on yet another form of dirty work — the mining of cobalt — that

has been outsourced to workers in Africa and to foreign subcontractors that often brutally exploit them.

Like the essential jobs performed by grocery clerks and other low-wage workers during the Covid-19 pandemic, this work sustains our lifestyles and undergirds the prevailing social order, but privileged people are generally spared from having to think about it. One reason is that the dirty work occurs far away from them, in isolated institutions — prisons, slaughterhouses — that are closed to the public. Another reason is that the privileged rarely have to do it. Although there is no shortage of it to go around, dirty work in America is not randomly distributed. It falls disproportionately to people with fewer choices and opportunities such as high-school graduates from depressed rural areas, undocumented immigrants, women and people of color.

Many of these workers are victims in their own right, susceptible not only to exploitation and physical injury — as is true of so many people in low-status occupations — but also to another, less familiar set of hazards, owing to the unpalatable nature of the jobs they do. In their classic book, "The Hidden Injuries of Class," the sociologists Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb called for shifting the focus of class analysis away from material conditions to "the moral burdens and the emotional hardships" that workers bear. For dirty workers, these burdens include stigma, self-reproach, corroded dignity and shattered self-esteem. In some cases, they include "moral injury," a term that military psychologists have used to describe the suffering that some soldiers endure after they carry out orders that transgress the values at the core of their identity.

"When a man — a good man, or woman — goes into prison, a little bit of your goodness wears off," a former corrections officer named Bill Curtis told me. "You became jaded. You become more callous."

The moral slide Mr. Curtis described may be particularly unsettling for those who are well intentioned, including the legion of psychiatric aides who work in jails and prisons, which in recent years have effectively become America's largest mental health institutions. As I have reported elsewhere, mental health staff routinely violate medical ethics by standing by while incarcerated people with mental illness are mistreated and abused. For example, in the months after Mr. Rainey's death, Ms. Krzykowski lost her appetite. Her hair fell out. She struggled with guilt and shame and was eventually diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Though more difficult to quantify, the moral and emotional wounds that many dirty workers experience can be as debilitating as material disadvantage, shaping people's sense of self-worth, their place in the social order and their capacity to hold on to their dignity and pride. The result is a form of moral inequality that mirrors the economic kind. Just as the rich and poor have come to inhabit starkly different worlds, an equally stark gap separates the people who perform the most thankless,

ethically troubling jobs in America and those who are exempt from these activities. Like so much else in a society that has grown more and more unequal, the burden of dirtying one's hands — and the benefit of having a clean conscience — are increasingly functions of privilege: of the capacity to distance oneself from the isolated places where dirty work is performed while leaving the sordid details to others.

To be sure, plenty of elite white-collar professionals — Wall Street bankers who sell shady financial products, or software engineers who design hidden spyware — do jobs that are morally suspect. But for white-collar workers who grapple with the ethical consequences of what they do, lavish salaries and bonuses can offset whatever discomfort they may feel. These elites are also less likely to be shamed and stigmatized for what they do than to be envied, lessening the impact of the ethical compromises they may feel they are making.

In my research, I have found that people from marginalized groups are not only more likely to do the dirty work in America, they are also more likely to be faulted for it, singled out as "bad apples" who can be blamed when systemic violence that has long been tolerated comes to light. This is not to say that they are not accountable for their actions. Though charges weren't brought against them, the prison guards who put Darren Rainey in the shower deserve to be shamed and prosecuted.

But pinning the blame for dirty work solely on the people who carry it out can be a useful way to obscure the power dynamics and the layers of complicity that perpetuate their conduct. In prisons as elsewhere, the conditions that give rise to such work are a product of collective decisions, after all, reflecting our values, the social order we unconsciously mandate and what we are willing to have done in our name.

In the case of Mr. Rainey's death, the chain of responsibility extends not only to the Florida Department of Corrections but also to the governor at the time, Rick Scott, and the Republican legislature of a state that was spending less money per capita on mental health than every other state except Idaho. It also extends to many "good people" who voted these officials into office.

What we owe dirty workers is the willingness to see them as our agents and to grapple with our own complicity. We also owe many of them the right to have their stories listened to with respect and curiosity.

How might this look? One evening not long ago, I attended a ceremony in a small chapel at the V.A. medical center in Philadelphia, where a group of veterans gathered to talk about the moral injuries they had sustained while serving in America's recent wars. One veteran sobbed while recounting an airstrike he'd called in that ended up killing dozens of Iraqi civilians.

After the veterans spoke, members of the audience formed a circle around them,

linking arms and delivering a message that all dirty workers deserve to hear. “We put you into situations where atrocities were possible,” the audience members chanted in unison. “We share responsibility with you for all that you have seen, for all that you have done, for all that you have failed to do.”

Eyal Press is a writing fellow at the Type Media Center.

The Times is committed to publishing a diversity of letters to the editor. We’d like to hear what you think about this or any of our articles. Here are some tips. And here’s our email: letters@nytimes.com.

Follow The New York Times Opinion section on Facebook, Twitter (@NYTopinion) and Instagram.

Amid Extreme Weather, a Shift Among Republicans on Climate Change

Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana and other Senate Republicans spoke to media after reaching a bipartisan infrastructure deal last month. "We cannot live without fossil fuels or chemicals, period, end of story," he said recently.

WASHINGTON — After a decade of disputing the existence of climate change, many leading Republicans are shifting their posture amid deadly heat waves, devastating drought and ferocious wildfires that have bludgeoned their districts and unnerved their constituents back home.

Members of Congress who long insisted that the climate is changing due to natural cycles have notably adjusted that view, with many now acknowledging the solid science that emissions from burning oil, gas and coal have raised Earth's temperature.

But their growing acceptance of the reality of climate change has not translated into support for the one strategy that scientists said in a major United Nations report this week is imperative to avert an even more harrowing future: stop burning fossil fuels.

Instead, Republicans want to spend billions to prepare communities to cope with extreme weather, but are trying to block efforts by Democrats to cut the emissions that are fueling the disasters in the first place.

Dozens of Republicans in the House and Senate said in recent interviews that quickly switching to wind, solar and other clean energy will damage an economy that has been underpinned by fossil fuels for more than a century.

"I'm not doing anything to raise the cost of living for American families," said Senator Rick Scott of Florida, where climate-fueled disasters have cost the state more than $100 billion over the past decade according to estimates from the federal government.

Mr. Scott said he wants to address climate change, but "you can't do it where you're killing jobs."

It's a message supported by polling that shows Republican voters are more concerned with jobs than the environment. A Pew Research Center survey in May found just 10 percent of Republican and Republican-leaning independents were deeply concerned with addressing climate change, while a majority thought President Biden's ambitious plans to curb climate change would hurt the economy.

With the exception of young Republicans who have been agitating for their party to take climate change more seriously, conservative voters as a whole have not shifted much on the issue over the past 10 years. That skepticism may have reached a pinnacle with President Donald J. Trump, who famously derided climate science, loosened emissions rules and expanded oil and gas drilling on public lands.

But as the impacts of global warming becoming more apparent with each weather forecast, the message from Republicans and their allies has shifted. They now argue for investment in research and development, or technological solutions that are years away from viability, such as cleaning the air after oil, gas and coal are burned. Many also favor expanding nuclear energy, which does not produce greenhouse gases but poses other challenges including the lengthy time it takes to build new plants and concerns about disposal of spent fuel and risk of radioactive leaks.

A few Republicans, like Senator Mitt Romney of Utah and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, have said they support charging companies for the carbon dioxide they generate, a strategy that economists say would create a powerful incentive to lower emissions. But neither man is championing such a measure with any urgency.

The majority of Republican lawmakers back less aggressive responses popular with their voters, like planting trees to absorb more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, or offering tax credits to businesses that capture carbon dioxide after it has been released into the air by power plants or industrial sites.

"What they are opposing is any program to meaningfully reduce emissions," said David G. Victor, co-director of the Deep Decarbonization Initiative at the University

of California, San Diego.

Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana helped craft the $1 trillion infrastructure package that the Senate passed this week, and made sure it included billions of dollars to protect coastal states from sea level rise caused by climate change. But Mr. Cassidy said he won't support policies to curb the amount of oil that is drilled off the Louisiana coast — the burning of which is contributing to melting ice caps and rising seas.

"We cannot live without fossil fuels or chemicals, period, end of story," said Mr. Cassidy, who wants to expand exports of liquefied natural gas, which is produced in Louisiana and emits half the carbon dioxide of coal but is a source of methane, a greenhouse gas even more potent in the short term.

And while Senator Kevin Cramer, a North Dakota Republican, allowed that climate change is driving the extreme drought that has devastated crops and decimated livestock in his state this summer, he said the gases produced by burning fossil fuels should be the target, not the fuels themselves.

"We need to be on an anti-carbon mission, not an anti-fuel mission," said Mr. Cramer, whose state is also a top oil and gas producer.

Senator Marco Rubio, the Florida Republican, said it made no sense for the United States to cut its emissions while other countries like China continue to pollute. But at the same time, he also rejected trade policies that would apply pressure on China and others to curb their emissions.

Still, the fact that Republicans recognize emissions as a problem marks progress, however incremental, said Tom Moyer, the Utah state coordinator for the Citizens' Climate Lobby, which is trying to build bipartisan support for a tax on carbon dioxide emissions. "They're small bites at a solution, but it's so much more than we could have gotten even a few years ago," he said. "And hopefully the trend continues."

Mitch McConnell, the Senate Republican leader, said of climate change last September, "I concur that it is happening and it is a problem. The argument is about how to best address it."

Senator John Cornyn of oil and gas-rich Texas said in a July interview, "I have no doubt the climate is changing and people contribute to it." Senator Richard Shelby of Alabama said he thinks weather disasters simply happen, yet "a lot of it, I'm sure, with all the stuff we put in the air, is self-made."

Even Senator James Inhofe, an Oklahoma Republican who famously once threw a snowball on the Senate floor to claim the planet is not getting hotter, insisted last

month that he never called climate change a "hoax," only that the dire consequences have been overblown. (Mr. Inhofe is the author of a book entitled "The Greatest Hoax: How the Global Warming Conspiracy Threatens Your Future.")

"They don't want to look like they are denying the science, but they don't want to look like they're anti-free market and support regulation," said Michael Oppenheimer, a professor of geosciences and international affairs at Princeton University. "But the fact is, there's no way to solve this without regulating and mandating the cut of emissions. There's no magical easy 'innovation-only' way out of this."

Democrats say the tools exist now to stave off a hotter planet: rapidly expand wind and solar energy, beef up energy storage and the electric grid, electrify transportation, and make buildings energy efficient.

Many of those elements are tucked into a $3.5 trillion budget package that Democrats hope to pass in the fall. The budget bill includes a tool called a clean electricity payment program, designed to drive utilities to produce an increasing amount of electricity from low and zero-carbon sources like wind, solar and nuclear energy.

If approved, the measure would be the most consequential climate bill in United States history, putting the country on track to hit President Biden's goal of roughly halving domestic greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. But to get it through the evenly split Congress, every Democrat would need to support it and at least two, Senator Joe Manchin of coal-rich West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, have indicated they may oppose it.

Republican leaders, meanwhile, have made it clear they will vote against the budget bill, arguing that it is too expensive and that mandates like a clean electricity standard and government-funded electric vehicle expansion will hurt taxpayers and consumers.

Their messaging closely mirrors the position of major oil and gas companies, which are running advertising campaigns touting "technology innovation" as a response to global warming.

"They are acknowledging their role in climate change, but they want the public to believe they are on top of it," Edward Maibach, director of George Mason University's Center for Climate Change Communication, said of the fossil fuel companies. "They say they are innovating, they are evolving, they've got this. They don't need policy — and Republicans are following that cue."

Behind the scenes in Washington, oil and gas interests continue to lobby hard against policies that would reduce emissions, particularly tighter vehicle mileage rules that would prevent the burning of hundreds of billions of gallons of gasoline.

Those companies are donating overwhelmingly to Republicans. In the 2020 election cycle alone, oil, gas, coal mining and other energy companies gave $46 million to the Republican Party. That's more than those industries donated to Democrats over the course of the last decade, according to data compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonprofit group that tracks money in politics.

In many ways the $1 trillion infrastructure package, which the Senate approved in a 69-30 vote on Tuesday, shows the limits of Republican action on climate change.

The package, which still needs approval from the House, includes about $80 billion in programs to upgrade the nation's power grid, create charging stations for electric vehicles and research new clean energy technologies. It delivers more than $12 billion for technology to capture and store carbon dioxide emissions, which if commercialized at scale could prolong the life of fossil fuel plants; and $2.5 billion for developing a new generation of nuclear reactors.

Left out was any provision that would mandate the reduction of fossil fuels or the emissions they produce. Nineteen Republicans, including the minority leader, voted for the legislation.

Who Will Take Care of America's Caregivers?

When you are old and gray and full of sleep and nodding by the fire — whom do you expect to help take care of you? Family? Friends? Paid aides? All of the above?

The nation's caregiving work force is fraying. Paid providers are overworked and undervalued, often forced to take on multiple jobs or turn to public assistance just to scrape by. Many family caregivers are struggling as well, sacrificing their own health and well-being to tend to loved ones for years on end. Consistent, skilled, affordable care is in short supply — and getting shorter — and those who provide it are shouldering an increasingly unsustainable burden.

Women, who do most of this caregiving, are being hit the hardest. The industry relies heavily on women of color, who make up about half of the paid work force, and on immigrants. Around one-fourth of caregivers were born outside the United States. Just something to remember the next time certain politicians start screeching about the scourge of immigration.

But the widespread disrespect for and neglect of this work ultimately hurts everyone. "We can't have a strong economy if we have millions of people working as full-time caregivers and making so little that they are still living in poverty," Gina Raimondo, the secretary of commerce, told me in a recent interview. "We can't have

a strong economy when we have millions of other people dropping out of the work force to take care of elderly loved ones."

There are currently around 4.6 million direct care workers in the United States, a category that includes home health care aides, personal aides and nursing assistants. Over the next decade, the demand for these workers will balloon as aging baby boomers require more, and more advanced, care. Despite this, the industry's pay is a scandal. For home health and personal care aides, the average wage is $13.49 an hour — below the average hourly wage of an employee at Chipotle. Around 15 percent of direct care workers live in poverty. The work is hard, stressful and dangerous, with high rates of injury. Caregivers often receive minimal training and have few opportunities for advancement. The field is plagued by chronic labor shortages and high turnover.

The shabby state of the paid work force is only part of the picture — and a comparatively small part. The open secret of America's long-term care system is that most of the labor is provided by unpaid family members or friends. Nearly 42 million U.S. adults are providing informal support and services to someone age 50 or older, according to a 2020 report by AARP.

Even as a labor of love, this work takes its toll. Family caregivers incur thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket expenses each year, for everything from shampoo to home modifications to transportation costs. This is in addition to an average of more than $5,000 a year in lost wages. Around a quarter of family caregivers are forced to take on more debt, AARP has found. More than one-tenth report being unable to afford basic needs such as food.

There are harder-to-measure costs as well. Numerous studies have examined the psychological and physical strain of caregiving. Caregivers appear to be at increased risk of a host of serious illnesses, from heart disease and high blood pressure to cancer and infection. Depression and anxiety are common. The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated existing stressors — and created plenty of new ones.

Worse, even as the number of seniors needing long-term care expands, the number of family members available to provide that care is contracting — a consequence of baby boomers having fewer children than their parents. This means more pressure and less help for everyone, with no relief in sight.

This is not a uniquely American challenge. Japan, with the world's oldest population, has a term for the stress and exhaustion of family caregivers: kaigo jigoku, or "caregiving hell." To help relieve some of the pressure, Japanese lawmakers passed a long-term care insurance program in 1997. The U.S. Congress seems unlikely to follow suit any time soon.

But with a problem of this magnitude, the federal government needs to step up.

President Biden has called for a major investment in the caregiving economy, pieces of which have been written into legislation. Under the Better Care Better Jobs Act, for example, states would receive additional Medicaid funding for taking steps to shore up the "infrastructure" necessary to improve the access to and quality of home-based care: increasing the wages and benefits of direct-care workers, improving training standards, easing access to respite services for family caregivers and so on. The Social Security Caregiver Credit Act would, as the name suggests, provide retirement compensation for people who left their jobs to look after family members. And AARP has been pushing for the bipartisan Credit for Caring Act, which would provide federal tax credits to eligible family caregivers. Mr. Biden's American Families Plan also called for 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave, an idea that should have been embraced long ago.

Family caregivers contribute at least $470 billion worth of free labor to the economy each year; it's time they got at least a sliver of relief in return.

Policy experts and decision makers can debate the details, but America needs to stop taking its caregivers for granted. Paid or unpaid, these workers are looking after our mothers and grandfathers, our sisters and uncles. They assist in dressing, bathing and feeding some of the most vulnerable among us, helping them cope with the aches and pains and fears and frustrations of growing older. They deserve better than to be casually abandoned. It's worth remembering that many of us will eventually find ourselves among their ranks.

The Times is committed to publishing a diversity of letters to the editor. We'd like to hear what you think about this or any of our articles. Here are some tips. And here's our email: letters@nytimes.com.

Follow The New York Times Opinion section on Facebook, Twitter (@NYTopinion) and Instagram.

Don't Let Inflation Anxiety Undermine Our Future

The lesson from Wednesday's consumer price report was, to a large extent, in the eyes of the beholder.

Team Transitory — a term I'm stealing from the economic analyst George Pearkes — was encouraged by the fact that July's inflation was substantially lower than June's. That is, those arguing that recent price increases reflect temporary disruptions as we recover from the pandemic rather than an underlying inflation problem — a group that includes White House economists, many progressives and yours truly — found the report reassuring.

Other reasonable economists were not as sanguine, pointing out that inflation is still running hot and warning that we may soon see substantial increases in rent, which is a big part of the Consumer Price Index. And I'll concede the possibility that above-normal inflation may prove persistent enough that the Federal Reserve will want to tighten monetary policy sooner than it now expects. I don't think that's going to happen, but I'm not confident enough in that judgment to rule out the possibility.

Even if inflation is a bigger problem than the Biden administration or like-minded economists think it is, however, what are the implications beyond monetary policy? In particular, is the risk of inflation a reason for Democrats to scale back their plans to invest in America's future?

No, no, 3.5 trillion times no.

Much of the media coverage of the budget resolution just approved by the Senate on a party-line vote — a resolution that lays the foundation for $3.5 trillion in new spending — suffers from two common problems in fiscal reporting: lack of quantitative context and failure to distinguish clearly between spending increases and fiscal stimulus, which aren't necessarily the same thing.

On the first point, yes, $3.5 trillion is a lot of money. But this is spending intended to help rebuild the U.S. economy — and the U.S. economy is enormous. Bear in mind that we're talking about a long-term spending plan, under which the money would be gradually disbursed over a decade. And America's G.D.P. over that decade is likely to be in the vicinity of $300 trillion — the Congressional Budget Office says $287.7 trillion.

So ignore headlines that describe the plan as "massive" or "enormous." It's a plan that could make a big difference to many Americans' lives and help build a better future. But it's only a bit over 1 percent of G.D.P. That wouldn't be enough to cause serious inflation problems even if all of the spending were paid for with borrowed money.

And the budget resolution doesn't envision pure deficit spending. That is, it isn't like the American Rescue Plan, earlier this year, which was financed entirely with debt.

On the contrary, Democrats are proposing to pay for most of the new spending with new taxes on the wealthy (plus collecting the taxes the wealthy owe but haven't been paying). And this means that higher spending on roads and child care would be offset by lower spending on superyachts and helicopters to the Hamptons. In other words, if you're worried that the Democratic plan would overstimulate the economy, bear in mind that it would provide less stimulus than the headline spending numbers might suggest.

But if the plan isn't about stimulus, what is it about? Mainly investment — and that reduces the inflationary risks even further. Spending on physical infrastructure, both in the bipartisan bill the Senate has already passed and in the likely future Democrats-only bill, would alleviate the supply bottlenecks that have played a big role in recent inflation, while making workers more productive.

What about spending on "human infrastructure"? There's strong evidence that aiding families with children will make America richer and more productive in the long run, but to be fair, those benefits would take a long time to materialize. Federal support for child care and universal pre-K would, however, also yield much quicker results, in particular helping more women enter the paid work force. This would expand the economy's capacity, which is exactly how you want to fight inflation if

you can manage it.

So what's all this about? I don't know whether people like Joe Manchin expressing anxiety about inflation are truly misinformed or are just trying to signal that they're to the right of their colleagues.

If they're sincerely worried about inflation, I'd urge them to have their staffs do the math. Anxiety about the inflationary impact of public investment just doesn't make sense if you work through the numbers.

If it's just signaling, well, OK, politics is what it is. But I'd urge them to find a way to send their signals without undermining their party — and their country.

For the fact is that America desperately needs to invest in its future — both in hard assets like roads and bridges and in its people, especially its children. And there are no good economic reasons not to make those investments. Debt isn't a problem given low interest rates; inflation wouldn't be a problem given the economy's ability to absorb higher government spending.

Build we can, and build we must.

The Times is committed to publishing a diversity of letters to the editor. We'd like to hear what you think about this or any of our articles. Here are some tips. And here's our email: letters@nytimes.com.

Follow The New York Times Opinion section on Facebook, Twitter (@NYTopinion) and Instagram.

Dutch-Turkish Novelist Depicts Her Journey to Secularism With No Inhibitions

The Dutch-Turkish writer Lale Gul at the office of her publisher in Amsterdam, in June.

AMSTERDAM — Perhaps naïvely, Lale Gul thought she could continue living with the same people on whom she had based her best-selling novel: her strict Turkish-Dutch migrant family.

But just weeks after the February publication of her book — the autobiographical tale of a young woman breaking with her conservative Muslim culture — "a war broke out" in the family's tiny apartment in a migrant neighborhood in Amsterdam, said the author of "Ik Ga Leven," or "I Will Live."

As years of building frustration erupted into open conflict that March evening, Ms. Gul, 23, fled her house in the middle of the night and has not returned since.

Looking back, Ms. Gul admitted that after writing an unbridled book revealing her journey to secularism, the thought that her parents would simply not hear about it was maybe a little foolhardy.

They did hear about it, as has most of the country: The novel quickly became one of the most read in the Netherlands, and she was in demand for TV interviews.

The publicity made it impossible not to address the book with her family, but she

wanted to stay with them.

"Even after the book came out, I was still trying to negotiate with my parents, I wanted to make it work, try to combine their lives and my own life," she said on a recent afternoon in the 17th-century canal house where her publisher has an office. "Despite everything, they are my family."

But in her family's view, what Ms. Gul had done was beyond repair.

The main character in her book, whose life closely mirrors Ms. Gul's own, breaks all the rules her parents and their interpretation of the Muslim faith set for her. She goes around unveiled, works in a restaurant, drinks and has wild sex with her secret boyfriend, a Dutch man from a family supporting an anti-migrant party.

"It's all me in the book," Ms. Gul said, shrugging her shoulders. "I'm done hiding. I don't believe in God and the religious and cultural rules that were set for me."

Ms. Gul's truth, written without mercy for anyone involved, shocked her conservative parents who had migrated from rural Turkey to the Netherlands decades ago.

Although she was raising her children in one of the most secular countries on earth, Ms. Gul's illiterate mother was determined to make sure the family would live as if they had never left the Turkish village where she herself had been born.

Regular mosque visits were scheduled, and the mother made sure her two daughters — Ms. Gul has a younger sister — were always veiled. All their friends were Turkish. On weekends Ms. Gul went to a school run by a Turkish-Islamist organization to study the Quran.

For her brother, 21, there were many exemptions to the strict rules imposed on her and her sister, 9. As the book tells it, he was allowed to have girlfriends, and no questions were asked when he went out. Ms. Gul, however, would be constantly tracked by her parents, who would make frequent video calls to her cellphone to see where she was.

At times, her mother would call her a "prostitute" when she wore makeup.

"For men, many rules don't apply," Ms. Gul said. "For women their 'honor' is more important than their lives, my mother used to say. But for young men it's fine to play around before marriage. To me that's a massive double standard."

The most controversial parts of her book were quickly translated by the Turkish diaspora in the Netherlands. Angry messages from uncles and aunts in Turkey followed not much later, saying Ms. Gul had broken the family honor and insulted Islam by writing steamy sex scenes and mocking Turkish culture.

Ms. Gul's brother, who requested that his name not be used, said that his family prefers not to react to the issues raised in Ms. Gul's book for privacy reasons.

Reviews offered both criticism, over her unorthodox usage of the Dutch language, and praise for the insights she delivered about the lives of those who are often unseen in Dutch society: women from Islamic communities who have doubts about the beliefs of their family but have to deal with those in silence.

"Nobody seems to share my problems, it seems," Ms. Gul writes in her book. "They obey the rules. There is nobody I know who also struggles with wearing the veil. Nobody I know also secretly has a white boyfriend. Nobody who I know also prefers to lie on the beach in a bikini in summer. Nobody fights every day with her conceivers. I see few allies," Ms. Gul concludes.

These perspectives of a lonely female rebel not knowing who or where to turn to are new in Dutch migrant literature.

"For the first time a young woman gives us insights into the problematic sides of migration," said Ozcan Akyol, a Dutch-Turkish novelist. "Lale comes from a conservative Sunni Muslim family, who are also fierce Turkish nationalists, but she is born here, in the Netherlands. The description of her life is a revelation to many here."

As a result of her frank depictions, Ms Gul has received dozens of anonymous death threats.

Her final night at home started with her father and mother screaming at her, saying she had dishonored the family. Ms. Gul started screaming back. Then neighbors, mostly fellow migrants from Turkey, Morocco and elsewhere, came rushing in, soon filling every corner of the apartment.

They hadn't come to mediate; instead, each took a turn excoriating Ms. Gul over everything she had done wrong in their eyes.

"I just sat there," Ms. Gul recounted. "They expected me to fall to my knees and apologize for all the rules I had broken."

Among the neighbors who had come to tell her off was a childhood friend, a young woman also of Turkish descent. Ms. Gul said her friend had been beaten up "over a dozen times" by her brothers for having had secret boyfriends.

"I thought she would connect to my book," Ms. Gul said. Instead her friend criticized Ms. Gul for bringing their problems into the open. "'Keep everything between the four walls of your apartment,'" Ms. Gul remembered her friend telling

her. "'Don't present it all to the whole of the Netherlands.'"

At 2 a.m. that night, Ms Gul had had enough: She stuffed some clothes in two shopping bags and left. Her experiment of trying to become a secular person while living with her conservative Turkish Muslim family had failed.

The mayor of Amsterdam, Femke Halsema, with whom she had been in touch, helped Ms. Gul find temporary housing.

While Ms. Gul's departure was abrupt, her coming out as a secular person was a long, fraught struggle.

In elementary school, her Dutch teachers told her that, in their view, God didn't exist. The school also introduced her to the local library, and she started reading voraciously all sorts of Dutch literature. Her mother would take away these books when she decided it was time for her daughter to study the Quran.

Then, when the family got internet access at home, a whole new world opened up, and Ms. Gul started reading about left-wing secular parties in Turkey as well as other schools of Islamic thought that differed from her parents' beliefs.

Inspired by her discovery that there were other ways to experience Islam, one day Ms. Gul asked her Quran teacher why she should wear the veil, while boys of her age could dress the way they wanted.

The teacher was infuriated.

"'Stop exposing yourself to nonsense spoken by riffraff who have an identity crisis and are ashamed of their faith,'" Ms. Gul recalled the teacher answering. "'Repent or else you will automatically become an apostate.'"

Ms. Gul said it amazed her when left-wing Dutch parties, supportive of gay rights and other liberal policies, came to the same Quranic school to hand out campaign flyers urging the students' conservative working-class parents to vote for them.

"In Turkey these people vote for President Erdogan, and in the Netherlands they vote left," Ms. Gul said. "It's a bizarre marriage of convenience. Why didn't those Dutch parties stand up for my individual rights?"

After her book came out, some Dutch writers who themselves came to the Netherlands as migrants from Islamic countries, or their parents did, were critical of the literary merits of her effort.

"The two main ones were both Muslim men," Ms. Gul said of her critics, adding that she was not surprised by negative reactions to her story from men who undoubt-

edly had very different immigrant experiences than what she had lived through as a woman.

“They had the luxury of having been able to negotiate with their families, they could shift between Dutch culture and the faith of their parents, because men get that space in our culture,” she said. “My only option, as a woman wanting to change that environment, was to radically break with it.”

Genial and Respectful? Why New York's Next Governor Is a Radical

Kathy Hochul, on the cusp of becoming New York's first woman governor, has been consigned to a strange limbo for the next 12 days because of Andrew Cuomo's time-delayed resignation — a lag she has made clear is not her preference.

But Mr. Cuomo's slow goodbye may be a blessing in disguise for Ms. Hochul, and not just because it gives her time to put together a trusted team and get her arms around the many significant challenges facing the state.

It also gives New Yorkers time to figure out who the heck she is — and to learn that she is not someone to be underestimated, as some of us who have long watched her know. Ms. Hochul has made a whole career out of biding her time, seizing opportunities and cannily remolding herself to address shifting constituencies.

What's critical to understand about Ms. Hochul — and it may sound like a small thing, but it's not — is that she finds ways to make the most of her position.

Her most recent one, the lieutenant governor's job, is largely ceremonial in New York, with no official policy portfolio and little opportunity to establish an agenda. And until this month, she has been far from a household name: Even some seasoned TV anchors and reporters covering the governor's downfall and resignation struggled to pronounce "Hochul." (It's a hard "c," like "cool," not the soft "ch" of "church.")

But Ms. Hochul is seemingly indefatigable, known to pack her day full of public events — sometimes beginning and ending at opposite ends of the state. In the process, she has established strong ties with a wide array of political stakeholders and power brokers.

In doing so she has created a profile for herself well beyond her political base in Buffalo, which has always been viewed as something of a backwater by the downstate-dominated political class. The last true upstate governor was a Cortland County native, Nathan Miller, elected in 1920. George Pataki claimed the upstate mantle, but he hailed from Westchester County, which is really a New York City suburb.

Her experience in western New York is also revealing. Her unlikely 2011 special election victory in a Republican-dominated congressional district briefly captured media attention outside the Empire State. She was the first Democrat to hold the seat in 40 years. But less than two years later, her district redrawn to become even more G.O.P.-dominant, Ms. Hochul lost a tight race to the Republican Chris Collins.

While running for Congress as an "independent Democrat," Ms. Hochul was endorsed by the N.R.A. She regularly accepted the Conservative Party line in local races, and while serving as Erie County clerk, she took on Gov. Eliot Spitzer — who had appointed her to the role — when she opposed his plan to let undocumented immigrants obtain driver's licenses.

That played well in western New York, which leans right, but made Ms. Hochul a lightning rod for the left. Eleven years later, in a different position with a broader constituency, she vocally supported Mr. Cuomo's push for the same immigration

policy Mr. Spitzer had failed to realize and cheered when the so-called Green Light bill became law.

New York elected officials have a tradition of shifting positions as they move up the political food chain. Kirsten Gillibrand's transformation from a Blue Dog congresswoman to an outspoken progressive senator is Exhibit A. But some on the left remain skeptical about Ms. Hochul. She has work to do to unite the notoriously fractious Democratic Party.

That may prove to be an impossible task, given the growing schism between the party's liberal wing and its more moderate members. Difficult debates are looming in Albany next year, particularly around single-payer health care — a top priority for Democratic Socialists, who are growing their number in the New York State Legislature.

But Ms. Hochul will be up for the challenge. Her folksy mannerisms and kill-them-with-kindness approach belie a steely and savvy operator.

That prowess was on display in 2018 when Ms. Hochul outmaneuvered Mr. Cuomo as he sought to dump her from his third-term re-election ticket while facing a primary challenge from the progressive activist and actress Cynthia Nixon. Ms. Hochul herself was fending off a primary opponent: Jumaane Williams, who is now the New York City public advocate but was then a Brooklyn councilman.

Ms. Hochul rejected the governor's public suggestion that she run for her old House seat, calling his bluff. She knew he could not afford to force out his loyal lieutenant and alienate upstate voters, or, for that matter, women — especially not as he faced a female challenger. He was stuck with her.

She won the primary and cruised to a general election victory at Mr. Cuomo's side: She had beaten Albany's political chess master at his own game.

Now that she plans to seek a full term in 2022 for the office she is about to inherit, Ms. Hochul has just over 14 months to convince New York voters, as well as Democratic leaders and allies, of her competence and progressive credibility. She is already seeking to separate herself from her predecessor and quell accusations that she stood silently by while he created a toxic work environment and harassed multiple women. (Ms. Hochul insists she had no knowledge of that, but Mr. Cuomo's bullying and strong-arm tactics have long been well known.)

Ms. Hochul faces many challenges: the surging Delta variant, an uptick of urban violent crime, annual budget battles and a growing list of 2022 wannabes. But she starts with a well of good will and a reputation for being tough but not abusive. "No one will ever describe my administration as a toxic work environment," she told reporters on Wednesday. For the time being, that should be more than enough.

Liz Benjamin is a former reporter who covered New York politics and government for two decades. She's now the managing director for Albany at Marathon Strategies, a communications and strategic consulting firm.

The Times is committed to publishing a diversity of letters to the editor. We'd like to hear what you think about this or any of our articles. Here are some tips. And here's our email: letters@nytimes.com.

Follow The New York Times Opinion section on Facebook, Twitter (@NYTopinion) and Instagram.

An Afghan warlord who steadfastly resisted the Taliban surrendered. Others may follow his lead.

Mohammad Ismail Khan, center, last week in Herat. He rose to prominence in the mujahedeen resistance to the Soviets, and then fought against the Taliban in the 1990s.

KABUL, Afghanistan — A prominent Afghan warlord and former governor, who had resisted Taliban attacks in western Afghanistan for weeks and rallied many to his cause to push back the insurgent offensive, surrendered on Friday, officials said.

The surrender of the warlord, Mohammad Ismail Khan, is particularly important for the Taliban because he commanded a force that potentially posed a threat to the insurgents in the western region of the country — perhaps even a greater threat than Afghan government forces.

Mr. Khan's surrender could kick off a trend among warlords and regional power brokers such as Mohammed Atta Noor, who is trying to defend the economic hub of Mazar-i-Sharif in the country's north and has rallied militias for the city's defense. During the civil war in the 1990s, it was common for warlord commanders to switch sides at the first sign of opportunity or survival.

Mr. Khan was a young army captain when the Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan in 1979. He rose to prominence after joining the mujahedeen, the U.S.-backed insurgents who fought against the Soviet-supported Communist government in his home

of Herat.

He fought against the Taliban in the 1990s as part of the Northern Alliance in western Afghanistan. He was captured by the Taliban, and spent about two years as their captive.

Mr. Khan, now in his 70s, picked up his rifle last month, mobilized his militias, and fought alongside Afghan security forces in an attempt to push back the Taliban offensive on Herat, the capital of the province with the same name and the country's third largest city.

He became a national celebrity for his steadfast resistance against the Taliban and thousands of Afghans commended him for his leadership against the insurgents, posting his photos on social media, calling him the "Lion of Herat."

He initially succeeded, and pushed the Taliban fighters out of the city, but his battlefield victories were not enough to prevent its fall.

The Taliban finally seized control of Herat on Thursday night after a two-week siege, forcing Mr. Khan, top government officials and forces to retreat to the provincial airport and the army corps outside the city.

Mr. Khan and senior security officials including a deputy for the interior ministry, an army corps commander and an intelligence director, along with thousands of government forces, surrendered to the Taliban this morning.

The Taliban's online media outlets later shared a video of Mr. Khan after the surrender.

"I hope all brothers can create a peaceful environment, so the war ends and we can have peace and stabilization in Afghanistan," Mr. Khan told a member of the Taliban, from the back of a vehicle.

The fall of Herat, and the surrender of thousands of forces, come after the insurgents captured over half of the country's 34 provincial capitals in just over a week. Among the fallen cities are the strategic southern Kandahar, the country's second-largest city, and Kunduz, a commercial hub in the north.

It was a dramatic reversal for Mr. Khan, who was appointed as Herat governor after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, then served as a cabinet minister during Hamid Karzai's presidency.

Along with other warlords, he was sidelined by President Ashraf Ghani, who once publicly dismissed Mr. Khan as not even being worth meeting.

Los Angeles and Chicago schools to mandate teacher vaccinations.

A back-to-school event that included coronavirus testing, vaccines, and free backpacks in Los Angeles last week.

As schools prepare to reopen five days per week amid an alarming surge in the coronavirus, Los Angeles and Chicago, the second and third-largest districts in the nation, announced on Friday some of the strongest teacher vaccine mandates to date.

Educators and school staff in both cities will have to be fully vaccinated by Oct. 15. School begins in Los Angeles on Aug. 16 and in Chicago on Aug. 30.

In Los Angeles, district employees will also have to submit to regular virus testing, regardless of vaccination status. In Chicago, staff will be tested weekly until the vaccine deadline. Both systems said there will be an exemption process for those with disabling medical conditions or sincerely held religious beliefs.

California and Illinois are also both requiring everyone to use masks inside schools when they reopen.

The new vaccine mandates will put pressure on other large school systems, particularly those in liberal states, to institute similar policies. New York City, the nation's largest district, is currently planning to offer teachers the choice of either vaccination or weekly virus testing.

Leaders of both national teachers' unions, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, have said they support vaccine mandates, but that details should be negotiated locally.

Nearly 90 percent of the nation's educators are vaccinated, according to a survey from Education Week. Yet a small but vocal group of rank-and-file educators oppose vaccine requirements.

After 18 months of classroom closures and hybrid schedules, families and schools had been planning for a return to normalcy this fall. Research from the previous academic year had shown that schools could be operated relatively safely with mitigation strategies such as masking, distancing, hand washing and ventilation.

There is some reassuring evidence from the United Kingdom that during its Delta surge in June, schools remained among the safest places for children to spend time. But it is unclear whether the Delta variant presents more danger in American schools, given the patchwork of mitigation strategies.

Before the Chicago vaccine mandate was announced, Kenzo Shibata, a high school social studies teacher in the district, had considered requesting a leave of absence. A colleague with whom he worked closely had been "steadfast" in her refusal to be vaccinated, he said — a source of major anxiety for Mr. Shibata, whose wife is undergoing cancer treatment and has compromised immunity. Their son is too young to be vaccinated.

On Friday, Mr. Shibata said he was hopeful about the district's mandate, though he remained concerned about fellow teachers asking for exemptions.

"I think this will cut back risk dramatically," he said. "I'm still not feeling like five days a week in person is a good idea, but this is a step in the right direction."

On England's Canals, Boaters Embrace the Peace and Pace of a Floating Life

Canal boats on the Grand Union Canal near Daventry, England.

LITTLE BOURTON, England — On a damp June afternoon, a floating home bobbed gently on the Oxford Canal, where it was moored just outside the village of Little Bourton, a blip on the map with just one pub.

Rachel Bruce and her husband, Chris Hall, have called this idyllic spot northwest of London home for a few days, looking out from the hull of their canal boat, the Glenrich V, over sweeping fields where the wind blowing through the long grass made a low hiss.

But it was time to discover their next patch. So the mooring pins were freed, and Ms. Bruce, 31, steered away from the bank. Their boat set off at the pace of a swift walk as it passed through the hulking wooden and steel gates of the canal's locks.

A group of five ducklings skimmed the water in a V-shape. Kayakers hurried along, quickly bypassing their boat. The vivid yellow of buttercups peeked through the high grass on the towpath.

"We're just feeling like we've made a very good life decision at the moment," Ms. Bruce said about the couple's choice a few weeks ago to give up their stationary lives

to begin a slow traverse of England's canal network.

In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, more people around the globe are re-evaluating their living situations, with greater flexibility thanks to remote work. And in Britain, more people are choosing to call these canals — and the narrow boats used to navigate them — home.

The canals, a vast network once used to move goods across the country, cut their way through Britain's countryside and meander through town and city centers. But after being replaced by trains and highways, they fell into disrepair.

Since the 1960s, though, they have been painstakingly restored and become popular for leisure cruising. And for many people, the appeal of turning weekend jaunts or weeklong trips into a permanently mobile lifestyle is becoming increasingly irresistible.

Tanmim Hussain, 46, a driving instructor and mother of four who lives in North London, bought a canal boat this summer. She felt she would never be able to afford to own an apartment or house in London, and the pandemic made her eager to get out of the city anyway.

"I decided, let's just be adventurous and throw yourself into something, and see how it goes," she said. For now, she has kept her London rental and spends weekends on the boat, cruising with her family from village to village.

Her son's education is the biggest consideration, as moving from town to town would be impossible while he is in school. But some people with young children have taken advantage of more permanent moorings in cities and towns.

"My aim this year was to get used to it and see if I enjoyed the lifestyle," Ms. Hussain said. "And see if there is a potential for a more permanent future."

For Ms. Bruce and Mr. Hall, the stresses of work, a mental health struggle and deaths in the family in the last year made them feel the need for change. Plus, they had long wanted to shake free of what had begun to feel monotonous and flat.

"All of the circumstances of last year just gave us that final push over the edge," said Mr. Hall, 32. "It kind of just felt like doing this is taking back control a little bit."

Within a week of looking at their first boat, they bought it, committing to giving up their decade-long London life and making the 6-foot 10-inch wide, 50-foot long steel boat — which they call the Glen — their permanent home. They paid 42,000 pounds, or about $58,000.

Although the boat is powered by diesel, the couple say they use less fossil fuels and resources then they did in London. This is also part of the appeal, they say. They have two solar panels to power a refrigerator and small electronics, and a Wi-Fi-router to get online and for Mr. Hall's work as a technology consultant.

Life on board is tight but comfortable, with a small seating area next to a wood-burning stove, decorated with succulents and a stack of board games at the ready. A small kitchenette with a gas stovetop is steps away, and further along the hull is a bathroom with a composting toilet. In the back of the boat is the bedroom, with a double bed and small closet.

Boat retailers are seeing more first-time buyers like Ms. Bruce and Mr. Hall, and they say the pandemic has been a factor.

"It's become a little haven really during the coronavirus — living on a narrow boat and keeping yourself to yourself," said Adrian Dawson, a sales executive for Whilton Marina, on the Grand Union Canal in Northamptonshire.

The Canal & River Trust, which is responsible for 2,000 miles of waterways across England and Wales, says there are now 35,130 boats wending their way across the country's canals — more than at the height of the Industrial Revolution.

Life on a rustic canal boat is not all romance. Water tanks need filling, toilet waste needs emptying and tight quarters mean little space for luxuries.

Plus boaters without a permanent mooring have to move every 14 days and travel at least 21 miles a year, under Canal & River Trust rules.

In London, where houseboats have long been an affordable alternative to more traditional living arrangements, boat owners protested in June against new regulations they fear will drive them from their homes, laying bare some of the tensions at play as the waterways become more crowded.

Then there's the little matter of winter: Icy canals, slippery surfaces and staying warm while navigating are all a challenge.

Ms. Bruce and Mr. Hall have their aches to remind them that their muscles are not yet fully accustomed to this life. Unfamiliar with the ins and outs of boat maintenance and navigation, they've had a steep learning curve and have relied on online forums and a guidebook for help.

"It felt a bit terrifying to buy a hunk of steel with an engine when you know nothing about any of those things," Ms. Bruce said. "But then the second I felt a little bit scared about that I was like, 'This is what I need in my life.'"

They have noticed some divisions within the world of canal boating — for example, when an older couple with a flashy boat tsked and tutted as they made their way a little clumsily through a lock.

But they have also found a thriving community of like-minded fellow boaters who are quick to lend their expertise.

“I feel like we probably all have something in common,” Ms. Bruce said. “You know: loving the canals for the peace and the pace, and not tasting and smelling polluted air. And being able to hear the birds when you’re sitting out having tea.”

That shared bond makes it easy to connect with others journeying along the canals, who pass with a wave and some chat.

“Maybe you both feel like you’ve uncovered the secret to life,” Ms. Bruce added with a smile.

The Taliban seek to isolate Kabul, the Pentagon says.

Furniture, home appliances and toy cars belonging to a family that had fled the country are unloaded from a truck and sold on the spot in Kabul, Afghanistan on Friday.

After a bracing string of battlefield victories, Taliban forces are seeking to isolate Kabul, the Pentagon said Friday, taking over border crossings, highways and lines of revenue on its march through Afghanistan.

"You can see a certain effort to isolate Kabul," said John Kirby, the Pentagon press secretary, at a news conference Friday. The move "is not unlike the way they've operated in other places of the country, isolating provincial capitals and sometimes being able to force surrender without necessarily much bloodshed."

"We're certainly concerned by the speed with which the Taliban has been moving," he added. "And as we've said from the very beginning that this is it still is a moment for Afghan national security and defense forces, as well as their political leadership."

The Taliban's accelerated march toward Afghanistan's capital underlies the urgency for American forces to assist with the evacuation of American and Afghan civilians, including State Department personnel and Afghans who have Special Immigrant Visas that permit them to leave the country for the United States. Three battalions

of U.S. troops, or about 3,000 personnel, are being dispatched to Kabul for that effort.

“Nobody’s walking away from the fact that this is potentially dangerous,” Mr. Kirby said of the American mission, in which thousands of civilians are meant to move out of the country daily. “We’re all mindful of the perilous situation in Afghanistan.”

President Biden has vowed to end America’s longest war and withdraw its troops by the end of the month. And U.S. forces have sharply curtailed airstrikes in support of Afghan forces.

In spite of the rapid ascent of Taliban forces and the imminent danger to the capital Mr. Kirby said that the broader battle to secure Afghanistan would remain in the hands of the Afghan security forces.

“They have an air force, a capable Air Force,” he said. “They have organizational structure. They have the benefit of the training that we have provided them over 20 years. They have the material of physical that tangible advantages. It’s time now to use those advantages.”

U.S. Asks Taliban to Spare Its Embassy in Coming Fight for Kabul

Starting in April, the United States Embassy in Afghanistan began sending home nonessential employees as security became more untenable in Kabul.

WASHINGTON — American negotiators are trying to extract assurances from the Taliban that they will not attack the U.S. Embassy in Kabul if the extremist group takes over the country's government and ever wants to receive foreign aid, three American officials said.

The effort, led by Zalmay Khalilzad, the chief American envoy in talks with the Taliban, seeks to stave off a full evacuation of the embassy as they rapidly seize cities across Afghanistan. On Thursday, the State Department announced it was sending home an unspecified number of the 1,400 Americans stationed at the embassy and drawing down to what the agency's spokesman, Ned Price, described as a "core diplomatic presence" in Kabul.

The embassy also urged Americans who were not working for the U.S. government to immediately leave Afghanistan on commercial flights. The Taliban's march has put embassies in Kabul on high alert for a surge of violence in coming months, or even weeks, and forced consulates and other diplomatic missions in the country to shut down.

American diplomats are now trying to determine how soon they may need to fully

evacuate the embassy should the Taliban prove to be more bent on destruction than a détente.

"Let me be very clear about this: The embassy remains open," Mr. Price said on Thursday. "And we plan to continue our diplomatic work in Afghanistan."

Mr. Price said the heightened pace of the Taliban's rout, leading to increased violence and instability across Afghanistan, was of "grave concern."

"So given the situation on the ground, this is a prudent step," he said.

Five current and former officials described the mood inside the embassy as increasingly tense and worried, and diplomats at the State Department's headquarters in Washington noted a sense of depression at the specter of closing it, nearly 20 years after U.S. Marines reclaimed the burned-out building in December 2001.

Several people gloomily revived a comparison that all wanted to avoid: the fall of Saigon in 1975, when Americans stationed at the U.S. Embassy were evacuated from a rooftop by helicopter.

The fears underscore what was unfathomable just a few years ago, when thousands of American forces were in Afghanistan and the U.S. Embassy in Kabul hosted one of the largest diplomatic staffs in the world.

Mr. Khalilzad is hoping to convince Taliban leaders that the embassy must remain open, and secure, if the group hopes to receive American financial aid and other assistance as part of a future Afghan government. The Taliban leadership has said it wants to be seen as a legitimate steward of the country, and is seeking relations with other global powers, including Russia and China, in part to receive economic support.

Two officials confirmed Mr. Khalilzad's efforts, which have not been previously reported, on the condition of anonymity to discuss the delicate negotiations. A third official said on Thursday that the Taliban would forfeit any legitimacy — and, in turn, foreign aid — if it attacked Kabul or took over Afghanistan's government by force.

Other governments are also warning the Taliban that they will not receive aid if they overrun the Afghan government, given the rampage its fighters have waged across the country in recent days. On Thursday, Foreign Minister Heiko Maas of Germany said Berlin would not give the Taliban any financial support if they ultimately rule Afghanistan with a hard-line Islamic law.

In other posts around the world, U.S. diplomats said they were closely watching the perilous situation in Kabul to see how the State Department would balance its

longstanding commitment to stabilizing Afghanistan against protecting the Americans who remain there as military forces withdraw.

Ronald E. Neumann, who was the American ambassador to Afghanistan from 2005 to 2007, described a push and pull between the Pentagon and the State Department in similar situations, given the military's responsibility for carrying out evacuations and diplomats' duty to maintain American assistance and influence even in danger zones.

"If the military goes too early, it may be unnecessary, and it may cost you a lot politically," said Mr. Neumann, who is now the president of the American Academy of Diplomacy in Washington. "If the diplomats wait too late, it looks like Saigon off the roof or the departure from Mogadishu after everything was already lost, and it puts the military people at risk. So there's no guaranteed right side."

Another senior U.S. official expressed alarm this week at the fall of the provincial capitals across Afghanistan, and said that if other cities follow, particularly Mazar-i-Sharif, the only major northern city still under government control, the situation could disintegrate quickly.

Officials in Washington and Kabul said the embassy was holding regular meetings of an emergency action committee, which is set up in every American diplomatic post to assess whether or how soon an evacuation may be necessary. The content of the meetings is classified because, in part, they review intelligence about specific attack scenarios.

Spokespeople from the State Department headquarters in Washington and the U.S. Embassy in Kabul would not discuss how often the committee was meeting, but other officials said its members were holding discussions daily.

The committee can only make recommendations, and it would be up to the embassy's top-ranking diplomat — in this case, Ross Wilson, the chargé d'affaires in Kabul — to order an evacuation after consulting with senior officials in Washington. On Thursday, Mr. Wilson warned the Taliban that "attempts to monopolize power through violence, fear and war will only lead to international isolation."

Starting in April, the embassy began sending home nonessential employees as security became more untenable in Kabul. Other staff members have been allowed to leave, without penalty to their careers, if they feel in danger.

One diplomat said a number of what he described as small military elements have recently been brought in to reinforce the embassy, which is inside what is probably already the most hardened compound in Kabul's international zone, where diplomatic missions and the Afghan government are based.

At the same time, officials said, fewer diplomats are rotating into Kabul to replace colleagues who have left to further cull the number of Americans posted there. That has raised concerns in the American diplomatic corps that the embassy would have trouble recruiting staff for years to come.

"It's a wrenching time," said Eric Rubin, the president of the union that represents career foreign service officers and who is a former ambassador to Bulgaria. He said about one-quarter of the current U.S. diplomatic corps have been posted to either Afghanistan or Iraq over the last 20 years and remain emotionally invested in the war zones in which they worked.

"There was a lot of sacrifice," Mr. Rubin said. "Everyone who served there for the most part served without their families, and under difficult conditions; at times under mortar fire. So it wasn't easy."

As recently as last month, senior officials at the embassy in Kabul voiced confidence that personnel there could be evacuated quickly if necessary, noting a sufficient number of commercial flights leaving from the capital's international airport every day could accommodate the compound's staff.

It is not clear, however, whether an evacuation would include all of the embassy's foreign personnel along with American citizens, and the fate of Afghan employees who would all but certainly be targeted by the Taliban for aiding the United States is of acute concern to senior officials, according to several people familiar with the discussions.

Officials also said the Biden administration is concerned that an evacuation of the American Embassy could create a domino effect that accelerates the departure of other diplomatic missions and international support — and, in turn, leads to the collapse of the Afghan government.

"I am quite sure that no one in our Foreign Service who's involved in this effort is advocating closing down the embassy and evacuating," Mr. Rubin said.

While decisions about the embassy's security are on the horizon, he said, "there's no reason to think that there's an imminent security threat to our people."

"The first thing is, obviously, the mission, and the mission is changing," Mr. Rubin said. "But I don't think anybody's going to propose to walk away."

Helene Cooper contributed reporting from Washington, and Thomas Gibbons-Neff from Kabul, Afghanistan.

For a Crime at 14, He Faces Death in a Case Casting Doubt on Saudi Reforms

A former site of public executions in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's capital.

BEIRUT, Lebanon — The thief entered the jewelry store disguised as a woman, in a black gown and face veil, then drew a pistol and an assault rifle to rob the place.

He shattered a glass case, shot and wounded two employees, and swiped more than $200,000 in gold before shooting dead a police officer, dumping his body in the gutter and speeding off in the officer's car.

The robbery in May 2017 in Duba, on Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coast, was captured in surveillance footage that shocked the kingdom, and a young man now sits on death row for the crime.

But there's a wrinkle: The convict, Abdullah al-Huwaiti, was only 14 at the time of the robbery and killing.

A New York Times review of court documents raised other questions about the case. The court dismissed evidence that Mr. al-Huwaiti, who is now 19, was elsewhere when the robbery occurred and ignored his claim that his initial confession had been coerced.

Rights groups also cite the case as an example of the kingdom continuing to execute people for crimes committed as minors, despite legal overhauls aimed at limiting the

practice.

Among 37 people executed for terrorism-related crimes in one day in 2019, at least two were under 18 at the time of the crimes they were accused of, according to Human Rights Watch. Others who were executed or are on death row could also have been convicted of crimes committed as minors, but the court documents do not specify their ages when those crimes occurred.

"Saudi Arabia's allies in the West are more or less supporting and promoting the authorities' reform narrative," said Hiba Zayadin, a researcher for Human Rights Watch. "But a case like this cuts against that narrative by showing how incomplete and often unevenly implemented many of the recently announced reforms actually are."

Saudi officials say the kingdom's courts work diligently to enforce the laws. In a statement about Mr. al-Huwaiti's case to the United Nations Human Rights Council in February, Saudi Arabia denied that Mr. al-Huwaiti was mistreated, insisted that he confessed of his own accord and defended his conviction, saying it was based on solid evidence.

"The death penalty is imposed only for the most serious crimes and in extremely limited circumstances," the statement said.

Human rights groups have long criticized Saudi Arabia's justice system, which is based on Shariah law, for failing to ensure fair trials and handing down punishments like public floggings and beheadings.

In recent years, the kingdom has announced legal changes to address some of these concerns as part of broader overhauls championed by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, a son of King Salman and the de facto ruler.

Last year, the kingdom's top court banned flogging, instructing judges instead to issue fines or prison time. In January, the kingdom announced that the number of executions had dropped to 27 in 2020 from 184 the year before, largely because of a moratorium on death sentences for drug crimes.

Rights campaigners have called on Saudi Arabia to stop executing people for crimes committed when they were under 18, which is prohibited under the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child. Saudi Arabia ratified the convention, but with a reservation on stipulations it deemed in conflict with Islamic law.

But the kingdom has since modified some related laws. In 2018, King Salman set a maximum prison term of 10 years for crimes committed by minors, except for capital offenses. Last year, he decreed an end to such executions in cases whose sentences are set according to the discretion of judges.

But that ban did not extend to all types of cases. Convicts can still be executed for murder in so-called retribution cases, and for crimes like adultery, apostasy and violent robbery, whose punishments are laid out in Islamic scriptures.

Mr. al-Huwaiti's conviction — for robbing the store, shooting two employees and killing the police officer — fell in the last category, earning him a death sentence regardless of how old he was at the time.

In the trial, prosecutors accused Mr. al-Huwaiti and five other defendants of forming an armed gang to commit the robbery. One other defendant was also a minor when the crime occurred, and all six tried to revoke confessions they had given to interrogators.

Mr. al-Huwaiti said that interrogators had beaten him, deprived him of sleep and threatened to harm his relatives if he did not confess, according to documents submitted to the court.

The other defendants were given 15-year prison sentences and were required to reimburse the cost of the stolen goods.

The guns and gold were never recovered.

To build their case against Mr. al-Huwaiti, prosecutors cited: bullets found in his house after the robbery, even though firearms are not uncommon in remote parts of the kingdom; a DNA sample taken from the police car used in the getaway; and initial confessions by him and the other defendants.

During the trial, Brig. Gen. Walid al-Harbi, an investigator who had opened the case but was removed from it shortly after for reasons that were not made clear, said that cellphone data and surveillance footage had not placed any of the suspects near the shop at the time of the crime, and had indicated that Mr. al-Huwaiti was on the waterfront, giving him an alibi.

General al-Harbi did not dispute the DNA match, but said Mr. al-Huwaiti had told him that he had initially confessed to the crime because the interrogators told him that his mother and sisters had been arrested and would not be released unless he confessed.

The court dismissed Mr. al-Huwaiti's statement that he had been abused or forced to confessed.

"There's DNA evidence, but there's no way to verify it," said Taha Alhajji, a Saudi legal expert for the European Saudi Organization for Human Rights. "You can't trust the legal procedure."

Mr. Alhajji said prosecutors could have pushed to convict Mr. al-Huwaiti to avoid leaving a case involving a dead police officer unsolved.

“Their colleague died,” Mr. Alhajji said. “They didn’t want his blood to be in vain.”

Mr. al-Huwaiti’s case is now before the kingdom’s highest court, which reviews all death penalty cases. If the court upholds the sentence, it goes to the king, who must sign off before the execution goes ahead.

It is unclear when the court will rule on the case.

In an interview, Mr. al-Huwaiti’s mother said her son had returned home around midnight on the night of the crime, acting normally. He shopped for breakfast the next day, went to school the day after and was arrested that night when security forces stormed the family home.

She maintains her son’s innocence, saying a boy of that age could not have committed such a heinous crime.

“Where is the criminal?” she said, requesting that her name not be published for fear of retribution. “A child can’t carry this out.”

Afghanistan's Unraveling May Strike Another Blow to U.S. Credibility

Internally displaced families last week in Kandahar. In the last few months, at least 400,000 Afghans have become internally displaced, a number likely to rise considerably.

BRUSSELS — Afghanistan's rapid unraveling is already raising grumblings about American credibility, compounding the wounds of the Trump years and reinforcing the idea that America's backing for its allies is not unlimited.

The Taliban's lightning advance comes at a moment when many in Europe and Asia had hoped that President Biden would reestablish America's firm presence in international affairs, especially as China and Russia angle to extend their influence. Now, America's retreat is bound to sow doubts.

"When Biden says 'America is back,' many people will say, 'Yes, America is back home,'" said François Heisbourg, a French defense analyst.

"Few will gang up on the U.S. for finally stopping a failed enterprise," he said. "Most people would say it should have happened a long time ago." But in the longer term, he added, "the notion that you cannot count on the Americans will strike deeper roots because of Afghanistan."

The United States has been pulling back from military engagements abroad since

President Obama, he noted, and under President Trump, "we had to prepare for a U.S. no longer willing to assume the burden of unlimited liability alliances."

That hesitation will now be felt all the more strongly among countries in play in the world, like Taiwan, Ukraine, the Philippines and Indonesia, which can only please China and Russia, analysts suggest.

"What made the U.S. strong, powerful and rich was that from 1918 through 1991 and beyond, everybody knew we could depend on the U.S. to defend and stand up for the free world," said Tom Tugendhat, chairman of the British Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee.

"The sudden withdrawal from Afghanistan after 20 years and so much investment in lives and effort will see allies and potential allies around the world wondering whether they have to decide between democracies and autocracies, and realize some democracies don't have staying power anymore," he added.

In Asia, the American withdrawal and looming collapse of the Afghan government have been viewed with a mixture of resignation and trepidation.

"Most Asians have already factored it in because it's been a protracted process, not a shock," said Susan L. Shirk, the head of the 21st Century China Center at the University of California, San Diego.

The country expressing the most concern has been China, which shares a short, remote border with Afghanistan, which under the Taliban served as a haven for Uyghur extremists from Xinjiang, the far western Chinese province.

China, which routinely criticizes the United States for acting as a global belligerent, has warned that a hasty American withdrawal could create instability across the region.

At the same time, China's Foreign Ministry offered a public show of support to the Taliban, holding two days of talks late last month with a delegation that included one of the movement's founders, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar.

The issue for America's allies and others, though, is less "credibility," a much misused term, than ability to see commitments through to the end. And the world can seem a more anarchic, less comprehensible place, said Jean-Marie Guéhenno, former French and United Nations diplomat now at Columbia University.

"The military debacle of Afghanistan, coming after the diplomatic debacle of Syria, will make Western nations more inward-looking, cynical and nationalist," he said, "as they feel surrounded by a world that they don't control, but keeps intruding."

Still, Mr. Guéhenno said, Western democracies "must not adopt a doctrine of indifference to the plight of other people."

Afghanistan was never a particularly vital interest for Europe to begin with. NATO went to war there 20 years ago only to show solidarity with the United States after 9/11.

But the suddenness of Afghanistan's collapse is another reminder of what can happen when Europe outsources decisions to Washington.

NATO countries let the Americans call the shots in Afghanistan, even if they complained about a lack of consultation. For NATO, the mantra was always "in together, out together." Once President Biden decided to pull the plug, NATO troops also began leaving at speed; there is little appetite for returning.

Europe's main worries now are a new flow of Afghan migrants and a new safe haven for terrorism. But for a long time now, European terrorism has had its roots closer to home, in North Africa and the Middle East and in domestic disaffection.

The Biden administration has other problems, and Europeans want support from Washington on more important issues, like climate change, Russia and China, said Robin Niblett, director of Chatham House, the London research institution.

"Biden will take some hit for lack of consultation with allies and piggybacking on a flawed Trump strategy," Mr. Niblett said. "But there is a lot more to be gained for American soft power by getting through the corona crisis and focusing on vaccines for the world, than on putting more effort into whether the Afghan government survives."

Allies, especially Britain and Germany, were angry at the way the pullout was announced and saw it as a fait accompli, so there will be some residual damage, Mr. Niblett said.

"But Europe won't give up on a Biden who believes in allies on the big issues that matter," he said, adding: "On these Biden is leading in the right direction."

Europeans have failed to identify their own interests in Afghanistan, which center on regional stability, energy supplies and migration, said Ulrich Speck, a senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund in Berlin. "Europeans ignore geopolitics at their own peril," he said.

For instance, a new wave of migration could destabilize Turkey, which is already hosting nearly 4 million Syrian refugees, Mr. Speck said. That, in turn, he added, could bring new tensions with Greece and the rest of the European Union.

"The Europeans should not play the American role, but at least have consulted with one another about what we could do, even to help Kabul," he said.

Carl Bildt, the former Swedish prime minister, went further, urging the U.S. and Europe to reconsider the wholesale withdrawal.

"I believe the U.S., E.U. and allies should commit to keeping a security force in Kabul until the Taliban agrees to a cease-fire and a political solution," he said in a Twitter post. "To just cut and run is to endorse a military solution dictated by the Taliban."

But there appear to be few volunteers at this stage.

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell Fontelles, issued a statement Thursday night calling on the Taliban to immediately resume talks with the Afghan government in Qatar and to respect human rights. Echoing State Department warnings, he said that "if power is taken by force and an Islamic Emirate reestablished, the Taliban would face nonrecognition, isolation, lack of international support."

But Europe has little leverage. There are obvious worries about how long the Afghan government will last, what will happen to women, girls, judges and the media under a renewed Taliban rule, and about a new wave of Afghan refugees.

Earlier this week, ministers from six countries — Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece and Denmark — called for continuing deportations of Afghans whose asylum claims have been rejected.

But given the speed of the collapse, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark and France have, for now, at least, stopped sending Afghans who do not qualify as refugees back to Afghanistan.

Few expect a repeat of the 2015 migration crisis, when more than a million people sought asylum and the resulting chaos boosted far-right and populist politics. But a large new flow from Afghanistan is likely to feed domestic anxieties, especially in Germany, which has elections next month.

Though the numbers are down, in 2020 Afghans were the second-largest country of origin for asylum seekers arriving in the bloc, with some 50,000 applying, the European Asylum Support Office says. Fully 59 percent of applications from Afghans were accepted.

Some 1,200 Afghans have been returned so far this year, and only 200 of them did not return voluntarily, European officials told reporters on Tuesday. But they said that in the last few months, at least 400,000 Afghans have become internally

displaced, a number likely to rise considerably.

In Britain, which has a long history with Afghanistan and has had the second largest number of casualties after the United States, there is more chagrin and even anger.

Lord David Richards, chief of defense from 2010 to 2013, criticized his government for moving so quickly to evacuate Britons. He told BBC Newsnight that the evacuation "is a tacit, explicit really, admission of a dismal failure of geostrategy and of statecraft."

He said he had hoped to hear "an explanation for why we're in this position, and then, an explanation on how they are going to avert this disaster." Instead, he said, there was just "an admission of failure and a desire to pull people out."

He added: "I'm almost ashamed that we're in this position."

Steven Lee Myers and Monika Pronczuk contributed reporting.

Local officials struggled with eviction freeze as cases stacked up.

Tawana and Akeem Smith with their children Mya, 5, Malakai, 12, Akeelia, 7, Maliyah, 9, and Amirah, 2, in their Las Vegas home. The Smith family has faced eviction several times since the start of the pandemic.

Inside a Las Vegas courtroom last week, renters and landlords battled over evictions that continued at a brisk pace despite a last-minute, two-month extension of the federal protections meant to keep people in their homes.

Vanessa Merryman, 41, was among the tenants ordered to leave her apartment. "I have never been homeless in my life," she said through tears. "I do not know what I am going to do."

The federal moratorium on evictions — combined with billions of dollars in rent subsidies — was supposed to avert the scenario of millions of Americans being turned out of their homes after they lost their jobs during the pandemic and were unable to afford their rent.

Yet despite these efforts, many local governments and courts were not sure how to apply the extension, and desperate tenants continued to flood local government websites seeking rental assistance that was usually slow in coming.

"The lay of the land has been confusing at every level, not just to tenants, but

also to landlords, court personnel and judges," said Dana Karni, the manager of the Eviction Right to Counsel Project in Houston.

In extending the moratorium last week, the Biden administration hinged it to high local coronavirus infection rates — the idea being that protection was warranted in areas where the virus was surging. Clark County, including Las Vegas, was among hundreds of counties that meet the criterion for high infection rates, but the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines gave some leeway to judges to instead apply state laws, which at times allowed for evictions.

Looking for St. Mark's Square? You May Find Yourself in a Shipyard Instead.

The port of Monfalcone, Italy, where some cruise ships bound for Venice docked.

MONFALCONE, Italy — Vittoria Comparone had never been to Venice. So for her coming honeymoon, she booked a dream cruise including a majestic approach to the city past St. Mark's Square, the Doge's Palace and all the astonishing, photogenic treasures along the Giudecca Canal.

At dawn on Saturday, the 2,500-passenger ship, the MSC Orchestra, glided toward its designated Venice stop, and Ms. Comparone, 28, and her husband, both from Caserta in southern Italy, stepped onto their cabin's balcony. Under a glorious salmon-hued sky, the couple took in the view.

Towering cranes bent over a vast shipyard. A peppermint-striped thermoelectric cooling tower loomed over walls wrapped in barbed wire. Signs in the distance advertised the main cultural attraction, the Shipbuilding Museum.

"It's not exactly as charming as Venice," Ms. Comparone said.

A navigating error did not bring her to Monfalcone, an industrial port with a renowned history of shipbuilding more than two hours' drive east of Venice. The government did.

On July 13, a day after Ms. Comparone's wedding, Italy's prime minister banned cruise ships and other enormous boats from the Venice lagoon and canals — a move long sought by environmentalists and local activists to protect the fragile ecosystem and exasperated residents after years of mass tourism.

By Saturday, the last day before the ban went into effect on Aug. 1, cruise ship companies had already given up on Venice and rerouted to other ports, including Monfalcone. Locals wading opposite the port on a beach sullied with rusted debris and abandoned buildings with shattered windows admired the ship. "Spectacular in the morning light," said Sabrina Ranni, 55, whose husband worked on a larger mega-cruise ship still in the yard.

But some passengers were less satisfied with Monfalcone than Monfalcone was with them.

"We were really upset," said Erika Rosini, 43, who learned of the change once the ship set sail. "It wasn't great to wake up this morning and see this horrible spectacle."

She decided to avoid the long bus trek into Venice and spend the day with her family on the boat. "The pools are awful," she said while standing in one of them, drinking a mocktail, shouting over thumping music and trying to look toward the sea rather than the shipyard. "It's small with a lot — a lot — of people."

Some passengers, including the newlyweds, braved the bus.

"I hoped we would arrive by sea, but with these changes we knew something would be different," said Ms. Comparone as she got off the bus at Venice's cruise ship terminal wearing a black T-shirt reading "Life Is Good."

"It's doable," she said.

She, her husband, Gaetano La Vaccara, 32, and the rest of their group climbed into a smaller boat that brought them down the same Giudecca Canal that the cruise ships used to traverse. They shared space comfortably with public Vaporetto buses, water taxis, an array of motorboats and rocking gondolas.

Under a scorching sun in St. Mark's Square, the couple followed a tour guide and waded through the pandemic-thinned crowds. They held hands and craned their necks with expressions of wonder at the glorious mosaics of the basilica, the winged lion sculpture atop a column and the towering bell tower.

They learned some history and took some pictures. They looked delighted with each other and with Venice, and without a care in the world or a hard feeling about the extra step to get here.

“It’s right, I think,” Mr. La Vaccara said, his neck draped with a cross-body bag, blue audio guide control and ID cards, referring to the decree keeping the ship out of the lagoon. “It’s more respectful.”

As the couple continued toward the Rialto Bridge, leaders of Venice’s anti-cruise ship resistance basked in their victory.

“For 10 years we protested on the water, right here,” Tommaso Cacciari, a spokesman for the No Big Ships committee said, pointing at the slushing canal. He said that when the ban was announced last month, he was with his wife and son — who is 3 and shouts “ugly ship” whenever he sees a big ship — at a cafe flying a No Big Ships flag.

“A party basically broke out,” he said, calling the decree a “liberation.”

With the war over, the grizzled veteran of the cruise ship conflicts took a drag of his cigarette and said he was considering his next move. Among the possibilities: to fight a proposed cruise dock in Marghera, the lagoon’s commercial port on the mainland, or maybe to help residents of other towns keep the ships away.

Told that earlier in the day, bar workers on Monfalcone’s beach begged that more cruise boats come and that more passengers stay, Mr. Cacciari smiled. “Wait two years,” he said.

In the years leading up to the pandemic, tourists so overran the city that residents took to describing the influx as an “assault,” as existential a threat as flooding from high water. The economy had long become addicted to tourism. Residents converted their apartments into lucrative Airbnbs and abandoned the city. Low-cost airlines brought more and more people from more and more places.

But cruise ships, despite bringing only a tiny fraction of the tourists, became the most glaring symbol of that inundation, and they inspired a passionate resistance. When the pandemic halted the cruises, the opponents gained momentum. And when the ships briefly returned, despite a previous government statement that they would not, anger in the city exploded.

For a long time, No Big Ships flags, T-shirts and stickers covered the windows of the committee’s office in a fashionable section of the city, where cruise ship day trippers hardly ever ventured. And when they did, it often did not go well.

“Some of these people ask me ‘Where’s St. Peter’s or the Leaning Tower of Pisa,’” said Valentina Zanda, 31, who supported the ban and was working in the former kiosk of the No Big Boats committee, which has become a Dr. Green “Hemp Life Benefits” shop. “Seriously, they should preselect who can come here.”

Still, she wasn't entirely unsympathetic. Ms. Zanda said that, about a decade ago, she herself worked the reception desk at the cruise terminal, and once even spent two weeks aboard a cruise ship working as a hostess.

"I gained 15 pounds. All alcohol," she said. Then with a highly relaxed glance into the middle distance, she pondered, "On the one hand, it gives work. But at what cost?"

In the last hours of the cruise ship era, that question hung over Venice.

Gondoliers called it a "punch in the gut" when the pandemic had already knocked the city down. Makers of traditional Venetian masks said protesters who had no stake in the tourism industry had acted selfishly.

Many residents remain torn. Alessandra De Rispinis, 75, whose family has owned the Cantine del Vino già Schiavi wine bar for more than 60 years, liked seeing the reflection of the passing ships in her bar mirror. But after accidents, especially when the hulking MSC Opera crashed into a dock in 2019, she said the "fear was real that they would fall on top of you. They are skyscrapers."

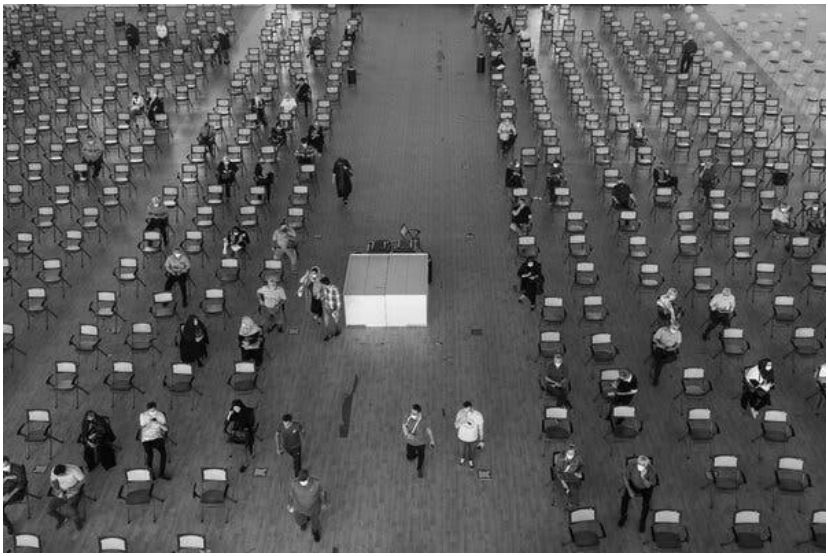
As Venice's residents contemplated a post-cruise world, the newlyweds blithely took in some more sites and ate a bag lunch before returning to Monfalcone. They rode near the port hotel, where a model of a Crown Princess cruise ship sits in the lobby among groggy sailors and workers, and where the front desk manager recommends the exhibit "dedicated to people who died of asbestos" in the Shipbuilding Museum.

The couple boarded the Orchestra as Ms. Rosini's husband, out of the pool and on his phone, posted memes about how he had been promised a view of St. Mark's but only got this lousy shipyard.

As the sun began to set, the Orchestra sailed again. Ms. Comparone stepped onto the balcony and watched the shipyards and cranes and cooling tower grow small. She thought, she said, of Venice — "with its palaces, bridges and bell towers."

Emma Bubola contributed reporting from Rome.

Iran's Health System 'Beyond Disastrous' from Covid Surge



Iranians waiting to receive a coronavirus shot at a vaccination center in Tehran on Monday.

Hospital medics in Iran are triaging patients on the floors of emergency rooms and in cars parked on the roadside. Lines stretch for blocks outside pharmacies. Taxis double as hearses, transporting corpses from hospitals to cemeteries. In at least one city, laborers are digging mass graves.

Iran is under assault from the most cataclysmic wave yet of the coronavirus, according to interviews with physicians and health workers, social media postings from angry citizens, and even some unusually frank reporting in state media. The aggressive Delta variant has led to record numbers of deaths and infections, and appears to be overwhelming the health system of a country that has been reeling from Covid-19 since the scourge began.

The latest phase of the crisis has intensified the challenges facing Iran's new hardline president, Ebrahim Raisi, testing his abilities just days after he took office.

"The situation we are facing is beyond disastrous," said Dr. Mahdiar Saeedian, a 39-year-old physician in Mashhad, Iran's second-largest city. "The health care system is on the verge of collapse."

Even during the 1980-88 war with Iraq, said Dr. Saeedian, who was born during that conflict, "it was not like this."

The official virus death toll is 500 to 600 people a day, but even these record-high figures are disputed as low by some government media. Iran's state television has said that one Iranian dies every two minutes — at least 720 a day.

Frontline doctors in Tehran, Isfahan, Ahvaz and Mashhad told The New York Times that the real death toll was closer to 1,000 a day.

Doctors also say that the true rate of infections is likely much higher than the official rate of about 40,000 a day because of insufficient testing and lack of access to care.

Medical personnel who were once afraid to speak out are now openly chastising what many Iranians see as gross misjudgment, incompetence and negligence in the nation's leadership, from Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on down.

They are especially furious over a dearth of vaccines, which Iran's leaders refused to purchase in time or in sufficient quantities, instead holding out for domestically developed alternatives that may be too late. They banned vaccines made in the United States and Britain, even rejecting donations, because Mr. Khamenei said they had been designed by the West to "contaminate other nations."

Less than 3 percent of Iran's 85 million people have been fully vaccinated.

Nurses from Covid-19 wards are shown crying on state television. Doctors are posting videos on social media begging officials to act immediately before the crisis gets even worse: lock down the country and buy more foreign-made vaccines, they plead.

"Whatever budget you have, whatever steps you can take, get help from the world, do it to save people," Dr. Nafiseh Saghi, a renowned physician and professor of medicine in Mashhad, begged Iran's leaders in a voice message posted on social media. "History will judge you."

Iran's leaders have repeatedly sought to blame the United States and its prolonged economic isolation of the country for a range of domestic crises, including the Covid-19 contagion.

Critics say the leadership has mismanaged the pandemic from the start: concealing accurate data, refusing to order quarantines, criminalizing transparency by medical staff, prioritizing development of insufficient homegrown vaccines and misleading the public by overpromising mass inoculations.

"Whoever is at fault must be held accountable," said Dr. Muhammad Reza Fal-

lahian, a physician and professor of medicine in Tehran, the capital. “Our vaccinations are very, very late. What else can we doctors do that we are not doing? We are at the breaking point in Iran.”

In revelations that have shaken many Iranians, Dr. Alireza Zali, the head of Tehran’s coronavirus committee, told Iranian news media on Wednesday that officials had not allowed the purchase of foreign vaccines because of the expense.

When experts from the World Health Organization visited to assess Iran’s needs and offer help, Dr. Zali said, his superiors ordered medical personnel to portray the country as self-sufficient.

“They told us to praise Iran’s health care system,” he said. “We covered up real death tolls from the W.H.O. and turned around international aid at the airport.”

In his first week in office, Mr. Raisi, the new president, is under fire, even from supporters, for refusing to lock down the country for two weeks at the request of the Health Ministry and for the vaccine shortage.

He acknowledged Wednesday that “not that many” doses of domestic vaccine had been produced yet and that he planned to import at least 40 million doses before winter.

A spokesman for Iran’s Food and Drug Administration, Kianoush Jahanpour, promised that an improbably high 120 million doses of vaccine would be imported within three months, including Pfizer and Moderna brands — as long as they were not produced in the United States or Britain.

Mr. Khamenei, who is responsible for Mr. Raisi’s ascendance and is believed to consider him a possible successor, said in a televised speech on Wednesday that the pandemic was the country’s top issue. He also said that efforts to vaccinate Iranians must be accelerated, opening the door to more purchases from producers in China, Russia and India.

But Mr. Khamenei also overruled Health Ministry warnings to cancel Shiite mourning rituals now underway for the holy month of Muharram, when thousands of faithful converge on shrines, tightly packed and often unmasked — ripe incubators for super-spreading the virus.

The government’s refusal to impose such restrictions has invited some unusually blunt expressions of anger, even from supporters who risk retribution or at least accusations of disloyalty.

“If I say, ‘Mr. Raisi, by not quarantining Tehran when there are no hospital beds you are responsible for the rising deaths,’ am I considered counterrevolutionary?”

Mehdi Sasani, a Tehran resident who voted for Mr. Raisi, asked in a Twitter posting.

Mr. Sasani related his family's ordeal in battling the virus, from being unable to find a hospital bed to wandering for hours from pharmacy to pharmacy in search of prescribed medication. He said people lining up for health care and medication were cursing Mr. Khamenei.

"We are officially facing a situation of having no government," Hamidreza Salehi, a computer programmer, said in a Twitter posting. "They have lost control of everything."

Despite the ravages of the most recent virus wave, pictures and videos from Iran mostly show business as usual on the streets. Offices, shops and restaurants are open at full capacity. No restrictions have been enforced on masking, travel or social distancing. Many people, exhausted from pressures of the poor economy, the pandemic and distrust of government, are not following recommended protocols.

The deputy health minister, Iraj Harirchi, said last week that Iran's death toll would rise for six weeks, according to estimates by international agencies. Nearly all of Iran's 31 provinces are labeled "red," the highest risk level under Iran's alert system.

In what appeared to be a concession to medical critics, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, the powerful paramilitary force that reports directly to Mr. Khamenei, said Thursday that its regional commanders would take steps to help prevent unfettered movement of people around the country. Details on how such restrictions would work remained unclear.

A mother in Tehran with a 13-year-old son who contracted Covid-19 said that when his respiratory symptoms worsened she could not find a hospital bed and that doctors who made house visits for hefty prices told her they had no openings for days. To obtain the prescribed anti-viral medications, she said, she waited from midnight to 3 a.m. outside a 24/7 pharmacy.

Ehsan Badeghi, a journalist for the government newspaper Iran, said in an interview that his next-door neighbor, a 43-year-old mother of two young children, had died a few days earlier waiting for an ambulance. He said the woman had been unable to find a hospital bed and could not afford home care services.

"Vaccination or quarantine both need money and planning and neither is happening here," he said. "So the pandemic rages and will continue to get worse. We are dying and nobody cares."

Critical medical therapies such as intravenous fluids, oxygen tanks and antiviral medications are in short supply at hospitals and pharmacies and are sold in the black market at exorbitant prices, according to interviews with doctors from four

cities.

Medical staff are also physically exhausted and emotionally drained as they work double shifts in hospitals without a break, said Dr. Ali Nikjoo, a 43-year-old psychiatrist in Tehran. He said he has received many calls from colleagues battling depression, anxiety and grief.

“The medical staff is walking through a minefield every day,” Dr. Zakani said. “There is an overwhelming feeling of abandonment among not just doctors and nurses but ordinary people. We are floating and drowning.”

I Joined a Penguin NFT Club Because Apparently That's What We Do Now

Earlier this week, I got attacked by penguins.

Not real ones, mind you. These were Pudgy Penguins — a flock of Twitter accounts with cartoon penguins as their avatars, which descended on me with messages like "Welcome to club pengu!" and "Enjoy the huddle!" As the replies flooded past, I saw penguins with sunglasses and penguins wearing sombreros, penguins with bow ties and penguins with mohawks. Dozens of penguins became hundreds; soon, my mentions were overflowing with bulbous and beaked interlopers, all congratulating me on joining them.

What had I done to deserve this welcome wagon? Well, a few minutes earlier, I'd acquired my very own Pudgy Penguins, marking me as an owner of one of the internet's strangest new status symbols.

For months now, the crypto-obsessed have been buzzing about the rise of "community NFTs," or nonfungible tokens, a kind of digital collectible that combines the get-rich-quick appeal of cryptocurrency with the exclusivity of a country club membership.

If you know anything about NFTs, you probably know that they are one-of-a-kind digital objects — cryptographic tokens, hosted on the Ethereum blockchain, that correspond to a digital asset, such as an N.B.A. highlight video or a piece of digital art. The most valuable NFTs — including the column I sold as an NFT this year for more than $500,000 — attract buyers for the same reason that Renaissance paintings do: because only one of them exists.

Community NFTs, by contrast, are group projects. They're released in sets of unique but thematically linked images that can be bought and sold individually. Buying a community NFT typically entitles you to certain benefits, including membership in a shared Discord server or access to a private Telegram channel, where you can talk with other owners. (The biggest perk, though, is getting to change your Twitter profile photo to your NFT, marking yourself as part of the in crowd.)

I decided to join the Pudgy Penguins because ... well, it's August and I'm bored. But I also wanted to explore a more serious undercurrent. For years, technologists have been predicting the rise of the "metaverse," an all-encompassing digital world that will eventually have its own forms of identity, community and governance. Mark Zuckerberg, the chief executive of Facebook, recently said the social network would pivot to becoming a "metaverse company." Epic Games, the maker of Fortnite, has also bet big on the metaverse, raising $1 billion to build its own version of digital reality.

Metaverse enthusiasts believe that our digital identities will eventually become just as meaningful as our offline selves, and that we'll spend our money accordingly. Instead of putting art on the walls of our homes, they predict, we'll put NFTs in our

virtual Zoom backgrounds. Instead of buying new clothes, we'll splurge on premium skins for our V.R. avatars.

Pudgy Penguins, and similar NFT projects, are a bet on this digitized future.

"The way I describe it to my family members and friends is like, people buy Supreme clothes, or they buy a Rolex," Clayton Patterson, 23, one of the founders of Pudgy Penguins, told me in an interview. "There are all these ways to tell everyone that you're wealthy. But a lot of those things can actually be faked. And with an NFT, you can't fake it."

Mr. Patterson, who goes by the online handle "mrtubby," is a computer science student at the University of Central Florida. He started Pudgy Penguins with three classmates this summer after seeing other community NFTs take off. They chose penguins as their theme because the birds seemed approachable and friendly, and settled on using an algorithm to generate 8,888 unique penguins with different combinations of clothing, facial expressions and accessories.

"There was huge meme potential in fat-looking penguins, so we decided to roll with that," Mr. Patterson said.

The first community NFT was the CryptoPunks, a series of 10,000 pixelated characters that was sold starting in 2017. They became a luxury status symbol, with single images selling for millions of dollars, and paved the way for other community NFTs, including the Bored Ape Yacht Club, a group of 10,000 cartoon primates that now sell for upward of $45,000 apiece.

Mr. Patterson and his co-founders hope that Pudgy Penguins will end up joining the NFT pantheon. The original collection sold out within 20 minutes, and more than $25 million worth of them have changed hands overall, according to NFT Stats, a website that aggregates data on NFT sales. Early this week, it was still possible to score a penguin for a few thousand dollars, but penguins with rare features, such as different-colored backgrounds or gold medals around their necks, can go for much more. The most expensive was Pudgy Penguin #6873, which sold for $469,000.

I messaged Mr. Patterson on Tuesday, asking if he had any advice for getting my own Pudgy Penguin without breaking the bank. (The New York Times's expense policy does not, sadly, cover JPEGs of birds.)

"Hold on, I might be able to do something," he wrote back.

Minutes later, two Pudgy Penguins — #3166 and #5763 — appeared in my cryptocurrency wallet. One was an image of a penguin with a do-rag and sunglasses; the other was wearing a baseball hat with an igloo and what looked like a bomber jacket. They were a gift, Mr. Patterson said, in appreciation of my willingness to

learn about the community. (Since I can't ethically accept gifts, I'll be sending my Pudgy Penguins back to Mr. Patterson after this column publishes.)

I then joined the Pudgy Penguin Discord server, where I was greeted by a throng of fellow owners who were excited to see me, not least because they thought getting attention from The Times would increase the value of their own penguins. (After I received my images, I got offers to buy them for thousands of dollars.) The co-founders of Pudgy Penguins earn a royalty every time a penguin is sold, but other owners stand to profit only if they can resell their penguins for more than they paid.

Like any good crypto-clique, Pudgy Penguin owners have developed their own language and customs. Penguins are "pengus." Owners are "huddlers." "Tufts" are a rare, valuable type of penguin with no head covering, while "floors" refer to cheaper and more common varieties.

Several Pudgy Penguin owners told me that while they hoped to turn a profit if the price of penguins kept rising, they mostly saw it as a social opportunity. Pudgy Penguins claims to have more than 4,000 individual owners, and its Discord server, which you don't need to own a penguin to join, is a hyperactive flurry of penguin memes, celebrations of new purchases and strategizing about how to get crypto-celebrities to join the club. (The group scored a coup on Tuesday when Alexis Ohanian, one of the founders of Reddit, showed off his newly acquired Pudgy Penguin on Twitter.)

"The people in the community are great," said Christopher Aumuller, 29, a Pudgy Penguins owner from Queens. "Everyone is pretty much just vibing and sharing penguin memes."

Tiffany Zhong, a cryptocurrency entrepreneur and investor, said part of the penguins' appeal was that other popular crypto tokens had gotten too expensive.

"The average consumer has been priced out of those projects," she said. "And so people who are trying to get into this are like, what's the next big project I can get into?"

To the uninitiated, Pudgy Penguins may seem fundamentally pointless, and in some ways, they are. But I wouldn't bet against them for the same reason I wouldn't bet against the continued appeal of blue check marks on Twitter or O.G. Instagram user names. Humans are status-seeking creatures, always looking for new ways to elevate ourselves above the pack. The first iteration of the internet tended to flatten status distinctions, or at least make them harder to pin down — "on the internet, nobody knows you're a dog" went the proverb — but newer technologies, including NFTs, have allowed for more obvious kinds of signaling.

Packy McCormick, the author of the Not Boring newsletter, argued in a recent essay that community NFTs were behaving as a kind of social network because they

gave people access to social standing and connection, as well as a potentially lucrative investment.

"Powerful things happen when you combine money, status and community," Mr. McCormick wrote.

It's true that the people who buy Pudgy Penguins or other community NFTs may end up losing tons of money if the fad passes. But it's also true that, like the Redditors gleefully pushing up the price of GameStop and AMC, the fans of these projects don't seem to mind the risk. (In fact, some days, NFT traders and meme-stock speculators seem to be the only people still having fun on the internet.)

And while I personally wouldn't invest my retirement money in Pudgy Penguins, I find the most common objections to them fairly unconvincing.

Are NFTs bad for the environment? Arguably, yes. Running the Ethereum blockchain requires a lot of computing power and energy, and NFT trades certainly contribute to the overall carbon footprint of the network. But they're still a tiny portion of the overall cryptocurrency market, and their environmental impact is a drop in the bucket compared with the hundreds of thousands of regular Bitcoin and Ethereum transactions that take place every day.

Are they a rich person's plaything, a waste of money that could be better spent elsewhere? Sure, but the same could be said of sports cars and designer handbags.

Is there something morally indefensible about people buying and selling blockchain collectibles for many multiples of the median annual U.S. income? Probably, but at least they're not hurting anyone. (Put it this way: One of the least harmful things I can imagine a young, mostly male group of extremely online people doing in their spare time is trading pictures of cartoon penguins.)

The worst you could say about community NFTs is that they're encouraging people to overpay for what amount to digital bragging rights, and that suckers will inevitably end up holding the bag when the bubble pops. But I doubt many fans would be dissuaded by the argument.

I told Ms. Zhong, the crypto entrepreneur, that I was still confused by the appeal of Pudgy Penguins, which didn't seem to do much besides attract attention.

"That's half the point," she responded. "No one knows what's going on, but it's a lot of fun."

How Facebook Failed to Stem Racist Abuse of England's Soccer Players

In May 2019, Facebook asked the organizing bodies of English soccer to its London offices off Regent's Park. On the agenda: what to do about the growing racist abuse on the social network against Black soccer players.

At the meeting, Facebook gave representatives from four of England's main soccer organizations — the Football Association, the Premier League, the English Football League and the Professional Footballers' Association — what they felt was a

brushoff, two people with knowledge of the conversation said. Company executives told the group that they had many issues to deal with, including content about terrorism and child sex abuse.

A few months later, Facebook provided soccer representatives with an athlete safety guide, including directions on how players could shield themselves from bigotry using its tools. The message was clear: It was up to the players and the clubs to protect themselves online.

The interactions were the start of what became a more than two-year campaign by English soccer to pressure Facebook and other social media companies to rein in online hate speech against their players. Soccer officials have since met numerous times with the platforms, sent an open letter calling for change and organized social media boycotts. Facebook's employees have joined in, demanding that it do more to stop the harassment.

The pressure intensified after the European Championship last month, when three of England's Black players were subjected to torrents of racial epithets on social media for missing penalty kicks in the final game's decisive shootout. Prince William condemned the hate, and the British prime minister, Boris Johnson, threatened regulation and fines for companies that continued to permit racist abuse. Inside Facebook, the incident was escalated to a "Site Event 1," the equivalent of a companywide five-alarm fire.

Yet as the Premier League, England's top division, opens its season on Friday, soccer officials said that the social media companies — especially Facebook, the largest — hadn't taken the issue seriously enough and that players were again steeling themselves for online hate.

"Football is a growing global market that includes clubs, brands, sponsors and fans who are all tired of the obvious lack of desire from the tech giants to develop in-platform solutions for the issues we are dealing with daily," said Simone Pound, head of equality, diversity and inclusion for the Professional Footballers' Association, the players' union.

The impasse with English soccer is another instance of Facebook's failing to solve speech problems on its platform, even after it was made aware of the level of abuse. While Facebook has introduced some measures to mitigate the harassment, soccer officials said they were insufficient.

Social media companies aren't doing enough "because the pain hasn't become enough for them," said Sanjay Bhandari, the chair of Kick It Out, an organization that supports equality in soccer.

This season, Facebook is trying again. Its Instagram photo-sharing app rolled out

new features on Wednesday to make racist material harder to view, according to a blog post. Among them, one will let users hide potentially harassing comments and messages from accounts that either don't follow or recently followed them.

"The unfortunate reality is that tackling racism on social media, much like tackling racism in society, is complex," Karina Newton, Instagram's global head of public policy, said in a statement. "We've made important strides, many of which have been driven by our discussions with groups being targeted with abuse, like the U.K. football community."

But Facebook executives also privately acknowledge that racist speech against English soccer players is likely to continue. "No one thing will fix this challenge overnight," Steve Hatch, Facebook's director for Britain and Ireland, wrote last month in an internal note that The Times reviewed.

Some players appear resigned to the abuse. Four days after the European Championship final, Bukayo Saka, 19, one of the Black players who missed penalty kicks for England, posted on Twitter and Instagram that the "powerful platforms are not doing enough to stop these messages" and called it a "sad reality."

Around the same time, Facebook employees continued to report hateful comments to their employer on Mr. Saka's posts in an effort to get them taken down. One that was reported — an Instagram comment that read, "Bro stay in Africa" — apparently did not violate the platform's rules, according to the automated moderation system. It stayed up.

Much of the racist abuse in English soccer has been directed at Black superstars in the Premier League, such as Raheem Sterling and Marcus Rashford. About 30 percent of players in the Premier League are Black, Mr. Bhandari said.

Over time, these players have been harassed at soccer stadiums and on Facebook, where users are asked to provide their real names, and on Instagram and Twitter, which allow users to be anonymous. In April 2019, fed up with the behavior, some players and two former captains of the national team, David Beckham and Wayne Rooney, took part in a 24-hour social media boycott, posting red badges on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook with the hashtag #Enough.

A month later, English soccer officials held their first meeting with Facebook — and came away disappointed. Facebook said that "feedback from the meeting was taken on board and influenced further policy, product and enforcement efforts."

Tensions ratcheted up last year after the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. When the Premier League restarted in June 2020 after a 100-day coronavirus hiatus, athletes from all 20 clubs began each match by taking a knee. Players continued the symbolic act last season and said they would also kneel this season.

That has stoked more online abuse. In January, Mr. Rashford used Twitter to call out "humanity and social media at its worst" for the bigoted messages he had received. Two of his Manchester United teammates, who are also Black, were targeted on Instagram with monkey emojis — which are meant to dehumanize — after a loss.

Inside Facebook, employees took note of the surge in racist speech. In one internal forum meant for flagging negative press to the communications department, one employee started cataloging articles about English soccer players who had been abused on Facebook's platforms. By February, the list had grown to about 20 different news clips in a single month, according to a company document seen by The Times.

English soccer organizations continued meeting with Facebook. This year, organizers also brought Twitter into the conversations, forming what became known as the Online Hate Working Group.

But soccer officials grew frustrated at the lack of progress, they said. There was no indication that Facebook's and Twitter's top leaders were aware of the abuse, said Edleen John, who heads international relations and corporate affairs for the Football Association, England's governing body for the sport. She and others began discussing writing an open letter to Mark Zuckerberg and Jack Dorsey, the chief executives of Facebook and Twitter.

"Why don't we try to communicate and get meetings with individuals right at the top of the organization and see if that will make change?" said Ms. John, who is also the director of equality, diversity and inclusion at the English federation, explaining the thinking.

In February, the chief executives of the Premier League, the Football Association and other groups published a 580-word letter to Mr. Zuckerberg and Mr. Dorsey accusing them of "inaction" against racial abuse. They demanded that the companies block racist and discriminatory content before it was sent or posted. They also pushed for user identity verification so offenders could be rooted out.

But, Ms. John said, "we didn't get a response" from Mr. Zuckerberg or Mr. Dorsey. In April, English soccer organizations, players and brands held a four-day boycott of social media.

Twitter, which declined to comment, said in a blog post about racism on Tuesday that it had been "appalled by those who targeted players from the England football team with racist abuse following the Euro 2020 Final."

At Facebook, members of the policy team, which sets the rules around what content stays up or comes down, pushed back against the demands from soccer officials,

three people with knowledge of the conversations said.

They argued that terms or symbols used for racist abuse — such as a monkey emoji — could have different meanings depending on the context and should not be banned completely. Identity verification could also undermine anonymity on Instagram and create new problems for users, they argued.

In April, Facebook announced a privacy setting called Hidden Words to automatically filter out messages and comments containing offensive words, phrases and emojis. Those comments cannot then be easily seen by the account user and will be hidden from those who follow the account. A month later, Instagram also began a test that allowed a slice of its users in the United States, South Africa, Brazil, Australia and Britain to flag "racist language or activity," according to documents reviewed by The Times.

The test generated hundreds of reports. One internal spreadsheet outlining the results included a tab titled "Dehumanization_Monkey/Primate." It had more than 30 examples of comments using bigoted terms and emojis of monkeys, gorillas and bananas in connection with Black people.

In the hours after England lost the European Championship final to Italy on July 11, racist comments against the players who missed penalty kicks — Mr. Saka, Mr. Rashford and Jadon Sancho — escalated. That set off a "site event" at Facebook, eventually triggering the kind of emergency associated with a major system outage of the site.

Facebook employees rushed to internal forums to say they had reported monkey emojis or other degrading stereotypes. Some workers asked if they could volunteer to help sort through content or moderate comments for high-profile accounts.

"We get this stream of utter bile every match, and it's even worse when someone black misses," one employee wrote on an internal forum.

But the employees' reports of racist speech were often met with automated messages saying the posts did not violate the company's guidelines. Executives also provided talking points to employees that said Facebook had worked "swiftly to remove comments and accounts directing abuse at England's footballers."

In one internal comment, Jerry Newman, Facebook's director of sports partnerships for Europe, the Middle East and Africa, reminded workers that the company had introduced the Hidden Words feature so users could filter out offensive words or symbols. It was the players' responsibility to use the feature, he wrote.

"Ultimately the onus is on them to go into Instagram and input which emojis/words they don't want to feature," Mr. Newman said.

Other Facebook executives said monkey emojis were not typically used negatively. If the company filtered certain terms out for everyone, they added, people might miss important messages.

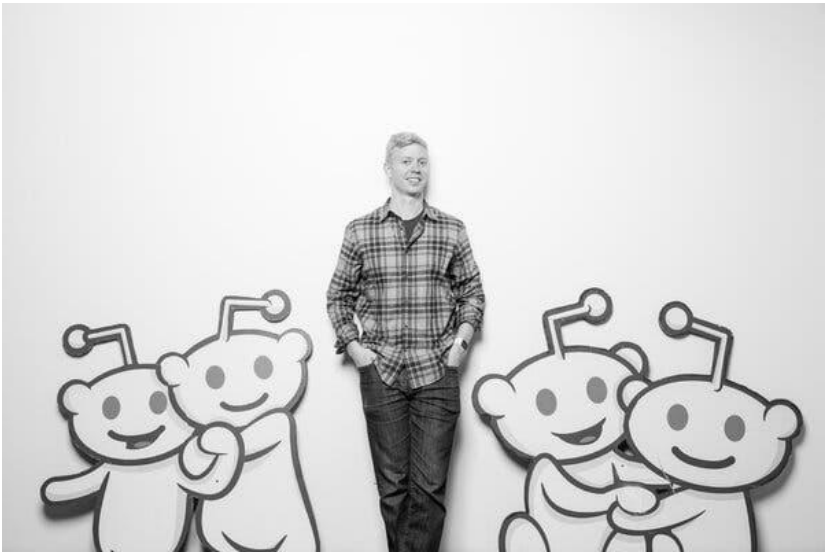
Adam Mosseri, Instagram's chief executive, later said the platform could have done better, tweeting in response to a BBC reporter that the app "mistakenly" marked some of the racist comments as "benign."

But Facebook also defended itself in a blog post. The company said it had removed 25 million pieces of hate content in the first three months of the year, while Instagram took down 6.3 million pieces, or 93 percent before a user reported it.

Kelly Hogarth, who helps manage Mr. Rashford's off-field activities, said he had no plans to leave social media, which serves as an important channel to fans. Still, she questioned how much of the burden should be on athletes to monitor abuse.

"At what point does responsibility come off the player?" she wondered. She added, "I wouldn't be under any illusions we will be in exactly the same place, having exactly the same conversation next season."

Reddit is valued at more than $10 billion in latest funding round.



The new funding will go toward improving Redditrsquo;s features, said Steve Huffman, the chief executive.

Reddit, the virtual town square of the consumer internet, has raised a fresh $410 million in funding, valuing it at more than $10 billion, the company said on Thursday.

The financing, which was led by Fidelity Investments, increases Reddit's valuation from the $6 billion it achieved six months ago, when it raised $250 million. Reddit said it expected existing investors to participate in the latest financing as well, so the round is likely to grow and close out at around $700 million.

The latest funding wasn't planned, but "Fidelity made us an offer that we couldn't refuse," Steve Huffman, Reddit's co-founder and chief executive, said in an interview.

The company then decided the capital would give it more time to decide on when — and how — to go public. "We are still planning on going public, but we don't have a firm timeline there yet," Mr. Huffman said. "All good companies should go public when they can."

The move gives Reddit more of a war chest to build its business and attract new users. The company makes most of its money selling advertising, which appears in the feeds of users who browse the many "subreddits," or topic-focused forums,

across the site.

But Reddit must compete against digital advertising giants like Google, Facebook and Amazon, as well as other ad-based social networking sites, including Twitter, Snap and Pinterest.

“We’ve grown up in the shadow of Facebook and Google, and pretty much every dollar we make we’ve had to fight for,” Mr. Huffman said.

Still, he said, the company’s advertising products have begun to work better. Reddit surpassed $100 million in quarterly revenue for the first time in the second quarter this year, up 192 percent from the same period in 2020.

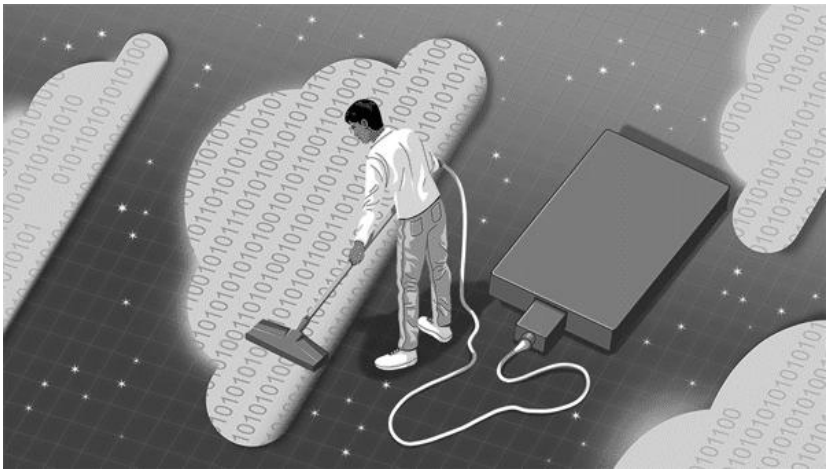
More than 50 million people now visit Reddit daily, and the site has more than 100,000 active subreddits. While it previously had a laissez-faire approach to free speech, regardless of toxicity, Mr. Huffman has spent the past few years overhauling Reddit’s policies and making it more difficult for trolls to overrun the forums.

The company will use the new funds to improve product features, focusing on how to make it easier for newcomers to explore and quickly understand the site, Mr. Huffman said. Reddit is also enhancing its video products with an eye toward more advertising. And the company is building its self-service advertising system, which could help appeal to small and medium-size business marketers.

Reddit is also focused on expanding internationally. Most of the site is U.S.-centric, Mr. Huffman said — something he hopes to change.

“The first priority on the product is just making Reddit awesome,” he said. “We want to build what is best for new users, because over time it will be best for everyone.”

The Lesson to Learn From Apple's Tool to Flag Child Sex Abuse



As we all put more of our photos, documents and videos online, how much of that data really belongs to us anymore?

That's the question many are now pondering because of a change coming to iPhones. The debate has implications for online privacy and government surveillance and underlines how the storage of our digital data has changed over time, raising concerns about the ways we should conduct ourselves technologically.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me back up.

The hubbub began last week when Apple introduced a software tool for iPhones to flag cases of child sex abuse. That seems good, right? The tool will be included in Apple's next mobile software update this fall. It works by scanning an iPhone for code linked to a database of known child pornography when photos from the device are uploaded to iCloud, Apple's online storage service. Once there are a certain number of matches, an Apple employee reviews the photos before informing the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

But some cybersecurity experts countered that the content-flagging system was invasive and infringed on people's privacy. They warned that Apple was creating a precedent that made it simple for surveillance-heavy countries like China to pass laws that could require the company to use the technology for other purposes, such as scanning for political images that are unfavorable to an authoritarian government.

"They've said they don't have any plans to do worse things with this technology, but this just feels, at this point, naïvely optimistic," said Erica Portnoy, a technologist for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the digital-rights nonprofit.

In response to the backlash, Apple this week published a document explaining that the new system will not scan people's private iPhone photo libraries. Also, the matching technology will cease to work if people disable their iPhone's photo library from backing up images to iCloud, a company spokesman said.

But no matter how this Apple episode plays out, it's a reminder of just how much our digital data storage has changed. In the past, most of us stored our digital photos on our personal computer drives and on miniature USB sticks. Those belonged to us alone.

Now we increasingly store our documents and other information in "the cloud," where big companies like Apple, Google and Microsoft host the data on their server computers. In the process, those companies gained a lot more power over our information.

That leads me to something I have said before: It's wise to have an exit strategy for pulling your data from the cloud in the event that you want to leave. All it takes is a little forethought.

Over the last few years, I've embraced a hybrid approach of storing copies of my data online and offline so I can reap the benefits of the cloud but also retain independent ownership of my data. My efforts culminated in creating an online server at home, which is essentially a private cloud.

Here's how I did that, along with other approaches to a hybrid approach for storing your data.

Many of us have become accustomed to automatically backing up our data to Apple's, Google's and Microsoft's online servers. These cloud services are convenient, and using them ensures your data is regularly backed up over the internet.

But the best practice is a hybrid one: Store local copies on physical drives, too, according to Acronis, a data protection firm. It's nice to have a local backup for when you lack an internet connection and need immediate access to a file.

"It is shocking how few people follow a hybrid backup plan," said Topher Tebow, a senior cybersecurity researcher at Acronis. "The whole point of backups is to ensure continuity of data, and that just isn't something that can be guaranteed with a single solution in place."

To me, having local copies is important for self-reliance. What if I get tired of paying a company's cloud subscription fees? What if the company's servers are hacked? Or what if the company changes the product in an unappealing way?

Without a local backup, you could feel locked into a company's ecosystem; the longer you put one off, the more difficult it will become to pull your data out if you decide to leave. Yet only 17 percent of consumers take the hybrid approach, according to an Acronis survey last year.

Fortunately, creating a local backup isn't hard. The first step is to safely back up all of your digital information to another device.

For iPhone photos, the simplest option is to back up your images to a computer. On a Mac, you would plug in your iPhone, open Apple's Photos app and import all your photos. On Windows, you would use the Windows Photos app to do the same. And if you want to be extra thorough, you can make a backup of all your iPhone data with the Finder tool on Mac or the iTunes app on Windows.

From there, you can create a backup of your computer data to an external drive that plugs into your computer. Apps like Apple's Time Machine for Macs or File History for Windows will take care of that for you.

Now that you have pulled your photos off your phone, you can decide what to do from there, like delete them from the cloud and port them to another cloud service such as Google Photos. Just remember not to become entirely dependent on the next cloud.

There's also an extreme version of the hybrid backup, which is what I do but don't recommend for everyone. It's to set up a so-called network attached storage device, which is a miniature server that plugs into your internet router and gives you remote access to your data. It's like having a private cloud in your home.

Building a server is not for the faint of heart. For one, the software is not easy to use. For another, it's not cheap. An internet-connected storage device, like the Synology DS220+, costs roughly $300, and hard drives must be bought separately.

But I found it was worth the investment and time. I plug my phone into my Mac weekly, which backs up data to my computer, and when I'm asleep, the Mac backs up its data to my miniserver.

It's not as seamless as a company's cloud storage but convenient enough — plus I was tired of paying for multiple subscriptions to cloud services.

Even if you take a hybrid storage approach, does that get you away from Apple's new content-flagging tool?

No, said Matthew D. Green, a cryptography professor at Johns Hopkins University who has been a vocal critic of Apple's move. There is no true escape, he said, because part of the technology will reside on the phone hardware — and there's nothing we can do to remove it.

The cryptographer said that for the first time, he was contemplating switching to a phone that used Google's Android software instead. That would involve pulling out all the photos that he had stored in Apple's cloud.

"It's going to be so painful," Mr. Green said. "I have 20,000 photos that go back to 2010. This is stuff I can't bear the thought of losing."

The Next Chapter in Times Newsletters

Times Insider explains who we are and what we do, and delivers behind-the-scenes insights into how our journalism comes together.

Newsletters have a history even longer than newspapers, and email is several decades older than the web. Despite this lengthy pedigree, email newsletters are having a very buzzy moment — and here at The New York Times, we're striving to bring even more depth, ambition and scale to our lineup.

This summer marks 20 years since The Times published its first newsletters. We started off in 2001 covering technology, books and finance, among other topics. Some of those newsletters are still thriving, in various incarnations, as part of a portfolio that reaches some 15 million people every week — a number that has surged over the last two years. Flagships such as The Morning and DealBook serve as a destination for readers and a crucial gateway and guide to our journalism, while offering original reporting and analysis.

As the editorial director of Times newsletters, I've been thinking with my colleagues about what comes next. How can we break new ground in the inbox and deliver sophisticated coverage of the topics that our readers care about most?

Newsletters are already a core part of our subscriber experience: Nearly half of our subscribers engage with a newsletter every week. This week, we're pulling back

the curtain on a new kind of Times journalism: more than 15 newsletters that will be available only to our subscribers. The goal is to continue developing the inbox as a destination for our journalism, and to add value to a Times subscription.

The first batch focuses on topics that our readers are passionate about, is staffed by journalists with deep expertise and features exciting, diverse new voices. It includes newsroom favorites Well, On Tech, At Home and Away, On Soccer and Watching, and columnists like Paul Krugman and Jamelle Bouie.

It also features a new set of newsletters in Opinion (which remains a completely separate, independent entity, apart from our news operation):

All of these subscriber-only newsletters represent a unique collection of talent and expertise in Opinion and the newsroom, assisted by editors, designers, developers, product managers and other specialists.

We've spent most of the last year working toward this launch, and more new and revamped newsletters — including a new version of On Politics and a revamped Smarter Living focused on back-to-work issues — will join this initial batch in the coming months.

You can subscribe to Times newsletters here.

‘Welcome to the Mesh, Brother’: Guerrilla Wi-Fi Comes to New York

Daniel Heredia working this spring to bring inexpensive Wi-Fi to a building in Brownsville, Brooklyn.

Daniel Heredia peered across rooftops, surveying the derelict satellite dishes and rusty television antennas of Brownsville, Brooklyn. Wearing a motorcycle jacket and boots, he crouched on Andre Cambridge’s roof, trying to see if he had a clear line of sight to the Riverdale Avenue Community School a half-mile off. A large tree was possibly in the way.

Mr. Cambridge, a 28-year-old student who lives with his parents and younger brother in an apartment on the first floor, watched the scene apprehensively. He had been without internet for nine weeks. “Man,” Mr. Heredia said, “you should have told us.” He could have moved up the installation.

Mr. Heredia is a 19-year-old volunteer with NYC Mesh, a nonprofit community Wi-Fi initiative, and he was there to install a router that would bring inexpensive Wi-Fi to the building. Mr. Cambridge’s family said they had become fed up with the take-it-or-leave-it pricing for spotty service that internet providers seem to get away with in this part of Brooklyn.

Mr. Heredia crouched to affix the router to a plumbing vent, positioning it so the Wi-Fi signal could avoid the tree down the block. An app on his phone beeped to indicate the strength of the connection. Higher in pitch and more rapid was good.

Mr. Cambridge whipped out his phone to search for NYC Mesh among the available networks. “It just came up!”

He skipped across the roof, beaming under Ray bans and dreadlocks. The installation took two hours and cost $240 to cover the equipment, plus a $50 tip for Mr. Heredia, the installer.

Mr. Cambridge ran a speed test. “We’re getting 80 megabits down and 50 megabits up!”

Mr. Heredia clasped palms and bumped shoulders with Mr. Cambridge. “Welcome to the Mesh, brother,” he said.

In New York, like most big cities, the wealthier a neighborhood is, the more options for internet service its residents probably have — and the more incentive for providers in those areas to compete on service and price. On some blocks on the Upper West Side, residents can choose among four carriers. In Brownsville, Mr. Cambridge could choose between Altice or Optimum — which is owned by Altice. Verizon’s fiber-optic service, Fios, is supposed to be available on every city block, which in theory would spur more competition, but that has yet to happen.

While a fiber connection remains the gold standard, “fixed wireless” options like the rooftop routers used by NYC Mesh can deliver a signal that is plenty strong for most residential uses and usually much faster and cheaper to deploy. NYC Mesh has a subsidized option for installations, and members pay a suggested monthly donation of $20 to $60.

NYC Mesh is one of many fixed-wireless outfits in New York City. They range from community-owned models — like the D.I.Y. “internet in a box” efforts led by the digital justice organization Community Tech NY, and the internet cooperative People’s Choice, started by former Spectrum strikers — to smaller for-profits like Starry, a Boston-based start-up rolling out flat-rate internet plans of $50 a month in large urban markets including New York City.

NYC Mesh covers more neighborhoods than the others and is the largest community network in the city by far. Yet it’s still small, serving only about 800 households, concentrated in Lower Manhattan and central Brooklyn. That’s a tiny slice of the 2.2 million New York City households with broadband at home, usually through one of the “incumbent providers,” as they are known: Verizon, Spectrum or Optimum.

But with NYC Mesh’s expansion into Brownsville, and a new contract with the city to place routers on a handful of housing developments, the one million New Yorkers who don’t have broadband — 46 percent of households in poverty lack a home connection — might soon have another, more affordable choice. “To grow, we need to be on more tall buildings,” said Brian Hall, the founder of NYC Mesh.

The pandemic has actually helped his initiative get there, and it might encourage New Yorkers to think about the internet in a new way — as a utility that everyone should be able to access.

Community Wi-Fi networks have been operating in other countries since the early 2000s. It's a relatively niche phenomenon. The biggest community network in the world is Guifi.net in Spain, and that has only 39,000 connections. Still, it was an inspiration to Mr. Hall when he was starting NYC Mesh back in 2014. Burned out from his job as a programmer, he wanted to do something community-based that could have an impact.

Mr. Hall secured funding from the Internet Society, an international nonprofit that promotes open and secure internet around the world, to set up NYC Mesh's first "supernode" on top of the former Verizon building in downtown Manhattan. This supernode, plus another in Industry City, on the Brooklyn waterfront, serve as the central spigots for NYC Mesh's neighborhood hubs and nodes, as they refer to the members' routers.

Early supporters were mostly tech-liberationist types. "Initially everyone united around hating Time Warner Cable," Mr. Hall said. A manifesto on NYC Mesh's website lists the reasons members were behind community Wi-Fi: to build a neutral network that doesn't block content or sell personal data; to bridge the digital divide; and to "stand in opposition to the telecom oligopoly in New York of Verizon, Optimum and Spectrum."

There are no paid employees. A team of 30 or so volunteers, about a third of them women, lead installations and maintain the network. A recent installation at a housing development in Bedford-Stuyvesant that Mr. Heredia helped lead included a 50-year-old coder/actor/carpenter, a 40-year-old Turkish woman who ran a tech company back home, a 26-year-old with a fellowship to study the digital divide from the Robin Hood Foundation (whose family used to live in that very complex), and a father with a week-old baby whose wife had given him permission to go.

Organizing occurs on the online platform Slack, with the work documented on public channels for the benefit of other groups interested in starting community Wi-Fi projects. The pandemic brought a rush of volunteers along with requests from people needing help to get communities connected, including one from an intrepid social worker from the Riverdale Avenue Community School in Brownsville. After setting up that hub, Mr. Heredia and another volunteer installed routers in the hallways of the family homeless shelter across the street.

Around that time, NYC Mesh members were already in negotiations with the New York City Housing Authority about putting a hub on a 24-story tower in Bed-Stuy. It would extend the nonprofit's coverage area to less-gentrified parts of Brooklyn — hundreds of buildings within a two-mile radius of the hub could get internet. It

wouldn't cost the city anything. NYC Mesh simply needed permission. There was reason to be optimistic.

In January 2020, the office of Mayor Bill de Blasio released its Internet Master Plan, an ambitious reimagining of the city's broadband infrastructure. The plan offers free use of the rooftops of public buildings and streetlight poles to providers large and small to build out their network infrastructures. This strategy amounts to a thumb on the scale in favor of grass-roots outfits like NYC Mesh, whose technology depends on rooftop access versus the larger providers, who must bury their cable or string it from telephone poles.

Brian Dietz, a spokesman from the industry lobbying group NCTA — the Internet & Television Association — maintained that commercial broadband is the best for consumers. "It provides the fastest, most reliable service for the best value," Mr. Dietz said. "We have made billions of dollars of investment in infrastructure and speeds have increased thousands of times over the last decade."

Before the recent vision, the city's last major broadband intervention was negotiated under Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg in 2006. New York entered a franchise agreement with Verizon that gave the company the privilege of burying fiber-optic cable under city streets in exchange for installing high-speed Fios in every neighborhood. But Verizon has failed to do so in many low-income neighborhoods. In a public hearing in April, the city's chief technology officer, John Paul Farmer, testified that the relatively few providers in some neighborhoods meant that there was little market pressure to bring the prices down. "The current oligopolistic system is broken, and it has built digital inequity into the streets and neighborhoods of New York," he said.

The city recently reached a settlement with Verizon, requiring it to connect an additional 500,000 households, with at least 125,000 in underserved neighborhoods, by 2023.

Chris Serico, a spokesman for Verizon, said the company was on track to meet the terms of its settlement. "Verizon is committed to finding long-term solutions that make affordable broadband options available to low-income Americans," Mr. Serico wrote in an email.

Clayton Banks, the chief executive of Silicon Harlem, a company focused on increasing connectivity in Harlem, said he hoped that the city's strategy of betting on more competition would work, but that he was waiting to see how Fios and the current providers would be priced. "If you continue to build out infrastructure, which is certainly welcome and necessary, but you keep the same retail price," he said, "you haven't solved anything in terms of getting more people online."

After months of back and forth, NYC Mesh got the greenlight to put a hub on the 24-story public housing tower in Bed-Stuy, along with two other developments

in the Bronx and Queens. Four other small providers, including Silicon Harlem, were selected to wire up 10 other NYCHA developments. As part of Phase One of the Internet Master Plan, to which the city will direct $157 million, NYC Mesh installed free public hot spots around the exterior grounds of the projects; the other companies must provide residents access to Wi-Fi in their apartments for no more than $20 a month.

NYC Mesh has applied to establish hubs on an additional 163 public buildings as part of Phase Two. If successful, this would allow NYC Mesh to cover much of the city in the next five to seven years. Since each router installation comes with a free public Wi-Fi hot spot, NYC Mesh could help make the internet truly universal throughout New York City.

Even as NYC Mesh has continually grown, it still runs into the same trouble as the big providers: The internet sometimes goes down. Mr. Heredia and other volunteers pride themselves on resolving service problems quickly, but as the organization expands, it will need more people like Mr. Heredia if it wants to keep members happy.

Mr. Heredia has been volunteering since last October, when he stumbled across NYC Mesh online when researching alternatives to commercial providers. After setting up a router using NYC Mesh's instructions, he attended a socially distanced meet-up in a Brooklyn park. A half-dozen installs later, Mr. Heredia got his own cable-crimping set and became an install leader.

He also helps maintain the network, particularly the hub on top of a NYCHA building in Bed-Stuy that supplies his internet. A few months back, the power went out at Mr. Heredia's hub. It turned out the building's custodians were repairing the elevator and had shut off some breakers. Mr. Heredia (who is a full-time student with a part-time job) sped over on his motorcycle with a long extension cord and battery packs, and had it working again an hour and 15 minutes after the first complaint came in on the NYC Mesh Slack channel. "All the people I know in the Mesh who participate actively have a similar relationship," he said about his own vested interest in maintaining the network.

But the people who use the free hot spots in public housing or the family shelter in Brownsville don't know how to fix the equipment or where to request a repair or report an outage on Slack. Indeed, all but one of the hallway routers in the shelter have been out for the last couple of months, and a number of new ones at the Bed-Stuy tower keep going offline. There's an issue with the devices that Mr. Heredia and other volunteers have spent hours trying to figure out.

The future for Mesh relies on cooperation with members, but it's a hard sell in certain neighborhoods. First, not all renters can put routers on the roofs of their buildings. Some people are suspicious of "free internet" and won't use the hot spots. NYC Mesh volunteers acknowledge that they need community members from the

underserved neighborhoods to take the same ownership over their hubs as Mr. Heredia does over his.

Brownsville's newest member, Andre Cambridge, might be up for the task. A week after his installation, Mr. Cambridge told me that his speeds had been good and that he hadn't experienced any problems. His mother even suggested that they should up their monthly donation from $20 to support the cause.

He said he was excited but also wary about Mesh's future. He had seen other community solutions get up and running only to be squashed by regulation and corporate interests. He suggested that if the government really wanted to help, it should fund training for volunteer installs, subsidize hardware costs and pay for network education so community members would understand the hubs they would be stewarding.

In the meantime, Mr. Cambridge said he was prepared to do his part to take care of his new hub. "If you had a community well back in the day, you had to maintain it," he said. "Eventually I'm going to be like, 'What's the network map on this, what's my upkeep look like?' I'm part of a system, so I have to be. I'm going to advocate for my neighbor. 'Hey, would you like to join the system too?'"

Disney+ reaches 116 million subscribers, and its parks division returns to profitability.

Disney's chief executive, Bob Chapek, with Emma Stone, the star of "Cruella," which proved popular on Disney+.

LOS ANGELES — An adolescent sea monster, Marvel's god of mischief and Cruella de Vil helped Disney's flagship streaming service attract 12.4 million new subscribers between April and June, more than Wall Street had expected.

The Disney+ service ended the quarter with 116 million subscribers worldwide, the company reported on Thursday. Analysts had been hoping for 112 million to 115 million. The most popular offerings on Disney+ were "Luca," an original Pixar film; the superhero series "Loki," starring Tom Hiddleston; and the live-action movie "Cruella," with Emma Stone taking over as the classic Disney villain.

The quarter, the third in Disney's fiscal year, was notable for another reason: Disney Parks, Experiences and Products swung to a profit ($356 million) after four consecutive money-losing quarters ($3.6 billion in total). The availability of coronavirus vaccines prompted families to return in large numbers to Walt Disney World in Florida. Disneyland in California reopened on April 30 for the first time in 14 months, although state regulators initially limited capacity to 25 percent, a restriction that has since been lifted. (Masks are still required.)

Bob Chapek, Disney's chief executive, told analysts on a conference call that theme

park bookings remained "really strong" despite a new surge of coronavirus infections around the world, the result of the Delta variant. Christine M. McCarthy, Disney's chief financial officer, added that spending on hotel rooms, merchandise and food had been "exceptionally strong." Ms. McCarthy said that, unless the coronavirus situation changed, Disney planned to increase capacity at its theme park resorts for the coming holidays.

Disney is the world's largest entertainment company, with operations that include the ABC broadcast network, ESPN, cruise vacations, stage musicals, book publishing and the Disney Store chain. But investor excitement about streaming has in some ways made Disney a one-business enterprise: At least for the time being, as Disney+ goes, so goes the entire company.

Disney+ surpassed its five-year subscriber goal in just its first nine months. The pandemic was one accelerant, as families looked for ways to entertain themselves at home. But growth slowed between January and March — Disney+ added 8.7 million subscribers in that period, and Wall Street had hoped for more than 14 million — prompting worries about streaming-service fatigue and leading to a slide in Disney shares.

The company's stock price rose more than 5 percent in after-hours trading on Thursday.

Like other media companies, Disney has turned to streaming because cable television has conked out as a growth engine. Operating profit at Disney's traditional TV business — ESPN, ABC, Disney Channel, FX, Freeform, National Geographic and other cable networks — totaled $2.2 billion in the quarter, a sharp 33 percent decline. Disney attributed the drop to higher programming costs, including the return of live sports on ESPN and the pandemic-delayed Academy Awards, which ran on ABC. Higher advertising revenue and cable subscriber fees only partly offset the rise in expenses.

Even so, traditional television remains a huge business for Disney, generating $6.96 billion in revenue in the quarter, an increase of 16 percent.

Disney logged $4.3 billion in total streaming revenue, up 57 percent from a year earlier. The monthly price for a Disney+ subscription in the United States rose $1 in late March, to $8. Disney+ also generated tens of millions of dollars from "Cruella," which was made available to subscribers in May — at the same time the film arrived in theaters — for a $30 surcharge. Hulu, which Disney took over in 2019, benefited from higher advertising revenue and subscriber growth.

Disney said Hulu had about 42.8 million subscribers, a 21 percent increase from last year. About 15 million people pay for access to the company's ESPN+ platform, up 75 percent from a year earlier.

But building a portfolio of streaming services is mighty expensive. A variety of costs (content production, marketing, technology infrastructure) contributed to losses of roughly $300 million for Disney's streaming unit. Still, the division lost twice that amount in the same period a year ago.

Citing the pandemic, which has ravaged the movie theater business, Disney has recently changed its film distribution methods. Some films that were originally supposed to play in theaters — animated films, in particular — have been rerouted to Disney+ entirely. Others have been made available on Disney+ when they open in theaters, a practice that has put the company on war footing with at least one major star and her agents.

Scarlett Johansson, who has played the superassassin Black Widow in eight films, sued Disney this month, contending that making "Black Widow" available on Disney+ when it opened in theaters "dramatically" lowered box office revenue, which cost her tens of millions of dollars in bonus compensation. Her lawsuit drew a blistering "no merit whatsoever" response from Disney.

Mr. Chapek commented only indirectly on Thursday on Ms. Johansson's complaint.

"Certainly this is a time of anxiety in the marketplace," he said in response to an analyst question about Disney's movie release strategy. "These films that we are releasing right now were imagined under a completely different environment than unfortunately fate has delivered us. But we're trying to do the best thing for all our constituents and make sure that everybody who is in the value chain, if you will, feels like they're having their contractual commitments honored both from a distribution and a compensation standpoint."

The company will continue to decide "film by film" how movies will be released, Mr. Chapek said. "We value flexibility," he said.

Profit in the quarter totaled $923 million, compared with a loss of $4.8 billion a year earlier, when the world was still in the throes of the prevaccine pandemic. Excluding one-time items, the company had per-share profit of 80 cents, up from 8 cents. (Analysts had expected about 56 cents.)

Revenue was $17 billion, a 45 percent increase from a year earlier. (Analysts had predicted $16.8 billion.)

Ms. McCarthy announced on the call with analysts that Disney would not restart dividend payments to investors "until we return to a more normalized operating environment." Disney last paid its semiannual dividend in January 2020.

The Experts Making High-Tech Storytelling Possible

A 3-D model, left, of a church sanctuary in Harlem was created using thousands of photographs.

Times Insider explains who we are and what we do, and delivers behind-the-scenes insights into how our journalism comes together.

At the top of a New York Times article online that gives explanations to frequently asked questions about Covid-19 vaccines, readers can type in any query that comes to mind. “Am I eligible?” “Can I take Tylenol before I get vaccinated?” “How will we know when things are getting better?” A search tool returns the most relevant answer. It’s a little like Google, except all of the results have been reported by Times journalists.

The tool, which uses machine learning to most accurately infer what readers are asking, is a project of The Times’s research and development group. A constantly evolving department at The Times that has existed in its current form since 2016, the group continually looks for ways that technology can elevate journalism.

In June, the R&D team updated its website to make it easier to share its experimental projects and its newsroom collaborations with fellow technologists, journalists and academics.

While “research and development” might evoke images of locked offices full of an-

alysts and inventors secretly building futuristic prototypes, the reality is a bit different. Members of the 35-person team of technologists, designers, producers and strategists work closely with the newsroom involving technologies that are either already in use for other mediums, such as gaming, or are expected to be soon.

"We make calculated bets around those technologies" and then experiment with them, Lana Porter, R&D's creative director, said.

The vaccine F.A.Q. page was built with a technology called natural language processing, which uses machine learning to analyze large amounts of text. The software that R&D built was originally developed for the coronavirus F.A.Q. page, a predecessor where readers sought answers about the virus when it was first spreading around the globe.

"We all realized that if coronavirus was the story of 2020, the vaccines were the story of 2021," said Tara Parker-Pope, founding editor of Well and the lead editor of the F.A.Q. page. "And we really wanted to make sure that we were giving readers the same kind of science-based answers to their questions."

Other advances that R&D has applied to help journalists expand storytelling possibilities include photogrammetry, a technology that reconstructs 3-D spaces from thousands of 2-D photos and was recently used to create a model of a church sanctuary in Harlem, and software that uses 5G cellular technology to send photos and videos from cameras in the field to computers in the newsroom nearly instantaneously.

"A lot of the work that we're doing is trying to figure out how we adapt the technology to the needs of journalism — or sometimes the constraints of journalism," Marc Lavallee, the executive director of R&D, said.

In photogrammetry, for example, which is often used to create 3-D scenes for video games, producers must take upward of thousands of photos that accurately capture a large space. A gaming company might have months or even years to put together a scene in a game, and if designers don't capture something correctly, they can artificially fix it later.

"We don't do that in photojournalism," Mr. Lavallee said. "So that creates a set of constraints that are somewhat unique to our needs."

Once a technology has been deemed viable, part of the work involves figuring out how it can be used by journalists in the field. "How do you build the design patterns, the pipelines, the workflows to actually produce this type of work at a cadence that we would never have considered in the past?" Ms. Porter said, describing part of the challenge.

That efficiency can be critical. Using homography, a computer vision technique, R&D and the Sports and Graphics desks published a multimedia article on Lamont Marcell Jacobs's gold medal run in the 100 meters at the Olympics — the day of his race. Photographs were taken every five-hundreths of a second, and time stamps on the photos were used to track the runners' positions.

The members of the R&D team will use the new website to connect with other people doing similar work around emerging technologies, with the site serving as a space where team members can share the results of a big project, incremental experiments and other questions the team is thinking about.

It's also a place where they can celebrate successes, like the tool used for the vaccine F.A.Q. The litmus test for many of these technologies is whether they make the journalism stronger.

The ultimate goal of all of this experimentation, Mr. Lavallee said, is that it "makes sense for our readers."

Alibaba Rape Allegation Reveals China Tech's Seamy Side

More than 6,000 employees of Alibaba, one of the worldrsquo;s biggest internet companies, signed a letter urging management to forbid sexual remarks and games in team building and business meetings.

For years, as Alibaba turned from a scrappy Chinese start-up into an e-commerce behemoth, some of its business units welcomed new employees with an ice-breaking ceremony that alarmed many of those who endured it.

Fresh hires were required to answer deeply personal questions in front of their colleagues, according to former employees: about their first loves, their first kiss and their first sexual encounters. The questions were phrased in ways that aren't printable in this newspaper, they said.

The Chinese technology giant has denied such claims. But last weekend, a female employee alleged on the company's internal website that she had been sexually assaulted by a company client then raped by her manager — and the disclosure unleashed a slew of stories about ice-breaking activities. Former employees said online that they, too, had gone through them.

And in a letter to management signed over the weekend by more than 6,000 Alibaba workers, employees urged the company to forbid sexual remarks and games in ice-breaking and other business events. (Alibaba has said it fired the employee accused of rape and will take other steps to stop sexual misconduct. It did not

respond to requests for comment.)

The allegations against Alibaba may have shocked the Chinese technology industry and the public, but it shouldn't have surprised them.

The male-dominated sector has long objectified women, blamed the victims and normalized sexual violence. Women who dare to speak out about sexual harassment and violence are called troublemakers or worse.

Three years ago, a student at the University of Minnesota alleged that Richard Liu, the billionaire founder of one of China's largest companies, JD.com, had raped her after an alcohol-soaked business meal. After Mr. Liu denied the allegations and the police declined to press charges, the Chinese internet and the tech industry took his side and called her a gold digger, among other misogynistic slurs.

Often, public allegations simply go unaddressed. An employee for Didi, the ride-hailing company, was fired for poor performance last year after she complained to the company's operations in Jiangsu Province that she was physically and sexually assaulted after she was forced to binge drink at a business meal. She later posted on social media photos of her badly bruised face and a doctor's diagnosis. Didi didn't respond to questions about whether it had investigated her allegations, back then or when asked again for comment this week.

Incidents like the one at Alibaba happen throughout the industry, one female tech investor said. She asked for anonymity because she worried that entrepreneurs, some of whom make dirty jokes in big chat groups, will think she is too judgmental and will stop trusting her.

The industry has toned down some of its most blatant and explicit behavior. For example, more recently hired Alibaba employees told me that they didn't have to answer personal questions at their ice-breaking ceremonies.

And if society doesn't force them to change, the Communist Party will. Amid a government crackdown on the powers of Big Tech, People's Daily, the party's official newspaper, warned on social media that nothing "can be too big to fail."

But the Chinese technology industry's toxic culture is so ingrained that it won't be easy to stamp out.

Not so long ago, Chinese tech companies invited popular Japanese porn stars to their events to drum up publicity. Qihoo 360, a cybersecurity company, invited a Japanese porn star to dance with its programmers in 2014, while some of its female employees wore revealing outfits.

A business unit at China's other internet giant, Tencent, made its female employees

at a 2017 event kneel and use their mouths to open water bottles that male colleagues clutched in their crotches. Tencent later apologized.

Over the years, the search giant Baidu, the smartphone maker Xiaomi and JD.com have had Victoria's Secret-style lingerie fashion shows at their annual celebrations. Sometimes the models were their female employees.

At the time, few people, if anybody, condemned their behavior. Some programmers reacted by asking whether those companies were hiring.

Women everywhere face some of the same challenges. But in China's technology industry, these attitudes have been passed down from internet giants like Alibaba to alumni who now lead start-ups big and small.

Cheng Wei, founder of Didi and a former Alibaba executive, borrowed much of his management style from the e-commerce giant, which he called his true alma mater. One of Didi's earliest hires told a magazine that a few new employees were shocked by how far its ice-breaking ceremony could go, according to a flattering profile in 2016. The employee said she felt closer to her colleagues after learning about their personal details.

A former employee who asked for anonymity said she was too scared not to answer those questions for fear of antagonizing her co-workers and her manager.

Even punishments at tech companies can be sexual in nature. Mr. Cheng has said he punished one male executive by ordering the executive to "run naked." A former Didi executive explained that others, too, were similarly told to run around the company campus in its early years, though men were allowed to wear their underwear and women could wear paper clothes over their undergarments.

The executive and other employees said the practice went away in recent years.

The Alibaba crisis also triggered discussions about two misogynistic rituals at Chinese business meals: forced drinking and women's company.

Young women can be considered accessories at business meals. "A meal without girls is not a meal," read the headline of a 2017 column in the Chinese edition of GQ, accompanied by an illustration of naked women in soup bowls.

In the allegations she posted on the internal Alibaba website, the female employee said her manager had told their clients at dinner: "Look how good I am to you, I brought you a beauty."

The Alibaba client who she alleged had sexually assaulted her denied that he had done anything inappropriate. "It was a regular meal," the client told a Beijing news-

paper. “I only hugged and cuddled her. Nothing else.” (His company said he had been fired for misconduct and that he was cooperating with a police investigation.)

The Alibaba employee wrote that her nightmare began after she was forced to drink too much.

Forced drinking plays an important and a problematic role in China’s business culture. It can serve as a power play that puts women and the junior employees at a disadvantage. Refusing to drink with a superior is considered offensive.

At a business dinner last year, a bank manager slapped a new employee after he rejected the manager’s repeated orders to replace his soft drinks with alcohol. The bank later disciplined the manager.

In their appeal for action over the weekend, Alibaba employees urged the company to forbid forced drinking and to stop linking alcohol with business. The company stopped short of forbidding it, saying it supports the right of its employees to reject drinking requests.

Alibaba said it had fired the manager accused of rape and pushed out two senior managers who ignored the woman’s pleas. Still, its response has left many people unhappy.

Wang Shuai, Alibaba’s public relations chief, reposted a post he said a colleague had written. The post complained that some people simply believed in rumors and assumed the worst of Alibaba. People who are too critical of the company, the post said bluntly, could go away.

In response, members of the public pointed to episodes that they said indicated problems at the top.

A widely circulated video showed that Jack Ma, Alibaba’s billionaire founder, made a sex joke when he was hosting a group wedding ceremony — an annual event for the company that typically draws headlines — for his employees in 2019. “In work, we want the 996 spirit,” he said, referring to the punishing work schedule of 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week. “In life, we want 669,” he said. “Six days, six times. The key is long-lasting.”

He played with the pronunciation of the word “nine,” which sounds like the word for “long-lasting.” His audience cheered and applauded.

California Panel Backs Solar Mandate for New Buildings

Workers installing solar panels on the roof of Van Nuys Airport in Los Angeles in 2019.

LOS ANGELES — California regulators voted Wednesday to require builders to include solar power and battery storage in many new commercial structures as well as high-rise residential projects. It is the latest initiative in the state's vigorous efforts to hasten a transition from fossil fuels to alternative energy sources.

The five-member California Energy Commission approved the proposal unanimously. It will now be taken up by the state's Building Standards Commission, which is expected to include it in an overall revision of the building code in December.

The energy plan, which would go into effect on Jan. 1, 2023, also calls for new homes to be wired in ways that ease and even encourage conversion of natural-gas heating and appliances to electric sources.

"The future we're trying to build together is a future beyond fossil fuels," David Hochschild, the chair of the Energy Commission, said ahead of the agency's vote. "Big changes require everyone to play a role. We all have a role in building this future."

The commercial buildings that would be affected by the plan include hotels, of-

fices, medical offices and clinics, retail and grocery stores, restaurants, schools, and civic spaces like theaters, auditoriums and convention centers.

The provisions would supplement requirements that took effect last year mandating that new single-family homes and multifamily dwellings up to three stories high include solar power.

Homes and businesses use nearly 70 percent of California's electricity and are responsible for a quarter of its greenhouse gas emissions, according to the commission. It said the proposals approved Wednesday would reduce emissions over 30 years as much as if nearly 2.2 million cars were taken off the road for a year.

Any increase in construction costs is expected to be minimal, the Energy Commission said. Adding solar power and storage during construction is considered more cost-effective than retrofitting.

Lindsay Buckley, a spokeswoman for the Energy Commission, said that "while there is no guarantee" that the Building Standards Commission will adopt the plan, it had never rejected such a proposal after approval by the energy panel.

Many California cities have building codes that restrict or ban natural gas in new construction — 49 municipalities in all, according to the Sierra Club — but the changes advanced on Wednesday would greatly extend the push away from fossil fuels.

Along with consumers and environmental groups, representatives of electric companies including Southern California Edison, one of the state's investor-owned utilities, and the Sacramento Municipal Utility District spoke in support of the changes.

The commission heard some opposition during its development of the plan, in particular from Southern California Gas, which provides much of the natural gas to residential, commercial and industrial customers in Southern California, Mr. Hochschild said.

The California Building Industry Association took a neutral position, though some utility union members cautioned against any ban on natural gas, arguing that it could increase customer bills and hurt jobs.

"Instead of a reckless push for building electrification, has the commission considered advocating for an appliance replacement program?" Carlos Portillo, a member of the Utility Workers Union of America, wrote to the panel.

The head of the organization that represents the state's solar power and battery companies said that while she felt the code change was needed, policies under review by other state regulators could undermine the benefits.

The official, Bernadette Del Chiaro, the executive director of the California Solar and Storage Association, said that while utilities had praised the commission's plan, they had proposed to reduce the benefits that homeowners and businesses receive for excess electricity they produce and send to the grid.

Owners of rooftop solar energy systems receive compensation equivalent to the retail cost of electricity, an arrangement that utility companies argue is unfair to those without such systems. The California Public Utilities Commission, which oversees investor-owned utilities, is considering a modification to the arrangement, known as net energy metering, in future solar installations.

A significant change could reduce or eliminate the savings that solar power and storage provide to residential and business customers. "Net metering is the one opportunity for the little guy to get relief, and they want to put the kibosh on it," Ms. Del Chiaro said.

Californians have felt an urgency to move away from using fossil fuels as climate change has brought extreme weather, which has contributed to some of the state's most devastating wildfires. And beyond reducing carbon emissions, solar power has been embraced as a way to cope with blackouts.

Investor-owned utilities have cut power for as long as a week to prevent electrical equipment from starting fires. So consumers have increasingly sought solar panels and battery storage as secondary energy sources.

During public comments to the Energy Commission on Wednesday, speakers urged regulators to help ensure the safety of the state's residents in the face of all of the devastation.

"We can hear the passion and just the urgency and the emotion beyond what's motivating people to get behind this," Commissioner Andrew McAllister said. "California is being forced to lead even more than ever before."

The last big change in the energy provisions of the state's building code — the requirement for new single-family homes to be equipped with solar power — was approved in 2018. The rules took effect on Jan. 1, 2020. The impact so far has been limited, since builders who already had permits could operate under the previous standards, and the coronavirus pandemic disrupted work and the issuing of permits.

The primary focus, Mr. McAllister said, should be to recognize the important role that changes in the building code can play in helping reduce emissions. "This is a huge lever that California has to pull to get the attention of the market," he said.

Judge Permits Biden's Replacement Evictions Ban to Stay in Place for Now

Demonstrators protesting against evictions in New York this week.

WASHINGTON — A federal judge on Friday permitted the Biden administration's replacement evictions moratorium to continue, saying that she lacked authority to block such an emergency public-health policy even though she believed "the government is unlikely to prevail" when the matter returns to the Supreme Court.

In a 13-page ruling, Judge Dabney L. Friedrich of the Federal District Court for the District of Columbia expressed doubts about the legality of the policy, which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention imposed on Aug. 3 in counties where Covid-19 is raging.

The ban replaced an expired, nationwide moratorium first imposed last September to prevent a surge of people crowding into homeless shelters and relatives' homes, spreading the virus. The new one is narrower because it applies only where transmission rates are high. Still, that category currently covers about 91 percent of counties in the United States.

Judge Friedrich had in May blocked the nationwide version of the moratorium, but the federal appeals court for the District of Columbia Circuit overruled her, and the Supreme Court let that decision stand in June. On Friday, she ruled that the replacement policy was similar enough to the original one that the earlier appeals

court ruling controlled the case — for now.

"Absent the D.C. Circuit's judgment," she wrote, she would immediately block the government from enforcing the new evictions ban. "But the court's hands are tied."

The Justice Department declined to comment. But in a statement, Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said: "The administration believes that C.D.C.'s new moratorium is a proper use of its lawful authority to protect the public health. We are pleased that the district court left the moratorium in place, though we are aware that further proceedings in this case are likely."

The plaintiffs, led by the Alabama Association of Realtors, are expected to swiftly take the case back to the appeals court in an effort to speed its way to the Supreme Court, where five of the nine justices appear likely to agree with Judge Friedrich that the ban exceeds the government's emergency powers under a broadly worded, but vague, 1944 public health law.

A lawyer for the plaintiffs forwarded a request for comment to Patrick Newton, a spokesman for the National Association of Realtors, which is not a party to the case but supports the landlords. He said the plaintiffs would appeal, adding, "We are confident in our position that this unlawful eviction ban will soon come to an end."

The government's power to ban evictions as part of its efforts fighting the pandemic has raised complex legal and political issues. The Biden administration had signaled that it intended to let an earlier version of the moratorium, which had by then already been extended several times, expire at the end of July after a Supreme Court justice warned that it was likely on legally shaky ground.

But as the Delta variant of the virus surged and Speaker Nancy Pelosi and progressive Democrats urged the White House to reverse course, the administration this month issued a new, narrower moratorium — even as Mr. Biden made clear in comments to reporters that he understood its chances of being upheld by the Supreme Court were dim.

"The bulk of the constitutional scholarship says that it's not likely to pass constitutional muster," he said on Aug. 3. "But there are several key scholars who think that it may — and it's worth the effort."

Signaling that the White House understands the moratorium's longer-term prospects are weak, Ms. Psaki on Friday called on state and local officials to take other steps that could mitigate a virus-spreading wave of mass evictions, including by imposing local moratoriums and by taking more aggressive steps to distribute $46.5 billion that Congress appropriated to serve as emergency rental assistance funds.

A temporary evictions moratorium for the pandemic began during the Trump administration. At times, Congress has explicitly authorized it. But when those periods lapsed, the C.D.C. has issued extensions of it under the 1944 law, which empowers the government to issue rules it deems necessary to slow the interstate spread of disease.

Unable to evict nonpaying tenants, landlords sued, raising the question of whether a nationwide evictions ban fell outside of the 1944 law.

In May, Judge Friedrich ruled that the plaintiffs were likely to prevail and issued an order that would enjoin the government from enforcing the ban while the litigation played out. But she also stayed that ruling while the government appealed it, and the appeals court declined to lift her stay — while also stating that, contrary to her view, the ban would most likely be found lawful.

In late June, the Supreme Court also declined to lift her stay, voting 5-4 against immediately blocking the original evictions ban. But while the government won, the action came with a strong warning: Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh warned that "clear and specific congressional authorization" would be necessary for the moratorium to continue beyond its scheduled expiration at the end of July.

At that point, the pandemic appeared to be waning and the administration thought that tens of billions of dollars appropriated by Congress as emergency rental assistance funds were on the cusp of distribution. Against that backdrop, the Biden administration's legal and policy teams agreed to allow the moratorium to end as scheduled.

But by late July, conditions had shifted. The distribution of the housing assistance funds proved to be dysfunctional, and coronavirus cases were rising. When swiftly passing new legislation proved politically impossible, House Democrats led by Ms. Pelosi pressured Mr. Biden to act unilaterally after all, at a time when his larger agenda made it perilous to alienate any allies in the closely divided Congress.

That push was complicated by the fact that some Biden policy and press officials had in the interim suggested that the Supreme Court's action in June made it illegal to extend the moratorium. Those now-awkward comments were an oversimplification of the more complicated reality, according to officials familiar with internal deliberations.

In fact, they advised, the government could stick to its position that it can authorize an evictions moratorium under the 1944 law because the Supreme Court's action in June was not a definitive, controlling precedent about what that law could be interpreted to mean. They also, however, warned that it was likely that the Supreme Court would swiftly strike down any new moratorium, and such a ruling could also narrow the C.D.C.'s flexibility to act in some future public health crisis.

Three days after the nationwide moratorium expired, the Biden administration issued its narrower evictions moratorium until October.

One legal question raised by the case is whether the new facts — the rise of the Delta variant and the narrowed scope of the ban — make the new moratorium different from the old one in a legally meaningful way, or whether the primary issue is how to interpret the 1944 statute.

In her ruling on Friday, Judge Friedrich determined that the replacement moratorium was fundamentally similar enough to the original one that it counted as an extension of it for which the existing litigation could continue, rather than a new policy for which legal arguments would need to start over.

"The minor differences between the current and previous moratoria do not exempt the former from this court's order," she wrote, adding that even though the government "has excluded some counties from the latest moratorium's reach, the policy remains effective nationwide, shares the same structure and design as its predecessors, provides continuous coverage with them and purports to rest on the same statutory authority."

Amid Extreme Weather, a Shift Among Republicans on Climate Change

Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana and other Senate Republicans spoke to media after reaching a bipartisan infrastructure deal last month. "We cannot live without fossil fuels or chemicals, period, end of story," he said recently.

WASHINGTON — After a decade of disputing the existence of climate change, many leading Republicans are shifting their posture amid deadly heat waves, devastating drought and ferocious wildfires that have bludgeoned their districts and unnerved their constituents back home.

Members of Congress who long insisted that the climate is changing due to natural cycles have notably adjusted that view, with many now acknowledging the solid science that emissions from burning oil, gas and coal have raised Earth's temperature.

But their growing acceptance of the reality of climate change has not translated into support for the one strategy that scientists said in a major United Nations report this week is imperative to avert an even more harrowing future: stop burning fossil fuels.

Instead, Republicans want to spend billions to prepare communities to cope with extreme weather, but are trying to block efforts by Democrats to cut the emissions that are fueling the disasters in the first place.

Dozens of Republicans in the House and Senate said in recent interviews that quickly switching to wind, solar and other clean energy will damage an economy that has been underpinned by fossil fuels for more than a century.

"I'm not doing anything to raise the cost of living for American families," said Senator Rick Scott of Florida, where climate-fueled disasters have cost the state more than $100 billion over the past decade according to estimates from the federal government.

Mr. Scott said he wants to address climate change, but "you can't do it where you're killing jobs."

It's a message supported by polling that shows Republican voters are more concerned with jobs than the environment. A Pew Research Center survey in May found just 10 percent of Republican and Republican-leaning independents were deeply concerned with addressing climate change, while a majority thought President Biden's ambitious plans to curb climate change would hurt the economy.

With the exception of young Republicans who have been agitating for their party to take climate change more seriously, conservative voters as a whole have not shifted much on the issue over the past 10 years. That skepticism may have reached a pinnacle with President Donald J. Trump, who famously derided climate science, loosened emissions rules and expanded oil and gas drilling on public lands.

But as the impacts of global warming becoming more apparent with each weather forecast, the message from Republicans and their allies has shifted. They now argue for investment in research and development, or technological solutions that are years away from viability, such as cleaning the air after oil, gas and coal are burned. Many also favor expanding nuclear energy, which does not produce greenhouse gases but poses other challenges including the lengthy time it takes to build new plants and concerns about disposal of spent fuel and risk of radioactive leaks.

A few Republicans, like Senator Mitt Romney of Utah and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, have said they support charging companies for the carbon dioxide they generate, a strategy that economists say would create a powerful incentive to lower emissions. But neither man is championing such a measure with any urgency.

The majority of Republican lawmakers back less aggressive responses popular with their voters, like planting trees to absorb more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, or offering tax credits to businesses that capture carbon dioxide after it has been released into the air by power plants or industrial sites.

"What they are opposing is any program to meaningfully reduce emissions," said David G. Victor, co-director of the Deep Decarbonization Initiative at the University

of California, San Diego.

Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana helped craft the $1 trillion infrastructure package that the Senate passed this week, and made sure it included billions of dollars to protect coastal states from sea level rise caused by climate change. But Mr. Cassidy said he won't support policies to curb the amount of oil that is drilled off the Louisiana coast — the burning of which is contributing to melting ice caps and rising seas.

"We cannot live without fossil fuels or chemicals, period, end of story," said Mr. Cassidy, who wants to expand exports of liquefied natural gas, which is produced in Louisiana and emits half the carbon dioxide of coal but is a source of methane, a greenhouse gas even more potent in the short term.

And while Senator Kevin Cramer, a North Dakota Republican, allowed that climate change is driving the extreme drought that has devastated crops and decimated livestock in his state this summer, he said the gases produced by burning fossil fuels should be the target, not the fuels themselves.

"We need to be on an anti-carbon mission, not an anti-fuel mission," said Mr. Cramer, whose state is also a top oil and gas producer.

Senator Marco Rubio, the Florida Republican, said it made no sense for the United States to cut its emissions while other countries like China continue to pollute. But at the same time, he also rejected trade policies that would apply pressure on China and others to curb their emissions.

Still, the fact that Republicans recognize emissions as a problem marks progress, however incremental, said Tom Moyer, the Utah state coordinator for the Citizens' Climate Lobby, which is trying to build bipartisan support for a tax on carbon dioxide emissions. "They're small bites at a solution, but it's so much more than we could have gotten even a few years ago," he said. "And hopefully the trend continues."

Mitch McConnell, the Senate Republican leader, said of climate change last September, "I concur that it is happening and it is a problem. The argument is about how to best address it."

Senator John Cornyn of oil and gas-rich Texas said in a July interview, "I have no doubt the climate is changing and people contribute to it." Senator Richard Shelby of Alabama said he thinks weather disasters simply happen, yet "a lot of it, I'm sure, with all the stuff we put in the air, is self-made."

Even Senator James Inhofe, an Oklahoma Republican who famously once threw a snowball on the Senate floor to claim the planet is not getting hotter, insisted last

month that he never called climate change a "hoax," only that the dire consequences have been overblown. (Mr. Inhofe is the author of a book entitled "The Greatest Hoax: How the Global Warming Conspiracy Threatens Your Future.")

"They don't want to look like they are denying the science, but they don't want to look like they're anti-free market and support regulation," said Michael Oppenheimer, a professor of geosciences and international affairs at Princeton University. "But the fact is, there's no way to solve this without regulating and mandating the cut of emissions. There's no magical easy 'innovation-only' way out of this."

Democrats say the tools exist now to stave off a hotter planet: rapidly expand wind and solar energy, beef up energy storage and the electric grid, electrify transportation, and make buildings energy efficient.

Many of those elements are tucked into a $3.5 trillion budget package that Democrats hope to pass in the fall. The budget bill includes a tool called a clean electricity payment program, designed to drive utilities to produce an increasing amount of electricity from low and zero-carbon sources like wind, solar and nuclear energy.

If approved, the measure would be the most consequential climate bill in United States history, putting the country on track to hit President Biden's goal of roughly halving domestic greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. But to get it through the evenly split Congress, every Democrat would need to support it and at least two, Senator Joe Manchin of coal-rich West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, have indicated they may oppose it.

Republican leaders, meanwhile, have made it clear they will vote against the budget bill, arguing that it is too expensive and that mandates like a clean electricity standard and government-funded electric vehicle expansion will hurt taxpayers and consumers.

Their messaging closely mirrors the position of major oil and gas companies, which are running advertising campaigns touting "technology innovation" as a response to global warming.

"They are acknowledging their role in climate change, but they want the public to believe they are on top of it," Edward Maibach, director of George Mason University's Center for Climate Change Communication, said of the fossil fuel companies. "They say they are innovating, they are evolving, they've got this. They don't need policy — and Republicans are following that cue."

Behind the scenes in Washington, oil and gas interests continue to lobby hard against policies that would reduce emissions, particularly tighter vehicle mileage rules that would prevent the burning of hundreds of billions of gallons of gasoline.

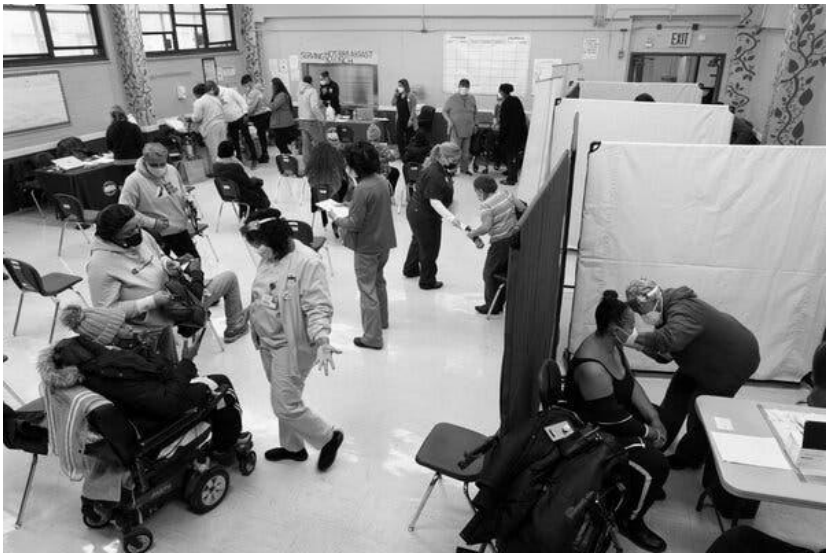
Those companies are donating overwhelmingly to Republicans. In the 2020 election cycle alone, oil, gas, coal mining and other energy companies gave $46 million to the Republican Party. That's more than those industries donated to Democrats over the course of the last decade, according to data compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonprofit group that tracks money in politics.

In many ways the $1 trillion infrastructure package, which the Senate approved in a 69-30 vote on Tuesday, shows the limits of Republican action on climate change.

The package, which still needs approval from the House, includes about $80 billion in programs to upgrade the nation's power grid, create charging stations for electric vehicles and research new clean energy technologies. It delivers more than $12 billion for technology to capture and store carbon dioxide emissions, which if commercialized at scale could prolong the life of fossil fuel plants; and $2.5 billion for developing a new generation of nuclear reactors.

Left out was any provision that would mandate the reduction of fossil fuels or the emissions they produce. Nineteen Republicans, including the minority leader, voted for the legislation.

C.D.C. Panel Recommends Third Dose of Covid Vaccine for Immunocompromised



A vaccine clinic set up for senior citizens in the Bronx in February.

WASHINGTON — An independent panel advising the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday recommended third doses of coronavirus vaccine for certain people with weakened immune systems, giving its support to the Food and Drug Administration's authorization of the extra shots.

The F.D.A. on Thursday cleared third doses for people with solid organ transplants and others with similarly weakened immune systems, who face a higher risk of severe bouts of Covid-19.

After nearly three hours of presentations and discussion on Friday, the C.D.C. committee, made up of medical experts, voted unanimously to recommend third shots for people in the category who have already received the two-dose vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna.

While the panel's guidance is nonbinding, it is followed closely by physicians and public health departments. Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the director of the C.D.C., quickly signed off on the recommendation, calling it "an important step in ensuring everyone, including those most vulnerable to Covid-19, can get as much protection as possible from Covid-19 vaccination."

About three percent of Americans have weakened immune systems for a variety of reasons, from a history of cancer to the use of certain medications such as steroids.

Dr. Neela D. Goswami, a C.D.C. official, said the group now eligible for third shots could include those with advanced or untreated H.I.V. infections, those who have undergone certain types of stem cell transplants within the past two years and those receiving certain kinds of chemotherapy, among others.

Those slated for treatments that weaken the immune system should get a third dose beforehand, Dr. Goswami said. Everyone eligible for a third shot should wait at least 28 days after their second before getting it, according to the C.D.C.

Dr. Dorry L. Segev, a transplant surgeon at Johns Hopkins University who has researched the impact of third doses in transplant recipients, praised the C.D.C. for putting out a more detailed guidance on who should receive a third shot.

"It is incredibly difficult to come up with clearly delineated criteria for who should be getting" a third shot among those with weakened immune systems, he added.

Dr. Jose U. Scher, a rheumatologist at NYU Langone Health who has studied the effect of vaccines on the immunocompromised, said that the C.D.C. vote — and the guidance from its experts — would help patients who had been agonizing over whether to seek out a third shot. Previously, he said, when people tested themselves for antibodies after vaccination and came up empty, "there were no tools for us to respond to that."

"We now know that this population was being left behind," he said.

Immunocompromised people will not need a doctor's permission or a prescription to get a third shot, C.D.C. officials said. They will need only to attest that they meet the eligibility requirements for an additional dose. Anyone else, including people with chronic medical conditions, like diabetes or asthma, should not be getting third shots at this point, they said.

Dr. Scher predicted that this honor-system approach could be messy. "I don't know if there's any way of corroborating someone's claim" of being immunocompromised, he said. Requiring some kind of proof, such as a doctor's note, would be a better process, he said.

The updated F.D.A. authorizations do not apply to immunocompromised people who received the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The C.D.C. panel did not offer recommendations on additional shots for that group, which is believed to be small. But the lack of guidance from either the F.D.A. or C.D.C. has left that group in limbo.

"We do understand the challenges here, and because of that we will continue to work very diligently to try to have a solution," Dr. Peter Marks, the F.D.A.'s top vaccine regulator, said at the panel's meeting. The F.D.A. is waiting on more data that it expects to receive this month, including Johnson & Johnson's clinical trial data on the safety and efficacy of two doses.

Dr. Kathleen Dooling, a C.D.C. official, said that patients who qualify for a third dose should ideally seek out the vaccine they already received, but that they could take the other two-dose vaccine if necessary.

Presenting studies that supported giving third doses, Dr. Dooling emphasized that immunocompromised people who receive a third dose should still wear a mask, maintain social distancing with people they do not live with, and avoid crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces. She said that people with weakened immune systems had also been shown to be at greater risk of breakthrough infection.

But Dr. Dooling said that early studies of how some immunocompromised people responded to third doses made clear that there could be some benefit. One such randomized, placebo-controlled study of more than 100 organ transplant recipients found that patients who received a third shot of Moderna's vaccine two months after a second dose showed marked increases in antibody levels.

Dr. Dooling also cited observational studies of solid-organ transplant recipients and patients on hemodialysis, which showed that people who had no detectable antibody response to their initial two doses did have one after a third dose.

Studies have also shown that third doses are safe.

The recommendation from the panel, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, comes as health officials grapple with whether people who were vaccinated early in the nation's inoculation campaign may need booster doses soon, a move that scientists and public health experts argue is not yet supported by data. Officials at the C.D.C. and F.D.A. have been careful to frame the authorization of third doses for people with weakened immune systems as a separate issue.

"Other individuals who are fully vaccinated are adequately protected and do not need an additional dose of Covid-19 vaccine at this time," Dr. Janet Woodcock, the acting F.D.A. commissioner, said in a statement on Thursday announcing the authorization, adding that the agency was "actively engaged in a science-based, rigorous process with our federal partners" to consider whether booster doses may be needed.

Some are taking matters into their own hands. Just over a million people who received a two-dose vaccine in the United States have already received a third dose, Dr. Dooling told the C.D.C. panel on Friday.

Supreme Court Blocks Part of New York's Eviction Moratorium

Other challenges to eviction moratoriums, including one imposed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, may reach the Supreme Court soon.

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Thursday blocked part of an eviction moratorium in New York State that had been imposed in response to the coronavirus pandemic, a move the law's supporters said might expose thousands to eviction.

"This is a very serious setback for our ability to protect tenants in the middle of a pandemic," said State Senator Brian Kavanagh, a Democrat and one of the sponsors of the moratorium law.

Randy M. Mastro, a lawyer for the landlords who had challenged the law, said the court's decision would permit "cases that have been stopped in their tracks by the state moratorium law to proceed so that both landlords and tenants can be heard."

Still, the court's order, which was unsigned, stressed that it applied only to a provision that bars the eviction of tenants who file a form saying they have suffered economic setbacks as a result of the pandemic, rather than providing evidence in court. "This scheme violates the court's longstanding teaching that ordinarily 'no man can be a judge in his own case,'" the majority wrote.

The order left other parts of the law intact, including a provision that instructed

housing judges not to evict tenants who have been found to have suffered financial hardship.

Other challenges to eviction moratoriums, including one recently imposed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, may reach the court soon. That federal moratorium is on precarious legal ground in light of a ruling in June in which a key justice said it could not be renewed without congressional approval.

It was not clear how many people could immediately be affected by the ruling on Thursday. More than 830,000 households in New York State, the majority of them in New York City, are behind on rent, with a total estimated debt of more than $3.2 billion, according to an analysis of census data by the National Equity Atlas, a research group associated with the University of Southern California.

Mr. Kavanagh said it appeared that landlords could start filing suits immediately to evict tenants. But a patchwork of other state and federal protections remains in place that could stop their suits from succeeding, including the C.D.C. eviction moratorium, which covers most of New York, including all of New York City.

Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul, who is set to become New York's next governor in less than two weeks after Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo leaves office amid a sexual harassment scandal, said in a statement that she would work with state lawmakers to "quickly address the Supreme Court's decision and strengthen the eviction moratorium legislation."

"No New Yorker who has been financially hit or displaced by the pandemic should be forced out of their home," she said.

The court's three liberal members dissented from the order. Justice Stephen G. Breyer, writing for himself and Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan, said the law was set to expire in a matter of weeks and was not plainly unconstitutional.

"The New York Legislature is responsible for responding to a grave and unpredictable public health crisis," Justice Breyer wrote. "It must combat the spread of a virulent disease, mitigate the financial suffering caused by business closures and minimize the number of unnecessary evictions."

"The Legislature does not enjoy unlimited discretion in formulating that response, but in this case I would not second-guess politically accountable officials' determination of how best to 'guard and protect' the people of New York," he wrote, quoting an earlier opinion.

The Supreme Court's ruling came as New York continued to struggle to dole out federal pandemic relief dollars to help tenants who fell behind on paying rent during the pandemic and landlords who had lost rental income.

Only about $100 million — or less than four percent of the state's $2.7 billion total — had been spent, state officials testified this week. Even before the court's ruling, the slow pace had prompted some lawmakers to warn that, without an extension, large numbers of people may face eviction. The ruling only intensified those fears.

The case was brought by several small landlords who said they had endured severe hardship and even homelessness because of the part of the law allowing eviction proceedings to be suspended by the filing of a form. The law does not relieve tenants of their obligation to pay rent or block lawsuits for unpaid rents.

The sponsors of the law, enacted in December 2020, said it addressed the pandemic by making it less likely that people would be forced into crowded shared housing, by easing the economic consequences of the health crisis and by alleviating the burdens on courts and litigants.

The landlords argued that the law violated due process principles by depriving them of meaningful access to the courts. They also objected to being required to supply their tenants with the forms, saying that was a violation of their First Amendment rights.

The majority did not address that second argument, and Justice Breyer said there were good reasons to be skeptical of it.

In June, Judge Gary R. Brown of the Federal District Court in Brooklyn rejected the landlords' arguments even as he acknowledged that they had suffered serious financial hardships.

Judge Brown relied on a 1905 Supreme Court precedent, Jacobson v. Massachusetts, which said states could require residents to be vaccinated against smallpox or pay a fine. Under that decision, Judge Brown wrote, courts may not second-guess the actions state lawmakers take to address public health crises.

He also rejected the landlords' First Amendment arguments, saying that government-mandated disclosures and warnings are commonplace in leases, mortgages and other documents.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, in New York, refused to block the moratorium while the landlords appealed. The landlords then asked the Supreme Court to intervene.

State officials responded that the moratorium was a "temporary pause" set to expire at the end of August. The landlords said the moratorium might well be extended, pointing to recent extension of a federal moratorium.

In June, by a 5-to-4 vote, the Supreme Court let stand a nationwide moratorium imposed by the C.D.C. that had been set to expire at the end of July. Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh, who appeared to cast the decisive vote in that case, wrote in a concurring opinion that any further extension must come from Congress.

Congress failed to act, and the general federal moratorium expired. On Aug. 3, however, the C.D.C. announced a new order barring evictions in many parts of the country, saying that "the evictions of tenants for failure to make rent or housing payments could be detrimental to public health control measures" aimed at slowing the pandemic.

That order, which will expire in early October unless it is extended or blocked in court, applies to regions of the country "experiencing substantial and high levels of community transmission" of the virus. President Biden said the new moratorium was expected to reach 90 percent of Americans who are renters.

Mihir Zaveri contributed reporting.

6 Issues Kathy Hochul Will Face as New York Governor

Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul will become governor as the state faces many challenges, including a rise in coronavirus cases.

In less than two weeks, Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul will become the next governor of New York, amid a period of exceptional tumult and uncertainty.

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, who held office for more than a decade and kept tight control over the state's Democratic Party, is resigning after a report by New York's attorney general found he had sexually harassed nearly a dozen women.

At the same time, the coronavirus pandemic is surging anew, raising thorny questions about public health, school safety and how best to manage New York's precarious path toward economic recovery.

On Thursday, Ms. Hochul confirmed that she would seek a full term as governor in November 2022, so she will be tackling the state's pressing issues while running a campaign in what could be a hotly contested election.

Bob Megna, president of the Rockefeller Institute of Government, an Albany-based think tank, said that he believed Ms. Hochul was well poised to tackle New York's many challenges.

"She's not new to the political environment, she's not new to the policy environment

and she has experience at the federal and local level, which a lot of people don't have," he said.

Here are some of the top issues facing Ms. Hochul.

Ms. Hochul must contend with a troubling uptick in coronavirus cases and hospitalizations, fueled by the highly contagious Delta variant. On Wednesday, the seven-day average of new infections in New York State was 3,715, up from a low point of 307 on June 26, according to a New York Times database. Hospitalizations rose to 1,559 from 823 over the same period.

The trend means that Ms. Hochul may have to make difficult choices on how to respond, including whether to pursue new state guidance to encourage more mask-wearing or implement vaccine mandates in places like nursing homes.

At a news conference on Wednesday, she said she would use the next two weeks to consult with experts and federal health authorities. She said one focus would be to increase the pace of vaccinations — less than 60 percent of New Yorkers have been fully vaccinated.

Assemblyman Richard Gottfried, the chairman of the Assembly's health committee, said that under Mr. Cuomo, a "large part" of health policy during the pandemic was decided by a small group of aides. He said he thought that would change in a Hochul administration.

"You may very well have different voices play a key role and that might have significant public policy consequences," he said.

Ms. Hochul will also have to decide how to work with New York City on a pandemic response. Mr. Cuomo had often been at odds with city officials: he blocked Mayor Bill de Blasio's idea for a shelter in place order last March, for example.

Ms. Hochul takes office amid significant upheaval over state measures meant to keep tenants from being evicted during the pandemic.

Less than three weeks before a state moratorium on evictions was set to expire, the United States Supreme Court struck down the provision on Thursday, clearing the way for thousands of eviction cases to move forward.

Tenants may still be shielded from eviction under other measures. A new federal eviction moratorium is in place until Oct. 3, but that measure has not prevented some evictions in other parts of the country. Another state law also keeps some tenants from being evicted because they couldn't pay rent during the pandemic, but does not prevent suits from being filed, or tenants from being evicted for other reasons.

The court's ruling, which stemmed from a lawsuit filed by several small landlords and a landlord group, stoked fears that thousands of New Yorkers could lose their homes.

While many landlord groups praised the ruling for allowing them to challenge cases where a tenant may have been improperly not paying rent and abusing the moratorium, the ruling also prompted calls from housing advocates for a new moratorium, which would have to be approved by the Legislature and signed by the governor.

After the ruling, Ms. Hochul said in a statement that she would work with state lawmakers to "quickly address the Supreme Court's decision and strengthen the eviction moratorium legislation."

"No New Yorker who has been financially hit or displaced by the pandemic should be forced out of their home," she said.

The ruling also places more scrutiny on New York's rent relief program, which Ms. Hochul will now inherit. The program has gotten off to a sluggish start, leaving many renters and landlords increasingly anxious and frustrated.

As of Tuesday, the state had distributed about $100 million in aid to roughly 7,000 households, totaling less than 4 percent of the $2.7 billion in available funds for the program. Renters and landlords continue to report errors and glitches in the application system.

Michael P. Hein, the commissioner of the state agency that runs the program, testified at an Assembly hearing this week that he had not spoken to Mr. Cuomo about the program, though he had kept in touch with others in the administration.

Ms. Hochul will assume control of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which operates a network of subways, buses and two commuter trains, as it is facing a severe crisis.

The M.T.A. has lost about half of its riders since the pandemic started. The subways are carrying about 2.5 million riders each weekday, down from more than 5.5 million in 2019. On the commuter railroads — the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North — ridership is down about 60 percent. A fare increase scheduled for this fall was postponed in hopes of luring back more riders.

The drop in passengers and an exodus of workers led the M.T.A. to make service cuts, some of which it has not yet restored. A gusher of emergency federal aid — $14.5 billion in all — has bolstered the authority against a huge operating deficit. But it could face a budget gap as soon as 2025, according to the Citizens Budget Commission, a nonpartisan fiscal watchdog.

Ms. Hochul also will have to identify a source of funding for one of the biggest public-works projects in the nation: the Gateway program to build a second rail tunnel under the Hudson River connecting to Pennsylvania Station. The tunnel alone is projected to cost $11.6 billion, half of which is supposed to come from New York and New Jersey.

Though Mr. Cuomo frequently contradicted Mr. de Blasio on decisions related to schools during the pandemic, the governor was conspicuously absent from the actual work of determining how to open classrooms last summer and fall.

Last week, as Mr. Cuomo's administration was engulfed in crisis, the health commissioner, Dr. Howard Zucker, announced that the state health department would not release guidance to school districts on how to reopen their buildings this fall, prompting outrage from senior education officials.

Ms. Hochul could play a larger role than her predecessor in helping the state's roughly 700 districts make decisions on masking, testing, quarantining and other safety measures.

She signaled on Thursday that her health department would mandate mask-wearing in schools. Many of the state's districts, including New York City, already have such mandates in place.

Ms. Hochul will also have to decide if she wants to pursue mandatory vaccination for all teachers and school staff, which would be the first statewide edict in the country.

For now, districts have to come up with their own rules on vaccines. New York City, for example, has already said all teachers will have to be vaccinated or submit to weekly testing.

Ms. Hochul will have to decide whether to speed up a plan to bring congestion pricing to New York City.

The policy, which would charge tolls to drivers entering the busiest parts of Manhattan, was approved by lawmakers in 2019 at Mr. Cuomo's urging, and over the objections of drivers from suburbs and other areas outside of Manhattan.

It is expected to generate $1 billion a year, which would be used to secure $15 billion in funding for other transit projects, including modernizing the subway system, although the money is not tied to any specific projects yet.

But the congestion pricing policy has been delayed, with critics suggesting that Mr. Cuomo did not want to alienate suburban voters as he considered a re-election bid next year. The governor effectively controls the M.T.A., which is implementing

congestion pricing.

With Ms. Hochul saying on Thursday that she plans to run for governor next year, she will also have to weigh the political costs of supporting congestion pricing, which could influence the speed of its implementation.

State lawmakers adopted a $2.1 billion fund in the spring that would offer one-time payments of up to $15,600 to undocumented workers who lost work as a result of the pandemic and were excluded from other types of government aid.

The Excluded Workers Fund, by far the biggest of its kind in the country, was hailed by progressive Democrats. But lawmakers and organizers who pushed for the fund said that it faced opposition from Mr. Cuomo, who sought measures to prevent fraud and abuse of the program.

Now, advocates for workers fear that newly announced requirements — including showing proof of a 50 percent loss in income — may prevent thousands of eligible workers from receiving payments, and they hope Ms. Hochul will push to change that.

The advocates say that day laborers and domestic workers who get paid in cash, for example, may not be able to easily document their lost earnings.

“The requirements are far more restrictive than those for typical benefit programs, like unemployment,” said Angeles Solis, a organizer at Make the Road New York, who helped lead a coalition of groups to advocate for the fund.

The workers are still struggling with poverty, hunger and debt as a result of the pandemic, she said, including thousands of undocumented women.

“The principal obstacle has been Governor Cuomo, so we are hopeful that Kathy Hochul will really step up,” said Ms. Solis, adding, “Kathy Hochul has spent her career defending the rights of women in the workplace.”

Lawmakers and organizers are calling on the new governor and the state labor commissioner to drop the restrictions to apply, and to provide a hotline and in-person consultations with applicants. Otherwise, Ms. Solis said, “it’s set up to fail.”

The Lithium Gold Rush: Inside the Race to Power Electric Vehicles

The Salton Sea is one of numerous new mining proposals in a global gold rush to find new sources of metals and minerals needed for electric cars and renewable energy.

Atop a long-dormant volcano in northern Nevada, workers are preparing to start blasting and digging out a giant pit that will serve as the first new large-scale lithium mine in the United States in more than a decade — a new domestic supply of an essential ingredient in electric car batteries and renewable energy.

The mine, constructed on leased federal lands, could help address the near total reliance by the United States on foreign sources of lithium.

But the project, known as Lithium Americas, has drawn protests from members of a Native American tribe, ranchers and environmental groups because it is expected to use billions of gallons of precious ground water, potentially contaminating some of it for 300 years, while leaving behind a giant mound of waste.

“Blowing up a mountain isn’t green, no matter how much marketing spin people put on it,” said Max Wilbert, who has been living in a tent on the proposed mine site while two lawsuits seeking to block the project wend their way through federal courts.

The fight over the Nevada mine is emblematic of a fundamental tension surfacing around the world: Electric cars and renewable energy may not be as green as

they appear. Production of raw materials like lithium, cobalt and nickel that are essential to these technologies are often ruinous to land, water, wildlife and people.

That environmental toll has often been overlooked in part because there is a race underway among the United States, China, Europe and other major powers. Echoing past contests and wars over gold and oil, governments are fighting for supremacy over minerals that could help countries achieve economic and technological dominance for decades to come.

Developers and lawmakers see this Nevada project, given final approval in the last days of the Trump administration, as part of the opportunity for the United States to become a leader in producing some of these raw materials as President Biden moves aggressively to fight climate change. In addition to Nevada, businesses have proposed lithium production sites in California, Oregon, Tennessee, Arkansas and North Carolina.

But traditional mining is one of the dirtiest businesses out there. That reality is not lost on automakers and renewable-energy businesses.

"Our new clean-energy demands could be creating greater harm, even though its intention is to do good," said Aimee Boulanger, executive director for the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance, a group that vets mines for companies like BMW and Ford Motor. "We can't allow that to happen."

This friction helps explain why a contest of sorts has emerged in recent months across the United States about how best to extract and produce the large amounts of lithium in ways that are much less destructive than how mining has been done for decades.

Just in the first three months of 2021, U.S. lithium miners like those in Nevada raised nearly $3.5 billion from Wall Street — seven times the amount raised in the prior 36 months, according to data assembled by Bloomberg, and a hint of the frenzy underway.

Some of those investors are backing alternatives including a plan to extract lithium from briny water beneath California's largest lake, the Salton Sea, about 600 miles south of the Lithium Americas site.

At the Salton Sea, investors plan to use specially coated beads to extract lithium salt from the hot liquid pumped up from an aquifer more than 4,000 feet below the surface. The self-contained systems will be connected to geothermal power plants generating emission-free electricity. And in the process, they hope to generate the revenue needed to restore the lake, which has been fouled by toxic runoff from area farms for decades.

Businesses are also hoping to extract lithium from brine in Arkansas, Nevada, North Dakota and at least one more location in the United States.

The United States needs to quickly find new supplies of lithium as automakers ramp up manufacturing of electric vehicles. Lithium is used in electric car batteries because it is lightweight, can store lots of energy and can be repeatedly recharged. Analysts estimate that lithium demand is going to increase tenfold before the end of this decade as Tesla, Volkswagen, General Motors and other automakers introduce dozens of electric models. Other ingredients like cobalt are needed to keep the battery stable.

Even though the United States has some of the world's largest reserves, the country today has only one large-scale lithium mine, Silver Peak in Nevada, which first opened in the 1960s and is producing just 5,000 tons a year — less than 2 percent of the world's annual supply. Most of the raw lithium used domestically comes from Latin America or Australia, and most of it is processed and turned into battery cells in China and other Asian countries.

"China just put out its next five-year plan," Mr. Biden's energy secretary, Jennifer Granholm, said in a recent interview. "They want to be the go-to place for the guts of the batteries, yet we have these minerals in the United States. We have not taken advantage of them, to mine them."

In March, she announced grants to increase production of crucial minerals. "This is a race to the future that America is going to win," she said.

So far, the Biden administration has not moved to help push more environmentally friendly options — like lithium brine extraction, instead of open pit mines. The Interior Department declined to say whether it would shift its stand on the Lithium Americas permit, which it is defending in court.

Mining companies and related businesses want to accelerate domestic production of lithium and are pressing the administration and key lawmakers to insert a $10 billion grant program into Mr. Biden's infrastructure bill, arguing that it is a matter of national security.

"Right now, if China decided to cut off the U.S. for a variety of reasons we're in trouble," said Ben Steinberg, an Obama administration official turned lobbyist. He was hired in January by Piedmont Lithium, which is working to build an open-pit mine in North Carolina and is one of several companies that have created a trade association for the industry.

Investors are rushing to get permits for new mines and begin production to secure contracts with battery companies and automakers.

Ultimately, federal and state officials will decide which of the two methods — traditional mining or brine extraction — is approved. Both could take hold. Much will depend on how successful environmentalists, tribes and local groups are in blocking projects.

On a hillside, Edward Bartell or his ranch employees are out early every morning making sure that the nearly 500 cows and calves that roam his 50,000 acres in Nevada's high desert have enough feed. It has been a routine for generations, but the family has never before faced a threat quite like this.

A few miles from his ranch, work could soon start on Lithium Americas' open pit mine that will represent one of the largest lithium production sites in U.S. history, complete with a helicopter landing pad, a chemical processing plant and waste dumps. The mine will reach a depth of about 370 feet.

Mr. Bartell's biggest fear is that the mine will consume the water that keeps his cattle alive. The company has said the mine will consume 3,224 gallons per minute. That could cause the water table to drop on land Mr. Bartell owns by an estimated 12 feet, according to a Lithium Americas consultant.

While producing 66,000 tons a year of battery-grade lithium carbonate, the mine may cause groundwater contamination with metals including antimony and arsenic, according to federal documents.

The lithium will be extracted by mixing clay dug out from the mountainside with as much as 5,800 tons a day of sulfuric acid. This whole process will also create 354 million cubic yards of mining waste that will be loaded with discharge from the sulfuric acid treatment, and may contain modestly radioactive uranium, permit documents disclose.

A December assessment by the Interior Department found that over its 41-year life, the mine would degrade nearly 5,000 acres of winter range used by pronghorn antelope and hurt the habitat of the sage grouse. It would probably also destroy a nesting area for a pair of golden eagles whose feathers are vital to the local tribe's religious ceremonies.

"It is real frustrating that it is being pitched as an environmentally friendly project, when it is really a huge industrial site," said Mr. Bartell, who filed a lawsuit to try to block the mine.

At the Fort McDermitt Indian Reservation, anger over the project has boiled over, even causing some fights between members as Lithium Americas has offered to hire tribal members in jobs that will pay an average annual wage of $62,675 — twice the county's per capita income — but that will come with a big trade-off.

“Tell me, what water am I going to drink for 300 years?” Deland Hinkey, a member of the tribe, yelled as a federal official arrived at the reservation in March to brief tribal leaders on the mining plan. “Anybody, answer my question. After you contaminate my water, what I am going to drink for 300 years? You are lying!”

The reservation is nearly 50 miles from the mine site — and far beyond the area where groundwater may be contaminated — but tribe members fear the pollution could spread.

“It is really a David versus Goliath kind of a situation,” said Maxine Redstar, the leader of the Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribes, noting that there was limited consultation with the tribe before the Interior Department approved the project. “The mining companies are just major corporations.”

Tim Crowley, a vice president at Lithium Americas, said the company would operate responsibly — planning, for example, to use the steam from burning molten sulfur to generate the electricity it needs.

“We’re answering President Biden’s call to secure America’s supply chains and tackle the climate crisis,” Mr. Crowley said.

A spokesman noted that area ranchers also used a lot of water and that the company had purchased its allocation from another farmer to limit the increase in water use.

The company has moved aggressively to secure permits, hiring a lobbying team that includes a former Trump White House aide, Jonathan Slemrod.

Lithium Americas, which estimates there is $3.9 billion worth of recoverable lithium at the site, hopes to start mining operations next year. Its largest shareholder is the Chinese company Ganfeng Lithium.

The desert sands surrounding the Salton Sea have drawn worldwide notice before. They have served as a location for Hollywood productions like the “Star Wars” franchise.

Created by flooding from the Colorado River more than a century ago, the lake once thrived. Frank Sinatra performed at its resorts. Over the years, drought and poor management turned it into a source of pollutants.

But a new wave of investors is promoting the lake as one of the most promising and environmentally friendly lithium prospects in the United States.

Lithium extraction from brine has long been used in Chile, Bolivia and Argentina, where the sun is used over nearly two years to evaporate water from sprawling ponds. It is relatively inexpensive, but it uses lots of water in arid areas.

The approach planned at the Salton Sea is radically different from the one traditionally used in South America.

The lake sits atop the Salton Buttes, which, as in Nevada, are underground volcanoes.

For years, a company owned by Berkshire Hathaway, CalEnergy, and another business, Energy Source, have tapped the Buttes' geothermal heat to produce electricity. The systems use naturally occurring underground steam. This same water is loaded with lithium.

Now, Berkshire Hathaway and two other companies — Controlled Thermal Resources and Materials Research — want to install equipment that will extract lithium after the water passes through the geothermal plants, in a process that will take only about two hours.

Rod Colwell, a burly Australian, has spent much of the last decade pitching investors and lawmakers on putting the brine to use. In February, a backhoe plowed dirt on a 7,000-acre site being developed by his company, Controlled Thermal Resources.

"This is the sweet spot," Mr. Colwell said. "This is the most sustainable lithium in the world, made in America. Who would have thought it? We've got this massive opportunity."

A Berkshire Hathaway executive told state officials recently that the company expected to complete its demonstration plant for lithium extraction by April 2022.

The backers of the Salton Sea lithium projects are also working with local groups and hope to offer good jobs in an area that has an unemployment rate of nearly 16 percent.

"Our region is very rich in natural resources and mineral resources," said Luis Olmedo, executive director of Comite Civico del Valle, which represents area farm workers. "However, they're very poorly distributed. The population has not been afforded a seat at the table."

The state has given millions in grants to lithium extraction companies, and the Legislature is considering requiring carmakers by 2035 to use California sources for some of the lithium in vehicles they sell in the state, the country's largest electric-car market.

But even these projects have raised some questions.

Geothermal plants produce energy without emissions, but they can require tens of billions of gallons of water annually for cooling. And lithium extraction from brine dredges up minerals like iron and salt that need to be removed before the brine is injected back into the ground.

Similar extraction efforts at the Salton Sea have previously failed. In 2000, CalEnergy proposed spending $200 million to extract zinc and to help restore the Salton Sea. The company gave up on the effort in 2004.

But several companies working on the direct lithium extraction technique — including Lilac Solutions, based in California, and Standard Lithium of Vancouver, British Columbia — are confident they have mastered the technology.

Both companies have opened demonstration projects using the brine extraction technology, with Standard Lithium tapping into a brine source already being extracted from the ground by an Arkansas chemical plant, meaning it did not need to take additional water from the ground.

"This green aspect is incredibly important," said Robert Mintak, chief executive of Standard Lithium, who hopes the company will produce 21,000 tons a year of lithium in Arkansas within five years if it can raise $440 million in financing. "The Fred Flintstone approach is not the solution to the lithium challenge."

Lilac Solutions, whose clients include Controlled Thermal Resources, is also working on direct lithium extraction in Nevada, North Dakota and at least one other U.S. location that it would not disclose. The company predicts that within five years, these projects could produce about 100,000 tons of lithium annually, or 20 times current domestic production.

Executives from companies like Lithium Americas question if these more innovative approaches can deliver all the lithium the world needs.

But automakers are keen to pursue approaches that have a much smaller impact on the environment.

"Indigenous tribes being pushed out or their water being poisoned or any of those types of issues, we just don't want to be party to that," said Sue Slaughter, Ford's purchasing director for supply chain sustainability. "We really want to force the industries that we're buying materials from to make sure that they're doing it in a responsible way. As an industry, we are going to be buying so much of these materials that we do have significant power to leverage that situation very strongly. And we intend to do that."

Gabriella Angotti-Jones contributed reporting.

Disney+ reaches 116 million subscribers, and its parks division returns to profitability.

Disney's chief executive, Bob Chapek, with Emma Stone, the star of "Cruella," which proved popular on Disney+.

LOS ANGELES — An adolescent sea monster, Marvel's god of mischief and Cruella de Vil helped Disney's flagship streaming service attract 12.4 million new subscribers between April and June, more than Wall Street had expected.

The Disney+ service ended the quarter with 116 million subscribers worldwide, the company reported on Thursday. Analysts had been hoping for 112 million to 115 million. The most popular offerings on Disney+ were "Luca," an original Pixar film; the superhero series "Loki," starring Tom Hiddleston; and the live-action movie "Cruella," with Emma Stone taking over as the classic Disney villain.

The quarter, the third in Disney's fiscal year, was notable for another reason: Disney Parks, Experiences and Products swung to a profit ($356 million) after four consecutive money-losing quarters ($3.6 billion in total). The availability of coronavirus vaccines prompted families to return in large numbers to Walt Disney World in Florida. Disneyland in California reopened on April 30 for the first time in 14 months, although state regulators initially limited capacity to 25 percent, a restriction that has since been lifted. (Masks are still required.)

Bob Chapek, Disney's chief executive, told analysts on a conference call that theme

park bookings remained "really strong" despite a new surge of coronavirus infections around the world, the result of the Delta variant. Christine M. McCarthy, Disney's chief financial officer, added that spending on hotel rooms, merchandise and food had been "exceptionally strong." Ms. McCarthy said that, unless the coronavirus situation changed, Disney planned to increase capacity at its theme park resorts for the coming holidays.

Disney is the world's largest entertainment company, with operations that include the ABC broadcast network, ESPN, cruise vacations, stage musicals, book publishing and the Disney Store chain. But investor excitement about streaming has in some ways made Disney a one-business enterprise: At least for the time being, as Disney+ goes, so goes the entire company.

Disney+ surpassed its five-year subscriber goal in just its first nine months. The pandemic was one accelerant, as families looked for ways to entertain themselves at home. But growth slowed between January and March — Disney+ added 8.7 million subscribers in that period, and Wall Street had hoped for more than 14 million — prompting worries about streaming-service fatigue and leading to a slide in Disney shares.

The company's stock price rose more than 5 percent in after-hours trading on Thursday.

Like other media companies, Disney has turned to streaming because cable television has conked out as a growth engine. Operating profit at Disney's traditional TV business — ESPN, ABC, Disney Channel, FX, Freeform, National Geographic and other cable networks — totaled $2.2 billion in the quarter, a sharp 33 percent decline. Disney attributed the drop to higher programming costs, including the return of live sports on ESPN and the pandemic-delayed Academy Awards, which ran on ABC. Higher advertising revenue and cable subscriber fees only partly offset the rise in expenses.

Even so, traditional television remains a huge business for Disney, generating $6.96 billion in revenue in the quarter, an increase of 16 percent.

Disney logged $4.3 billion in total streaming revenue, up 57 percent from a year earlier. The monthly price for a Disney+ subscription in the United States rose $1 in late March, to $8. Disney+ also generated tens of millions of dollars from "Cruella," which was made available to subscribers in May — at the same time the film arrived in theaters — for a $30 surcharge. Hulu, which Disney took over in 2019, benefited from higher advertising revenue and subscriber growth.

Disney said Hulu had about 42.8 million subscribers, a 21 percent increase from last year. About 15 million people pay for access to the company's ESPN+ platform, up 75 percent from a year earlier.

But building a portfolio of streaming services is mighty expensive. A variety of costs (content production, marketing, technology infrastructure) contributed to losses of roughly $300 million for Disney's streaming unit. Still, the division lost twice that amount in the same period a year ago.

Citing the pandemic, which has ravaged the movie theater business, Disney has recently changed its film distribution methods. Some films that were originally supposed to play in theaters — animated films, in particular — have been rerouted to Disney+ entirely. Others have been made available on Disney+ when they open in theaters, a practice that has put the company on war footing with at least one major star and her agents.

Scarlett Johansson, who has played the superassassin Black Widow in eight films, sued Disney this month, contending that making "Black Widow" available on Disney+ when it opened in theaters "dramatically" lowered box office revenue, which cost her tens of millions of dollars in bonus compensation. Her lawsuit drew a blistering "no merit whatsoever" response from Disney.

Mr. Chapek commented only indirectly on Thursday on Ms. Johansson's complaint.

"Certainly this is a time of anxiety in the marketplace," he said in response to an analyst question about Disney's movie release strategy. "These films that we are releasing right now were imagined under a completely different environment than unfortunately fate has delivered us. But we're trying to do the best thing for all our constituents and make sure that everybody who is in the value chain, if you will, feels like they're having their contractual commitments honored both from a distribution and a compensation standpoint."

The company will continue to decide "film by film" how movies will be released, Mr. Chapek said. "We value flexibility," he said.

Profit in the quarter totaled $923 million, compared with a loss of $4.8 billion a year earlier, when the world was still in the throes of the prevaccine pandemic. Excluding one-time items, the company had per-share profit of 80 cents, up from 8 cents. (Analysts had expected about 56 cents.)

Revenue was $17 billion, a 45 percent increase from a year earlier. (Analysts had predicted $16.8 billion.)

Ms. McCarthy announced on the call with analysts that Disney would not restart dividend payments to investors "until we return to a more normalized operating environment." Disney last paid its semiannual dividend in January 2020.

The Wedding Business Is Booming, a Short-Term Jolt to the Economy

Demand for weddings is expected to remain robust into 2023, giving the economy a jolt of spending.

Meg Van Dyke, who runs a Pittsburgh wedding planning company, spent a recent weeknight frantically calling photographers for a May 2022 wedding. All eight who fit her couple's criteria were fully booked.

"I've never had a problem finding vendors before," she said. "It's absolutely booming."

Weddings are roaring back after a pandemic-induced slump, leading to booked-up venues, a dearth of photographers and rising prices on catered dinners. As demand picks up, it's providing an additional jolt of spending to the U.S. economy.

The race to the aisle is payback after a lost year of ceremonies. As lockdowns swept the nation, weddings slowed abruptly at the onset of the pandemic. Shane McMurray, founder of The Wedding Report, estimates that 1.3 million marriages took place in the United States last year, compared with the typical 2.1 million. Those were often "micro-weddings," according to industry insiders, with just a handful of guests, if any were present at all.

That's turning around sharply. Weddings have not quite returned to normal for

2021, but they are quickly rebounding, and Mr. McMurray forecasts that next year they will jump to the highest level since the 1980s as engaged couples who have waited out a global pandemic finally tie the knot.

Once that pent-up demand plays out, he expects that long-running trends like cohabitation without marriage will come to dominate.

Many economists agree. "My instinct, immediately, is: This is not a marriage boom; this is a wedding boom," said Jessamyn Schaller, an economist at Claremont McKenna College. She added that even with the short-term pop, there were likely to be fewer marriages than there would have been had the pandemic never happened.

In other words, the wedding boom is probably a blip.

Marriage rates have been dropping for decades, and hit a record low of 6.1 per 1,000 people in 2019, down from 8.2 in 2000. The decline has come alongside a drop in fertility, which also hit a new low before the onset of the coronavirus.

What the wedding rebound could do is lay the groundwork for a brief post-pandemic baby bump, since couples often wait to exchange vows before they have children.

Lyman Stone, a research fellow at the Institute for Family Studies, tracks fertility intentions in surveys and keeps a close eye on state-level birth data. A baby bust that took hold after the pandemic started already appears to be turning around, much faster than expected.

"It is a rapid return to normal," Mr. Stone said. The nascent wedding rush "probably means that we have a couple of years here where we have somewhat more positive fertility than was previously expected."

Lest onlookers get too excited, Mr. Stone points out that what was expected was a slow decline in births..

And Melissa Kearney, an economist at the University of Maryland, cautioned that the early signs of a fertility rebound playing out now could be a false signal, since the pandemic is still playing out and it will take time to see how birth trends shape up.

But Adam Ozimek, chief economist at the freelance job site Upwork, thinks that many economists might be taking too dim of a view of the pandemic's ability to put America on a different social trajectory. He hasn't penciled in a big increase in marriage, but he does think that younger adults may change their ways in the wake of the crisis.

People have saved a lot of money during the pandemic, thanks to long months

at home, a rising stock market and repeated checks from the government. Remote work and the shift toward more work from home have introduced new geographic flexibility for many young adults.

Millennials who had been delaying home buying, for instance, may now have an opening.

"That's a pretty good recipe for stronger household formation," Mr. Ozimek said, referring to what happens when adults move out on their own or in with partners rather than parents or, in some cases, roommates. "You can afford to buy your own house, start your own family."

If that was to play out on any substantial scale, it would have big implications for the economy. Millennials are the nation's largest generation. Any change in homeownership, marriage or fertility rates among this group would fuel spending on everything from outdoor grills and washing machines to day care.

But it will take years to see whether the pandemic marked some sort of turning point for American family life.

What is clear now is that it pushed back ceremonies, making for a short-term spending boost on cakes, china, dresses, hair, makeup and photographers — a source of bottlenecks, but also a welcome recovery for some vendors who saw business drop precipitously amid lockdowns.

Ms. Van Dyke in Pittsburgh said brides with their hearts set on prized venues — like the downtown Omni William Penn Hotel — are setting their ceremony dates in 2023 as they compete for dates.

In Washington, D.C., the sweet shop Baked & Wired went from selling tiny six-inch cakes during the pandemic to receiving more orders than it can accept for Razmanian Devil wedding cakes: tiered layers of lemon cake filled with raspberry jam and topped with buttercream.

"It's Tuesday, and they're like, 'Hey, can I get a wedding cake for Saturday?'" said Teresa Velazquez, the shop's owner. "We've waited this long — let's throw it together and get married."

Marvin Alexander, a makeup artist in New York City who decided to shift from the fashion industry to bridal during the depths of the pandemic, is also seeing lots of last-minute bookings, including from rescheduled weddings. The events are often more modest affairs, with smaller wedding parties and guest lists, in a nod to virus risks.

"I'm starting to see a few people being more comfortable about 2022, even with

the Delta variant strong on our heels," Mr. Alexander said.

On the other end of the spectrum, Magdalena Mieczkowska, a wedding planner, has seen demand in the Hudson Valley and Berkshires take off for big events in 2022. And clients are willing to spend: Her average was typically $100,000 per event, but now she's seeing some weekends come in at $200,000 or more.

"People were postponing, and now they have more savings," she said. Plus, vendors are charging more for catered meals and cutlery rentals. "Everyone is trying to make up for their financial losses from the 2020 season."

Wedding industry experts said they expected demand to remain robust into 2023 before tapering back to normal, as new bookings vie for resources with delayed weddings like the one Ariana Papier, 31, and Andrew Jenzer, 32, held last weekend in Richmond, Mass., a town in the Berkshires.

The couple had to cancel their original June 6, 2020, date, opting to elope instead, but rescheduled the event to Aug. 7, complete with signature cocktails (a bush berry Paloma and an Earl Grey blackberry Old-Fashioned), a dance floor and s'mores.

"We're calling it a vow renewal and celebration," Ms. Papier said just ahead of the ceremony, adding it was the couple's third attempted venue, thanks to pandemic hiccups.

"Third and best," she said. "We are so excited."

Boeing's Starliner Launch Is Delayed, Again, Possibly Until Next Year

The Starliner spacecraft was rolled to the launchpad atop an Atlas 5 rocket earlier in the month. Boeing is recalling the astronaut capsule to the factory to troubleshoot hardware problems.

Boeing's Starliner spacecraft has been recalled to the factory because of sticky valves.

The Starliner is designed to take NASA astronauts to and from the International Space Station, and was already years behind schedule. Earlier problems with the spacecraft have added financial losses to Boeing's balance sheet.

Friday's announcement means that the capsule will be taken off the Atlas 5 rocket at the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida and returned to Boeing's factory located nearby at NASA's Kennedy Space Center. The scheduled crewless demonstration flight it was to complete will be delayed for at least two months, and possibly into next year. And that will further postpone Boeing's first flight with astronauts aboard.

"This is obviously a disappointing day," Kathy Lueders, NASA's associate administrator for human exploration and operations, said during a telephone news conference. "But I want to emphasize that this is another example of why these demo missions are so very important to us."

A similar spacecraft, Crew Dragon, built for NASA by SpaceX, has already carried astronauts to the space station three times since last year, and may carry two more crews to orbit before the end of 2021.

Starliner was originally supposed to lift off to the space station without astronauts aboard on July 30 — a repeat of an earlier flight to verify the spacecraft's systems — and then return to Earth about a week later. But that launch date was pushed back after a mishap at the space station, when a newly docked Russian module, Nauka, inadvertently fired its thrusters and sent the station into a spin.

The next opportunity to launch was Aug. 3, and the rocket with Starliner on top was on the launchpad the night before when a severe thunderstorm rolled through. During the countdown the next day, 13 valves used in Starliner's propulsion system failed to open, and the launch was called off.

In the days of troubleshooting that followed, engineers were able to get nine of the 13 valves working but four remained stuck.

"If we were able to free them all, we would have been in a good operational condition," said John Vollmer, Boeing's vice president and program manager for Starliner. "That's what we were shooting for, but obviously, with not getting all the valves, we made the decision that we were just out of runway and we had to come back to the factory."

Mr. Vollmer said the problem occurred among 24 valves that control the flow of nitrogen tetroxide, a propellant used by Starliner's thrusters. Some of the nitrogen tetroxide appears to have permeated through Teflon seals and interacted with moisture on the other side to produce nitric acid, Mr. Vollmer said.

"That nitric acid resulted in some corrosion which resulted in the stiction of those valves," Mr. Vollmer said.

Mr. Vollmer said the valves were unchanged in design from the first launch of Starliner in December 2019. That flight was bedeviled by major software flaws that prevented it from reaching the space station, leading Boeing and NASA to decide that a do-over was necessary before certifying that Starliner is ready to carry astronauts. But the hardware, including the valves, operated nearly flawlessly during the abbreviated 2019 trip.

"We haven't seen this problem in the past, and we're seeing it now," Mr. Vollmer said. He said engineers now need to figure out what was different — perhaps weather conditions including the thunderstorm drenching, perhaps something in the manufacture of the valves. He said he did not think rain had directly leaked into the valves.

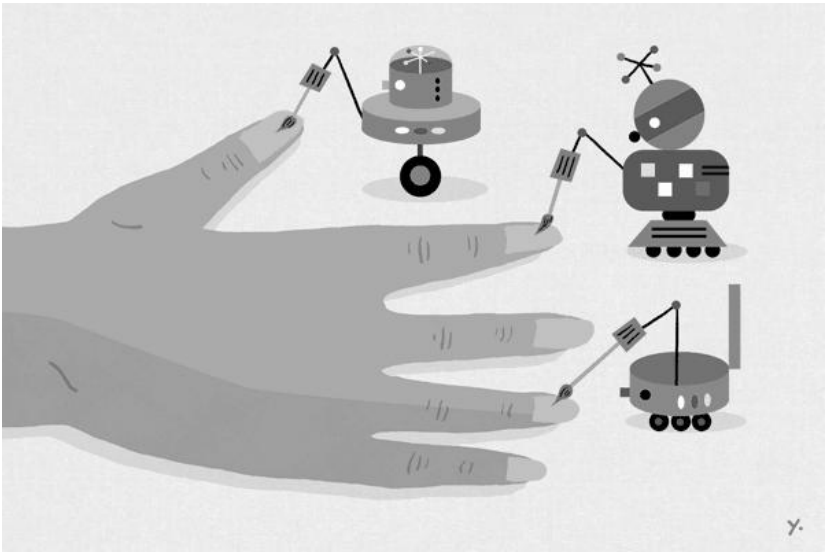
The Starliner launch will now occur after the launch of NASA's Lucy spacecraft,

which will be headed to study Trojan asteroids, which are gravitationally trapped in the orbit of Jupiter. The alignment of planets dictates that Lucy must launch during a three-week stretch from mid-October to early November. If it misses that window, the next opportunity would be next year.

Once Starliner is back at Boeing's facility at the Kennedy Space Center, engineers will first figure out what they have to take apart to fix the valves. Mr. Vollmer said it was too early to estimate how long the fixes would take or when the spacecraft would get back to the launchpad.

"It's probably too early to say whether it's this year or not," he said. "I would certainly hope for as early as possible. And if we could fly this year, it'd be fantastic."

Want Your Nails Done? Let a Robot Do It.



This article is part of our new series, Currents, which examines how rapid advances in technology are transforming our lives.

Omri Moran was on time for a first date, but the young woman, inexplicably, was late. She finally arrived, but skirted the question of her tardiness, saying "Never mind, you wouldn't get it," Mr. Moran recalled.

Not easily deterred, Mr. Moran, then the head of a geo-tracking start-up, persisted and discovered the reason: His date had ruined, and unsuccessfully tried to remedy, the new manicure she had gotten in anticipation of their meeting.

At the time of the date in 2016, he in fact didn't get it, but the moment also provided an epiphany of sorts. "I'm one of those people when they see things that are bad, I just start thinking of solutions," Mr. Moran said. "And I just wondered why it couldn't be automated. And that's kind of how we got rolling."

He envisioned a robotic approach to manicures and began working on his idea that year, which morphed into the company Nimble. The concept, which two other start-ups are separately working on, essentially seeks to offer a simple way to provide foolproof nail polish. The companies, Clockwork and Coral, in addition to Mr. Moran's Nimble, have developed distinct technologies and different business models to offer customers a quick color change.

But don't give up your regular appointment just yet. While all three companies have secured substantial outside financing, the devices are still being tested and altered before their full market debuts. And none of the three are offering a full salon-type manicure with shaping and buffing. Still, they could ultimately upend the growing nail care market.

As a market sector, manicures are a goal worth pursuing. Estimates peg the nail care market at close to $10 billion, and it could reach as high as $11.6 billion by 2027. While the size of the market for color alone has not been teased out, investors find it enticing. As Julie Bornstein, the founder of the shopping app the Yes, who has invested in Clockwork, said, the idea resonated because manicures could be time consuming: "I personally don't like spending 40 minutes going to the nail salon."

The technology incorporates some hardware — such as a robotic arm in some instances — to paint the nails, with software that relies on machine learning to distinguish a fingernail from the surrounding skin. Each company uses a different approach, yet essentially relies on the scanning of thousands of nail shapes to create a database. Cameras within the devices take photos of the nails of the individual user, a process repeated each time a manicure is done even on the same person. During the development, all three have tried to minimize the number of moving parts and rely more on software, because moving parts can break down over time.

Clockwork is the first to hit the market, although in a limited way. Last Friday, the company opened in a storefront space in the Marina District of San Francisco, essentially a pop-up location expected to be open for at least six months. Clients will pay $7.99 to test the device, which is slightly bigger than a microwave. The soft opening follows a 2019 test run in their office of a prior iteration with employees of Dropbox, where the Clockwork founders Renuka Apte and Aaron Feldstein first met. (At the time, the two companies were located blocks away from each other.)

The pop-up is the culmination of four years of work. Ms. Apte and Mr. Feldstein had initially started their company in 2017, Ms. Apte said, sifting through roughly 70 ideas before settling on what they called "minicures."

Their tabletop device, destined for stores, offices and apartment complexes, incorporates a mix of computer vision and artificial intelligence to paint nails. Rather than use a robotic arm, their machine incorporates what's known as a gantry, an older technology that relies on multiaxis movements to apply polish.

They chose the corporate name of Clockwork, which is a play on words addressing the penchant for regular manicures as well as the technical intricacy of a clock. The two had worked without pay until late 2019, when they secured $3.2 million in their first round of funding.

Coral, another company trying to upend the salon industry, obtained $4.3 million in venture funding around the same time. But Bradley Leong, the company's chief executive and co-founder, said that because they could not get the device's price as low as they had hoped in its current iteration, they were making it semirobotic to decrease the cost.

Nimble has incorporated so-called computer vision to work with artificial intelligence and a robotic arm to offer simple, 10-minute manicures in a device also close to the size of a toaster. To build brand awareness, the company, which started in Tel Aviv but is now headquartered in Brooklyn, recently ran a Kickstarter campaign and has secured $10 million in seed financing as well.

As with any robotics, there is the inevitable question of whether jobs will be replaced by the devices. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2019 there were 155,300 jobs; average pay was $27,870 per year or $13.40 per hour (before tips). Without any disruption, a growth rate of 19 percent is expected.

None of the futuristic machines shape nails, so that part of salon service will not be disrupted. Ms. Apte said she did not anticipate any job losses at salons, because her device would function as an extra service. Mr. Leong also said that he did not expect his company's device would put people out of work because it didn't substitute for a full manicure.

The three companies have different business models. Clockwork wants to maintain ownership, with its devices available for a quick change of color in offices, apartment buildings or retail stores for about $10, Ms. Apte said. Nimble's product is geared for home use, and the company plans to sell directly to consumers and in retail outlets, Mr. Moran said, with an intended price of $399. (Those who invested through Kickstarter were eligible for a pre-order price of $249). Coral is also pursuing consumers, but its model is in flux, Mr. Leong said, as it adjusts the device to keep prices below $100.

The process is quick. Nimble, Mr. Moran said, will polish and dry nails within the 10 minutes, using its proprietary formula. Ms. Apte acknowledged that while Clockwork's manicure might take under 10 minutes, drying time is additional.

While all the founders said their devices were safe, they were not required to undergo the type of arduous review that, say, certain medical devices would, according to Tricia Kaufman, a health care and life sciences lawyer and partner at the Stinson law firm in Minneapolis.

Mr. Feldstein, the Clockwork co-founder, said that their device has multiple safety features, including a plastic-tipped cartridge that won't pierce a finger. It will not be connected to the internet, so the hacking threat — with polish running amok — is curtailed. Ultimately, the consumer is the last defense because a hand can easily

be pulled out.

The founders all seem to be contemplating brand extensions. None of the companies, for example, have yet to offer pedicures.

But one way to expand their reach seems clear. While women traditionally have gotten manicures, men comprise a largely untapped market that may be receptive to the automation. According to Ms. Apte of Clockwork, "We hear that they would rather go get it done by a robot then to sit in a nail salon."

As for Mr. Moran, that first date was worth waiting for. Dar Moran is now his wife. And, he said, "she was customer No. 1."