Daniel Fishman

From: Daniel Fishman

Sent: Monday, April 19, 2021 4:29 PM

To: mike.poore@lrsd.org; pilewskig@nlrsd.org; cmcnulty@pcssd.org;

kwalters@bryantschools.org; bduffie@jnpsd.org

Subject: Notice of Public Hearing

Dear Superintendents Poore, Pilewski, McNulty, Walters, and Duffie:

I write on behalf of IDEA Public Schools Arkansas to inform you of IDEA's intent to submit an application for a public, tuition-free, open-enrollment charter to serve children and families in Pulaski County, with a likely focus on residents of Little Rock and North Little Rock. A virtual public meeting will be held via <u>BlueJeans video conference</u> on May 7, 2021 at 5:00PM CT.

Should have you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by phone [512-810-4389] or email [daniel.fishman@ideapublicschools.org].

Sincerely,

Daniel Fishman Sr. VP of Growth IDEA Public Schools

Pressure

Continued from Page 1A

doses to other countries. Japan also saw a rapid resurgence of infections just three months before it's scheduled to host the Olympics. A top ruling-party official suggested the possibility of canceling the games if the infections make them impossible.

Troubling signs also emerged in the U.S. despite the good news that more than 198 million shots have been administered and the seven-day average of daily shots given hit 2.9 million last week: New daily infections have increased 11% in the past two weeks.

According to Johns Hopkins University, the U.S. has recorded more than 31,491,000 covid-19 cases and more than 565,000 deaths.

Many states have lifted restrictions on businesses and public gatherings. But more people are being admitted to hospitals in some states, including Michigan, which leads the nation with nearly 8,000 new infections per day.

In suburban Detroit, Dr. Nick Gilpin of Beaumont Health likened a rising crush of patients to a "runaway train." Staff members were using tents to handle the flow of people seeking emergency care from Michigan's largest hospital system, which Thursday was treating more than 800 patients. That's up from about 500 two weeks ago.

"Our covid-19 numbers are climbing higher and faster, and it's very troubling and alarming to see this," said John Fox, chief executive of Beaumont Health, which operates eight hospitals.

Coronavirus patients statewide were near record numbers in Michigan, which had 3,960 people with confirmed infections hospitalized Wednesday.

Even though half of U.S. adults are still completely unvaccinated, dwindling demand for shots was reported by some hospitals in Alabama and Missouri. Both states already lag the nation in vaccinating their populations.

In Alabama, only 37% of adults have received even one dose. Yet Cullman Regional Medical Center north of Birmingham cited declining appointments as it announced that its vaccine clinic was being moved to an urgent care center. East Alabama Medical Center near Auburn University said it was preparing to wind down its vaccination program in a county where fewer than 18% are fully vac-

"The number of vaccine requests has reached a plateau," hospital spokesman John Atkinson said.

Health care officials in Missouri are also worried that not enough people are seeking shots. A large federally operated vaccination site in downtown St. Louis is administering less than half its capacity of 3,000 shots per day. Appointments have also slowed in St. Joseph, Mo., said Dr. David Turner, chief medical officer

for Mosaic Life Care. "As a medical professional, I am concerned," Turner said. "We would like to see more folks getting vaccinated. Even if they had covid, we still recommend vaccination.

In other developments, the U.S. government reported Thursday that some vaccinated people, as expected, have become sick from the coronavirus, though such cases are

The CDC said about 5,800 of such "breakthrough" infections have been confirmed. That's out of about 75 million Americans who have been fully vaccinated, but the agency warned that reporting of such cases is uneven and incom-

plete. Serious illness among vaccinated Americans is even more rare, with fewer than 400 who were hospitalized and 74 who died. As with the flu, people who get covid-19 after being vaccinated are more likely to have a milder illness than unvaccinated people, the CDC has said.

AIDING POOR COUNTRIES

Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday appealed for other countries to inject another \$2 billion into the U.N.-backed program to ship vaccines to the world's poorest countries at a time when rich countries including the U.S. have seized the lion's share.

Blinken's call came as the United States co-hosted a virtual conference that drummed up hundreds of millions of dollars in support from gov-



Health workers conduct blood oxygen and body temperature checks Thursday in Mumbai, India, while doing contact tracing. Stringent restrictions have been imposed in Mumbai and New Delhi. More photos at arkansasonline.com/416covid/. (The New York Times/Atul Loke)

VIDEO ONLINE

Fauci, Jordan clash over reopeninas arkansasonline. com/416fauci/



Ohio governor calls vaccine 'ticket to freedom' arkansasonline. com/416dewine/

com/416newsom/



ernments and philanthropy groups to help buttress the \$6.3 billion that's already been raised for the COVAX

The program has begun donating millions of vaccines to 92 low- and middle-income countries in recent months. But the World Health Organization — insisting that no one is safe until everyone is — has repeatedly decried a lack of

Donors either chipped in funds or announced plans to

Prime Minister Stefan Lofven said Sweden was increasing its contribution to COVAX from \$20 million to \$280 million in the day's biggest pledge. In addition to contributing about \$12 million, New Zealand will donate enough vaccines for more than 800,000 people, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said.

That contribution marked the start of COVAX efforts to get countries with excess doses to share them.

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance a Geneva-based public-private partnership that helps run COVAX — said about \$400 million was raised Thursday toward the goal of locking in 1.8 billion doses this year.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Gates Philanthropy Partners and Google.org were among philanthropists that contributed, committed or mobilized tens of millions of dollars worth of support Thursday, Gavi said.

But access to vaccines which has been constrained by hoarding by some wealthy countries and by limits to production — is a more pressing need than cash.

Marie-Ange Saraka-Yao, who heads resource mobilization for Gavi, said commitments of money help COVAX nevertheless build capacity and give "clear visibility to manufacturers that the money is there for them to build the supply — and for us to buy."

Blinken, speaking in recorded remarks, laid out an ambition to raise COVAX's target of vaccinating 20% of populations in the affected countries, even as he praised the pledges and donations made so far.

"To beat this pandemic, we need to aim much higher. With \$2 billion more to COVAX, we can reach approximately 30% of people in target countries rather than 20%," he said. "Just think for a moment of all the people whose lives would be impacted by hitting that higher

Blinken added: "That's not all we must do. We need to produce more safe, effective vaccines, and we need to distribute them more rapidly."

He did not propose new U.S. funds but highlighted the Biden administration's contribution of \$2 billion to COVAX in March and its plans to add

another \$2 billion through 2022, reversing a Trump administration decision to opt out of the effort.

rest of the world.

Innovation Center.

The paper's authors in-

such as Mark McClellan, who

served as commissioner of the

Food and Drug Administra-

tion under President George

W. Bush, as well as Krishna

Udayakumar, founding direc-

tor of the Duke Global Health

echo the concerns from other

public health experts globally,

including World Health Or-

ganization Director General

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreve-

sus, who called vaccine-dis-

tribution plans that focus only

on domestic issues a "self-de-

feating strategy [that] will cost

BLOOD CLOTS

from the University of Oxford

said the risk of blood clots

among those who've been di-

agnosed with covid-19 is high-

er than among those who've

risk of 39 in a million. That

compared with 4 in a million

with mRNA vaccines like

those developed by Pfizer-Bi-

oNTech and Moderna, and 5

in a million people with As-

Though the analyses for

the three vaccines are based

on different data sets, making

comparisons difficult, the study

suggests that the risk of a clot

among those with the disease is

about eight to 10 times higher

the European Union have

placed restrictions on the use

of the AstraZeneca vaccine,

while shots of Johnson &

Johnson's vaccine have been

placed on hold in much of

the world amid concern over

an association with the rare

clots. The relative benefits of

the AstraZeneca shot, com-

pared with the risk of clots,

decrease when doses are given

to younger adults, according to

an analysis by the U.K.'s Medi-

cines and Healthcare Products

Information for this article was

contributed by Russ Bynum, Ed

White, Jay Reeves, Mike Stobbe,

Heather Hollingsworth and Jamey

Keaten of The Associated Press;

by Adam Taylor and Emily Rau-

hala of The Washington Post; and

by Todd Gillespie of Bloomberg

Regulatory Agency.

News (WPNS).

Regulators in the U.K. and

than after vaccination.

Covid patients saw a clot

Also Thursday, a new study

lives and livelihoods.'

received vaccines.

traZeneca's vaccine.

Their recommendations

"We recognize that as long as covid is spreading and replicating anywhere, it poses a threat to people everywhere," Blinken said.

PRESSURE ON U.S.

However, the U.S. is on track to have gathered an oversupply of hundreds of millions of vaccine doses as soon as July, even while many countries in the developing world will have to wait years to vaccinate a majority of their populations, according to a report by the Duke Global Health Innova-

The new estimates, included in the paper alongside recommendations, come as the Biden administration faces mounting pressure to facilitate equitable vaccine distribution around the world. Despite pledging money, Washington has resisted calls to share vaccine technology or donate surplus doses.

Blinken on Thursday did not address the issue of surplus U.S. doses.

On Wednesday, Oxfam released a letter signed by more than 100 former heads of state and Nobel laureates calling on President Joe Biden to waive intellectual property rules for coronavirus vaccines and "put the collective right to safety for all ahead of the commercial monopolies of the few."

"Leadership from the US on safe, effective, and equitable global access to Covid-19 vaccines is imperative," the Duke paper argues, pushing for Washington to increase funding for vaccine-sharing programs, and to donate excess doses and use its clout to open up vaccine manufacturing.

Another proposal, put forward in a letter backed by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, calls for the United States to donate 10% of its excess doses over the summer, moving to 50% by the end of the year, and argues that Biden should deliver a speech this spring to make the case to the American people.

Under the leadership of Gayle Smith, Blinken's new coordinator for global coronavirus response and health security, the nonprofit ONE Campaign called on wealthy countries to donate 5% of their surplus doses once they've vaccinated 20% of their populations.

The United States will probably have "at least 300 million excess doses or more" by the end of July, the Duke paper estimates, even as vaccination programs are extended to the vast majority of U.S.

The estimate is based on the assumption that the vaccine developed by AstraZeneca receives emergency-use authorization and that the currently suspended Johnson & Johnson vaccine is used widely despite rare side effects.

The oversupply in the United States is in stark contrast with the situation in many poorer parts of the world, where vaccination programs have been slow to begin amid problems with supply and distribution, and could ultimately prolong the pandemic and hamper a U.S. recovery.

The Biden administration has pledged to donate doses. "If we have a surplus, we're going to share it with the rest of the world," Biden said last month when pressed on the issue. "We're going to start off making sure Americans are

Notice of Public Hearing

IDEA Public Schools Arkansas plans to submit an application for a public, tuition-free, open-enrollment charter school to serve children and families in Pulaski County, with a likely focus on Little Rock and North Little Rock

Online Meeting Address: www.bit.ly/IDEAArkansas Or Join by Phone: Dial 1.866.226.4650, Meeting ID 512 354 9769 Friday, May 7, 2021 at 5:00PM CT

Join us to share your input on what K-12 educational offerings your community needs, and to learn more about IDEA



taken care of first, but we're WHO sees covid plight then going to try to help the in Europe as 'serious' clude former U.S. officials

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GENEVA — A top official from the World Health Organization says Europe has surpassed 1 million deaths from covid-19 and the situation remains "serious," with about 1.6 million new cases reported each week.

The comments by Dr. Hans Kluge on Thursday aimed to emphasize that Europe must keep up its guard with social distancing and speed up vaccinations as virus variants drive new infections to record levels in some

Overall, a tally by Johns Hopkins University shows nearly 3 million deaths have been linked to covid-19 worldwide — with the Americas hardest-hit, followed by Europe. The United States, Brazil and Mexico have reported the highest number of deaths, collectively at more than 1.1

The U.S. has recorded more than 31,491,000 covid-19 cases and more than 565,000 deaths.

Worldwide, the virus is claiming about 12,000 lives

Speaking to reporters during a visit to Greece, Kluge

did point to "early signs that transmission may be slowing across several countries" in agency's 53-country European region, which stretches into Central Asia —and cited "declining incidence" among the oldest people.

He said the proportion of covid-19 deaths among people older than 80, who have been prioritized for vaccines, had dropped to nearly 30% — the lowest level in the pandemic.

Britain in particular has seen new infections and deaths drop dramatically since January, because of a successful vaccination program and a prolonged national lockdown that is being reversed only in stages.

Addressing recent concerns about vaccines, Kluge also said the risk of people suffering blood clots is far higher for people with covid-19 than for people who receive AstraZeneca's vac-

"Let there be no doubt about it, the AstraZeneca vaccine is effective in reducing covid-19 hospitalization and preventing deaths," he said, adding that the health agency recommends its use for all eligible adults.







Why is April one of the best times to replace your windows?

Because if you call us now, you can get your more energy-efficient windows installed and enjoy a more comfortable home right away.

Our exclusive High-Performance[™] Low-E4® SmartSun™ glass is **up to** 70% more energy efficient[†]. It's engineered to make your home more comfortable in the colder and warmer months.

It's like getting **FREE WINDOWS** for 1 year¹

MONEY PAYMENTS INTEREST

FOR 1 YEAR

.....Plus

BUY 1 WINDOW OR DOOR,

GET 1 WINDOW OR DOOR

Call for your FREE Window and Door Diagnosis

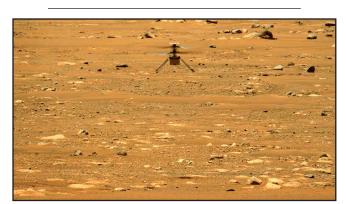




501-380-0168

10ffer not available in all areas. Discount applied by retailer representative at time of contract execution and applies to purchase of 4 or more windows and/or patio doors. Buy two windows and/or doors, get the second two windows and/or doors, of equal or lesser value, 40% off. Discount applied to lowest priced window and/or door products in purchase. Cannot be combined with other offers. Initial contact for a free Window and Door Diagnosis must be made and documented on or before 4/30/21, with the appointment then occurring no more than 10 days after the initial contact. No payments and deferred interest for 12 months available to well qualified buyers on approved credit only. Not all customers may qualify. No Finance Charges will be assessed if promo balance is paid in full in 12 months. Renewal by Andersen retailers are independently owned and operated retailers, and are neither brokers nor lenders. Any finance terms advertised are estimates only, and all financing is provided by third-party lenders unaffiliated with Renewal by Andersen retailers, under terms and conditions arranged directly between the customer and such lender. Oklahoma Windows & Doors LLC, d/b/a Renewal by Andersen of Greater Oklahoma City and Greater Tulsa. "Renewal by Andersen" and all other marks where denoted are marks of Andersen Corporation. ©2021 Andersen Corporation. All rights reserved. ©2021 Lead Surge LLC. All rights reserved. *Using U.S. and imported parts. 'Values are based on comparison of Renewal by Andersen® double-hung window U-Factor to the U-Factor for clear dual pane glass non-metal frame default values from the 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018 International Energy Conservation Code "Glazed Fenestration" Default Tables. All sales, marketing and installation of windows is conducted by Renewal by Andersen of Greater Oklahoma City and Greater Tulsa, an independently owned and operated affiliate operating in OK and AR.

The nation in brief



The Mars Ingenuity helicopter hovers Thursday above the surface of the planet during its second flight. (AP/NASA/JPL-Caltech/ASU/MSSS)

2nd flight a success for Martian copter

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — NASA's little Mars helicopter aced its second test flight Thursday, soaring even higher and longer than before.

The 4-pound chopper, named Ingenuity, hovered longer and also flew side to side this time, according to NA-SA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California. It achieved the intended altitude of 16 feet and even accelerated sideways 7 feet. The latest hop lasted 52 seconds, 13 seconds longer than the first one.

The success came just three days after Ingenuity made the first powered flight by an aircraft on another planet. The helicopter is carrying a bit of wing fabric from the Wright Flyer that made similar history at Kitty Hawk,

Flight controllers had to wait four hours before learning Thursday's outcome. Like it did during Monday's 10-foot-high hop, the helicopter sent back a black and white photo showing its shadow against the dusty, rockstrewn surface now known as Wright Brothers Field.

"It sounds simple, but there are many unknowns regarding how to fly a helicopter on Mars," Ingenuity's chief pilot, Havard Grip, said from JPL in a statement. "That's why we're here — to make these unknowns known."

NASA plans up to three more test flights in the next 11/2 weeks, venturing higher each time with more complicated acrobatics. The rover team allotted one month for the \$85 million tech demo. Ingenuity hitched a ride to Mars on the rover Perseverance, which will set off on its journey to find any signs of past microscopic life once Ingenuity's flights are complete.

NYC subway bomb plotter gets life term

NEW YORK — A federal judge in Manhattan sentenced a Bangladeshi immigrant to life in prison Thursday, saying he plotted to carry out a "barbaric and heinous" plot to kill as many people as he could with a suicide bombing attack in New York City's subway beneath Times Square in 2017.

Akayed Ullah, 31, was sentenced by Judge Richard J. Sullivan, who said Ullah had carried out "about as serious a crime as there is," though he largely failed when the bomb attached to his chest barely exploded in a pedestrian tunnel beneath Times Square and the Port Authority, burning him severely but largely sparing those around him from severe injuries.

"A life sentence is appropriate," Sullivan said. "It was a truly barbaric and heinous crime."

Ullah, a Bangladeshi who got an entry visa in 2011

because he had an uncle who was already a U.S. citizen, spoke through a white mask over his black beard and apologized before hearing the sentence.

Prosecutors said the attack was committed on behalf of the Islamic State group.

Plea guilty in killings of 8 in Ohio family

A man pleaded guilty for his role in the murders of his child's mother and seven other members of her family on Thursday, the fifth anniversary of when the shootings were discovered in southern Ohio.

Edward "Jake" Wagner pleaded guilty to 23 counts in Pike County court in a deal with prosecutors that spares him from a potential death penalty. He agreed to cooperate in the cases against his parents and brother, who also are charged in the Rhoden family slayings of seven adults and a teenage boy.

The charges included eight counts of aggravated murder, as well as charges of conspiracy, aggravated burglary, tampering with evidence and other charges. Wagner, 28, said he was deeply sorry. He wasn't imme-

diately sentenced, but his lawyers acknowledged Wagner understands that the plea means he will likely die in pris-The killings in April 2016 — at three trailers and a

camper near Piketon — took authorities more than two years to investigate before they announced the arrests. George Billy Wagner III, Angela Wagner and their son

George Billy Wagner IV have pleaded innocent. Prosecutors alleged the Wagner family planned the killings for months, motivated by a custody dispute.

Transgender shelter denial policy ended

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is withdrawing a Trump-era policy that would have allowed taxpayer-funded homeless shelters to deny access to transgender people.

The move is partially symbolic; the proposed policy never took effect and was still being hotly debated last fall when former President Donald Trump lost his bid for reelection.

One of President Joe Biden's first actions after taking office was signing a Jan. 20 executive order on combating discrimination on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation. Biden directed every executive branch agency to examine further steps that could be taken to combat such discrimination.

Under Trump and his housing secretary, Ben Carson, HUD proposed a rule modification that would have allowed single-sex homeless shelters to deny transgender people access.

New HUD Secretary Marcia Fudge called the move a "a critical step in affirming HUD's commitment that no person be denied access to housing or other critical services because of their gender identity." — COMPILED BY DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE STAFF FROM WIRE REPORTS



Nevaeh Wooten (right) from Litchfield, Maine, and her friend, Savannah Desjardins from Wales, Maine, paint their ceramic unicorns Thursday at Moon Stone Pottery in Auburn, Maine. (AP/Sun Journal/Russ Dillingham)

House vote backs D.C. statehood

But Senate fight looms as Republicans squarely in opposition

ASHRAF KHALIL THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — A decadeslong movement to reshape the American political map took a further step Thursday as the House approved a bill to make the nation's capital the 51st state.

Approval was by a 216-208 vote along strict party lines. Republicans oppose the idea given that the new state would be overwhelmingly Democratic — and the proposal faces a far tougher road in the Senate, where even full Democratic support isn't guaranteed.

The legislation proposes creating a 51st state with one representative and two senators, while a sliver of land taking in the White House, the U.S. Capitol and the National Mall would remain as a federal district. Instead of the District of Columbia, the new state would be known as Washington, Douglass Commonwealth — named after famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who lived in Washington from 1877 until his death in 1895.

An identical statehood bill passed the House in 2020 but died in the Senate. Now, with Democrats controlling both chambers and the White House, Republican senators may resort to a filibuster to stymie the bill.

The Senate is split 50/50 with Vice President Kamala Harris as the tiebreaker. But it takes 60 senators to break a concerted filibuster attempt. Senate Democrats could vote to tweak the filibuster rules and slip the statehood issue through a loophole — but that would require total unity, and some moderate Democrats have expressed opposition to that strategy.

Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, a perennial swing vote, has said he would not vote to eliminate or weaken the filibuster. He is also one of a handful of Democratic senators who has not openly supported the D.C. statehood initiative.

For now, though, Democrats and statehood advocates are celebrating their House victory.

D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser tied the issue to America's reck-



Del. Eleanor Holmes-Norton (right), D-D.C., joined by Sen. Tom Carper, D-Del., and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., speaks at a Capitol Hill news conference Thursday ahead of the House vote on H.R. 51 — the Washington, D.C. Admission Act. (AP/J. Scott Applewhite)

VIDEO ONLINE

House passes bill on D.C. statehood



'racist trash' comment arkansasonline.

GOP objects to

com/423jones/

oning over police brutality and issues of racial injustice.

"This vote comes at a critical time when Americans nationwide are eager to deliver on the promise of liberty and justice for all," Bowser said in a statement. "For centuries, an incremental approach to equality in America has delayed this promise for too many. Now is the time for bold action."

Kentucky Republican Rep. James Comer called the measure "flatly unconstitutional."

"It won't withstand judicial scrutiny, but it will cause massive confusion for years as it's reviewed by the courts," Comer said in a statement. "Democrats are pushing D.C. statehood to pack the U.S. Senate with two progressive senators so they can end the filibuster, pack the Supreme Court, enact the Green New Deal, and create the socialist utopia the Squad dreams

The bill received strong support from the White House, which has called Washington's current status "an affront to the democratic values on which our Nation was founded."

During Thursday's floor debate, a succession of Republican representatives decried it as a cynical and unconstitutional power grab. The country's founding fathers, "never wanted D.C. to be a state and then specifically framed the Constitution to say so," said Georgia Republican Rep. Jody Hice.

But Virginia Democratic Rep. Gerald Connolly pointed out that Kentucky was once a part of Virginia, and was carved out as a state by Congress.

Connolly argued that the federal district was theoretical when first conceived, not a community with a higher population than two U.S. states.

"When the Constitution was written, this place didn't exist,"

he said. "When people say this is not about race and partisanship, you can be sure it's about race and partisanship."

During a March hearing by the House oversight committee, GOP representatives claimed D.C. was unfit for statehood and proposed a variety of alternatives that included absolving Washingtonians of federal taxes and "retroceding" most of D.C. back into Maryland.

Opponents also contend that Congress lacks the authority to change D.C.'s status, despite every state other than the original 13 being admitted to the union via congressional vote.

Zack Smith, a legal fellow at the Heritage Institute, a conservative think tank, said the measure would unleash a wave of lawsuits.

D.C. has long chafed under its relationship with Congress, which has the power to essentially veto or alter any local laws. Its population is larger than that of Wyoming or Vermont, and its 712,000 residents pay federal taxes, vote for president and serve in the armed forces, but they have no voting representation in Congress.

Sides signal standoff on raising debt cap

COMPILED BY DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE STAFF FROM WIRE REPORTS

WASHINGTON — The White House on Thursday signaled little appetite for Senate ' early insistence Renublicans that Congress should couple an increase in the country's debt ceiling with either spending cuts or reductions of entitlement programs like Social Security and Medicare, hoping to ward off a major political showdown entering the summer.

A White House official. speaking on condition of anonymity, said President Joe Biden "fully expects that Congress will meet its obligations as it did on a bipartisan basis three times during the Trump Administration and amend the debt limit law as needed."

Under President Donald Trump, Republicans largely abandoned their zeal for austerity and endorsed a series of spending increases, including approving more than \$3 trillion in 2020 alone to address the economic and health toll of the coronavirus pandemic.

The early warning that at which point lawmakers must Senate Republicans are trying vote to suspend it again or raise to reclaim the mantle of fiscal the amount — or eventually risk conservatism occurred a day af- an unprecedented default that ter they gathered to adopt their would carry catastrophic conseconference's guiding rules for quences for the global economy. this session. Unanimously, they agreed to a nonbinding yet symbolic statement that they would not raise the debt ceiling unless lawmakers also cut by a similar amount.

Senate Republicans agreed to stake the position at the request of Sen. Rick Scott of Florida, who regularly has joined other Republicans in blasting Biden and his Democratic allies for seeking major spending in-

"I certainly hope that every member of the Republican conference complies with what the conference rules say," said Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas.

However, Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, told reporters that the resolution was "aspirational."

The debt ceiling is the amount of money the U.S. government can borrow to finance its obligations. Congress suspended the limit through June, Under Trump, Republican

lawmakers did not demand spending cuts as they raised the debt ceiling several times, even as the former president shelled out large sums to fund his priorities, including the military. But the GOP historically has sought to use the debt as leverage in political fights against Democrats, at one point putting the country at risk of default under former President Barack Obama in order to secure a decade of caps on domestic spending.

Fearing a return to those fights, Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon on Wednesday blasted Republicans for trying to hold the debt ceiling

'hostage.' "This is a page from the Obama-era economic sabotage playbook, and I'm not going to let Republicans play games with the economy for their political benefit," he said in a statement.

To avert a showdown, Democrats may have at their disposal a budget process known as reconciliation that could allow them to raise the debt ceiling with only 51 votes. But some of the party's members have expressed reticence to use reconciliation too often. The process also would not allow Democrats to suspend it outright, much as they did two years ago, according to Senate aides.

If Republicans refused to raise the debt ceiling, many economists have warned that it could lead to an economic crisis because confidence in U.S. government debt could plummet. In 2020, the government ran a \$3.1 trillion deficit, meaning it spent \$3.1 trillion more than it brought in through revenue. It made up the difference by issuing debt and borrowing. If it cannot borrow more, the government would be unable to pay all its bills.

Information for this article was contributed by Tony Romm of The Washington Post and by Emily Cochrane of The New York Times.

Kansas governor vetoes transgender sports ban

JOHN HANNA THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TOPEKA, Kan. — Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly on Thursday vetoed a Republican measure that would have made Kansas the latest state with a GOP-controlled legislature — including Arkansas — to ban transgender athletes from girls' and women's school sports. Kelly's action was widely ex-

pected because she had labeled the bill "regressive" and said it would hurt the state's ability to recruit businesses. Conservative Republican lawmakers did not have the two-thirds majorities necessary in both chambers to override a veto when they pushed it to passage earlier this month. The governor cited possible

damage to the state's business climate but emphasized what she said was its broader, "devastating" message that "Kansas is not welcoming to all children and their families.

"As Kansans, we should be focused on how to include all students in extracurricular activities rather than how to exclude those who may be different than us," her veto message said. "Kansas is an inclusive state and our laws should reflect our values."

VIDEO ONLINE

Kelly warns against bill in Monday talk arkansasonline. com/423kelly/



Kansas is among more than 20 states that have considered such a ban this year, pushing back against an executive order from Democratic President Joe Biden aimed at preventing discrimination against transgender students. Idaho enacted such a ban last year, and the Republican governors in Arkansas, Mississippi and Tennessee have signed measures this year.

Sen. Roger Marshall, a Kansas Republican, has been vocal in supporting legislation in Congress. Supporters of such bans argue that they ensure fair competition for "biological" girls and women and preserve decades of hard-won opportunities for them, including college athletic scholarships.

Supporters have also accused corporations and sports bodies such as the NCAA of trying to

bully state lawmakers into not passing a ban. "It doesn't exclude oppor-

tunities for biological girls and

ly will," said Republican state Sen. Renee Erickson, a former college basketball player who was the bill's leading sponsor. Kelly's veto is likely to be an

issue in her race for reelection in 2022. Both of her main GOP rivals, state Attorney General Derek Schmidt and former Gov. Jeff Colyer, said they would have signed the measure. "It's very important to our

culture as a state," said Brittany Jones, advocacy director for the conservative Family Policy Alliance of Kansas. "But I also want to make sure that we're protecting girls now." Supporters of the bill prom-

ised to try to override the veto.

women, while her veto absolute- They'd have to persuade a handful of moderate Republicans who either voted against the bill or abstained to switch. No Democrat voted for it.

Supporters needed to pick

up only one more vote in the Senate but were eight short in the House. "If not this year, we'll keep

trying until we're successful," Erickson said.

Senate Minority Leader Dinah Sykes, a Democrat, said in a statement after the veto: "The Legislature has picked up a nasty habit this year of sticking its nose where it doesn't belong and creating restrictive laws to address problems that don't

IDEA Public Schools Arkansas plans to submit an application for a public, tuition-free, open-enrollment charter school to serve children and families in Pulaski County, with a likely focus on Little Rock and North Little Rock

> **Online Meeting Address:** www.bit.ly/IDEAArkansas Or Join by Phone: Dial 1.866.226.4650, Meeting ID 512 354 9769 Friday, May 7, 2021 at 5:00PM CT

Notice of Public Hearing

Join us to share your input on what K-12 educational offerings your community needs, and to learn more about IDEA



Democrats push to fit Medicare redo in family plan

AND SEUNG MIN KIM

THE WASHINGTON POST WASHINGTON — Congressional Democrats are planning to pursue a major expansion of Medicare as part of President Joe Biden's new \$1.8 trillion economic relief package, defying the White House after it opted against including a major health over-

haul as part of its plan. The early pledges from some party lawmakers, led by prominent members of its progressivewing, threaten to create even more political tension around a package that is already facing no shortage of it. The expansion push comes as Biden on Wednesday stressed in his first address to Congress that he is still committed to making health care more affordable.

They specifically aim to lower the eligibility age for Medicare to either 55 or 60, expand the range of health services the entitlement covers and grant the government new powers to negotiate prescription drug prices. Party lawmakers say their approach could offer new, improved or cheaper coverage to millions of older Americans nation-

Roughly 100 House and Senate Democrats led by Rep. Pramila Javapal of Washington and Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., publicly encouraged Biden in recent days to include the overhaul as part of his latest package, called the American Families Plan, which proposes major investments in the country's safety net programs. Yet Biden opted to propose only additional subsidies for Americans who purchase their health insurance, disappointing many lawmakers who still otherwise support the White House's blueprint.

Sanders said Wednesday he would "absolutely" pursue a Medicare expansion as lawmakers begin to translate Biden's economic vision into legislation. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., the chairman of the tax-focused Finance Committee, similarly pledged that he would "look at every possible vehicle" to lower drug costs.

Sen. Richard Durbin of Illinois, the Democrats' vote-counter in the chamber, said he planned to push for Medicare reforms he saw as a "game-changer." He said he didn't know why the White House ultimately chose to exclude the policies, but he predicted tough work ahead for Democratic leaders in crafting a legislative package that has sufficient support.

"I don't presume that we have a majority going in," Durbin said. "I think we have



Sen. Bernie Sanders talks with reporters on his way to a vote Thursday in the Senate. Sanders said Wednesday that he would "absolutely" pursue a sizable expansion of Medicare. (The New York Times/T.J. Kirkpatrick)

to listen carefully to all the members and particularly those who have some problems, trying to resolve [them]."

The early efforts reflect a broader belief among congressional Democrats that they must more aggressively seize on their narrow but powerful majorities to push policies that long have been stalled in Washington — no matter their cost. Many party lawmakers have pushed Biden at times to spend sky-high sums, sometimes even more than the president himself says he supports, arguing that they have a political mandate to pursue vast economic change.

But health-care revisions are likely to present a significant challenge, threatening to open rifts not just between the two parties but within the Democratic caucus itself. In an early sign of trouble, Sen. Joe Manchin III, D-W.Va., told The Washington Post on Wednesday that he opposes expanding Medicare eligibility even as he supports broader adjustments to the Affordable Care Act, commonly called Obamacare.

"No, I'm not for it, period," Manchin said when asked about efforts to expand the health-care entitlement.

Rethinking Medicare also risks touching off a fierce lobbying barrage on the part of health insurers and pharmaceutical giants, which have mobilized aggressively against such changes in the past. The corporate opposition could add to new political obstacles now facing one of the staple elements of Biden's economic agenda.

In his address to Congress Wednesday night, Biden described his American Families Plan as a "once-in-a-generation" series of federal investments. And he specifically promised "in addition" to that package that he would however, did not seem detry to lower health insurance premiums, reduce drug costs party's leading lawmakers and pursue other reforms to instead said the White House

"This is all about a simple premise: Health care should be a right, not a privilege in America," the president said.

But the overall spending being proposed has drawn staunch opposition from Republicans. Despite adding trillions to the federal deficit under President Donald Trump, GOP lawmakers blasted Biden on Thursday for seeking to spend such sizable amounts — and for trying to couple the spending with proposed tax increases on wealthy families and profitable corporations.

"Instead of empowering all kinds of families with flexibility, this one would just subsidize specific paths that Democrats deem best, so Washington can call the shots from early childhood through college graduation," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, describing Biden's latest package as "another gigantic taxand-spend colossus."

Combined with Biden's stimulus and infrastructure plans, Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) said the total price tag of the president's agenda also threatened to "ignite inflation, which is very harmful to our economy and American families."

Manchin, a closely watched swing vote in virtually all significant policy fights in the Senate, also expressed some trepidation this week about tax increases outlined by Biden, including roughly a doubling of the capital gains tax rate for those earning

more than \$1 million per year. "That's a heavy lift," Manchin said. "We just can't make ourselves noncompetitive. We have an economy that's ready to take off and boom.

We can't put the brakes on it." Most other Democrats, terrea the Affordable Care Act "this should seize on its rare op-

portunity to pursue even larger investments across the economy as part of the new

families plan.

"This is our chance to do big things on housing, and big things on infrastructure, and big things on poverty," Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, the chairman of a key committee that oversees housing, told reporters Wednesday.

For many Democrats, the most enticing target is Medicare, as they try to deliver on their 2020 campaign promises to make health insurance affordable and available. Biden himself endorsed a policy report after the party's presidential primaries — part of a "unity" effort among Democratic contenders, including Sanders — that called for lowering the Medicare enrollment age and expanding

the health services it covers. But Biden opted against including any of those provisions in the American Families Plan, choosing to focus on extending the additional health insurance tax benefits that Congress previously adopted as part of the most recent coronavirus stimulus. The White House pointed to the president's past support for a major expansion of Medicare that would lower the eligibility to age 60 and allow the government to ne-

gotiate drug costs. Asked about the approach, a White House official said the administration had embarked on an outreach campaign in the Capitol. The aide, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Vice President Kamala Harris has been calling lawmakers to get their views on the American Families Plan.

Speaking at a news conference Thursday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., acknowledged "big interest in our caucus" particularly in Medicare reforms that aim to lower drug prices. But she declined to outline a path forward, saying: "What is in one bill or another is not really

Other Democrats pledged to address the priorities in tandem. Sanders, who had lobbied Biden before the release of his plan, said this week that

"No, I'm not for it, period."

- Sen. Joe Manchin, when asked about efforts to expand **Medicare**

lawmakers are working "very hard" to ensure the inclusion of a Medicare expansion. His comment came just hours after he unveiled a government study that showed Americans pay between two and four times more for prescription drugs than citizens of other countries.

Citing the new data, Rep. Frank Pallone Jr., D-N.J., chairman of the House Energy

and Commerce Committee, stressed that tackling drug costs remains "one of my top priorities as we work to pass the American Families Plan."

Jayapal, leader of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, said Democrats across the Capitol are likely to intensify their push out of a belief that the president's plan is the most efficient route to improve Medicare — given the shrinking congressional calendar and the growing

need for an overhaul. "If we have to spend all the way through August working on the jobs and families plan[s], I don't think we have the time," Jayapal said about calls to tackle Medicare independently. "Everything gets harder heading into the mid-

Notice of Public Hearing

IDEA Public Schools Arkansas plans to submit an application for a public, tuition-free, open-enrollment charter school to serve children and families in Pulaski County, with a likely focus on Little Rock and North Little Rock.

> Online Meeting Address: www.bit.ly/IDEAArkansas Or Join by Phone: Dial 1.866.226.4650, Meeting ID 512 354 9769 Friday, May 7, 2021 at 5:00PM CT

Join us to share your input on what K-12 educational offerings your community needs, and to learn more about IDEA







RESERVE A FEATURE FOR YOUR **SPECIAL GRADUATE TODAY!**

This special section will honor the achievements and experiences of Arkansas' 2021 graduating seniors, including photos, quotes and personal notes from those who have had an impact on the graduate's life.

The deadline to reserve your profile is May 25.

Contact Sandra Ward at **sward@adgadvertising.com** or 501-749-7530.



GALLERY ADG

ARKANSASONLINE.COM/GALLERYADG



CALLING ALL ARKANSAS ARTISTS!

The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette's GALLERY ADG invites you to share your art virtually with the community.

Paintings, pastels, charcoal, digital, pottery, sculpture, quilts and more. Artists can share their original art and find their audience — for free!

There is no limit to the number of works you can post in this free community gallery. Submit high resolution photos of your work with the title of the artwork and a brief description at arkansasonline.com/galleryadg.



Arkansas Democrat To Gazette

*Artwork is not for sale through this site or the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette. Contact the artist directly to purchase the artwork. All submissions will be reviewed by the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette before being published online. Artists who are concerned about digital piracy should watermark their photos.