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Make Today Different

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World Insights: White House, GOP reach deal on infrastructure, final passage uncertain

WASHINGTON, June 24 (Xinhua) -- After much wrangling with Republicans, U.S. President Joe Biden announced Thursday that a deal has been reached on a nationwide, once-in-a-lifetime U.S. infrastructure plan.

"We have a deal," Biden said after emerging from a meeting with a bipartisan group of senators.

"They have my word. I'll stick with what we've proposed, and they've given me their word as well," the president said.

"None of us got all that we wanted. I didn't get all that I wanted. But this reminds me of the days we used to get an awful lot done up in the United States Congress," he said.

Indeed, the bill, if signed into law, could be a big win for a president who campaigned on bringing the nation together, at a time of bitter partisanship in Washington and political divisions nationwide.

While the price tag is far less than the 2-trillion-U.S.-dollar package he initially wanted, the bill, if passed, could open the door for Biden's more ambitious proposals that total around 4 trillion dollars.

Thursday's agreed-upon framework comprises 579 billion dollars in new spending, according to NBC News, a U.S. broadcaster.

Around 300 billion dollars will be spent on transportation, with around 100 billion for roads and bridges and 66 billion for railways, reported CNBC, a U.S. business news outlet.

Despite Thursday's handshake deal, it remains unknown whether the bill will get enough votes in Congress to become law.

Some progressive Democrats slammed the legislation on Thursday as not being anywhere near the size and scope of the plan they had hoped for. That would include investments in climate change, human resources and elsewhere.

"We have to have the whole thing, not just cleave off a little piece of it," Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren was as quoted as saying Thursday by CNBC.

The clock is ticking, and Biden wants to get a deal completed soon, as a president's ability to keep the momentum going can quickly diminish, experts said.

At the same time, Democrats have their eye on the calendar, knowing their slim majority could be overturned after next year's Midterm elections.



"Some version of the infrastructure bill will pass because America's highways and bridges are crumbling, and both Republicans and Democrats like to bring federal money back to their states," Brookings Institution Senior Fellow Darrell West told Xinhua.

"This bill is a high priority for President Biden, so he will do what it takes to pass it," West said.

While both parties agree that the nation is badly in need of a major infrastructure upgrade, the two sides have had many disagreements on what should be included in the bill, as well as how to pay for it.

Republicans define infrastructure the traditional way, sticking to roads and bridges, while Democrats maintain a broader definition of the term, to include investments in climate change and a laundry list of other concerns.

Republicans have blasted much of this as a progressive wish list that has nothing to do with infrastructure, while Democrats contend that investments in climate change and human resources are needed to make the nation competitive in the 21st century.

Still unresolved is how to pay for the plan, which has been a serious source of contention between the two parties since the previous administration, and Republicans will not permit any new tax

revenue, while the White House contends such a move could raise ten times that amount.

Shirley Garnet, a 64-year-old retiree in the U.S. state of New Jersey, told Xinhua that if the

money pays for infrastructure with no pork, "that's fine," but he added that when "(former U.S. President) Obama rammed through his stimulus package,"



increases.

Under discussion is the possibility of boosting the budget of the Internal Revenue Service, in a bid to clamp down on tax cheats and force them to pay up.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, this could raise around 60 billion dollars in tax

it didn't make much impact in terms of new jobs



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China's cross-departmental joint working group visits injured Chinese nationals in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, July 16 (Xinhua) -- Wu Wei, head of China's cross-departmental joint working group to Pakistan, and Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Nong Rong Friday afternoon visited the injured Chinese nationals from the Dasu terrorist attack at the Combined Military Hospital in Rawalpindi, near the federal capital Islamabad.

Wu, also deputy director-general of the Department of External Security Affairs of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Nong asked about the condition of and treatment for each wounded Chinese national.

Wu conveyed the care, solicitude and sympathy of the Chinese leadership to the injured one by one, saying that their compatriots in China care a lot about their safety.

The joint working group has got in touch with a cross-departmental team from the Pakistani side, Wu said, adding that both sides will continue to spare no effort to conduct medical treatment for them.

Wu said that he hopes the injured Chinese nationals can set their mind at rest and get recovered at an early date.

China's cross-departmental joint working group left Beijing for Islamabad early Friday morning Beijing time, and met with people from different relevant Pakistani departments after their arrival.

At around 7:00 a.m. local time Wednesday, the shuttle vehicles of the Dasu Hydropower Project for which a Chinese company is contracted to build, were hit by a blast when they were heading to the construction site in Pakistan's northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, leaving nine Chinese nationals and three Pakistanis dead, according to the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan.



Largest wildfire in U.S. Oregon grows to 227,000 acres with 7 pct containment

SAN FRANCISCO, July 16 (Xinhua) -- The Bootleg Fire, the largest blaze burning the northeast of Klamath Falls in the U.S. state of Oregon, continues to grow, measuring more than 227,000 acres (about 920 square km), an area larger than New York City, according to a report by the OregonLive on Friday.

The fire, beginning on July 6, is now 7 percent contained. It has destroyed at least 11 homes and

35 other structures in Klamath County. Another 1,900 remain under threat.

The fire had driven about 2,000 people to evacuate. Its growth prompted new evacuations in Lake County on Thursday evening, the OregonLive report said.

Bootleg Fire operations spokesperson Holly Krake said that

strong winds pushed the fire northeast, driving it toward the smaller Log Fire, about six miles northeast of the Bootleg Fire's eastern line.

Editor's Choice



A man is detained after a fight broke out during a Loudoun County School Board meeting which included a discussion of Critical Race Theory and transgender students, in Ashburn, Virginia. REUTERS/Evelyn Hockstein



Pope Francis greets a person dressed as Spider-Man after the general audience at the Vatican. REUTERS/Remo Casilli



A person celebrates the summer solstice at the Kokino megalithic observatory, near the city of Kumanovo, North Macedonia. REUTERS/Ognen Teofilovski



People carry candles past the "The Motherland Calls" monument illuminated in red during a ceremony to mark the 80th anniversary of German invasion into Soviet Union at the Mamayev Kurgan World War Two memorial complex in Volgograd, Russia. REUTERS/Kirill Braga



People sunbathe on the beach on the Sicilian island of Lampedusa, as a flow of migrants arriving continuous on the Mediterranean island, in Lampedusa, Italy. REUTERS/Guglielmo Mangiapane



Police officers salute the casket of K-9 Kitt in Gillette Stadium during a memorial service held in honor of the police dog, who was killed during a domestic violence call, in Boston, Massachusetts. Jessica Rinaldi/Pool

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

BUSINESS

Lockdown Protests Held Worldwide



Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

The anti-lockdown protests that have garnered so much attention in the United States in recent weeks may seem like a uniquely American phenomenon. Writer Emma Grey Ellis called them an “American mess,” describing them as “a modern permutation of an identity crisis with roots very deep in America’s individualist history.” The protests have been compared to other American political movements, from Trump rallies to the rise of the Tea Party in 2009, which took its own name from the 1773 Boston Tea Party, a seminal event in US history that helped spark the American Revolution and came to symbolize the fundamental American trait of rejection of tyranny and government overreach. But while the anti-lockdown protests that have taken place in Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, Minnesota, North Carolina, Utah, and elsewhere certainly have a distinctly American flavor, they are far from unique to America. Similar protests have taken place almost everywhere you look around the world. Just this month alone, thousands of people from Latin America to Europe have demonstrated against aggressive government policies intended to curb the coronavirus outbreak. They don’t perfectly mirror the protests in the US, but there are some striking similarities.



COVID-19 Anti-lockdown protests
Anti-lockdown protests took place this past weekend in over a dozen European countries in response to strict government restrictions to control a third wave of COVID-19 infections. The sentiment swept across the continent with demonstrations in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Romania, Serbia, Sweden, the United Kingdom and others. Meanwhile, France and Poland announced tighter lockdown measures as new virus variants spread and the European Union’s vaccination program stalls. Unlike the United States, European lockdown measures have been more severe, demanding prolonged shutdowns of nonessential businesses, schools and travel restrictions. In its earlier lockdowns, France required citizens to carry documents explaining why they were out of their homes. Residents were limited to one hour of outdoor exercise per day, includ-

ing walking a pet. The United Kingdom continues to prohibit gatherings of more than two people outside the home, including for peaceful protests. Germany banned residents from traveling more than 15 kilometers (9.3 miles) from their homes if they lived in high-risk areas and the European Union adopted travel restrictions throughout the 27-member bloc. Now, 12 months into the pandemic, many Europeans are frustrated, fatigued and taking to the streets, largely unmasked, in defiance of public health orders.



Swedish authorities dispersed hundreds of protesters in Stockholm who gathered in violation of the government’s restrictions on large gatherings. Video showed protesters being arrested and holding signs that read, “Freedom for security,” “Stop dictatorship,” and “They inject us with poison.” Unlike other countries, Sweden remained open during the early part of the pandemic but implemented tougher restrictions as cases accelerated in the winter. In the Netherlands, police fired water cannons at hundreds of protesters who gathered in Amsterdam’s Museum Square, a popular site for demonstrations. Italians took to the streets against restrictions that have closed schools, businesses, restaurants, cafes and left the entire country under a 10 p.m. curfew. Roughly 20,000 people showed up in the central German city of Kassel to protest the lockdown, according to Deutsche Welle. Police used pepper spray, batons and water cannons to disperse demonstrators. Another 500 demonstrators took to the streets in Berlin. The unrest followed a Friday announcement by German Chancellor Angela Merkel that the country’s leaders would “pull the emergency brake” and reinstate lockdowns on schools and businesses through April. The largest number of arrests occurred in London after thousands took to the streets in violation of nationwide pandemic restrictions that specifically forbid protest gatherings. Demonstrators hurled bottles and other projectiles at

police, trying to break up the crowds. Close to three dozen people were arrested Saturday during the clashes.



It was a dramatic reaction to what activists see as an undemocratic law masked in public health authorities. The U.K. law strictly limits the reasons a person can leave their home and imposes fines of up to 10,000 (\$13,864) for anyone charged with holding a gathering or more than 30 people. Ahead of the protests, the London Metropolitan Police reiterated the law stating, “The right to protest must be balanced against the rights of others and the protection of public health.” Protesters held signs that denounced government “tyranny” and called the pandemic restrictions “A cure worse than the disease.” Big Brother Watch, a civil liberties campaign, argued, “A country cannot be described as a democracy if people do not have the freedom to protest.” The group is working with members of the British Parliament who are calling to end protest exemptions in coronavirus regulations. The protest restrictions are set to expire next week. Police have also come under scrutiny for forcibly breaking up a candlelit vigil to denounce violence against women. The protests across Europe were part of a Worldwide Rally for Freedom, organized to oppose government-imposed coronavirus mandates and supported by conspiracy groups. They were also a sign of resentment against the way many European governments have handled the pandemic. “You can imagine the frustration,” said Heather Conley, director of the Europe, Russia, and Eurasia program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. “It’s really a perfect storm of issues.” First, European lockdowns have been more restrictive than what most Americans experienced, even at the beginning of the pandemic. Second, Europe has been dealing with the B.1.1.7 variant, which originated in the U.K. and is more contagious and potentially more deadly than other strains of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. That has put added strain on health care resources.



Paris hospitals reached capacity last week and began transferring patients to other regions. Poland hospitals are under pressure as the number of new cases exceeds the height of the November surge. “No government wants to do this,” Conley said of the third lockdown. “But the fact of the matter is, Europe has to do this because the hospital systems are going to be overwhelmed again.” Third, some parts of Europe have struggled to provide relief for workers and businesses impacted by coronavirus lockdowns. Unemployment also remains high, at 8.2% across the Euro area. Unlike the United States, which spent trillions of dollars in direct payment checks, unemployment assistance and small business loans, Europe’s relief effort was decentralized. States with larger budgets, like Germany, were able to provide more support. Furloughed German workers can receive up to 87% of their pre-pandemic wages through the end of 2021. Countries like Italy and Spain, hard-hit by the virus, unemployment and fiscal instability, have to rely on a European Union recovery fund, that likely won’t be available until 2022. Finally, much of Europe has been frustrated by the slow rollout of vaccines across the continent. The European Union signed agreements for hundreds of millions of vaccines from BioNTech-Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca. Altogether the EU has lined up 2.6 billion vaccine doses to be delivered by the end of 2021.



However, out of a population of 447 million people, recent data show only 70 million vaccines have been delivered and 51 million shots have been administered. By comparison, Great Britain, now separated from the EU, has administered more than 28 million shots and currently has the second-highest rate of any nation for vaccine doses per 100 people. (Courtesy nbcmontana.com)

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

COMMUNITY

COVID-19: Research Points To Long-Term Neurological Effects



Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

A recent paper examining existing evidence argues that SARS-CoV-2 infection might increase the risk of long-term neurological problems, including cognitive decline and dementia. Nearly 1 year after the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, was identified, global cases have surpassed 88 million. Although a number of vaccines have been approved, the rollout will take time. In the meantime, researchers continue studying COVID-19 in an attempt to slow the spread and reduce severe symptoms. A recent perspective article, which appears in *Alzheimer’s & Dementia: The Journal of the Alzheimer’s Association*, reviews research into past viral illnesses, including the flu pandemic from a century earlier. The authors believe the research indicates COVID-19 could cause a lasting effect on the brain.



Other scientists are trying to piece together a picture of what life may look like in the long run for someone who has

had COVID-19. **Neurotropic viruses**
Scientists consider the SARS-CoV-2 virus a “neurotropic” virus, because it can enter nerve cells. Neurotropic viruses include the mumps, rabies, and Epstein-Barr viruses. While some neurotropic viruses cause milder symptoms, others can cause swelling in the brain, paralysis, and death. Some flu-like viruses are neurotropic and similar in structure to the novel coronavirus. As such, researchers looked at these viruses to try to gain insight into what type of long-term effects to expect in people who have recovered from COVID-19. Dr. de Erausquin, who is a neurology professor at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, explains: “Those respiratory viruses included H1N1 and SARS-CoV. The SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes COVID-19, is also known to impact the brain and nervous system.”



“Since the flu pandemic of 1918 and

1918, many of the flu-like diseases have been associated with brain disorders,” says lead author Dr. Gabriel A. de Erausquin.

According to the scientists, an elevated risk of Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, and mental health problems could potentially be connected to these flu-like illnesses.

Importance of neurological symptoms
Some people with COVID-19 do not experience any symptoms, while others have symptoms ranging from mild to severe.

Some of the hallmark symptoms include: dry cough, fever, and difficulty breathing. Additionally, an estimated 15–25% of people with the viral illness may have neurological symptoms, including: loss of sense of taste and smell, altered mental state and headache. To enter cells, SARS-CoV-2 binds to ACE2 receptors on cell membranes. The olfactory bulb, which is the part of the brain receiving sensations of smell, harbors a high concentration of these receptors. The olfactory bulb also has strong connections to the hippocampus — the area responsible for memory.



While losing the sense of smell may not seem serious at first, it is still important, since it is tied directly to brain function.

According to Dr. de Erausquin, “The trail of the virus, when it invades the brain, leads almost straight to the hippocampus.” “That is believed to be one of the sources of the cognitive impairment observed in COVID-19 patients. We suspect it may also be part of the reason why there will be an accelerated cognitive decline over time in susceptible individuals,” he adds.

Among severe neurological issues during SARS-CoV-2 infection, patients may develop fluid on the brain, inflam-

mation in the brain, and seizures.

Lasting impact of COVID-19
COVID-19 can cause severe damage to the lungs, and that damage can be irreversible. However, according to the authors’ research, it appears that the possible fallout from COVID-19 may extend far beyond lung damage.

The authors write that “respiratory problems due to SARS-CoV-2 are thought to be due in part to brain stem dysregulation, as are possibly some of the gastrointestinal symptoms.”

Based on the idea that COVID-19 can cause damage to the brain, it is possible that people who have had the novel coronavirus but were either asymptomatic or experienced mild symptoms may face problems down the road. However, because COVID-19 is a new disease, scientists will need to carry out longer-term studies to confirm these theories.

“As the *Alzheimer’s & Dementia* article points out, the under-recognized medical history of these viruses over the last century suggests a strong link to brain diseases that affect memory and behavior,” comments Dr. Maria C. Carrillo.



Alzheimer’s Association chief science officer and paper co-author. “In this difficult time, we can create a ‘silver lining’ by capitalizing on the Alzheimer’s Association’s global reach and reputation to bring the research community together to illuminate COVID-19’s long-term impact on the brain,” says Dr. Carrillo. (Courtesy medicalnewstoday.com)

Related
Stanford Researchers Develop Single-Dose Nanoparticle Covid-19 Vaccine That Doesn’t Need Cold Storage
Researchers have successfully tested a nanoparticle Covid-19 vaccine which, as yet, doesn’t appear to have any of the

side effects or distribution issues plaguing the current generation of vaccines in use. The scientists at the lab of Stanford University biochemist Peter S. Kim were already working on vaccines for the likes of Ebola, HIV and pandemic influenza when the coronavirus pandemic hit, and they quickly channeled all of their efforts into fighting the new scourge. The team has already produced and tested a promising new vaccine which could provide the solution to many of the issues frustrating global vaccination efforts. Nanoparticle vaccines are often just as effective as their virus-based counterparts, while encountering fewer of the drawbacks. For example, nanoparticle vaccines can be produced faster, don’t require the extensive cold storage supply chain for delivery to immunization centers, are less likely to produce side effects, and can be produced at a lower cost, if all goes to plan.

Early results from vaccine tests on mice indicate that Stanford’s nanoparticle inoculation may grant immunity after just one dose. (Courtesy rt.com)

