

Wires 9/8/20

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US Senators Call on Trump to Extend New START Treaty - Letter

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Four Democratic and Republican Senators on Tuesday sent a letter to President Donald Trump urging him to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) that is set to expire early next year.

"We write to urge you to immediately extend our New START arms control agreement with Russia for another five years," Senators Dianne Feinstein, Rand Paul, Chris Van Hollen and Susan Collins said in the letter.

The senators said the New STAR has pivotal importance in reducing the chances of nuclear confrontation between the United States and Russia.

They warned about the dangerous and destabilizing effect if the treaty is allowed to expire as it remains the last existing arms control agreement between the two countries.

"Losing New START's extensive and effective verification regime would create greater uncertainties about Russia's current and future nuclear plans, intentions and capabilities," the senators said. "As transparency between our mutual nuclear force structures decreases, it could undermine fundamental prerequisites of mutual deterrence and increase the risks of nuclear crises similar to those we experienced during the Cold War, like the Cuban Missile Crisis."

The New START will expires on February 5 if it is not extended. Russian President Vladimir Putin previously proposed extending the treaty for five years without any preconditions.

However, the Trump administration has emphasized the need to include China in the arms control negotiations so as a new trilateral nuclear deal can be reached. China has repeatedly rejected the idea.

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Trump Signs Measure to Extend Moratorium on Offshore Drilling

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump on Tuesday signed an executive order to extend a moratorium on offshore drilling in Florida's Gulf coast and to expand the temporary drilling ban into the state's Atlantic coast.

"In a few moments I will sign a presidential order extending the moratorium on offshore drilling on Florida's gulf coast and expanding it to Florida's Atlantic coast as well as the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina," Trump said.

Trump said in a copy of the presidential memorandum that the existing moratorium will be extended for another 10 years starting on July 1, 2022.

Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden weighed in on Trump's executive order, describing it as a fair-weather decision made in light of the US election. Biden emphasized that he also opposes new offshore drilling.

The Trump administration, which has been keen on rolling back federal regulations on the US energy sector, had promised energy industry executives it would open up those zones to offshore drilling.

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General Motors Sells Discounted Electric Cars to Uber Drivers to Promote Cleaner Air

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - A partnership between the ride-sharing company Uber and General Motors (GM) will allow drivers to purchase electric vehicles and charge equipment at preferential prices, GM said in a press release on Tuesday.

"Improving access to EVs [electric vehicles] for on-demand service providers can help reduce overall tailpipe emissions in cities across the country and help accelerate widespread EV adoption," GM Director of Sales for Global Innovation Sigal Cordeiro said in the release. "Our collaboration with Uber will facilitate drivers' switch to an EV, empowering these drivers, their passengers and communities to experience electric vehicles and contribute to cleaner air in our cities."

Eligible Uber drivers will receive the same discount for the Chevrolet Bolt EV that is now available to GM employees plus a 20 percent discount on Bolt accessories including at-home charging equipment, the release said.

GM plans to begin offering the discounts to qualified drivers in the cities of Los Angeles and Denver before expanding the program to the rest of the United States.

The program is intended to help accelerate the rideshare industry's transition to an all-electric, zero-emissions future, according to the release.

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Rochester Police Command Staff Retire Amid Backlash From Daniel Prude's Death - Mayor

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The Rochester Police Department command staff retired amid protests over the death of African American man Daniel Prude in police custody in March, Mayor Lovely Warren said during a virtual City Council meeting on Tuesday.

"I do want to inform you that the entire Rochester Police Department command staff has announced their retirement, that includes the police chief [La'Ron Singletary]," Warren said.

The mayor also said that more resignations from the Rochester Police Department are expected in the future.

Last week, the Rochester Police Department released body camera footage taken on March 30 by officers who apprehended Prude, who ran naked through the streets at night. Prude's family had called 911 saying he was going through a mental health emergency.

The video footage shows that Prude complied with the officers' orders, but started to shout and spit once he was handcuffed. The officers placed a spit bag over his head and pinned Prude to the ground. Prude vomited and appeared lifeless about two minutes later. According to Prude's family, he died of asphyxiation.

On Saturday, New York Attorney General Letitia James said in a statement that her office was moving to empanel a grand jury as part of the investigation into Prude's death, which has sparked major protests in Rochester.

The Prude family has called for the police officers to be fired and criminal charges to be filed against them.

Earlier this month, Warren announced that she had suspended the police officers suspected of being involved in Prude's death.

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Wall Street's Rout Continues as Tech-Heavy Nasdaq Falls Over 4%

NEW YORK, Sept 8 (Sputnik) - The sell-off in US stocks showed no signs of slowing on Tuesday as Wall Street's tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite fell more than 4 percent on continuous worries about America's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Nasdaq fell 465 points to close at 10,848, losing about 10 percent since last week when it reached record highs above 12,000. The S&P 500, a barometer for the top 500 US stocks, fell 2.8 percent to close at 3,332, after hitting an all-time high of 3,588 last week. The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the broadest US stock indicator, slid 2.3 percent to finish at 27,500, after scaling 29,000 last week.

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G7 Foreign Ministers Call for Full Transparency on Navalny Case - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The top diplomats of the Group of Seven (G7) in a joint statement on Tuesday urged Russia to establish full transparency on the alleged poisoning of opposition figure Alexey Navalny.

"We, the G7 foreign ministers, call on Russia to urgently and fully establish transparency on who is responsible for this abhorrent poisoning attack and, bearing in mind Russia's commitments under the Chemical Weapons Convention, to bring the perpetrators to justice," the statement said.

Last week, the German government said traces of a nerve agent from the Novichok group were detected in Navalny's system. Moscow said Russian doctors found no toxic substances before he was transported to Germany and that Berlin has provided no evidence to support its claims. The ministers said Germany briefed G7 members on clinical and toxicological findings. They also said Navalny is in intensive care and remains in serious condition.

The G7 ministers said they will monitor how Russia responds to international calls for an explanation of the incident.

The 44-year-old was initially treated in the Siberian city of Omsk, where the plane made an emergency landing. Two days later, once the doctors established he was fit for cross-border aerial transportation, Navalny was flown to the Charite hospital in Berlin for further treatment. On Monday, Berlin's Charite hospital announced that the politician's condition had improved and he was woken up from an induced coma.

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RPT - G7 Foreign Ministers Call for Full Transparency on Navalny Case - Statement

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Trump Says to Sign Measure to Extend Moratorium on Offshore Drilling

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"In a few moments I will sign a presidential order extending the moratorium on offshore drilling on Florida's gulf coast and expanding it to Florida's Atlantic coast as well as the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina," Trump said.

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US Selects Buyer for Chief of Mission Residence Near Tel Aviv - Embassy

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The US government has selected the buyer for the former Chief of Mission residence in Israel, the American embassy said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The buyer was selected solely on the basis of having submitted the highest and best offer. The selected buyer and the unsuccessful bidders have been notified," the embassy said.

US diplomats expect to vacate the property, located in Tel Aviv's neighborhood of Herzliya, by next spring without further plans to continue leasing or renting it, the embassy added.

"The short-term lease of the property between the closing date and the Spring of 2021 allows for an orderly transition period to remove and safeguard government property," the statement said.

This sale of the residence fully secures the US embassy move to Jerusalem, announced by President Donald Trump in December 2017. The decision means that the US formally recognized Jerusalem as Israel's undivided capital.

So far, only Guatemala moved its embassy to Jerusalem, while most countries condemned Washington's initiative.

Last Friday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Serbia would move its embassy to Jerusalem by next July, becoming the first European country to do so.

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Dr. Fauci Says 'Cautiously Optimistic' of Obtaining Safe Coronavirus Vaccine by December

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases head Dr. Anthony Fauci said on Tuesday he was "cautiously optimistic" that a safe and effective vaccine for the novel strain of the coronavirus will be available by the end of 2020.

"I have been projecting ... that by the end of the year, by November December, we will know whether we have a safe and effective vaccine," Fauci told a live-streamed event. "I feel cautiously optimistic that we will, given the preliminary data that we've seen."

The quest for a safe and effective vaccine has become a politically-charged issue in the United States - and the world - with President Donald Trump hinting there will be one approved vaccine before he stands for reelection on November 3.

The Trump administration said it is working with six trial vaccines for the novel strain of the coronavirus and three have entered the key Phase 3 trial of public testing.

Critics, including numerous medical professionals, have charged that the new vaccine may not be safe given that it is completely experimental, may have DNA-changing technologies and may be produced through a process that is also used to produce genetically modified organisms. Democrats have accused Trump of pressuring relevant agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration to cut corners and produce a vaccine quickly in order to boost his chances of getting reelected in November.

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US Navy Ends Search for Nimitz Aircraft Carrier Sailor Missing in Arabian Sea

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - A two-day search for a sailor believed to have fallen into the Arabian Sea from the US aircraft carrier Nimitz ended without results, the Navy's Fifth Fleet said in a press release on Tuesday.

"Following a thorough search of the ship and man overboard alert Sept. 6, Nimitz, guided-missile cruiser USS Princeton and aircraft from the US Navy and Air Force conducted search and rescue operations in the North Arabian Sea where it was reported that [Information Systems Technician 2nd Class Ian] McNight was missing," the release said.

The search was concluded on Tuesday "after extensive efforts to locate McKnight," the release added.

The Navy announcement followed notification of McKnight's next of kin, according to the release.

The Nimitz began its deployment to the Pacific and the Middle East in late April, after the carrier's crew of nearly 5,000 completed quarantine and testing to ensure the vessel was COVID-19 free.

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US Identifies Al-Shabab Terror Leader Killed in Recent Airstrike - Africa Command

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The United States named the Somalia-based al-Shabab terrorist group's leader, who was targeted and killed in an August airstrike, as Abdulqadir Commandos, the Africa Command (AFRICOM) said in a press release on Tuesday. "The al-Shabab leader was killed in the airstrike near Saakow, Somalia. He held numerous positions within the al-Shabab terrorist organization, including recently serving as a senior al-Shabab commander," the release said.

Abdulqadir Commandos was killed on August 25 in one of 46 airstrikes so far this year to degrade the al-Shabab network, the release said.

AFRICOM supports operations by Somali armed forces against al-Shabab, the East African affiliate of the al Qaeda terror group (banned in Russia).

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US 'Very Concerned' About Russian Flybys - Army Chief of Staff

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The US military is very concerned about recent incidents of Russian fighters flying near American aircraft, Army Chief of Staff General James McConville said on Monday.

On Friday, the Russian Defense Ministry said eight fighters were scrambled to intercept three US bombers that approached the Russian border over the Black Sea.

"[US] Chairman [of Joint Chiefs Mark Milley] has talked to his [Russian] counterpart and made clear he is very, very concerned," McConville said during a podcast hosted by Defense One. Top US commanders wanted to understand what had happened and why, McConville said. He also said the United States certainly does not want to have any great power conflict with Russia or China.

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Canada Chief Public Health Officer Says Rise in COVID-19 Transmissions 'Not Good Sign'

TORONTO, September 8 (Sputnik) - The transmission of the novel coronavirus in Canada is on the rise and the increase in cases is not a good sign, the country's Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Theresa Tam told reporters on Tuesday.

"[The reproduction number] is now... at the national level, because of what is happening in the larger provinces, is hovering above 1, which means one person is transmitting to one person - just over - that is not a good sign, don't want that to happen. That has to be monitored very carefully," Tam said.

Tam reiterated that the latest rise in cases is largely attributed to a spike in infections among young adults engaging in social activities as the virus-induced lockdown is increasingly scaled back. Last week, the Canadian authorities reported an average of 545 new infections - a 25 per cent increase over the previous week.

Tam said next week will be crucial in the fight against the novel coronavirus given that children have returned to school this week.

As of Tuesday, the number of novel coronavirus cases in Canada has surpassed 132,500 with 9,146 virus-related deaths, according to government data.

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Biden Retains Huge Lead Over Trump Among African-American Voters - Poll

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden retains a huge lead among African-American voters over his rival President Donald Trump, but the lead may not be a decisive factor in the November 3 election, a new Newsmax and John Zogby Strategies poll revealed on Tuesday.

"Biden leads Trump 81 percent - 14 percent among blacks; [African-American] majority supports BLM [Black Lives Matter], police," Zogby Strategies said in a press release explaining the poll. However, Trump's 14 percent is still a larger proportion of the African-American vote than the percentage he won in the 2016 election and greater still than the percentage the Republican candidates gained in their two defeats at the hands of Barack Obama with Biden as his running mate in the 2008 and 2012 elections, Zogby Strategies said.

"If Trump's 14 percent total holds into November, this could hurt the Democratic nominee again in the must-win critical Rust Belt, along with Minnesota, Georgia, and Texas, which Biden hopes to win," the release said.

Trump does especially well among young African-Americans - 18-24-year-olds - with 38 percent to Biden's 61 percent, Zogby Strategies said.

The online poll of 600 black likely voters nationwide was conducted September 4-7 and has a margin of sampling error of +/-4.1 percentage points.

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US Military Would Only Recommend Combat as 'Last Resort' - Army Chief of Staff

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US military leaders would only recommend sending troops into combat as a last resort, Army Chief of Staff General James McConville said on Tuesday.

On Sunday, President Donald Trump told reporters Pentagon leaders want to fight wars to ensure defense contractors can continue making bombs and planes.

"I can assure the American people that the senior leaders would only recommend sending our troops to combat when it is required in national security and in the last resort," McConville said during a podcast hosted by Defense One.

McConville refused to respond directly to questions about his reaction to Trump's comments and re-emphasized that the US armed forces and their commanders should stay totally out of politics.

The US Army chief of staff also said the regular army should be used only as a last resort to quell domestic unrest.

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US Sanctions Lebanese Politicians Ali Hassan Khalil, Yusuf Finyanus - Treasury

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed counter-terrorism sanctions on former Lebanese ministers Ali Hassan Khalil and Yusuf Finyanus over their alleged corruption and support for Hezbollah, the Treasury Department said in a notice on Tuesday.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned former Lebanese government ministers Yusuf Finyanus and Ali Hassan Khalil, who provided material support to [Hezbollah] and engaged in corruption," the Treasury said in a press release.

Khalil, who is a member of the Amal party, previously served as a finance minister and public health minister in Lebanon.

The Treasury said Khalil during his time in office colluded with Hezbollah to gain political success and also moved money from government ministries to Hezbollah-associated institutions while evading US sanctions.

Finyanus, a member of the Marada party, previously served as Lebanon's transportation and public works minister. Finyanus used his position to ensure million-dollar government contracts went to Hezbollah-owned companies, the Treasury said.

US Secretary Mike Pompeo said in a statement that corruption among Lebanon's political leaders and Hezbollah has resulted in a dysfunctional political system and tragedies such as the explosion at the Beirut port on August 4. Pompeo added that the United States would continue to support calls for an end to corruption.

The United States has been actively imposing sanctions on persons or entities with links to the Hezbollah movement as Lebanon currently goes through its worst economic crisis in 30 years, which has led to ongoing mass protests.

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Trump 'Actively Trying to Kill New York City' By Depriving Funds - Cuomo

NEW YORK, September 8 (Sputnik) - New York Governor Andrew Cuomo on Tuesday accused US President Donald Trump of "actively trying to kill" New York City and other cities in the United States run by Democrats by not providing them federal funds amid the novel coronavirus pandemic.

"Not only is he holding up [funds for] New York City for it to drop dead, he is actively trying to kill New York City," Cuomo told a news conference. "It is personal. I think it's psychological." Trump has threatened to cancel jobless benefits for individuals engaged in riots in New York and other Democrat-run cities that have been rocked by protests over alleged police mistreatment of minorities.

Democrats have criticized Trump for what they consider is fumbling the federal response to the novel coronavirus pandemic that has resulted in 6 million infections and nearly 190,000 virus-related deaths in the United States.

Cuomo went further by accusing Trump of directly causing the outbreak in New York. He "That is a fact. Donald Trump and his incompetence caused this," he said.

Cuomo said the pandemic was caused by the "European virus" given Trump's failure to mitigate the outbreak in time by closing borders to Europe as opposed to the US president calling it the "Chinese virus" and having closed the borders with China in February.

The New York governor also lamented Trump posing messages daily on social media like Twitter aimed at "locations and the outposts of his enemies" while continuing to deny them expedient development funds to contain the novel coronavirus.

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US House Foreign Affairs Leaders Call for Probe of Navalny Case

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The top two lawmakers on the US House Foreign Affairs Committee in a letter on Tuesday urged President Donald Trump's administration to open a probe into the alleged poisoning of Russian opposition figure Alexey Navalny.

"We... formally request that the executive branch investigate whether Russia has used chemical weapons in violation of international law or has used lethal chemical weapons against its own nationals," panel chairman Eliot Engel and ranking member Michael McCaul said in the letter. Last week, the German government said traces of a nerve agent from the Novichok group was detected in Navalny's system. Moscow said Russian doctors found no toxic substances before he was transported to Germany and that Berlin has provided no evidence to support its claims. The congressmen also said the request, per US law, triggers a 60-day evaluation period. If the investigation determines chemical weapons were used a sanctions process would commence, the letter added.

The 44-year-old was initially treated in the Siberian city of Omsk, where the plane made an emergency landing. Two days later, once the doctors established he was fit for cross-border aerial transportation, Navalny was flown to the Charite hospital in Berlin for further treatment.

On Monday, Berlin's Charite hospital announced that the politician's condition has improved and he has been taken out of an induced coma.

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US Imposes Sanctions on Lebanese Politician Ali Hassan Khalil - Treasury Department

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed counter-terrorism sanctions on Lebanese politician and member of Parliament Ali Hassan Khalil, the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) said in a notice on Tuesday. OFAC also imposed counter-terrorism sanctions on Lebanese national Yusuf Finyanus.

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US, Tunisian Military Aircraft Conduct Mission in North Africa - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Four US and Tunisian military aircraft conducted an interoperability training mission in North Africa in order to improve responsiveness to common threats, Africa Command (AFRICOM) said in a statement on Tuesday. "The mission included two Tunisian F-5s and two US B-52s, highlighting the militaries' ability to operate jointly," AFRICOM said. In May, US and Tunisian defense officials vowed to boost security cooperation in light of the instability and ongoing violence in neighboring Libya. Since 2011, the US has invested more than \$1 billion in the Tunisian military to enhance border security, military intelligence, and air-ground operations, according to AFRICOM.

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US Lawmakers Open Probe of Recent Deaths at Fort Hood Military Base

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Lawmakers in the House of Representatives will investigate military leadership at Fort Hood in the state of Texas following recent soldier deaths in which murder is suspected by Army investigators, the chairs of two House subcommittees said in a letter to Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy on Tuesday. "By mutual agreement, the [subcommittees] are jointly investigating whether an alarming pattern of recent tragedies at Fort Hood, Texas, may be symptomatic of underlying leadership, discipline and morale deficiencies throughout the chain of command," the letter from Oversight

National Security Subcommittee Chair Stephen Lynch and Armed Forces Military Personnel Subcommittee Chair Jackie Speier said.

Earlier this year, three US service members reported missing from Fort Hood were found dead, along with the body of a fourth soldier who had been listed as "absent without leave" for more than a year, the letter said.

Army investigators determined that two recent victims - Specialist Vanessa Guillen and Sergeant Elder Fernandez - were sexually abused or harassed prior to their deaths, the letter added.

An attorney for Fernandez's family claims that he was bullied by peers while Guillen's sister said Guillen reported similar harassment to friends and family but was too afraid to tell her superiors. The mother of Private Gregory Wedell-Morales, whose body was discovered a year after he was reported missing, said she battled Army investigators who insisted the soldier was absent without leave.

Three other recent deaths of Fort Hood soldiers are also being investigated by the Army as possible homicides, the letter said. The lawmakers' letter also cited recent comments by McCarthy that reports of murder, sexual assault and harassment at Fort Hood are higher than anywhere else in the US Army.

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UN General Assembly President Says Unclear If Leaders Will Attend General Debate In-Person

UNITED NATIONS, September 8 (Sputnik) - UN General Assembly President Tijjani Muhammad-Bande said on Tuesday that it is still unclear whether any head of state or head of government will come to New York for the upcoming General Debate to deliver their statements in-person amid the ongoing novel coronavirus pandemic.

"I do not know how many, if any, heads of state or heads of government will attend the UN General Assembly," Muhammad-Bande told reporters. "I do not have any information concerning if any person at the level of head of state or government is coming."

The 75th session of the UN General Assembly, scheduled to take place on September 15-30, will be held for the first time in a virtual format because to of the novel coronavirus restrictions in posed by the New York authorities.

Most leaders are expected not to travel to New York this year and send instead pre-recorded videos of their addresses.

The videos will be introduced by a state representative who is based in New York and can therefore be physically present at the UN headquarters.

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Trump Says Willing to Spend Substantial Amount of Own Money on Reelection Campaign

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump told reporters on Tuesday he is willing to spend a substantial amount of money on his reelection campaign.

"If I have to, I will... whatever it takes, we have to win," Trump said as quoted by a White House press pool report.

The New York Times reported that the Trump reelection campaign and the Republican Party raised about \$1.1 billion since early 2019, but has spent more than \$800 million.

According to an average of the most recent surveys published on poll aggregator Realclearpolitics.com (RCP) as of Sunday evening, Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden's lead nationally has grown by nearly a point to 7.1 percent in the past week. This reversed the slight bounce in the polls Trump saw in the wake of the Republican National Convention (August 24-27).

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China to Sanction US Officials Who Visit Taiwan - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - China will impose sanctions against US officials who go to Taiwan as well as the American companies they have ties with, The Global Times Editor-in-Chief Hu Xijin said on Tuesday.

The US officials will never be allowed to enter the Chinese mainland while the American companies sanctioned will lose access to China's mainland market, Hu Xijin said in a tweet.

The United States, along with many other countries, does not recognize Taiwan as a sovereign nation and officially sticks to the "One China" policy. Nevertheless, Washington has kept informal relations with the island nation after severing diplomatic ties with it in 1979.

Beijing has repeatedly called Taiwan a sensitive issue in its relations with Washington, as China considers the island to be part of its territory.

The Global Times is an English-language Chinese media outlet.

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UN Human Rights Chief Calls for Independent Probe in Navalny Case - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, September 8 (Sputnik) - UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on Tuesday called on Russia to carry out an independent investigation into the alleged poisoning of opposition figure Alexey Navalny.

"Navalny was clearly someone who needed state protection even if he was a political thorn in the side of the government," Bachelet said in a statement. "It is not good enough to simply deny he was poisoned, and deny the need for a thorough, independent, impartial and transparent investigation into this assassination attempt. It is incumbent on the Russian authorities to fully

investigate who was responsible for this crime - a very serious crime that was committed on Russian soil."

Bachelet pointed out that the nerve agent Novichok with which Navalny was allegedly poisoned is a sophisticated agent that is difficult to source, raising questions as to who may use such a substance and how they acquire it.

The UN official also noted that before the alleged poisoning, Navalny had reportedly been harassed, arrested and assaulted by either the authorities or by unknown assailants.

Navalny, 44, was initially treated in the Siberian city of Omsk after the commercial passenger airplane he traveled on made an emergency landing due to him being severely ill. The doctors established two days later that Navalny was fit to be transported by aircraft and he was flown to a hospital in Berlin for further treatment.

Last week, the German government said that the doctors in Berlin found traces of Novichok in Navalny's organism. Russia said Germany has not offered evidence to back up its claims and noted that the doctors in Omsk did not find toxic substances present in Navalny.

Russia has also sent requests for legal assistance and more information on Navalny's case. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said Berlin could share the information about Navalny but such sharing is a multistage process.

On Monday, Berlin's Charite hospital announced that Navalny's condition had improved and he woke up from being in an induced coma.

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Trump Wealth Shrinks \$600Mln in Past Year Due to COVID-19 Impact on Real Estate - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - Plunging commercial real estate values due to the novel coronavirus crisis reduced President Donald Trump's net worth by \$600 million in the past year, Forbes reported on Tuesday.

The crisis hit the industries in which Trump holds his biggest assets. Values for office buildings have plummeted, along with hotels, particularly ones in big cities, the report said.

Trump's net worth dropped \$600 million since last September to \$2.5 billion, placing the president at No. 339 on the Forbes list of the 400 wealthiest Americans, down 64 spots from a year ago, the report also said.

Forbes explained that declining property values of Trump's New York real estate portfolio accounted for more than half of the president's declining wealth.

For example, Forbes valued the Trump Tower at \$167 million, \$70 million less than the landmark property was worth in September 2019, the report said. Trump has significant debt against properties in Washington, DC and Chicago, as well as his Doral golf resort in Florida.

Doral is now worth an estimated \$28 million, after accounting for its mortgages, down 80 percent in the past year.

The report pointed out a few bright spots in the Trump portfolio, including parking 350 parking spaces in New York City, which appear to be prospering amid the pandemic with people afraid to ride the subway.

Trump's Mar-a-Lago Club and three nearby homes are also benefiting during the pandemic as wealthy New Yorkers flee the city for Florida, thereby driving up property values, according to the report.

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US Senate to Vote on New COVID-19 Relief Plan as Soon as This Week - Majority Leader

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The US Senate will vote as early as this week on a "targeted" coronavirus relief bill after failing to reach a bipartisan agreement on a broader package, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell announced via Twitter on Tuesday.

"Today, the Senate Republican majority is introducing a new targeted proposal, focused on some of the very most urgent healthcare, education, and economic issues," McConnell said. "I will be moving immediately today to set up a floor vote as soon as this week."

McConnell did not reveal details about what measures the trimmed-down relief bill would contain, though he acknowledged that it would not encompass all of the items that either Republicans or Democrats have sought to include in the legislation.

Congress has so far passed four phases of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act that have approved roughly \$3 trillion to be disbursed as loans and grants to businesses, paycheck protection for workers and personal aid to qualifying US citizens.

Both Democrats and Republicans have blamed each other for the drag over the fifth installment of the act, with Trump's rivals wanting a package worth around \$2 trillion versus the about \$500 billion that the administration is targeting.

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REVIEW - Mail-In Ballot Uncertainty Casts Shadow Over Biden's Lead

WASHINGTON, September 8 (Sputnik) - The prospect that a decisive number of mailed ballots could be rejected during the 2020 election, as suggested in a new study, may have tempered the Biden campaign's enthusiasm over halting President Donald Trump's rise in the polls.

BIDEN REVERSES TRUMP BOUNCE

According to an average of the most recent surveys published on poll aggregator Realclearpolitics.com (RCP) as of Sunday evening, Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden's lead nationally has grown by nearly a point to 7.1 percent in the past week. This reversed the slight bounce in the polls Trump saw in the wake of the Republican National Convention (August 24-27).

However, the national polls serve as only a general barometer of the race because the Electoral College format requires candidates to win states, not popular vote. A candidate must win at

least 270 of 538 electoral votes apportioned among 50 states (all but 2 states award electoral votes via a winner-take-all format). For example, in 2016 Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by more than 2 percent yet lost the election by 74 electoral votes (306-232).

Biden leads in eight of the top 10 largest battleground states, the sum of which account for nearly 35% of electoral votes. In half of those states Biden's lead, however, is within a typical margin-of-error range including Florida (+1.8 percent), Ohio (+2.3), Michigan (+2.6), and North Carolina (+0.6), according to the RCP averages.

Biden has increased his lead in Arizona by 2.8 percent to 5.0% and in Wisconsin from 3.5 to 5.0 percent over the course of the past week. Biden's leads in Pennsylvania (+4.2) and Minnesota (+3.7) have remained steady, the RCP averages show.

The only good news for Trump is that he has cut the former vice president's edge in Florida by nearly half from the 3.5 percent lead Biden held on August 31. Meanwhile, Trump's lead in Texas dropped a half point to 3.5%.

In a surprising development, a September 4 Quinnipiac Poll revealed that Trump took a 45-43 percent lead among likely Hispanic voters in the state of Florida. The previous poll in July showed Biden leading among that demographic by 7 points. Overall, Biden's lead shrunk from 11 to 3 points in Florida during the same period, according to Quinnipiac.

To put the overall battleground situation in perspective, consider that Trump won nine of these top 10 states in the 2016 election. Based on the current poll numbers on RCP, if the election were called today Biden would defeat Trump in a 352-186 Electoral College landslide.

HUGE GRAIN OF SALT

The pandemic has cast doubt over Biden's lead, however, considering that the voter sentiment expressed in polls may not be reflected in the final vote count. There is a high expectation of a surge in mail-in ballots that could be problematic due to postal disruptions and the reality that thousands of absentee ballots are rejected in every election.

On Sunday, AP released results of an analysis of mail-in ballot rejections in previous elections, which painted a gloomy picture for the Democratic Party.

If ballots are rejected at the same rate as this year's primaries, "up to three times as many voters in November could be disenfranchised in key battleground states when compared to the last presidential election," the report said.

In early August, NPR reported that 318,728 mailed ballots were rejected in the 2016 general election but more than 500,000 were rejected in the 2020 Democratic primaries.

Wisconsin had a 1.8% absentee ballot rejection rate in this year's Democratic Primary, representing about 23,000 votes – about the same number that Trump won the state by in 2016. Late arrival and signature issues are among the top reasons why mail-in ballots are rejected. Experts have stressed that voters must be extra diligent when filling out and submitting mail-in ballots.

"There could be a lot of people who are voting this way for the first time, and they tend to make the errors that lead to lost votes," Brennan Center for Justice elections expert Larry Norden told AP.

Officials say to allow seven days for a ballot to reach an election office. However, many Democrats are urging people to submit them right away due to recent cuts in postal agency funding.

Polls have indicated that a larger percentage of Democrats will use the mail-in ballot option, which is why Trump has repeatedly claimed that the process could lead to voter fraud.