

Groton Daily Independent

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Wednesday, Feb. 5

Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potato with gravy, peas and carrots, apricots, whole wheat bread.

Groton Chamber Board Meeting, noon, at City Hall
Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



Thursday, Feb. 6

Senior Menu: BBQ Chicken, rice pilaf, mixed vegetables, pineapple, whole wheat bread.

Basketball doubleheader hosts Deuel. boys JV at 4 p.m., girls JV at 5 p.m., boys varsity and girls varsity to follow.

Groton United Methodist: Caring Team Meeting, 5 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 7

Senior Menu: Scalloped potato with ham, beets, fruited Jell-O, whole wheat bread.

Girls Wrestling at Yankton, 9 a.m.

Boys Basketball at Vermillion: C game at 4 p.m., JV at 5 p.m., varsity to follow.

JH Boys Basketball at Waubay, 7th grade only, 4:30 p.m.

Boys Wrestling at Lyman, 6 p.m.

Saturday, Feb. 8

Girls Basketball at DAK XII/NEC Clash at Madison.
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 209 N Main

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1440

Why 1440? The printing press was invented around the year 1440, spreading knowledge to the masses and changing the course of history. More facts: In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. We're here to make each one count.

Sweden Mass Shooting

At least 10 people were killed and an undisclosed number of people wounded yesterday after a shooter opened fire at an adult education center in central Sweden in what officials described as the country's worst mass shooting. The attacker was shot and killed; a motive remains unclear as of this writing, though officials believe he acted alone.

The assailant began firing around 12:30 pm local time at the city of Orebro's Campus Risbergiska, a school for adults seeking remedial education and vocational training, including immigrants. The institute—located in the vicinity of other schools for children—was less populated at the time of the attack; students present were forced to shelter in place. Officials had not released information on the type of weapon used or the identity of the attacker or victims as of this writing.

While gun violence in much of Europe has declined over the last two decades, increased juvenile gang conflict in Sweden has lifted the country's gun homicide rate to roughly four deaths per million inhabitants—more than double the European average.

Ebola Vaccine Trial

Uganda has initiated the first-ever trial for a vaccine against the Sudan strain of the Ebola virus following an outbreak declared last week. At least one person has died, and two others have been infected.

The trial began with the first participant—currently in isolation—receiving a vaccination dose Monday. The initiative is considered groundbreaking because no approved vaccine for the Sudan strain exists. Conducted in collaboration with the World Health Organization, the trial aims to vaccinate 40 individuals who were in contact with the first victim; Uganda has identified 234 contacts to monitor. If proven effective, the vaccine could help protect communities against future outbreaks of the Sudan Ebola virus.

The strain is one of four Ebola viruses that give rise to Ebola virus disease, a hemorrhagic fever transmitted through direct contact with bodily fluids, with an average 50% fatality rate.

'Killer Nurse' Dispute

A panel of 14 international medical experts has cast doubt on the evidence that led to the conviction of Lucy Letby, a British nurse serving 15 life sentences for murdering seven babies and attempting to murder seven others. Dr. Shoo Lee, a retired Canadian neonatologist, said they found no evidence of murder in any of the cases reviewed. Letby, 35, was convicted in August 2023 of crimes allegedly committed between June 2015 and June 2016.

The experts concluded the prosecution had misinterpreted Lee's 1989 research during Letby's trial, particularly regarding skin discoloration as a sign of air embolism. They determined the infants' deaths or injuries were due to natural causes or errors in medical care, contradicting the prosecution's claims that Letby killed the babies using different methods. The defense has applied to the UK's Criminal Cases Review Commission, an independent public body that reviews possible miscarriages of justice.

A separate investigation into the hospital's systemic failures that led to repeated harm to babies is set to conclude next month.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Grammy Awards draw in 15.4 million TV viewers, a 9% drop from 2024's telecast; weekend events raised \$24M for Los Angeles wildfire relief.

Amber Ruffin, Emmy- and Tony-nominated comedian and writer, tapped to headline 2025 White House Correspondents' Dinner set for April 26.

Trial begins for man accused of 2022 knife attack on author Salman Rushdie that left Rushdie permanently blind in one eye.

Ten new sexual assault and misconduct civil lawsuits expected to be filed against Sean "Diddy" Combs in the coming days.

Science & Technology

Scientists discover treatment to stop tumor formation and growth of a type of medulloblastoma, the most common childhood malignant brain cancer.

Early North American communities peaked in population around the middle of the 12th century, falling by 30% before widespread European colonization, new study reveals.

Researchers launch long-term study of Alzheimer's in young adults, beginning as early as age 18; 25-year project seeks to track molecular changes in the brain, find interventions for the disease before it develops.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.7%, Dow +0.3%, Nasdaq +1.4%) as investors review latest batch of earnings and as US job openings fell to 7.6 million in December, the lowest level since September.

Alphabet shares fall more than 7% in after-hours trading after Q4 revenue miss.

Snap shares rise 5% in after-hours trading on better-than-expected Q4 results.

Cruise to slash workforce by nearly 50%, or roughly 1,000 employees, after owner General Motors ended funding to robotaxi unit.

Estee Lauder to trim up to 7,000 jobs, or around 11% of workforce; shares drop 16% on the news.

Politics & World Affairs

Senate panels advance Tulsi Gabbard's bid for national intelligence director and Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s bid for health secretary.

Senate confirms Doug Collins as veterans affairs secretary and Pam Bondi as US attorney general.

The US sends first migrant flight to Guantánamo Bay.

President Donald Trump proposes US control of Gaza and Palestinians to relocate elsewhere.

USAID direct hires put on leave worldwide, except those deemed essential.

China announces retaliatory tariffs on select US imports, including gas and coal, as well as an antitrust investigation into Google after Trump administration's 10% tariff on Chinese imports takes effect.

The Aga Khan, spiritual leader of the world's estimated 15 million Shia Ismaili Muslims, dies at age 88.

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Tina's Baskets! Text/Call at 605-397-7285 to reserve your basket now. They are going fast! Cash, check or Venmo.



2. White vase with sour suckers. \$7.50



3. Kit Kat Cake with Valentine suckers on top. \$35



4. Hersheys Cake, two tier with strawberry hard candy. \$40



7. Valentine container with fake roses and white bears. \$5



8. Reeses candy bars with Valentine suckers. \$50



9. Heart basket with assorted candy. \$15



10. Vase filled with strawberry drops and chocolate rose candy. \$9



12. Valentine's love balloon with fake flowers, MMs, skittles. \$15



14. Mini chip ahoy's cookies, be mine valentines book, a bear with a love heart on it and some hot wheels in it. \$12



15. Betsie Voucher book, puppy, mini chocolate hearts. Behind the dog a bag of heart bear gummies and a small box of mix chocolates. \$12



Lutheran Social Services calls Musk's illegal payment claims 'completely baseless'

BY STU WHITNEY

South Dakota News Watch

The leader of South Dakota's primary refugee resettlement program has condemned online attacks by tech billionaire Elon Musk regarding the legality of the organization's federal funding.

Rebecca Kiesow-Knudsen, president and CEO of Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota, said her group became aware of social media messages from Musk and former U.S. national security adviser Michael Flynn this past weekend "falsely claiming that Lutheran organizations, including ours, have illegally received federal payments and engaged in money laundering."

Kiesow-Knudsen added in her statement to News Watch that the messages "indicated an intention to defund our organization as a result. These accusations are completely baseless and inaccurate."

"Our work is carried out through legally awarded contracts and grants with local, state, and federal agencies that have entrusted us with these essential services," she wrote. "We are deeply concerned by any effort to misrepresent our work and jeopardize the funding that enables us to fulfill our mission."

LSS helps resettle immigrants and refugees through its Center for New Americans. It's an affiliate of Global Refuge, a nonprofit organization formerly known as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.

The organization said it helped resettle 206 refugees in South Dakota in fiscal year 2023, many from war-torn countries such as the Congo, Ethiopia and Sudan.

LSS became a DOGE target

LSS was among many South Dakota nonprofits on the defensive last week when Trump's administration unveiled a plan to halt federal grants and loans and issued a temporary freeze on payments.

That executive action is currently being litigated in federal court, with a judge Monday extending a temporary block on the funding freeze.

Musk, meanwhile, has kept organizations on edge with his stated intent to cut billions of dollars in federal spending through his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

Musk and his team gained access to sensitive Department of Treasury data payment systems on Saturday. On Sunday, Flynn posted a screenshot on the X social media site listing payments to Lutheran-based nonprofits involved in immigrant and refugee resettlement, characterizing the process without evidence as "money laundering."

The screenshot showed LSS of South Dakota receiving payments of \$934,073 on Dec. 26 and \$487,769 on Jan. 16 from the Department of Health and Human Services.

Flynn resigned from the first Trump administration in 2017 and later pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about his contacts with the Russian ambassador to the United States. He received a pardon from Trump in 2020.

Musk, who owns X, reposted Flynn's message to his 216 million followers and added that "the DOGE team is rapidly shutting down these illegal payments."

Kiesow-Knudsen told News Watch that Congress appropriated the money. She added that "defunding legal, government-awarded grants and contracts will have significant consequences, limiting our ability to provide vital services to those in need."

LSS of South Dakota's most recent financial reports show it with net assets of \$21 million following fiscal year 2023, of which \$14.9 million was listed as property and equipment. The organization spent \$26.1 million on program expenses in fiscal year 2023 and received \$19.3 million in fees and public grants that year.

Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, president and CEO of Global Refuge, the Baltimore-based organization that

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oversees Lutheran-based refugee resettlement programs, condemned “the false accusations lodged against our humanitarian work.”

LSS of South Dakota assumed oversight of state refugee resettlement in 2000 and has offices in Sioux Falls, Huron, Rapid City and Yankton. It also provides services such as behavioral health care, financial counseling, mentoring, psychiatric residential treatment for youth, shelter care and disaster response.

Also shown on the Flynn/Musk screenshot was Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska, an Omaha-based organization that provided News Watch with a statement that read in part:

“To allegations that we are somehow ‘money laundering,’ please know that we are highly audited, accredited, and endorsed by the Better Business Bureau and Charity Navigator. Our financial reports are available on our website. We were founded by Lutheran pastors, but we are not an evangelical organization. We are not a church. We do not proselytize. We simply serve.”

Small but growing foreign-born population

According to previous News Watch reporting, South Dakota’s increase of foreign-born population over the past 12 years exceeded the national average by 3 times, based on U.S. Census Bureau data.

The state’s population of people born overseas grew by 45.5% between 2010 and 2022, or 10,000 people, compared to 15.6% across the entire United States.

Despite those increases, South Dakota still has the fifth-lowest share of foreign-born residents in the country. Out of South Dakota’s estimated 910,000 residents, nearly 32,000, or 3.5%, are from outside of the United States.

Before 2000, the largest number of people came to South Dakota from Latin America, which was closely followed by Asia and then Europe. Since 2000, more people have been moving to South Dakota from Asia and Africa, moving Latin America to third place.

In 2018, according to an American Immigration Council, most foreign-born residents in South Dakota were from Guatemala, the Philippines, Mexico, Sudan and Ethiopia.

Households led by foreign-born residents paid \$137.7 million in federal, state and local taxes in 2018, the same report said.

This story was produced by South Dakota News Watch, an independent, nonprofit organization. Read more stories and donate at sdnewswatch.org and sign up for an email every few days to get stories as soon as they’re published. Contact Stu Whitney at stu.whitney@sdnewswatch.org.

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Tigers Roar Past Rival Roncalli in Gritty 50-40 Victory

ABERDEEN - The Groton Area Tigers made a statement Tuesday night, out muscling cross-county rival Aberdeen Roncalli 50-40 in a hard-fought road win. The victory, which improved Groton to 9-4 on the season, was powered by key scoring bursts, tenacious defense, and a dominant effort on the glass.

The Tigers wasted no time setting the tone, racing out to a 5-0 lead. However, Roncalli clawed back to take an 11-8 advantage late in the first quarter before the scoreboard showed matching digits - 11-11 - at the break, a moment that had fans joking about seeing "French fries" on the board.

Groton regained control in the second quarter with a decisive eight-point run that fueled a 23-14 halftime lead. The Tigers never looked back, as another eight-point surge in the third quarter extended their lead to 31-16. Roncalli attempted to rally but trailed 37-25 entering the final period, and Groton closed the door to seal the win.

Johnson Leads the Charge

Ryder Johnson led the way with a double-double, tallying 14 points and 10 rebounds while coming up clutch at the free-throw line, sinking all four of his fourth-quarter attempts. Karson Zac matched Johnson's 14-point effort and dished out four assists, while Keegen Tracy added 12 points, five rebounds, and four assists of his own.

Gage Sippel contributed in multiple ways, finishing with eight points, nine rebounds, and two blocks. Becker Bosma added two points, six rebounds, and an impressive four steals.

The Tigers were efficient inside, shooting 75% (18-for-24) on two-pointers. While their three-point shooting struggled (2-for-15), Zac and Tracy connected on the only triples of the night for Groton.

Roncalli, hindered by 16 team fouls, sent the Tigers to the free-throw line 14 times, where Groton converted eight shots (57%). Meanwhile, Groton committed 11 fouls, with Roncalli making four of six free throws (67%).

Complete Program Sweep

The Tigers' success wasn't limited to the varsity game. Groton also won the junior varsity matchup 37-27, the C game 43-33, and both junior high contests, completing a program-wide sweep over their county rivals.

With momentum on their side, Groton will look to keep the winning streak alive as they continue their season hosting Deuel on Thursday in a double header. Meanwhile, Roncalli (6-8) will regroup and seek a bounce-back performance in their next contest.

- Story compiled by ChatGPT

Ryder Johnson: 14 points, 10 rebounds, 2 assists, 3 steals, 3 fouls, 1 block.

Karson Zak: 14 points, 1 rebound, 4 assists, 2 steals, 1 foul.

Keegen Tracy: 12 points, 5 rebounds, 4 assists, 3 fouls.

Gage Sippel: 8 points, 9 rebounds, 2 blocks.

Becker Bosma: 2 points, 6 rebounds, 4 steals, 3 fouls.

Turner Thompson: 1 rebound.

Taylor Diegel: 2 assists, 1 foul.

2-pointers: 18-24 75%, 3-pointers: 2-15 13%, Free Throws: 8-14 57%, 32 rebounds, 22 turnovers, 12 assists, 9 steals, 11 fouls, 3 blocks.

Roncalli: Aiden Fisher 10, Cam Olson 9, Parker Grieben 8, Jesse Hernandez 5, Sam Franks 4, Brody Weinmeister 4. Field Goals: 17-41 41%, Free Throws: 4-6 67%, 16 fouls, 12 turnovers.

JV Game: Groton Area 37, Roncalli 27

Groton Area: Jace Johnson 7, Asher Johnson 7, Anthony Tracy 7, Easton Weber 5, Jayden Schwan 5, Ethan Kroll 4, Logan Warrington 2.

Roncalli: Creighton Fisher 9, Austin Fisher 8, Ezra Feickert 6, Mason Berndt 4, Lucas Daggett 1.

C Game: Groton Area 43, Roncalli 33

Groton: Anthony Tracy 18, Jace Johnson 9, Asher Johnson 7, Ethan Kroll 6, Jordan Schwan 2.

Roncalli: Creighton Fisher 7, Brock Bowman 7, Andrew Bain 6, Aiden Hernandez 6, Owen Vogel 3, Lucas Daggett 2, Paul Barr-Kvapil 2.

All three games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. Varsity game sponsors were Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Dan Richardt from Groton Ford, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes & Lounge, Locke Electric, Krueger Brothers, R&M Farms/Rix Farms, The Meathouse in Andover.

Hefty Seed sponsored the junior varsity game and Larry and Val Flihs sponsored the C game.

Funding Available for Local Communities to Enhance Public Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) announced today two opportunities for communities to apply for assistance to enhance public outdoor recreation opportunities.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The Land and Water Conservation fund (LWCF) 2025 grant application is now open.

Public outdoor recreation projects sponsored by city, county, township, and tribal governments are eligible to receive the grant money.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund provides up to 50 percent reimbursement for approved outdoor recreation projects that seek at least \$10,000 in grant assistance. Grants will be awarded for development or renovation of public outdoor recreation facilities. Emphasis will be given to project applications that address the priority needs identified in the 2023 South Dakota Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Priorities identified by the public included but are not limited to unpaved trails, swim beaches, fishing areas, canoe and kayak water trails, nature areas/open spaces, playgrounds, dog parks and picnic areas.

The application deadline is April 25, 2025.

LWCF funds are federal dollars that are apportioned to states by Congress to fund public outdoor recreation projects.

Recreational Trails Program

Recreational Trails Program (RTP) 2025 grant application is now available. The grants are available for trail projects sponsored by municipalities, counties, state parks, federal land management agencies, or tribal governments.

The grant provides up to 80% reimbursement for approved trail projects. Eligible projects include construction of new public trails, rehabilitation of existing public trails, development of trail-related facilities, and educational programs that relate to recreational trails.

RTP funds come to the state through the Federal Highway Administration and are apportioned to states by Congress to fund both motorized and non-motorized public recreation trail projects. The amount of funds available is based upon the number of recreational vehicles licensed in each state.

Application packets are available online at the Game, Fish and Parks website. The application deadline is Friday, April 4, 2025.

Application packets are available on the Game, Fish, and Parks website. For more information contact Grants Coordinator Kerri Richards at 605-773-5490 or by email at Kerri.Richards@state.sd.us.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Senate panel endorses easing of SD's one-of-a-kind drug ingestion laws

First- and second offenses would become misdemeanors, could draw intensive probation

BY: JOHN HULT - FEBRUARY 4, 2025 5:06 PM

Drug ingestion would no longer be a felony crime on the first or second offense under the terms of a bill endorsed by a Senate panel on Tuesday in Pierre.

South Dakota is the only state in the nation where a failed drug test alone can draw prison time if the drug in question is classified as a controlled substance. A failed test for marijuana can result in a misdemeanor charge and possible jail time.

Senate Bill 83 would strip the potential for felony charges for ingesting drugs like methamphetamine or cocaine from the state's ingestion law until a person is charged a third time. First- or second-offense charges would be misdemeanors, punishable by up to a year in jail. Those convicted or pleading guilty would be required to complete a chemical dependency evaluation, follow any recommendations that flow from it, and complete probation terms, in addition to any jail time their sentencing judge sees fit.

A third or subsequent offense in the space of 10 years would be a felony — a three-strikes setup similar to South Dakota's laws on driving under the influence.

The Senate Judiciary Committee took testimony on the bill last week, but deferred action until Tuesday. After adding an amendment meant to encourage the use of a specialty probation program, the committee opted to send the bill to the Senate floor on a 5-1 vote. The lone "nay" came from Hot Springs Republican Sen. Amber Hulse. Sen. Helene Duhamel, R-Rapid City, argued against SB 83 on Thursday but wasn't present for Tuesday's vote.

Supporters: Law causes more trouble than it addresses

A bipartisan smattering of lawmakers have tried to repeal or adjust the felony ingestion law on multiple occasions in recent years. None have succeeded; most fizzled before reaching a floor vote in the House or Senate.

This year's effort came from first-term Sen. Tamara Grove, R-Lower Brule, who ousted Democratic incumbent Shawn Bordeaux last fall to earn a seat that represents a heavily Native American constituency.

Grove, co-pastor of the Hope Center of Lower Brule, told the committee she's worked with drug users since her own recovery began in 2012. The law has done nothing to reduce the flow of drugs into the state or lessen its impact on users.

What it does do, Grove said, is straddle struggling people with the baggage of a felony conviction. That makes it harder to get a job or an apartment, which can make it harder to pay bills or care for children, perpetuating cycles of hopelessness that tend to spur continued drug abuse.

"Punishment does not work," Grove said during last week's debate on the measure.

Instead, she said, it burdens the state's courts and correctional system, the latter of which is moving to construct an \$825 million men's prison near Sioux Falls to deal with what Department of Corrections Secretary Kellie Wasko calls overcrowded and unsafe conditions at the state penitentiary. A new women's prison is also in the works for the Rapid City area.

Like Grove, Denny Davis of Sioux Falls is a pastor. The volunteer prison chaplain and supporter of SB 83 told lawmakers he recently sat down with a group of new arrivals at the Sioux Falls-based penitentiary

and asked how many had an ingestion charge.

"Every one of them raised their hand," Davis said.

Lobbyists for the state's trial and defense lawyers also testified in favor. Young people experimenting with drugs, they said, can wind up with felony charges or prison time thanks to the state's uniquely punitive approach.

Opponents: Public safety considerations, current probation scheme favor ingestion law

Calls for grace to the young and foolish may sound convincing, Lincoln County State's Attorney Tom Wollman said, but the reality is that people don't fail a drug test one day and wind up in prison the next.

"It does not happen," Wollman said. "What happens is that individuals who are convicted of these low-level drug offenses for the possession of the controlled substance and the ingestion of the controlled substance go out on supervised probation, and there are many success stories from that."

Wollman noted that state law has a presumption of probation for people convicted of low-level drug felonies. That means that unless a judge has a compelling reason not to, the first- and second-offense ingestion defendants referenced in Grove's bill would be on probation without stripping the crime of its felony status.

He also said most people charged with ingestion are typically charged with thefts or assaults. Drug users "are creating all manner of victims in our community," Wollman said, and the ingestion law offers prosecutors another tool for holding them accountable.

Grant Flynn, speaking on behalf of Attorney General Marty Jackley, said he finds the idea that drugs in the body are different from drugs outside of it "perplexing" in the criminal justice context.

"We don't want that substance going into a person, because of the significant negative effects that that has," Flynn said. "So why would we now diminish the criminality of the exact thing that we're trying to prevent from happening?"

A felony charge, Flynn argued, signals the seriousness of drug use and should act as a deterrent to those who might consider it a harmless experiment.

Tuesday amendment backs probation program

The Judiciary committee voted to defer a vote on SB 83 after Thursday's debate, in part to allow some undecided senators to ponder the change's implications.

Republican Sen. Greg Blanc, a Rapid City pastor, told his committee fellows the debate left him "torn between responsibility and redemption."

On Tuesday, Grove moved an amendment to encourage judges to use a probationary framework known as the HOPE program in first- and second-offense ingestion cases. It's a form of intensive supervision that involves random drug tests and "swift and certain" sanctions for violations.

That drew praise from Blanc. He said he's troubled that South Dakota's high incarceration rate — 14th in the nation, Wasko has told lawmakers — is so high compared with its low population.

"Something has to be done here," Blanc said on Tuesday. "I think we'd all agree that even though we have a great system, it is failing at least a certain majority of people."

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

Bill adjusting unemployment assistance taxes unanimously passes committee

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 4, 2025 2:22 PM

Legislation proposing a higher tax on employers to cover administrative expenses of the state's unemployment assistance program passed a legislative committee with a unanimous vote Tuesday at the Capitol in Pierre.

The bill would also lower a tax used to fund the program's payouts to the unemployed.

South Dakota's Reemployment Assistance program acts as a safety net for laid-off workers. Payroll taxes from employers help support the trust fund to cover unemployment claims. Payroll taxes also go toward the administration of the program and toward the Future Fund, which is used by the governor for economic development grants.

The increase in the administrative portion of the taxes is needed, according to state Department of Labor and Regulation Secretary Marcia Hultman. The administration fund is projected to fall into the red in coming years due to state employee salary increases passed by the Legislature, inflation and other expenses. That would jeopardize the program, she said.

The "modest increase," Hultman said, triples the portion of taxes known as the "administrative fee" to raise a collective \$3 million, while simultaneously reducing taxes paid to the unemployment trust fund by \$3 million to be "revenue neutral."

No opponents spoke against the bill during its appearance in the Senate Commerce and Energy Committee on Tuesday. Representatives of business organizations testified in support, though some previously expressed concern that it could disproportionately affect small retailers based on the tax rate change.

"This bill is irksome, irritating, annoying and objectionable, and we support it," said South Dakota Chamber of Commerce and Industry President David Owen, praising Hultman for her work as secretary. "This is a program that stands on its own, and we support her, we support her staff and we support this bill."

Owen is also a member of the state Reemployment Assistance Advisory Council.

The bill now heads to the Senate floor.

Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan who regularly reports on the intersection of politics and policy with health, education, social services and Indigenous affairs. Her work with South Dakota Searchlight earned her the title of South Dakota's Outstanding Young Journalist in 2024, and she was a 2024 finalist for the national Livingston Awards.

State education department searches for ways to improve science, math scores

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 4, 2025 12:31 PM

South Dakota's math and reading scores are relatively flat, state Department of Education Secretary Joseph Graves told lawmakers Tuesday in the Capitol in Pierre.

That's based on the biennial National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) rankings, often referred to as the Nation's Report Card. Students in fourth and eighth grades nationwide took tests between January and March in 2024, and rankings were released last week.

South Dakota students scored above the national average in fourth grade math and eighth grade reading and math. The state met the national average in fourth grade reading.

"Not a lot of change in there. We're not seeing the kind of growth we want to see in South Dakota," Graves said, adding that the state is seeing a similar trend in its annual state assessments.

Math and reading scores nationwide and in South Dakota dipped after the COVID pandemic, Graves said. Graves hopes a new statewide literacy initiative, using a phonics-based teaching approach known as "Sci-

ence of Reading," will help improve reading scores. The department wants to align standards for English and language arts with the framework.

The effort follows a global debate, often called the "reading wars," about the best approach to improving children's literacy. Some advocates emphasize phonics, which is understanding the relationship between sounds and letters. Others push a "whole language" approach that puts a stronger emphasis on words' meaning, with some phonics mixed in. The "balanced literacy" approach gained popularity in the 2000s, which is phonics-inclusive but favors whole language instruction.

Graves told lawmakers on the Joint Appropriations Committee his department wants a similar evidence-based standard for math instruction. Mathematics competency relies on calculation and numeracy, or number sense, Graves said. Math instruction across the nation might emphasize one or another. To have students become proficient in math, they have to "get both of those together," Graves said.

Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan who regularly reports on the intersection of politics and policy with health, education, social services and Indigenous affairs. Her work with South Dakota Searchlight earned her the title of South Dakota's Outstanding Young Journalist in 2024, and she was a 2024 finalist for the national Livingston Awards.

Lab-grown meat ban arises to challenge labeling bill in SD Legislature

Committee also advances legislation to restrict state spending in support of product

BY: SETH TUPPER - FEBRUARY 4, 2025 12:22 PM

PIERRE — Competing views about lab-grown meat are pitting some farmers and ranchers against each other at the South Dakota Capitol, where a legislative committee advanced a ban of the product after previously endorsing legislation that would only require it to be clearly labeled.

The labeling bill already passed both chambers and went to the governor for his decision to sign or veto it. The ban took its first legislative step Tuesday by earning the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee's approval by a vote of 8-5. Another bill that would restrict state spending in support of lab-grown meat earned unanimous approval, and both are now headed to the state House of Representatives.

Republican Rep. Jana Hunt, a rancher from Dupree, is a member of the committee. She summarized the feelings of some ranchers who said lab-grown meat is an attack on their livelihoods and is too new for its potential food safety implications to be fully understood.

"We need meat that can stand on its own feet," Hunt said.

A lobbyist for the South Dakota Stockgrowers Association took a similar stance, while lobbyists for other agricultural groups expressed a different view.

Speakers against the ban said South Dakota farmers and ranchers dislike it when people who oppose animal slaughter or the use of herbicides on crops try to ban or restrict products resulting from those practices.

Lobbyist Matthew Bogue spoke for a group of South Dakota Farm Bureau Federation members who were in the audience. He said most of his members would never purchase lab-grown meat, but "if we pass this bill, we're going to be hypocrites."

"This is the government telling consumers who can and cannot purchase this product, and picking winners and losers," Bogue said.

Lab-grown meat, also called cell-cultured or cultivated meat, starts from a sample of animal cells that are fed the sugars, water, proteins and vitamins needed to grow into muscle and fat.

Erin Rees Clayton is a Pierre-based scientific adviser for the Good Food Institute, a group that works to advance innovation in alternative proteins. She told the committee during a previous hearing that "cultivated meat is meat at the cellular level."

"It's just produced in a different way," she said.

Federal regulators approved the sale of lab-grown meat in 2023, but the product is not yet widely available. Some legislative committee members and others who testified Tuesday expressed skepticism or disagreement with federal approval of the product. Others said it's not the state's role to second-guess the decisions of federal agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration or the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The bill banning lab-grown meat would apply to the product's manufacture, sale and distribution in the state. Republican Rep. John Sjaarda, a farmer from Valley Springs, proposed the legislation.

Some other states, including Florida and Alabama, have banned lab-grown meat, and the Florida ban has sparked litigation from the industry. Nebraska is considering a ban.

The other bill advanced Tuesday in South Dakota would prohibit the use of state money for research, production, promotion, sale and distribution of lab-grown meat, with an exception for public universities.

South Dakota Searchlight asked Hunt, the main sponsor of that bill, what she's targeting. She gave an example of the state potentially providing an economic development grant to a company interested in lab-grown meat production, and said she wants to forbid that kind of state support for the industry.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

U.S. Senate confirms Florida's Pam Bondi as U.S. attorney general

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - FEBRUARY 4, 2025 7:05 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate Tuesday night confirmed Florida prosecutor Pam Bondi as the attorney general of the United States under President Donald Trump.

Senators voted 54-46 to install the former Florida attorney general at the top of the U.S. Justice Department, an agency Trump has in his crosshairs after federal prosecutions targeted his actions following his loss in the 2020 presidential election.

Democratic Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania voted in favor of Bondi's confirmation.

Bondi easily gained the support of the Republican-led Senate Committee on the Judiciary, which put her on a glide path to confirmation. The panel split along party lines Wednesday to advance her to a full floor vote.

Grassley support

"I'm disappointed that none of my Democratic colleagues on the Judiciary Committee voted for Ms. Bondi, and I hope the full Senate takes a different approach," Committee Chair Chuck Grassley of Iowa said on the floor Monday.

"If my colleagues won't cross the aisle for this qualified nominee, they'll show that they're intent on opposing President Trump's picks for purely partisan reasons," Grassley said.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune said Tuesday that Americans have "lost faith" in the Justice Department.

"Pam Bondi has promised to get the department back to its core mission: prosecuting crime and protecting Americans from threats to their safety and their freedoms," the South Dakota Republican said Tuesday afternoon on the floor, accusing the department of political bias under former President Joe Biden.

'Real concern' from Whitehouse

Democrats spoke out against Bondi ahead of the confirmation vote, highlighting Bondi's indirect response to Democratic committee members' questions over who won the 2020 election.

Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, a Rhode Island Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, said Tuesday that Bondi's responses during her confirmation hearing were cause for "real concern."

"She said a lot of the right things about independence of the department and rule of law. What I couldn't get over was how things changed when she got to a topic that would have been sensitive to Donald Trump,

something that would have gotten Donald Trump all twitchy," Whitehouse said on the floor.

"She couldn't say obvious things, things like, 'Did President Biden win the 2020 election?' That's an easy answer, 'Yes, he did, sir or ma'am.' Super simple. When she can't say that, that's a sign," Whitehouse continued.

The former president faced charges for scheming to overturn the 2020 election results and for hoarding classified documents in his Florida estate. The Justice Department dropped the cases after Trump won the election, citing a long-term policy of not prosecuting sitting presidents.

Trump's interim U.S. attorney in Florida's Southern District last week dropped the classified documents case against Trump's two co-defendants.

Trump has fired a round of Justice Department officials who were involved in prosecuting him as well as those involved in prosecutions of those charged after the violent attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

On his first night in office, Trump granted clemency to all of the nearly 1,600 defendants charged in the attack.

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

Demonstrators at U.S. Capitol rally against Trump's 'direct attack' on education

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - FEBRUARY 4, 2025 5:39 PM

WASHINGTON — Maryland Democratic U.S. Sen. Chris Van Hollen, alongside advocates and labor union leaders, on Tuesday lambasted President Donald Trump's sweeping education initiatives since he took office and his choice of Linda McMahon to lead the U.S. Education Department.

Trump's vast campaign vision to "save American education" is already coming to fruition after he signed a series of executive orders last week focused on prioritizing school choice funding, ending what the administration sees as "radical indoctrination in K-12 schooling" and taking "additional measures to combat anti-semitism."

The White House said its executive order regarding school choice funding "recognizes that parents, not the government, play a fundamental role in choosing and directing the upbringing and education of their children," per a fact sheet.

Reports have also surfaced that the president could soon issue an executive order that would dismantle the Education Department — perhaps his most far-reaching campaign promise in the realm of education.

Demonstrators outside the U.S. Capitol hailed from organizations within the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, a national coalition focused on protecting public education.

"If you look at the first two weeks — and my God, it's only been two weeks since President Trump was sworn in — you can see that there's a direct attack on our goal of trying to make sure that every child, regardless of ZIP code, gets a quality education," Van Hollen said.

Advocates also expressed their support for legislation Van Hollen reintroduced in January alongside Nevada Democratic Rep. Susie Lee that would "put Congress on a fiscally responsible path to fully fund Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) on a mandatory basis."

The Education Department administers Title I funds, which provide billions of dollars to school districts with high percentages of students who come from low-income families.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, guarantees a free public education for children with disabilities.

Education secretary nominee

Van Hollen also criticized McMahon's sparse education record and underscored reporting that found she

claimed on a questionnaire for a Connecticut education board seat that she had a bachelor's in education, but in fact had not earned that degree.

McMahon was on the Connecticut Board of Education for just over a year and a member of the board of trustees at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut.

McMahon is a former World Wrestling Entertainment executive, the prior head of the Small Business Administration during Trump's first administration and a wealthy donor to the Trump campaign.

She has yet to sit before a Senate panel regarding her nomination. If confirmed, McMahon could be pivotal to carrying out Trump's education agenda.

"I'm trying to figure out what her background has been in education, and you need to search far and wide, and I can tell you, even after you do that, you're not going to find anything," Van Hollen said.

Major labor unions speak out

Becky Pringle, president of the National Education Association, the country's largest labor union, said none of the administration's "vicious and vengeful and villainous attacks has the power to sway us from our vision and our values, despite the damage and the chaos" created since he took office.

Pringle added that "our students must never pay the price for tax cuts to billionaires who funded this president's campaign, the billionaires who are positioned to take Cabinet posts they are supremely unqualified for."

Fedrick Ingram, secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of Teachers, one of the nation's largest teachers unions, described Trump as a "bully."

"We would not teach this to our children — if we did this in schools, we would be fired," he said.

"What we are coming to you to say is, Mr. Trump, we need help in our schools. We don't need you to dismantle our schools. We don't need you to strike fear in our schools. We don't need you to take the money away from our schools."

"We need you to pour into those teachers who give their life, blood and soul to those kids every single day."

Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom's Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

Trump administration begins first detention flights to Guantanamo Bay

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - FEBRUARY 4, 2025 5:19 PM

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration on Tuesday sent the first flight of detained migrants on military aircraft from the United States to the naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as President Donald Trump continues high-profile displays of his immigration crackdown.

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem posted photos on social media of men in handcuffs and chains, being escorted by immigration officials dressed in tactical military gear.

"Guantanamo Bay will hold the worst of the worst," Noem wrote. "That starts today."

Trump announced last week that he would direct the Defense Department to use the migrant detention center on the base to detain up to 30,000 people who lack U.S. legal status. It would nearly double the current bed space that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has funding for across the nation, which is roughly 41,500.

More than 150 U.S. Marines and U.S. Army members started arriving at the base over the weekend, the U.S. Southern Command Public Affairs Office said in a press release. More than 300 military personnel are already stationed at the base.

The base is known for holding suspects accused of terrorism in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Advocates have pressed for the base to be shut down, citing human rights violations.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt also confirmed flights were taking place Tuesday during

a segment on Fox Business.

"The first flights from the United States to Guantanamo Bay with illegal migrants are underway," she said, adding that the president is "not messing around."

During a Sunday interview with NBC's "Meet the Press," Noem was asked if women, children and families would be detained at Guantanamo Bay, but Noem would not address the question.

"You know, if you look at what we are doing today of targeting the worst of the worst, we've been very clear on that," Noem said during the interview. "The priority of this president is to go after criminal aliens that are making our streets more dangerous."

While Guantanamo Bay has been used in the past to detain migrants, it's usually been to intercept refugees fleeing from Cuba and Haiti during the 1990s, not used to transport people from within the U.S.

The Department of Homeland Security did not respond to States Newsroom's request on where the flights departed from or how many detained migrants were on board the C-17 military jet, and if they had a criminal status.

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.

Gabbard nomination for intel chief headed to Senate floor after panel approval

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - FEBRUARY 4, 2025 3:39 PM

WASHINGTON — Former Hawaii U.S. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard got a step further on Tuesday in her bid to serve as the next director of national intelligence after a U.S. Senate panel propelled her nomination to the Senate floor.

Gabbard — who has stood among President Donald Trump's most controversial Cabinet nominees — managed to secure enough votes in the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence to advance her nomination, 9-8, along party lines, the panel confirmed to States Newsroom.

The lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve faced serious concerns from lawmakers of both parties regarding her nomination following a series of controversies, including over her foreign policy views and meetings she took part in with then-Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad.

But Gabbard provided further clarity to some of her past statements and actions last week in front of the Senate intelligence panel and described her vision on working "to end the politicization of the intelligence community," if confirmed.

Tuesday's committee vote by no means guaranteed Gabbard's confirmation, but the outcome brought her closer to potentially securing the post responsible for overseeing the vast intelligence community.

That community, made up of 18 agencies and organizations, has a budget of more than \$100 billion.

Gabbard, who is now a Republican but ran an unsuccessful 2020 Democratic presidential campaign, managed to win the support of senators on the panel who voiced skepticism surrounding her nomination, including GOP Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Todd Young of Indiana.

Collins said Monday that Gabbard addressed her concerns regarding the nominee's views on Edward Snowden — a former contractor at the National Security Agency who leaked classified information regarding surveillance efforts.

During last week's confirmation hearing, Gabbard took heat for refusing to call Snowden a traitor.

However, Collins managed to get Gabbard to say that she would not support a pardon for Snowden, if confirmed.

Gabbard also garnered the support of Young, who in a Tuesday post on social media backed the nominee while sharing a letter she wrote to the Indiana Republican outlining multiple commitments she will make, if confirmed.

Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom's Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

COMMENTARY

Without 'baggage' of national spotlight, Rhoden gets back to basics

by Kevin Woster

During her six years as governor of South Dakota, Kristi Noem showed a powerful affection for walls. She promoted them on the southern border, of course, sending our National Guard there to help with border security, which was wise politicking for a theatrically inclined Republican, especially one hoping for a place on the Donald Trump team.

Meanwhile back here at home, Noem built walls in a metaphorical sense between herself and many state legislators and especially in-state journalists and leaders of Native American tribes.

New Gov. Larry Rhoden supports tougher southern border security, of course. What wise Republican politician wouldn't? But he isn't inclined to build walls between himself and others, even when he disagrees with them.

At least, that's the guy I remember from the years I covered the rancher and welder from Union Center when he was in the South Dakota Legislature.

I've been disconnected from that type of coverage for a while now. But I doubt Rhoden has changed much. Our basic nature tends to hold pretty true. So I didn't hesitate to respond a few days after Rhoden was sworn in when my pastor stopped me after mass and said: "Hey, what about our new governor? What's he like?"

Then he added: "He seems reasonable."

That's a pretty good place to start when you're talking about Larry Rhoden. Very conservative. Strongly opinionated. But reasonable.

"He and I don't agree on a lot of things," I told my pastor. "But my experience with Larry was that you could talk to him and he would listen."

And when I said "listen" I didn't just mean standing there impatiently waiting for his turn to talk, as so many people do when they're "listening." He really listened.

You might get a slight shake of the head or smile that revealed doubt or skepticism about your argument. But it was never a disrespectful gesture. And sometimes you'd get a sort of resigned shrug or nod that indicated, well, maybe you had a point.

That didn't mean the point would change his mind. But it meant he was engaging with you in a meaningful way. An adult way. A respectful way. A civil way. And you parted on friendly terms.

Imagine that, in today's politics, from our governor in Pierre.

"And civility," I said to my pastor. "You probably already heard him say that. He wants to lead by example on civility. I don't think you can overstate the value of civility in a political and governmental leader. And I don't think Rhoden is just saying it. I think he'll live it."

Also, I said, he'll focus his attention and work on South Dakota, not Trump events in far-off states or schmoozing with Fox News and other conservative media outlets. He told KELOLAND News exactly that in a sit-down interview, noting that Noem had "developed this national profile. And she used that profile to benefit South Dakota."

Larry and I might disagree, politely, on how much Noem's national profile actually benefitted South Dakota, and whether she used it more for us or for herself. But she certainly got a lot of attention, good and not so good.

Either way, Rhoden told KELO that Noem's national profile "kind of put her in a different trajectory than what I'm going to be on. I don't have to worry about doing Fox News interviews every night." He emphasized to KELO that he wasn't being critical of Noem, but seemed relieved that he didn't have to lug around that kind of "baggage."

It can be a heavy lift, trying to do the people's work here in South Dakota and also dance on the national stage. Rhoden doesn't find such attention fetching as Noem clearly does. She demonstrated her

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love for theater and self promotion once again when she made her first appearance on a stage before her Department of Homeland Security staffers in Washington, D.C.

After a military flag ceremony, the national anthem and a prayer, she strode in to a blaring recording of Trace Adkins singing "Hot Mama." No, really, I am being serious here.

Don't look for any such self-focused theater from Rhoden. Instead, we're likely to see a return to what we might consider to be the more normal style and focus from our governors. Or, as a Capitol watcher for many years predicted in a text: "Daugaard/Rounds redux. Steady the ship."

Rhoden will put his own brand on that redux, of course, along with a lot of hard work. For us.

And if we're unfortunate enough to have a flood emergency somewhere in the state like the one we had last year at McCook Lake, don't expect Rhoden to be flying back and forth between ground zero of the flood and political events in other states.

He'll stay right where he belongs, in the middle of the action here at home, doing what a governor should do.

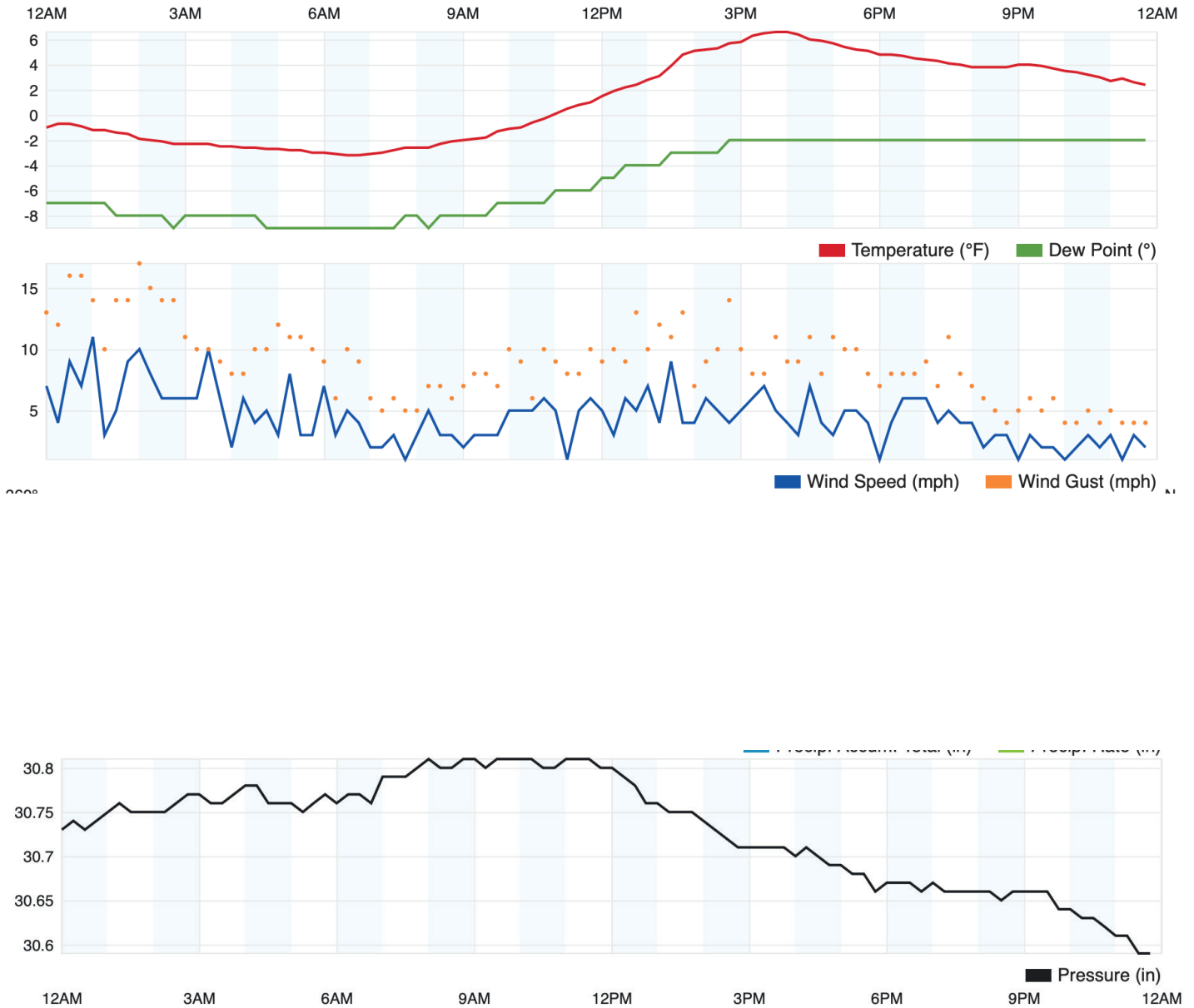
And that's more than civil. It's essential.

Kevin Woster grew up on a farm near Reliance and worked for decades as a journalist, including stops at the Brookings Register, Sioux Falls Argus Leader, Rapid City Journal, KELO-TV and South Dakota Public Broadcasting, plus freelance assignments for outdoors and agricultural magazines. He lives in Rapid City.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 25 °F

Mostly Cloudy
then Chance
Snow/Sleet

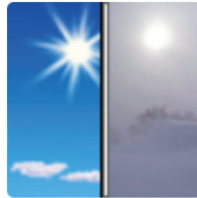
Tonight



Low: 4 °F

Chance Snow
then Partly
Cloudy

Thursday



High: 19 °F

Sunny then
Patchy
Blowing Snow
and Blustery

Thursday
Night



Low: 0 °F

Increasing
Clouds

Friday



High: 18 °F

Chance Snow



Potential for Snow Today

February 5, 2025
3:41 AM

Short, intense burst of snow possible this afternoon into this evening.

Key Messages

- Snow may fall this afternoon and evening, mainly over northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. Central South Dakota may also see some light snow.
- Less than an inch of accumulation is expected.
- While totals are not expected to be high, snow may fall quickly and reduce visibility.
- There is a low chance that sleet and/or freezing rain will fall at times.
- **Roads may become slippery, impacting travel.**
- In addition to the snow, strong winds of 20-25 mph gusting to 30-35 mph will be present today through Thursday.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Snow may fall this afternoon and evening over NE SD and western MN. Less than an inch of snow is expected, and there is a low chance for sleet and/or freezing rain as well. Roads may become slippery, and snow may fall quickly which would reduce visibilities. Strong winds gusting to 30-35 mph will also be in place through Thursday.

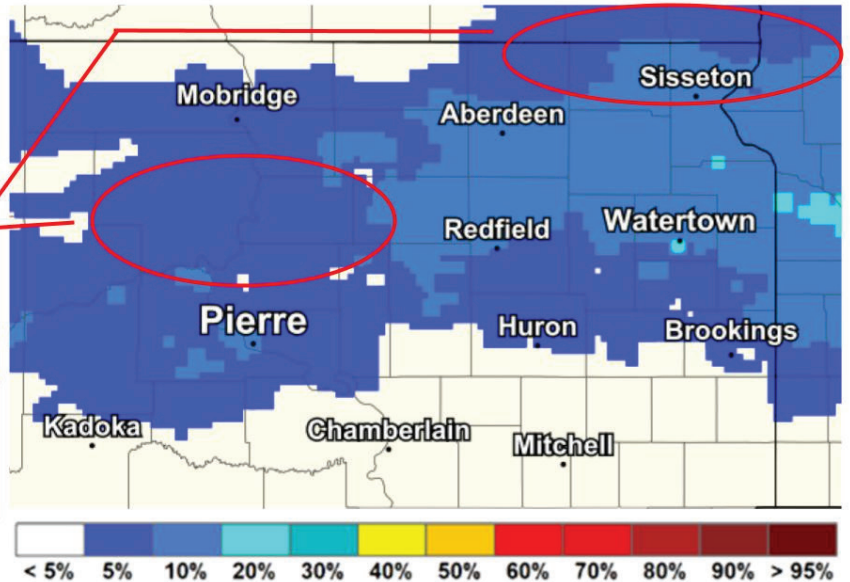


Snow Friday Night Into Saturday

February 5, 2025
3:41 AM

Probability of **MODERATE** Impacts from Fri. 12 PM to Sat. 12 PM

- There is an increasing potential for hazardous travel. **Stay home on Saturday if possible, and plan for delays if you are traveling.**
- Areas inside the red circles have the greatest uncertainty in the snowfall forecast (varying by ~5").



Potential Winter Storm Impacts

Moderate Impacts

Expect disruptions to daily life.

- Hazardous driving conditions. **Use extra caution while driving.**
- Closures and disruptions to infrastructure may occur.



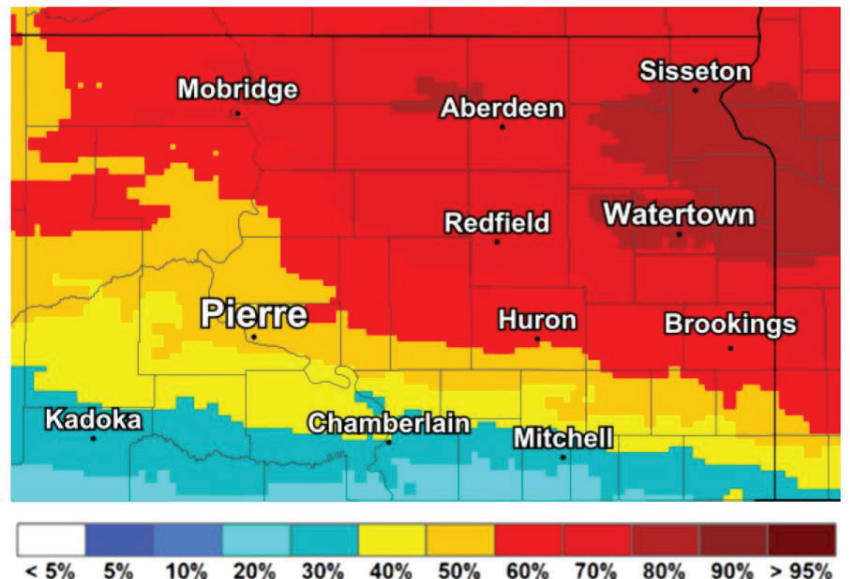
Snow Friday Night Into Saturday

February 5, 2025
3:41 AM

Probability of **MINOR** Impacts from Fri. 12 PM to Sat. 12 PM

Key Messages

- Snow begins Friday, tracks east and departs Saturday afternoon. A band of >6" of snow may fall over parts of South Dakota and western Minnesota.
- Peak snowfall currently expected early Saturday morning (midnight to 6 AM).
- **Shifts in timing and location of heaviest snowfall are still possible.**
- Continue to monitor the forecast for updates.



Potential Winter Storm Impacts

Minor Impacts

Expect a few inconveniences to daily life.

- Winter driving conditions. **Use caution while driving.**

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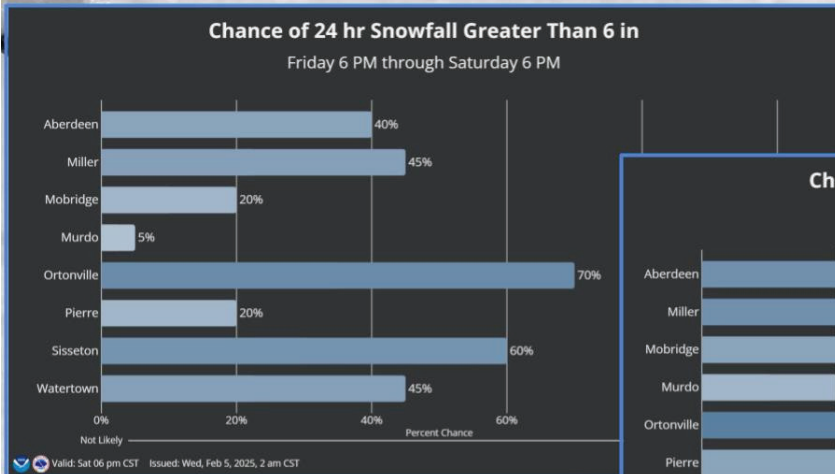
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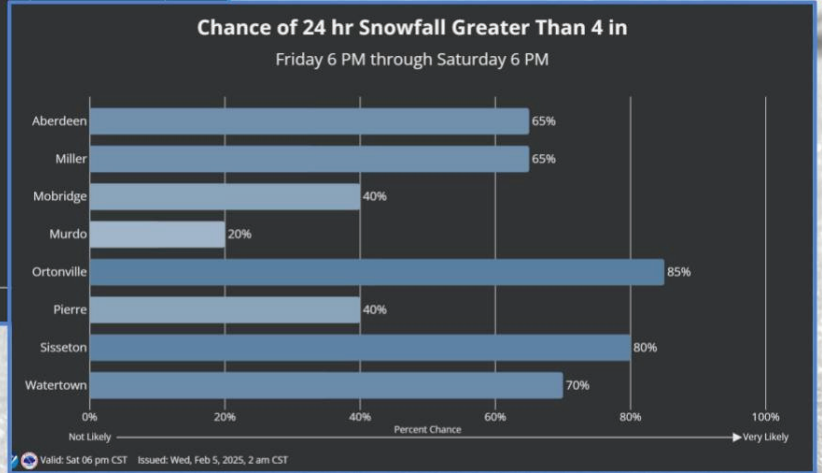
Snowfall Probability Charts

February 5, 2025
3:41 AM

High Probability of 4+ inches of snowfall across much of central and northeastern South Dakota.



4" of snow or more is forecasted across most of central and northeastern South Dakota, as well as western Minnesota, but it's not a guarantee.



Northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota will see the highest probability for 6" of snow or more through Saturday.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

4" of snow or more is forecasted across most of central and NE South Dakota as well as western Minnesota, but it's not a guarantee to see that much. On the other hand, NE South Dakota and western Minnesota have the highest probability for 6" of snow or more through Saturday. There is still much uncertainty with the system.

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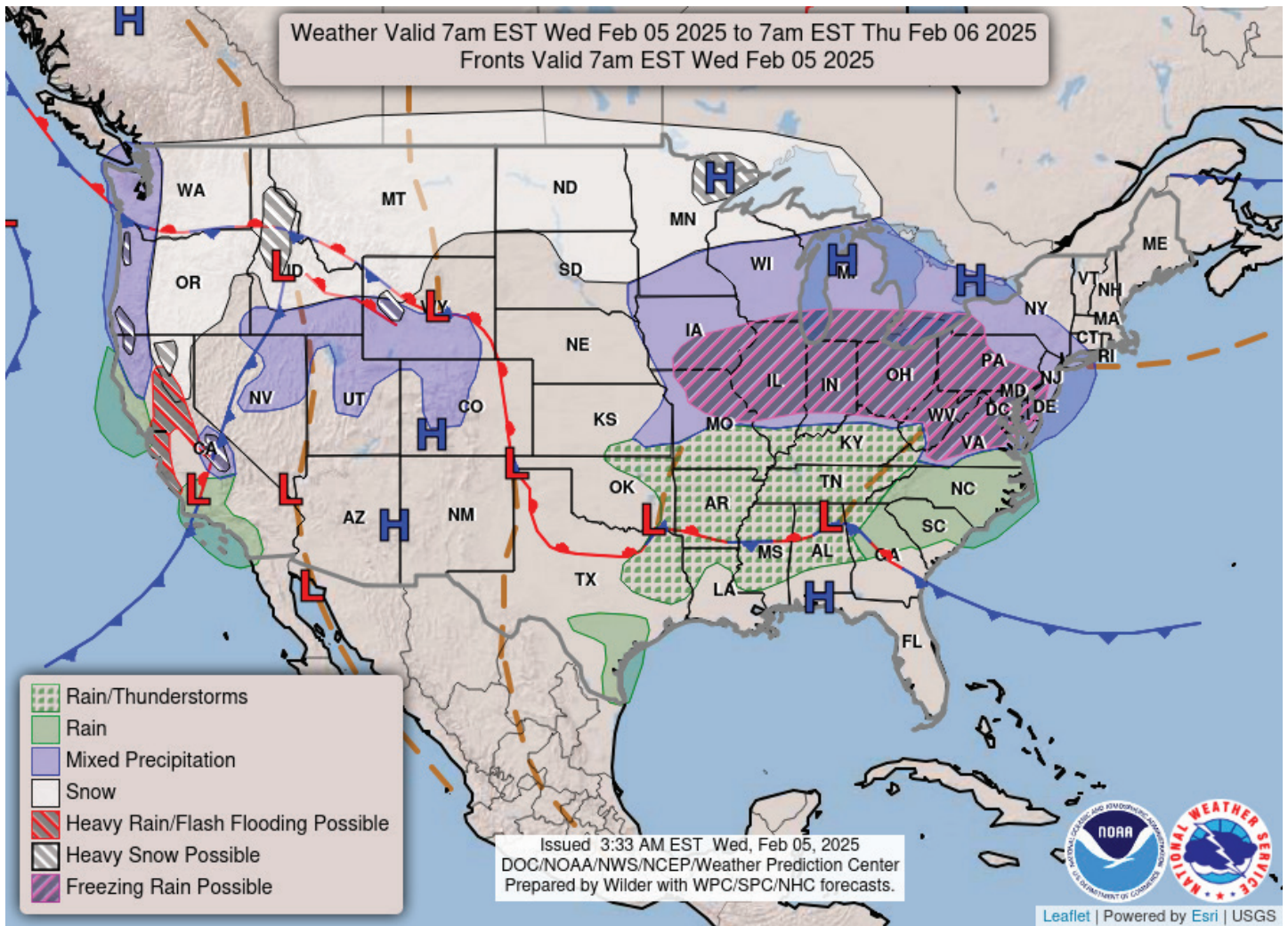
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 7 °F at 3:49 PM
Low Temp: -3 °F at 6:34 AM
Wind: 17 mph at 1:57 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 57 in 1991
Record Low: -36 in 1907
Average High: 26
Average Low: 3
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.10
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.14
Average Precip to date: 0.65
Precip Year to Date: 0.14
Sunset Tonight: 5:46:57 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:44:31 am

Day length: 10 hours, 01 minutes



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Today in Weather History

February 5, 1978: Another winter blizzard plagued the northern half of the state, beginning on February 5th and continuing until the 9th. The unusual aspect of this blizzard was that the wind came from the southeast between 25 to 45 mph. Only one to three inches of new snow accumulation fell during the five days but was piled high on the existing large snowdrifts. Most of the northern half of the state was paralyzed due to blocked roads. Eighteen counties across the north part of South Dakota were declared a disaster by the governor. There were also numerous livestock losses.

1745: Today is National Weatherman/Meteorologist day, commemorating the birth of John Jeffries in 1745. Jeffries, one of America's first weather observers, began taking daily weather observations in Boston, MA, in 1774, and he made the first balloon observation in 1784. You can read a narrative from the Library of Congress of the two aerial voyages of Doctor Jeffries with Mons. Blanchard: with meteorological observations and remarks. The first voyage was on November 13th, 1784, from London into Kent. The second was on January 7th, 1785, from England into France.

1887: San Francisco experienced its most significant snowstorm of record. Nearly four inches was reported in downtown San Francisco, and the western hills of the city received seven inches. Excited crowds went on a snowball throwing rampage.

1920: An intense nor'easter dumped 17.5 inches of snow over three days in New York City Central Park, New York. Boston, MA, saw 12.2 inches of snow on this day.

1976: Record-breaking snowfall of just two inches fell in Sacramento, California. February 5, 1976, is the only time since November 1941 when snow was reported in Sacramento.

1986: A supercell thunderstorm tracked through the Tomball area northwest of Houston, TX, and produced four tornadoes along with damaging microburst winds and up to tennis ball size hail. An F3 tornado killed two people, injured 80 others, and devastated a mobile home park and the David Wayne Hooks Airport. In addition, 300 aircraft were either damaged or destroyed. Much of the more substantial hail was propelled by 60 to 80 mph winds, resulting in widespread moderate damage. The total damage from this storm was 80 million dollars.

2006 - Mount Washington Observatory in New Hampshire reaches a high of 41°F, the warmest February 5th on record at the summit and two degrees off the monthly mark, where records have been kept since 1932. The Weather Doctor

2008 - The deadliest round of tornadoes in nearly a quarter century kill 58 people in the south. The storms kill 32 people in Tennessee, 14 in Arkansas, seven in Kentucky and five in Alabama. Damage is likely to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars. The Weather Doctor

2008 - The Super Tuesday 2008 Tornado Outbreak has been one of the deadliest tornado outbreaks in the US, with 59 fatalities reported. So far, it ranks in the top 15 deadly tornado outbreaks (and the highest number of tornado deaths since 1985). According to the SPC Storm Reports, there were over 300 reports of tornadoes, large hail (up to 4.25 inches in diameter in Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri), and damaging wind gusts from Texas to Ohio and West Virginia. The outbreak produced at least 64 tornadoes, some producing EF-3 and EF-4 damage.

2010 - A mega-snowstorm, which President Obama dubbed Snowmageddon, buried the Washington D.C. area with more than 30 inches of snow in some areas. At American University in Washington the official snowfall was 27.5 inches. Snowfall totals in the Washington DC area range from a low of 17.9 inches at Ronald Reagan National Airport to 40 inches in the northern suburb of Colesville, MD. Dulles Airport reported 32.4 inches, which established a new two-day snowfall record. The Baltimore-Washington International Airport, MD, measured 24.8 inches from the storm breaking the record for the largest two day snowfall there. It is one of the worst blizzards in the city's history.



FACING REALITY

Linus approached Charlie Brown in a comic strip and boldly asked, "Charlie Brown, do you want to know what the trouble is with you?"

"No," he answered.

"That's the trouble with you, Charlie Brown," screamed Linus. "You don't want to know what the trouble is with you!"

Charlie Brown is not the only one with that problem.

Few want to hear or accept the fact that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." But that does not change anything.

To refuse to hear something does not mean that it was not said. And if we deny something it does not mean that it is not true. Sin is sin, and it comes in all sizes and shapes, colors and containers, with many options and countless opportunities.

We all seem to have a Charlie Brown attitude. Few want to admit that we have broken God's laws or that we have refused to follow the teachings of Jesus. But Paul said all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. That includes each and every one of us.

Denying the fact of sin will not keep us from sinning nor eliminate the penalty that comes from being disobedient to God. No one is foolish enough to believe that if they deny the reality of death, they will live forever. We must all admit and accept what is: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life!"

Prayer: Open our hearts, Father, to the truths in Your Word and reality of sin and salvation. May we look to You in faith, believing that You alone can save us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23

We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.04.25

14 24 31 53 54 1

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$94,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 10
DRAW: Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.03.25

10 33 35 49 51 3

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$23,290,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 25 Mins 16
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.04.25

2 5 23 29 47 8

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 40 Mins 16
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.01.25

2 5 17 24 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$26,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 40 Mins 16
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.03.25

7 38 39 42 55 10

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 9 Mins 16
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.03.25

12 37 47 54 60 17

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$113,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 9 Mins 16
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

- 01/05/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/26/2025 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed at the Community Center 10am-1pm
- 01/26/2025 87th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
- 02/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 02/05/2025 FB Live Electronic Hwy 12 Sign Drawing City Hall 12pm
- 03/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 03/22/2025 Spring Vendor Fair at the GHS Gym 10am-2pm
- 04/05/2025 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39, 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp
- 05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm
- 06/07/2025 Day of Play
- 07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
- 07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm
- 08/09/2025 2nd Annual Celebration in the Park/Rib Cook-Off 1-9:30pm
- 09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1:30pm

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 59, North Central 20
Baltic 50, Garretson 40
Centerville 82, Alcester-Hudson 61
Chester 59, Parker 51
Crazy Horse 110, Takini 25
Custer 68, Douglas 21
Dell Rapids 53, Flandreau 38
Estelline-Hendricks 71, Waverly-South Shore 61
Faulkton 42, Warner 26
Great Plains Lutheran 59, Webster 45
Gregory 70, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 34
Groton 50, Aberdeen Roncalli 40
Hamlin 66, Milbank 32
Hanson 63, Wagner 57
Harrisburg 71, Marshall, Minn. 62
Highmore-Harold 61, Sunshine Bible Academy 44
Howard 60, Irene-Wakonda 44
James Valley Christian School 54, Hitchcock-Tulare 37
Kadoka 63, Bennett County 55
Lennox 63, Elk Point-Jefferson 54
Lower Brule 78, Crow Creek Tribal School 47
McCook Central-Montrose 67, Parkston 62
Mitchell 66, Sioux Falls Jefferson 49
Mobridge-Pollock 59, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 47
New Underwood 59, Philip 45
Platte-Geddes 56, Chamberlain 38
Potter County 72, Redfield 38
Rapid City Christian 70, Mahpíya Lúta Red Cloud 40
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 60, Ethan 54
Scotland/Menno 63, Avon 30
Sioux Falls Christian 118, Canton 51
Sioux Falls Lincoln 76, Watertown 50
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 60, Huron 58
Sioux Falls Washington 79, Brookings 49
Sisseton 54, Britton-Hecla 45
Spearfish 70, Lead-Deadwood 47
St Thomas More 43, Sturgis Brown High School 40
St. Francis Indian 70, Little Wound 54
Stanley County 63, Todd County 49
Sully Buttes 55, Jones County 41
T F Riggs High School 49, Yankton 47
Timber Lake 54, Dupree 52
Tripp-Delmont-Armour 64, Gayville-Volin High School 53

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Vermillion 61, Beresford 38
Viborg-Hurley 56, Canistota 44
Wakpala 58, Strasburg, N.D. 55
Wessington Springs 70, Iroquois-Lake Preston 59
West Central 78, Tri-Valley 46
Winner 61, Miller 45
Wolsey-Wessington 57, Kimball-White Lake 26

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Avon 39, Scotland/Menno 17
Belle Fourche 43, Sturgis Brown High School 34
Centerville 71, Alcester-Hudson 38
Chamberlain 33, Platte-Geddes 31
Colman-Egan 70, Bridgewater-Emery 32
Corsica/Stickney 70, Burke 51
Crow Creek Tribal School 73, Lower Brule 35
Custer 40, Douglas 35
DeSmet 58, Castlewood 42
Deubrook 52, Madison 16
Elk Point-Jefferson 45, Lennox 44
Estelline-Hendricks 41, Waverly-South Shore 34
Faith 50, Herreid-Selby 32
Garretson 37, Baltic 35
Gayville-Volin High School 49, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 41
Gregory 51, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 33
Hamlin 62, Milbank 54
Harding County 47, Lemmon High School 35
Highmore-Harrold 48, Sunshine Bible Academy 17
Ipswich 50, Leola-Frederick High School 18
Irene-Wakonda 49, Howard 35
Iroquois-Lake Preston 42, Wessington Springs 39
Jones County 51, Sully Buttes 42
Kimball-White Lake 44, Wolsey-Wessington 36
Lakota Tech 81, St. Francis Indian 52
Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 71, Rapid City Christian 42
Marshall, Minn. 77, Brandon Valley 73
McIntosh High School 69, Bison 42
Miller 59, Winner 38
Mitchell 57, Sioux Falls Jefferson 50
North Central 49, Aberdeen Christian 33
Parkston 58, McCook Central-Montrose 39
Potter County 44, Redfield 27
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 45, Ethan 28
Sioux Falls Christian 61, Canton 42
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 70, Tea 33
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 44, Huron 39
Sisseton 67, Britton-Hecla 28
South Border, N.D. 62, Leola-Frederick High School 52
Spearfish 70, Lead-Deadwood 11
Stanley County 38, Todd County 22

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T F Riggs High School 53, Harrisburg 40
Timber Lake 39, Dupree 27
Tiospaye Topa 74, White River 72
Vermillion 61, Beresford 34
Wagner 59, Hanson 34
Wakpala 57, Strasburg, N.D. 56
Warner 49, Faulkton 40
Watertown 54, Sioux Falls Lincoln 28
Webster 48, Great Plains Lutheran 34
West Central 41, Tri-Valley 36

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Ballot measure battle could curtail South Dakota's direct democracy

By STU WHITNEY/South Dakota News Watch South Dakota News Watch
Has South Dakota soured on direct democracy?

The answer to that question will be partly answered during the 2025 legislative session, as Republican lawmakers continue a recent trend of trying to restrict the state's first-in-the-nation initiative and referendum process.

In the spirit of such laws, the people will ultimately determine the fate of a South Dakota system that dates to 1898 and has led to progressive reforms such as increased minimum wage and Medicaid expansion in a deeply conservative state.

The power of residents to amend the state constitution through the petition process was added in 1972.

Michael Card, emeritus professor of political science at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion, calls this power "the gun behind the door," allowing a given percentage of state residents to propose a law or amendment that must be approved at the polls by a majority vote.

The guiding principle is that "direct democracy" – which also allows existing laws to be challenged through referendum, as seen with the carbon pipeline debate in 2024 – provides a check on the "representative democracy" power of state legislators.

The Republican super majority in Pierre has frequently pushed back, passing laws to make it harder to get initiated measures and constitutional amendments on the ballot and raising the voting threshold for measures to pass.

'Death by a thousand cuts'

Most prominent among the 2025 proposals is House Joint Resolution 5003, which would raise the percentage of voters needed to pass constitutional amendments in a statewide election to 60%.

That would match Florida and Illinois for the highest voting threshold among the 18 states that allow for constitutional amendments through the initiative process.

The resolution passed the House by a 61-5 vote on Jan. 22 and appears headed to the 2026 ballot, where a simple majority of voters can pass or reject it. Similar attempts to raise the voting threshold failed at the polls in 2018 and 2022.

Legislators have been more successful curtailing the process with statutory changes in Pierre. From 2018 to 2024, South Dakota passed 11 laws to make direct democracy more difficult, the most of any state, according to Ballotpedia.

These restrictions include petition deadlines, circulation requirements and allowing for the revocation of signatures. Another joint resolution proposed this year would increase the number of signatures required to make the ballot, from 5% to 10% of the general electorate for initiated measures and from 10% to 15% for constitutional amendments.

"They're attempting to orchestrate the death of direct democracy by a thousand cuts," said Rick Wei-

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land, whose Dakotans for Health organization has been a frequent sponsor of ballot measures, including unsuccessful abortion rights and grocery tax repeal efforts in 2024. "They keep trying and trying because when people organize and use their voice, they become a threat to the political establishment."

Federal courts have rolled back some of the restrictions as First Amendment violations, recognizing petition circulation as core political speech.

Holding amendments to higher standard

Rep. John Hughes of Sioux Falls, the Republican sponsor of House Joint Resolution 5003, said his proposal is meant to highlight the difference between initiated measures, which impact state statutes, and initiated amendments, which change the state constitution.

"I think all of us would agree that a constitution is different than a statute," Hughes told House State Affairs committee members at a Jan. 17 hearing. "It's intended to be much more permanent. It's meant to be a fundamental expression of the near universal agreement of the people of South Dakota as to the rights, duties and values that we hold to."

Republicans have criticized the use of initiated amendments for policy provisions such as Medicaid expansion, which passed in 2022, and legalization of recreational marijuana, which passed in 2020 but was overturned by the South Dakota Supreme Court for violating the state's single-subject rule.

Nathan Sanderson, executive director of the South Dakota Retailers Association, said his group supports the joint resolution because policy programs that involve budget fluctuations are best handled within state statutes.

"(Our association) has always believed that the constitution should be reserved for a philosophy of governance, not for specific policies and programs," Sanderson said. "Amending the constitution can only be done every two years and is not a very good way of handling nuanced policy."

Do voters have ballot measure fatigue?

Card, who has authored several studies on direct democracy, told News Watch that the arguments from Hughes and Sanderson don't fully explain the reasoning behind the latest attempt to restrict the process in South Dakota.

"I think it's being cast as something other than what it really is," Card said of the joint resolution. "What it's really about is that the Democrats with a small minority (23% of registered voters) are doing what is popular with the citizenry in terms of proposing initiatives. The real intent is to limit the ability to pass some of these laws."

But Hughes alluded to "fatigue" among voters toward ballot measures, with an average of nearly six measures on the ballot every two years since 2000. The highest during that period were 11 in 2006 and 10 in 2016.

Of the 122 measures that made the South Dakota ballot since 1985, 52 were successful, for a winning percentage of 43%.

Three of the most liberal measures on the 2024 ballot – abortion rights, grocery tax repeal and recreational marijuana legalization – all failed with less than 45% of the vote.

The only successful measures were populist (property rights groups rallying to refer a bill they saw as pro-pipeline) and staunchly conservative (allowing work requirements for Medicaid expansion, stemming from the Legislature).

But Card pointed out that even residents who don't agree with many of the issues being put forth "aren't going to give up a right that they have."

Voters in 2022 strongly rejected Amendment C, which was placed on the primary ballot and would have required a 60% vote for ballot measures that raise taxes or spend \$10 million in general funds in their first five years. That amendment, viewed as a preemptive strike against Medicaid expansion, managed only 33% of the vote.

Four years earlier was Amendment X, which came out of a legislative task force and would have required a 55% vote to approve constitutional amendments. That effort failed with just 47% support.

South Dakota blazes new ballot trail

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It's hard to assess the future of direct democracy in South Dakota without understanding the past, including the decision by voters in 1898 – nine years after statehood – to adopt the system of initiated ballot measures and referendums.

Several days after that election, the Omaha (Nebraska) Bee newspaper noted that South Dakota rejected women's suffrage on the same ballot, observing that the state's voters "were of the opinion that one experiment at a time was enough."

The newspaper also noted that South Dakota's system was partly based on the Switzerland model of allowing citizens to vote on how the country is run.

"That it has been at least fairly successful in the little country where it originated is true," wrote the Omaha Bee in an editorial. "But (in America), the process has been looked upon by practical men as a pretty but impracticable theory. Other states will be satisfied to let South Dakota stand the cost of the experiment."

The Chicago Record newspaper was more supportive of the direct democracy principle, framing it as a way for rural voters to have more say in their state's legislative affairs, especially at a time when monied interests were gaining power as part of the rise of corporations and corruption in the Gilded Age.

"Of late there has been a growing tendency on the part of legislatures to submit to popular vote measures of importance relating especially to larger cities," the editors wrote in an editorial. "The people of South Dakota, however, have put into operation a plan whereby the popular will can be given expression in law regardless of the indifference of the legislative body."

'No interference' with people's rights

This power of the people was elevated in 1972 with Amendment E, which expanded the resident petition process to include constitutional amendments in South Dakota.

In the House State Affairs hearing, Hughes incorrectly stated that this occurred in 1988 and that it "passed by a slim margin of our voters." Actually, the change was approved by 67% of the vote when introduced in 1972.

The amendment, which also included provisions for calling constitutional conventions, was initiated by the Legislature and a constitutional revision commission. It was approved 67-2 by the House and 34-0 by the Senate before going on the general ballot.

Hughes told News Watch that he was referring to Amendment A from 1988. But that was a procedural change that removed the requirement that the Legislature enact a measure proposed by voters before it could be placed on the ballot. Lawmakers had no choice but to "vote" for the measure under this formality, which ruffled feathers politically.

"It eliminates a bit of red tape," then-Legislative Research Director Terry Anderson told the Argus Leader at the time of that amendment. "It also makes it abundantly clear that there can be no interference with the people's right to initiate laws."

The amendment passed with 52% of the vote.

Progressive causes take hold

As the makeup of the South Dakota Legislature trended heavily Republican over the past 15 years (GOP legislators currently outnumber Democrats 95-9), direct democracy became a way to circumvent Pierre and take progressive issues to the polls.

One successful campaign was Weiland's push to raise the state's minimum wage from \$7.25 per hour to \$8.50 per hour in 2014, with future raises for inflation. Initiated Measure 18 passed with 55% of the vote.

When the Legislature voted in 2015 to exempt workers under age 18 from the required wage, Democrats gathered petitions to refer the law and more than 7 of 10 voters supported the referral, upholding the minimum wage.

"The message from the people was simple: Hands off," said Weiland, who ran an unsuccessful campaign for U.S. Senate in 2014.

South Dakota's minimum wage is currently \$11.50 per hour, higher than neighboring Minnesota (\$11.13).

Two years later came Initiated Measure 21, a bipartisan effort that targeted payday loan outlets and other predatory lenders by establishing a maximum interest rate of 36% on their loans.

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The group faced aggressive opposition from the Atlanta-based owner of North American Title Loans and other payday and car title lenders, who were accused of luring low-income customers into high-interest loans.

Veteran political strategist Steve Hildebrand, who served as former President Barack Obama's deputy campaign manager in 2008, was one of the key organizers behind IM 21, which passed with 76% of the vote.

"I've never been more proud of anything in my 30 years of political experience than trying to cap the interest on payday lending," Hildebrand said during the campaign. "It's time to stop treating our low-income families like dirt."

Out-of-staters fueled Marsy's Law

Those seeking to dial back direct democracy point to cautionary tales such as Marsy's Law, a 2016 victims' rights measure passed in South Dakota as a constitutional amendment as part of a nationally coordinated campaign.

The law was marred by unintended consequences. In some cases, law enforcement was unable to share information with the public in order to assist in solving crimes. There were also instances of alleged offenders being held longer behind bars because victims weren't available to be notified of a bond hearing.

A legislatively referred constitutional amendment was placed on the ballot two years later to fix some of the problems and passed with 80% of the vote.

The original measure was funded by California tech billionaire Henry Nicholas, who took up the cause of victims' rights after his sister, Marsy, was shot to death by an ex-boyfriend in 1983. He spent \$2 million to orchestrate the campaign in South Dakota, including ads featuring TV personality Kelsey Grammar, whose sister was murdered in 1975.

"They made some mistakes," said former Republican state legislator Mark Mickelson, who helped spearhead the follow-up amendment. "They didn't consult stakeholders and they had some language issues. No one on the ground was comfortable with what was being proposed or how it would be implemented."

Mickelson also helped orchestrate Amendment Z, a 2018 measure requiring that constitutional amendments involve only one subject "and that multiple proposed amendments to the constitution be voted on separately."

That amendment passed with 62% of the vote and became the basis for the South Dakota Supreme Court overturning the passage of legalized recreational pot two years later.

The ruling found that Amendment A, the 2020 marijuana measure, "contains provisions embracing at least three separate subjects, each with distinct objects or purposes," referring to recreational marijuana, medical marijuana and hemp.

South Dakota used as 'laboratory'

Hughes mentioned out-of-state influence as a key factor in his quest to make it harder to pass constitutional amendments. The state's simple majority provision and affordable advertising rates are cited as reasons that national advocacy groups view South Dakota as fertile ground for ballot efforts.

"My experience going door to door is that there is a weariness over (advertising) paid for by millions of out-of-state dollars to reshape and remold our state constitution," Hughes testified at the Jan. 17 hearing. "It's only because we have the 50-plus-one majority that we're a target for being used as a laboratory for the emergence of new values and new ideas that many South Dakotans do not share."

He pointed to Amendment G, the abortion rights measure placed on the 2024 ballot by Dakotas for Health. The campaign received a late influx of donations totaling \$750,000 from Think Big America, a progressive advocacy group funded by Democratic Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker.

Not mentioned at the hearing was the fact that the anti-abortion campaign, led by groups such as Life Defense Fund and No G for SD, received a \$500,000 donation from The Concord Fund, a Virginia-based nonprofit connected to conservative judicial activist Leonard Leo, as part of its effort to defeat the amendment.

Chase Jensen of Dakota Rural Action, which helped spur a grassroots petition effort that led to anti-pipeline forces rejecting Referred Law 21, said higher voting thresholds could lead to less involvement from

everyday residents and more influence from wealthy political action groups, the opposite of Hughes' intent. "With the unprecedented concentration of wealth in society and politics today, we believe that raising the threshold of votes wouldn't deter out-of-state money," said Jensen. "It would only open the tap even further."

'What about your politicians?'

Weiland, who served as an aide to former Democratic U.S. Senate Leader Tom Daschle, has become closely linked to direct democracy through his work with progressive organizations such as Dakotans for Health and Take it Back.

He finds the argument against out-of-state money ironic given the story behind Initiated Measure 22, a successful 2016 ballot effort that revised lobbying and campaign finance laws while establishing a state ethics commission after several state scandals.

Republican legislators, decrying sloppy and confusing language in the law, sought a preliminary injunction and later repealed the measure with an emergency clause that ensured it could not be sent back to voters.

That experience spawned another reason for petitioners to prefer constitutional amendments over initiated measures – they're impossible for the Legislature to overturn without getting the permission of voters.

As for the out-of-state money argument, Weiland called it hypocritical.

"You don't like ballot measures getting funded by out-of-state interests?" he said. "Well, what about your politicians? All of our federal politicians have millions of dollars in their campaign accounts, and I can tell you that all of that money didn't come from South Dakota."

Weiland and Rapid City lawyer Jim Leach, who represents Dakotans for Health, have submitted wording for potential 2026 ballot measures to counteract what's happening in Pierre.

One would prevent legislators from amending or repealing a resident-enacted ballot measure for seven years after it becomes effective, except by a three-fourths vote of both the House and Senate, followed by a vote in the general election.

The other would require that changes to a law that impacts the state's initiative and referendum process would have to be approved by voters on a general election ballot.

As the push-and-pull battle over direct democracy in South Dakota continues, Leach said "we plan to keep fighting to preserve the rights of citizens to propose and vote on the laws they're going to be subject to."

At least 10 killed in Sweden's worst mass shooting, gunman also dead

By SERGEI GRITS and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

OREBRO, Sweden (AP) — Sweden's worst mass shooting left at least 11 people dead, including the gunman, and at least five seriously wounded at an adult education center west of Stockholm.

The gunman's motive hadn't been determined by early Wednesday as the Scandinavian nation — where gun violence at schools is very rare — reeled from an attack.

Officials said Wednesday that three women and two men, all with gunshot wounds, underwent surgery at Orebro University Hospital. All were in serious but stable condition after being admitted to the hospital with life-threatening injuries. Another woman was treated for minor injuries and was stable.

Jonas Claesson, regional director of health and medical services, said that two of the gunshot victims were in intensive care Wednesday. All of the victims are over age 18, officials said. No other patients related to the shooting were admitted to Orebro University Hospital overnight.

The school, called Campus Risbergska, offers primary and secondary educational classes for adults age 20 and older, Swedish-language classes for immigrants, vocational training and programs for people with intellectual disabilities. The school is on the outskirts of Orebro, which is about 200 kilometers (125 miles) west of Stockholm.

Justice Minister Gunnar Strömmer called the shooting "an event that shakes our entire society to its core." King Carl XVI Gustaf and Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson ordered flags to be flown at half-staff at the Royal Palace and government buildings.

The king and Queen Silvia were in Orebro and would visit the school district and attend a memorial service in the city, the palace said. Kristersson and Strömmer would also be there. Soccer teams Degerfors IF and Orebro Syrianska will wear black armbands at a preseason match on Wednesday evening and hold a minute's silence before kickoff, Degerfors said.

The shooting started Tuesday afternoon after many students had gone home following a national exam. Students sheltered in nearby buildings, and other parts of the school were evacuated following the shooting.

Authorities were working to identify the deceased. Police said that officers discovered the gunman dead at the school when they arrived. It was unclear how the gunman died.

Roberto Eid Forest, head of the local police, said that the school's large premises meant it took a long time for officers to search the campus to ensure there were not any more victims. Police heard gunshots when they arrived and initially thought they were being fired upon, he said.

Eid Forest said that six officers were treated for smoke inhalation. There wasn't a fire, he said, but authorities didn't immediately know what caused the smoke.

Investigators will spend Wednesday seeking information from witnesses and checking any video footage of the attack. Police wouldn't say whether the shooter had multiple guns.

There were no warnings beforehand, and police believe the perpetrator acted alone. Police haven't said if the man was a student at the school. They haven't released a possible motive, but authorities said there were no suspected connections to terrorism at this point.

Police raided the suspect's home after Tuesday's shooting, but it wasn't immediately clear what they found. Police cautioned the public against spreading incorrect narratives on social media.

"Today, we have witnessed brutal, deadly violence against completely innocent people," the prime minister told reporters in Stockholm late Tuesday. "This is the worst mass shooting in Swedish history. Many questions remain unanswered, and I cannot provide those answers either.

"But the time will come when we will know what happened, how it could occur, and what motives may have been behind it. Let us not speculate," he said.

While gun violence at schools is very rare in Sweden, people were wounded or killed with other weapons such as knives or axes in several incidents in recent years.

A spine-zapping implant helped 3 people with a muscle-wasting disease walk better

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Three people with a muscle-destroying disease destined to worsen got a little stronger — able to stand and walk more easily — when an implanted device zapped their spinal cord.

On Wednesday, researchers reported what they called the first evidence that a spine-stimulating implant already being tested for paralysis might also aid neurodegenerative diseases like spinal muscle atrophy — by restoring some muscle function, at least temporarily.

"These people were definitely not expecting an improvement," said Marco Capogrosso, an assistant professor at the University of Pittsburgh who led the research. Yet over the month-long pilot study, "they were getting better and better."

Spinal muscle atrophy or SMA is a genetic disease that gradually destroys motor neurons, nerve cells in the spinal cord that control muscles. That leads muscles to waste away, especially in the legs, hips and shoulders and sometimes those involved with breathing and swallowing. There is no cure. A gene therapy can save the lives of very young children with a severe form of the disease, and there are some medicines to slow worsening in older patients.

Stimulating the spinal cord with low levels of electricity has long been used to treat chronic pain but Capogrosso's team also has tested it to help people paralyzed from strokes or spinal cord injury move their limbs unaided. While turned on, it zaps circuits of dormant nerves downstream of the injury to activate muscles.

Then Capogrosso wondered if that same technology might help SMA in a similar way — by revving up

related sensory nerves so they wake up damaged muscle cells, helping them move to combat wasting. The Pitt researchers implanted electrodes over the lower spinal cord of three adults with SMA and tested their muscle strength, fatigue, range of motion and changes in gait and walking distance when the device was firing and when it was turned off.

It didn't restore normal movement but with just a few hours of spinal stimulation a week, all quickly saw improvements in muscle strength and function, researchers reported in the journal *Nature Medicine*. "With a progressive disease you never get any better," said study participant Doug McCullough, 57, of Franklin Park, New Jersey. "Either you're staying stable or getting worse. So having any improvement is just a really surreal and very exciting benefit."

All three participants significantly increased how far they could walk in six minutes, and one who initially couldn't stand from a kneeling position could by the study's end, Capogrosso said. And McCullough's gait changed so that each step was about three times longer.

"They get less fatigued so they can walk for longer," Capogrosso said. "Even a person this many years into the disease can improve."

Intriguingly, researchers found the improvements didn't disappear as soon as the stimulator was switched off, though they did fade as participants were tracked after the study ended.

McCullough said even when the stimulator was turned off, some nights his legs "would just feel super-charged."

While he understood that the device had to be removed at the study's end, he was disappointed. He said there were some lingering benefits at his six-week checkup, but none after six months.

Neuroscientist Susan Harkema, who led pioneering studies of stimulation for spinal cord injuries while at the University of Louisville, cautioned the new study is small and short but called it an important proof of concept. She said it's logical to test the technique against a list of muscle-degenerating diseases.

"Human spinal circuitry is very sophisticated – it's not just a bunch of reflexes controlled by the brain," said Harkema, now with the Kessler Foundation, a rehabilitation research nonprofit. "This is a very solid study, an important contribution to move forward."

At Pitt, Capogrosso said some small but longer studies are getting underway.

Trump's suggestion the US 'take over' the Gaza Strip is rejected by allies and adversaries alike

By DAVID RISING and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — President Donald Trump's proposal that the United States "take over" the Gaza Strip and permanently resettle its Palestinian residents was swiftly rejected and denounced on Wednesday by American allies and adversaries alike.

Trump's suggestion came at a White House news conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who smiled several times as the president detailed a plan to build new settlements for Palestinians outside the Gaza Strip, and for the U.S. to take "ownership" in redeveloping the war-torn territory into "the Riviera of the Middle East."

"The U.S. will take over the Gaza Strip, and we will do a job with it too," Trump said. "We'll own it and be responsible for dismantling all of the dangerous unexploded bombs and other weapons on the site, level the site, and get rid of the destroyed buildings, level it out, create an economic development that will supply unlimited numbers of jobs."

The comments came amid a fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, during which the militant group has been turning over hostages in exchange for the release of prisoners held by Israel.

Egypt, Jordan and other American allies in the Middle East have already rejected the idea of relocating more than 2 million Palestinians from Gaza elsewhere in the region. Following Trump's remarks, Egypt's Foreign Ministry issued a statement stressing the need for rebuilding "without moving the Palestinians out of the Gaza Strip."

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Saudi Arabia, an important American ally, weighed in quickly on Trump's expanded idea to take over the Gaza Strip in a sharply worded statement, noting that its long call for an independent Palestinian state was a "firm, steadfast and unwavering position."

"The kingdom of Saudi Arabia also stresses what it had previously announced regarding its absolute rejection of infringement on the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, whether through Israeli settlement policies, annexation of Palestinian lands or efforts to displace the Palestinian people from their land," the statement said.

Similarly, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese told reporters in Canberra, Australia, that his country has long supported a two-state solution in the Middle East and that nothing had changed.

"Australia's position is the same as it was this morning, as it was last year, as it was 10 years ago," he said.

Trump has already made waves — and upset longtime allies — suggesting the purchase of Greenland, the annexation of Canada and the possible takeover of the Panama Canal. It was not immediately clear whether the idea of taking over the Gaza Strip was a well thought out plan, or an opening gambit in negotiations.

Albanese, whose country is one of the strongest American allies in the Asia-Pacific region, seemed frustrated to even be asked about the Gaza plan, underscoring that his policies "will be consistent."

"I'm not going to, as Australia's prime minister, give a daily commentary on statements by the U.S. president," he said. "My job is to support Australia's position."

New Zealand's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that its "long-standing support for a two-state solution is on the record" and added that it, too, "won't be commenting on every proposal that is put forward."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian also underscored Beijing's longstanding support for a two-state solution.

"We oppose the forced relocation of people in Gaza and hope that the relevant parties will take the ceasefire and post-war governance in Gaza as an opportunity to push the Palestinian issue back on the right track," he said.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan told state-run Anadolu Agency that Trump's proposal on "deportations from Gaza is not something that either the region or we would accept."

"Even thinking about it, in my opinion, is wrong and absurd," Fidan said.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas called for the United Nations to "protect the Palestinian people and their inalienable rights," saying that what Trump wanted to do would be "a serious violation of international law."

Hamas, which sparked the war with its Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel, said Trump's proposal was a "recipe for creating chaos and tension in the region."

"Instead of holding the Zionist occupation accountable for the crime of genocide and displacement, it is being rewarded, not punished," the militant group said in a statement.

In its attack on Israel, Hamas killed some 1,200 people, primarily civilians, and took about 250 hostages.

Israel's ensuing air and ground war has killed over 47,000 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to local health authorities who do not say how many of the dead were fighters. The war has left large parts of several cities in ruins and displaced around 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million people.

In the U.S., opposition politicians quickly rejected Trump's idea, with Democratic Sen. Chris Coons calling his comments "offensive and insane and dangerous and foolish."

The idea "risks the rest of the world thinking that we are an unbalanced and unreliable partner because our president makes insane proposals," Coons said, noting the irony of the proposal coming shortly after Trump had moved to dismantle the U.S. Agency for International Development.

"Why on earth would we abandon decades of well-established humanitarian programs around the world, and now launch into one of the world's greatest humanitarian challenges?" Coons said.

Democratic Rep. Rashida Tlaib, a Palestinian American member of Congress from Michigan, accused Trump in a social media post of "openly calling for ethnic cleansing" with the idea of resettling Gaza's entire population.

The Gaza Strip has long been a powder keg. Here's a look at the history of the embattled region

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Gaza has long been a powder keg, and it exploded after Hamas fighters stormed southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, and began killing and abducting people, sparking a crushing Israeli military operation there that's only recently reached an uneasy ceasefire.

President Donald Trump's suggestion Tuesday that that displaced Palestinians in Gaza be permanently resettled outside the war-torn territory and the U.S. take "ownership" may spark new tension over the enclave on the Mediterranean Sea.

Here's a look at the troubled modern history of the Gaza Strip:

1948 - 1967: Egyptian rule of Gaza

Before the war surrounding Israel's establishment in 1948, present-day Gaza was part of the large swath of the Middle East under British colonial rule. After Israel defeated the coalition of Arab states, the Egyptian army was left in control of a small strip of land wedged between Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean.

During the war, some 700,000 Palestinians either fled or were forced from their homes in what is now Israel — a mass uprooting that they call the Nakba, or "catastrophe." Tens of thousands of Palestinians flocked to the strip.

Under Egyptian military control, Palestinian refugees in Gaza were stuck, homeless and stateless. Egypt didn't consider them to be citizens and Israel wouldn't let them return to their homes. Many were supported by UNWRA, the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, which has a heavy presence in Gaza to this day. Meanwhile, some young Palestinians became "fedayeen" — insurgency fighters who conducted raids into Israel.

1967 - 1993: Israel seizes control

Israel seized control of Gaza from Egypt during the 1967 Mideast war, when it also captured the West Bank and east Jerusalem — areas that remain under Israeli control. The internationally recognized Palestinian Authority, which administers semi-autonomous areas of the occupied West Bank, seeks all three areas for a hoped-for future state.

Israel built more than 20 Jewish settlements in Gaza during this period. It also signed a peace treaty with Egypt at Camp David — a pact negotiated by U.S. President Jimmy Carter.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi has referenced this 40-year old treaty when he declined to permit Palestinian refugees from Gaza into Egypt, saying the potential entrance of militants into Egypt would threaten longstanding peace between Israel and Egypt.

The first Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation erupted in Gaza in December 1987, kicking off more than five years of sustained protests and bloody violence. It was also during this time that the Islamic militant group Hamas was established in Gaza.

1993 - 2005: The Palestinian Authority takes charge

For a time, promising peace talks between Israeli and Palestinian leaders made the future of Gaza look somewhat hopeful.

Following the Oslo accords — a set of agreements between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat that laid the groundwork for a two-state solution — control of Gaza was handed to the fledgling Palestinian Authority.

But the optimism was short lived. A series of Palestinian suicide attacks by Hamas militants, the 1995 assassination of Rabin by a Jewish ultranationalist opposed to his peacemaking and the election of Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister the following year all hindered U.S.-led peace efforts. Another peace push collapsed in late 2000 with the eruption of the second Palestinian uprising.

As the uprising fizzled in 2005, then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon led a unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, uprooting all of Israel's troops and roughly 9,000 settlers in a move that bitterly divided Israel.

2005 - 2023: Hamas seizes power

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Just months after Israel's withdrawal, Hamas won parliamentary elections over Fatah, the long-dominant Palestinian political party. The following year, after months of infighting, Hamas violently seized control of Gaza from the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority.

Israel and Egypt imposed a crippling blockade on the territory, monitoring the flow of goods and people in and out. For nearly two decades, the closure has crippled the local economy, sent unemployment sky-rocketing, and emboldened militancy in the region, which is one of the most densely populated places on the planet.

Through previous wars and countless smaller battles with Israel that devastated Gaza, Hamas has only grown more powerful. In each subsequent conflict, Hamas has had more rockets that have traveled farther. The group has displayed a growing array of weapons. Its top leaders have survived, and ceasefires have been secured. In the meantime, it has built a government, including a police force, ministries and border terminals equipped with metal detectors and passport control.

2023 Hamas attack sparks the Israel-Hamas war

The Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attack killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and saw around 250 people taken hostage. Over 100 hostages were freed during a weeklong ceasefire in November 2023, eight have been rescued alive and dozens of bodies have been recovered by Israeli forces.

Israel's air and ground war has killed over 47,000 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to local health authorities, who do not say how many of the dead were fighters. The war has left large parts of several cities in ruins and displaced around 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million people.

Under the first phase of the latest ceasefire, which went into effect on Jan. 19, Hamas is to release a total of 33 hostages, eight of whom Hamas says are dead, in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Israeli forces have pulled back from most areas and allowed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to return to devastated northern Gaza while aid flows in.

Negotiations on the second phase, which would end the war and see the remaining 60 or so hostages returned, are set to begin Monday. If mediators the United States, Qatar and Egypt are unable to broker an agreement between Israel and Hamas, the war could resume in early March.

USPS has suspended parcels from Hong Kong and China. Here's what it means for Shein and Temu

By ZEN SOO AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Americans are likely to pay more for products from popular Chinese e-commerce platforms like Shein and Temu as the U.S. Postal Service said it would stop accepting parcels from China and Hong Kong.

The move was announced Tuesday, coming after the U.S. imposed an additional 10% tariff on Chinese goods and ended a customs exception that allowed small value parcels to enter the U.S. without paying tax. Canada and Mexico managed to negotiate a month-long reprieve from 25% tariffs threatened by U.S. President Donald Trump.

It will likely impact online shopping destinations like Shein and Temu, popular with younger shoppers in the U.S. for cheap clothing and other products, usually shipped directly from China.

Cheap, direct postal service helps these companies keep costs low, as did the "de minimis" exemption that previously allowed shipments to go tax-free if their value is under \$800.

The temporary suspension by USPS is likely to delay shipments and could mean higher prices in the long term.

What exactly did the USPS announce?

The U.S. Postal Service said in a notice that it would temporarily stop accepting inbound parcels from the China and Hong Kong Posts until further notice.

Letters and flats — mail that measures up to 15 inches (38 centimeters) long or 3/4 inches (1.9 centimeters) thick — are not affected.

Why did it happen?

The USPS did not state a reason in a brief announcement, but the suspension came after Trump closed the “de minimis” customs exemption this week that allowed shoppers and importers to avoid duties on packages worth below \$800.

The exemption was removed as part of an executive order to levy a 10% tariff on Chinese goods. U.S. Customs and Border Protection previously stated that it processes an average of over four million “de minimis” imports each week.

What is the impact and who is most affected?

Consumers and companies alike will no longer be able to send parcels to the U.S. from Hong Kong or China.

This move is likely to impact Chinese e-commerce firms like Shein and Temu, although Shein is likely to be more affected, according to Jacob Cooke, CEO of e-commerce marketing agency WPIC Marketing + Technologies.

Both companies have significant market share in the U.S.

“Compared to Temu, Shein relies more heavily on USPS for direct-to-consumer shipping from China, and without this channel, it will have to rely more on private carriers,” said Cooke.

“That will increase logistics costs, which along with the recent scrapping of the de minimis exemption for most products from China, could erode its price advantage.”

Cooke said Temu operates on a semi-consignment model and often ships bulk orders to the U.S. before fulfilling orders domestically.

“Temu’s model of sourcing low-cost goods should also enable the platform to absorb higher logistics costs and remain price competitive,” he said.

Shein and Temu did not immediately comment.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said China would take “necessary measures” to protect its companies, and urged the U.S. to “stop politicizing economic and trade issues and using them as a tool, and to stop unreasonably suppressing Chinese companies.”

What are possible ways for companies to work around the issue?

It is unclear how long the USPS suspension will last, but the effort to crack down on the de minimis exemption seems like a longer-term shift in policy, Cooke said.

“Shein and Temu will simply need to rely more on private carriers as a workaround to the USPS suspension,” he said.

In the long term, Shein could accelerate its warehouse expansion in the U.S., while Temu can double down on its semi-consignment model. By shipping in bulk to the U.S. and fulfilling orders domestically, logistics cost can be reduced, Cooke said.

“Shipping in bulk to the U.S. and fulfilling domestically can reduce logistics costs, but for Shein, this poses a longer-term disruption to their business model which has depended on rapidly developing new SKUs and shipping them directly to consumers,” Cooke said.

1 person dead and 5 wounded in shooting at Ohio cosmetics warehouse

NEW ALBANY, Ohio (AP) — One person has died and five others were wounded in a shooting Tuesday night at a cosmetics warehouse in Ohio, officials said.

The victims have been transported to hospitals and the suspect is no longer believed to be at the building, said Josh Poland, a spokesperson for the city of New Albany.

New Albany Police Chief Greg Jones described the shooting just before 11 p.m. as a “targeted type of attack” and said officials don’t believe the suspect poses a general threat to the public.

“We have a person of interest and we’re looking to locate them and bring them into custody,” he said during a press conference. A firearm was found at the scene.

The shooting happened at the warehouse for a company that makes products including cosmetics and

toiletries. Police did not immediately provide a motive for the shooting or the conditions of those wounded. About 150 people were evacuated to a neighboring building, according to Jones.

Decorated pilot Harry Stewart, Jr., one of the last surviving Tuskegee Airmen, dies at 100

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

Retired Lt. Col. Harry Stewart Jr, a decorated World War II pilot who broke racial barriers as a Tuskegee Airmen and earned honors for his combat heroism, has died. He was 100.

Stewart was one of the last surviving combat pilots of the famed 332nd Fighter Group also known as the Tuskegee Airmen. The group were the nation's first Black military pilots.

The Tuskegee Airmen National Historical Museum confirmed his death. The organization said he passed peacefully at his home in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, on Sunday.

Stewart earned the Distinguished Flying Cross for downing three German aircraft during a dogfight on April 1, 1945. He was also part of a team of four Tuskegee Airmen who won the U.S. Air Force Top Gun flying competition in 1949, although their accomplishment would not be recognized until decades later.

"Harry Stewart was a kind man of profound character and accomplishment with a distinguished career of service he continued long after fighting for our country in World War II," Brian Smith, president and CEO of the Tuskegee Airmen National Historical Museum, said.

Born on July 4, 1924, in Virginia, his family moved to New York when he was young. Stewart had dreamed of flying since he was a child when he would watch planes at LaGuardia airport, according to a book about his life titled "Soaring to Glory: A Tuskegee Airmen's Firsthand Account of World War II." In the wake of Pearl Harbor, an 18-year-old Stewart joined what was then considered an experiment to train Black military pilots. The unit sometimes was also known as the Tuskegee Airmen for where they trained in Alabama or the Red Tails because of the red tips of their P-51 Mustangs.

"I did not recognize at the time the gravity of what we are facing. I just felt as though it was a duty of mine at the time. I just stood up to my duty," Stewart said of World War II in a 2024 interview with CNN about the war.

Having grown up in a multicultural neighborhood, the segregation and prejudice of the Jim Crow-era South came as a shock to Stewart, but he was determined to finish and earn his wings according to the book about his life. After finishing training, the pilots were assigned to escort U.S. bombers in Europe. The Tuskegee Airmen are credited with losing significantly fewer escorted bombers than other fighter groups.

"I got to really enjoy the idea of the panorama, I would say, of the scene I would see before me with the hundreds of bombers and the hundreds of fighter planes up there and all of them pulling the condensation trails, and it was just the ballet in the sky and a feeling of belonging to something that was really big," Stewart said in a 2020 interview with WAMC.

Stewart would sometimes say in a self-effacing way that he was too busy enjoying flying to realize he was making history, according to his book.

Stewart had hoped to become a commercial airline pilot after he left the military, but was rejected because of his race. He went on to earn a mechanical engineering degree New York University. He relocated to Detroit and retired as vice president of a natural gas pipeline company.

Stewart told Michigan Public Radio in 2019 that he was moved to tears on a recent commercial flight when he saw who was piloting the aircraft.

"When I entered the plane, I looked into the cockpit there and there were two African American pilots. One was the co-pilot, and one was the pilot. But not only that, the thing that started bringing the tears to my eyes is that they were both female," Stewart said.

The Air Force last month briefly removed training course s with videos of its storied Tuskegee Airmen and the Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASPs in an effort to comply with the Trump administration's crackdown on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. The materials were quickly restored following a

bipartisan backlash.

Trump to sign executive order barring transgender female athletes from competing

By WILL GRAVES AP National Writer

President Donald Trump will sign an executive order on Wednesday designed to prevent people who were biologically assigned male at birth from participating in women's or girls' sporting events.

The order, which Trump is expected to sign at an afternoon ceremony, marks another aggressive shift by the president's second administration in the way the federal government deals with transgender people and their rights.

The president put out a sweeping order on his first day in office last month that called for the federal government to define sex as only male or female and for that to be reflected on official documents such as passports and in policies such as federal prison assignments.

Trump found during the campaign that his pledge to "keep men out of women's sports" resonated beyond the usual party lines. More than half the voters surveyed by AP VoteCast said support for transgender rights in government and society has gone too far.

He leaned into the rhetoric before the election, pledging to get rid of the "transgender insanity," though his campaign offered little in the way of details.

Wednesday's order — which coincides with National Girls and Women in Sports Day — will involve how his administration will interpret Title IX, the law best known for its role in pursuing gender equity in athletics and preventing sexual harassment on campuses.

"This executive order restores fairness, upholds Title IX's original intent, and defends the rights of female athletes who have worked their whole lives to compete at the highest levels," said U.S. Rep. Nancy Mace, a Republican from South Carolina.

Every administration has the authority to issue its own interpretations of the landmark legislation. The last two presidential administrations — including Trump's first — offer a glimpse at the push-pull involved.

Betsy DeVos, the education secretary during Trump's first term, issued a Title IX policy in 2020 that narrowed the definition of sexual harassment and required colleges to investigate claims only if they're reported to certain officials.

The Biden administration rolled back that policy last April with one of its own that stipulated the rights of LGBTQ+ students would be protected by federal law and provided new safeguards for victims of campus sexual assault. The policy stopped short of explicitly addressing transgender athletes. Still, more than a half-dozen Republican-led states immediately challenged the new rule in court.

"All Trump has to say is, 'We are going to read the regulation traditionally,'" said Doriane Lambelet Coleman, a professor at Duke Law School.

How this order could affect the transgender athlete population — a number that is incredibly difficult to pin down — is uncertain.

The Associated Press reported in 2021 that in many cases, the states introducing a ban on transgender athletes could not cite instances where their participation was an issue. When Utah state legislators overrode a veto by Gov. Spencer Cox in 2022, the state had only one transgender girl playing in K-12 sports who would be affected by the ban. It did not regulate participation for transgender boys.

"This is a solution looking for a problem," Cheryl Cooky, a professor at Purdue University who studies the intersection of gender, sports, media and culture, told the AP after Trump was elected.

Yet the actual number of transgender athletes seems to be almost immaterial. Any case of a transgender female athlete competing — or even believed to be competing — draws outsized attention, from Lia Thomas swimming for the University of Pennsylvania to the recently completed season of the San Jose State volleyball team.

Inside the operations that took captive 2 North Korean soldiers fighting Ukraine

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — When Ukrainian soldiers captured two North Korean prisoners of war last month, it provided the first undeniable proof of Pyongyang's direct involvement in the war against Ukraine.

It also shed some light on the mindset and training of the conscripted North Korean soldiers sent to fight Russia's war a continent away from their home.

Highly disciplined, ready to die but also very young and with little battlefield experience they elicited curiosity and even some pity from the Ukrainian soldiers who captured them during two separate missions on Jan. 9.

Their capture confirmed what Ukraine, South Korea and the U.S. had been saying for months: Thousands of North Korean troops were fighting alongside Kremlin forces in the battle for Russia's Kursk border region — something Moscow had never confirmed.

'You will live,' one North Korean captive is assured

Capturing a North Korean prisoner had long been an objective for the Ukrainian special forces, even as the North Koreans seemed willing to kill themselves or a wounded comrade to elude capture. Only one had been taken captive, in December, but he died of his wounds.

Then intelligence came about three soldiers stranded in the so-called gray zone — a dangerous no-man's-land on the front line controlled by neither side. The soldiers were identified as North Koreans because they, not Russians, were operating in that sector of Kursk.

"They were likely abandoned," said a Ukrainian soldier who participated in the mission and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because special forces members are not authorized to reveal their names.

The team advanced through a barren winter forest toward the coordinates where a drone had spotted the three lost soldiers.

"Koreans are incredibly tough," the soldier said. "We've seen them carrying enormous loads: one soldier as small as a child, with a heavy backpack and a machine gun, yet sprinting."

As they closed in, the Ukrainians came under enemy fire, and two of the North Koreans were killed in the firefight. The third soldier was wounded in his legs.

When the Ukrainians reached him, his only remaining weapon was a single grenade. Disoriented, he didn't resist as the group began providing first aid and their commander discreetly removed the grenade. The North Korean, unaware of this, continued searching his pockets for it afterward.

The Ukrainian soldier said he tried to communicate with the captured man. He first spoke in Russian, eliciting a faint response. Then he heard the soldier muttering phrases in English and switched to his own broken English.

He asked the soldier's age and how long he had been serving. The soldier said he was 21 years old and had already spent four years in the military.

"He said conscription starts at 16 and lasts eight years," the Ukrainian soldier said. Despite his own 12 years of service and being a father of three, the soldier felt an unexpected wave of compassion.

"I looked at him, and honestly, I felt sorry for him," he said. "He asked for water, and we gave him some. Then he asked for a cigarette, and we gave him one. He called us 'brothers.'"

The team bandaged the North Korean soldier's legs and were carrying him toward Ukrainian-controlled territory when they were detected by a Russian reconnaissance drone, prompting a barrage of enemy fire.

"They must have realized we'd captured him and were desperate to take him out," the soldier said.

The team eventually reached a Ukrainian evacuation vehicle. They loaded the wounded North Korean into it. Only then, noticing the blue armbands on their sleeves, did he grasp he was in Ukrainian hands. He began searching frantically for his grenade again.

"When I handed him over to the medics, he looked terrified that I wasn't going with him," the soldier said. "I told him, 'Everything will be fine, you will live.'"

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With that, the vehicle drove off, concluding the operation after eight tense hours.

"I do feel sorry for him, but damn, they came to our land," the soldier said. "Still, I'd like to meet him again someday."

A North Korean soldier attempts suicide rather than be captured

On the same day, soldiers from an airborne unit captured another North Korean soldier, this time by chance and without initially realizing who they were taking prisoner.

It all began around 5 a.m., when a North Korean assault struck their position.

"The battle was intense and dragged on for hours," recalled 27-year-old paratrooper Maksym Didorchuk. The air thundered with explosions, and the sky buzzed with drones. The North Koreans attacked relentlessly.

"Their assaults are massive, but they're treated as expendable," Didorchuk said. "They're tough because they rely on sheer numbers"

"They follow orders," and never retreat, he said. "They're likely being used as training material."

Around noon, a reconnaissance drone spotted a lone soldier moving erratically from the Russian side toward the rear of the Ukrainian position.

"He was zigzagging, moving left and right," Didorchuk said. "Nobody knew who he was. The order was to intercept him, provide medical assistance if necessary, and decide what to do next."

Didorchuk and another paratrooper set off toward the soldier, guided by a Ukrainian reconnaissance drone. They eventually reached an area near destroyed Russian weaponry, where they saw the soldier sitting, his face hidden from view.

The paratroopers approached cautiously, asking in Ukrainian if the soldier needed help. No response. They tried Russian. The soldier glanced at them but remained silent. Switching to English also yielded no reaction.

Finally, as they drew closer, they saw his features clearly — and realized he was North Korean.

The soldier's arm was wounded, and his jaw bandaged, likely before he was separated. His movements were slow and uncoordinated, possibly the result of a concussion, Didorchuk said.

"He didn't seem to know where he was going."

Attached to his armor were a grenade and a knife. The paratroopers gestured for him to remove them, but he appeared confused.

"He didn't know if we were allies or enemies," Didorchuk said.

After repeated gestures, the soldier dropped the grenade and the knife. The paratroopers motioned for him to follow, and he complied. They maintained a cautious distance, aware that Russian drones could spot them and attack to prevent the North Korean from being captured.

"From what I understand, they don't want Koreans taken prisoner. They quickly evacuate their wounded and dead to erase all traces," Didorchuk said.

As they waited in a trench for transport, the North Korean asked for a cigarette, then another, while the paratroopers kept a vigilant eye not only on him but on the skies for Russian drones.

When the vehicle arrived, the North Korean soldier grew nervous. Suddenly he lunged at a concrete pillar, striking his head against it.

"I saw it as an attempt at self-destruction," Didorchuk said.

The soldiers secured him in the vehicle to be transferred to the authorities.

Ukraine's SBU security service, which interrogated the POWs, said one had no documents, while the other carried a Russian military ID in the name of a man from Tuva, a Russian region bordering Mongolia.

It said one of the soldiers claimed he was told he was going to Russia for training, not to fight against Ukraine. He said his combat unit only received one week of training alongside Russian troops before being sent to the front.

Trump talks Gaza takeover and other takeaways from his appearance with Netanyahu

By WILL WEISSERT, MICHELLE L. PRICE and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump offered a jaw-dropping performance during his joint news conference Tuesday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, suggesting that Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip could be permanently resettled elsewhere and that the U.S. might stage a long-term takeover of the vacated region — even leading redevelopment efforts to make it a seaside paradise in waiting.

He refused to rule out sending U.S. troops in to seal the deal, and said he himself — ever the real estate developer — might pay a personal visit.

Here are some takeaways from Trump's remarks:

Trump's comments could upend the ceasefire in Gaza

Negotiations to sustain the tenuous ceasefire in Gaza between Israel and Hamas — and secure the liberation of the remaining living hostages in captivity there, including at least one American — are set to begin in earnest this week. Trump's audacious proposal to relocate roughly 1.8 million Palestinians from the land they have called home, and look to as part of a future state, could completely upend those negotiations.

The framework for the talks calls for surging humanitarian and reconstruction supplies to help the people of Gaza recover after more than 15 months of devastating conflict between Israel and Hamas. It was always going to be a challenge for mediators to try to win Hamas' agreement to be uprooted as the governing authority in the territory.

Trump's suggestions that the U.S. take ownership of the area and redevelop it, with the possible support of American troops, is a sure non-starter for the militant group. It is also likely to put new stress on Qatar and Egypt, the other mediators in the talks, who have long advocated for Palestinian statehood.

A breakdown in the negotiations could see the return to fighting in Gaza — jeopardizing the fates of the remaining living hostages held by Hamas and other militant groups in the territory.

The suggestions were quickly panned in the Middle East

Trump's comments were immediately repudiated by Saudi Arabia, whose foreign ministry issued a sharply worded statement that the nation's long call for an independent Palestinian state was a "firm, steadfast and unwavering position."

Saudi Arabia has been in negotiations with the U.S. over a deal to diplomatically recognize Israel in exchange for a security pact and other terms. But the ministry's statement noted Saudi Arabia's "absolute rejection" of efforts to displace the Palestinian people from their land.

"The duty of the international community today," the statement added, "is to work to alleviate the severe human suffering endured by the Palestinian people, who will remain committed to their land and will not budge from it."

Hamas, in its own statement said, "We reject Trump's statements in which he said that the residents of the Gaza Strip have no choice but to leave, and we consider them a recipe for creating chaos and tension in the region."

An isolationist president is open to sending US troops to Gaza

Trump has built a political persona around an "America first" mantra that promotes isolationism, and is proud of the fact that the U.S. is currently not engaged in any foreign military conflicts.

So the fact that he might be ready to dispatch U.S. troops to Gaza is nothing short of stunning.

The president said he wants the U.S. to take "long-term" ownership of the Gaza and redevelop it after Palestinians are resettled elsewhere. Asked if that might involve American military forces, Trump replied, "As far as Gaza is concerned, we'll do what is necessary."

"If it's necessary," he added, "We'll do that."

Trump is in real estate developer mode

Trump, who became famous as a 1980s New York real estate developer, still often gleefully looks at the world that way — and it showed on Tuesday.

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The president said he envisions "the world's people" living in a redeveloped Gaza that he said could look like "the Riviera of the Middle East."

"This could be something that could be so valuable. This could be so magnificent," Trump said, adding that "most importantly," the people that live there would be able to live in peace and, "We'll make sure that it's done world-class."

Trump said that eventually he envisioned "Palestinians, mostly" living in the region but also described his vision for Gaza as "an international, unbelievable place."

The president also said he planned to visit Israel during his second term in office and even suggested he might go to Gaza — a trip that would present unprecedented logistical and security challenges.

Trump keeps expressing reluctance about his own Iran stance

Amid precarious ceasefire and hostage negotiations, Trump has also begun expressing reluctance about the pressure his administration is seeking to put on Iran.

Trump made it clear he would like to negotiate with one of America's top adversaries to allow it to prosper — as long as Iran commits to not developing a nuclear weapon. He twice said he "hated" signing an executive order earlier Tuesday instructing the U.S. to impose maximum pressure on Tehran.

"I want Iran to be peaceful and successful. I hated doing it," the president said.

Trump then sought to address the people of Iran directly by saying he "would love to be able to make a great deal, a deal where you can get on with your lives. You'll do wonderfully."

That tone was a noticeable departure from unapologetically tough words Trump offered about some of America's allies in recent days — threatening tariffs against Canada and Mexico and suggesting that similar levies could be coming against the European Union.

Trump praised the Iranians as "industrious, beautiful" and "incredible people," and said his one requirement as he seeks a deal with them is that they don't obtain a nuclear weapon. He also said if Iran can convince the U.S. that they won't, "I think they're going to have an unbelievable future."

"I hope we're going to be able to do something so that it doesn't end up in a very catastrophic situation. I don't want to see that happen," Trump said. "I really want to see peace."

Trump's takeover list is growing

And now it's designs on Gaza.

Trump's suggestions that the U.S. could occupy Gaza, with the possible support of U.S. troops, follows his threatening to take the Panama Canal by military force. And that came after his repeated insistence the U.S. can somehow wrest control of Greenland from Denmark, and that Canadians would like to become the 51st state.

Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., didn't mince words when asked about Trump's suggestions for Gaza: "He's completely lost it."

"He wants a U.S. invasion of Gaza, which would cost thousands of American lives and set the Middle East on fire for 20 years?" asked the Democrat from Connecticut. "It's sick."

Islamic State members held for years in a Syria prison say they know nothing of the world

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

HASSAKEH, Syria (AP) — Men of various ages and nationalities sit silently in their cells, a small window in the metal doors their only opening to the world. All are alleged members of the Islamic State group, captured during the final days of the extremists' so-called caliphate declared in large parts of Iraq and Syria.

The Gweiran Prison, now called Panorama has held about 4,500 IS-linked detainees for years. The Associated Press was given an exclusive visit to the prison, nearly two months after the fall of the 54-year Assad dynasty in Syria — an upheaval the detainees might not even know about as prison officials try to limit outside information.

Syrian President Bashar Assad's ouster during a lightning insurgent offensive in December has led to new attention, and new pressures, on such detention centers in the country's northeast that have been

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holding some 9,000 IS members without trial.

The centers are guarded by members of the U.S.-backed and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces that in March 2019 captured the last sliver of land that IS members once held, the eastern town of Baghouz.

SDF chief commander Mazloum Abdi told the AP that after the fall of Assad, IS members captured large amounts of weapons in eastern Syria from posts abandoned by forces loyal to the former president.

An SDF security official warned that the extremists might attack detention facilities and try to free their comrades. He spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

The detainees are "a literal and figurative 'ISIS army' in detention," Gen. Michael Erik Kurilla, commander of the U.S. Central Command, said during a visit to Syria last month.

The prison visit occurred in a corridor with six cells on each side and with masked guards holding clubs. A window in a cell door was opened, and the detainees were told they could speak briefly to journalists.

A young man moved forward and identified himself as Maher, a nurse from Melbourne, Australia. Prison authorities asked that only first names be used.

"I'd love to go back to Australia," the man said, adding that he was not arrested in 2019 in Baghouz but gave himself up when the U.S.-led coalition opened a humanitarian corridor.

"I didn't do anything to anyone. I've been here for seven years without judgement. Without anything," he said, and expressed regret for "a lot of things."

Maher said he married a Syrian woman and has two sons, and they are at one of the camps housing families of IS members in northeast Syria. He said he has not had information about them, and that he sent a letter to his parents via the International Committee of the Red Cross and never received an answer.

The security of the detention centers is a growing question since Assad's fall.

One of the most serious threats to the centers came in January 2022 when IS gunmen stormed the prison, leading to 10 days of battles with the SDF that left nearly 500 people dead.

The prison, formerly the classrooms of a technical school, was later renovated with the help of the U.S.-led coalition. Security was tight when the AP visited, with armed fighters stationed on roads leading to the facility.

But SDF officials have said that recent clashes between their fighters and Turkey-backed gunmen in northern Syria, which coincided with the insurgent offensive that led to Assad's fall, are affecting their ability to protect the prisons.

During a visit to Turkey last month by Syria's foreign minister, Asaad al-Shibani, his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan told reporters that Ankara was ready to help Syrian authorities manage the detention centers as well as the camps where more than 40,000 people, many of them women and children, with alleged IS links are held.

But the SDF chief commander didn't welcome the idea.

"The way Turkey can help is to stop its attacks on us so that we concentrate on the protection of al-Hol and the prisons," Abdi said.

He added that the fate of al-Hol and other prisons can be solved within Syria. The country's future is being discussed in talks between the SDF, which controls nearly 25% of Syria, and the new government in Damascus led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group.

Inside the cells, the men wait for word on their own fate.

A British prisoner from London who asked that his name not be made public said he wants to return to Britain and stand trial there. He was 18 when he came to Syria a decade ago after seeing media reports on "the killings of kids" by Assad's government forces during a popular uprising that turned into civil war.

He said he later wanted to leave Syria but could not.

"Once you enter (IS) it's hard to leave," he said.

He claimed he had not been a fighter but bought and sold cars while living in IS-held areas. He said all men captured by the SDF in the Baghouz area in early 2019 were classified as IS members.

Seven years have passed in detention.

"To survive a day in this place is a miracle," he said, adding that he and fellow detainees know nothing

of the world now, not even the date.

Asked what day it was, he replied: "We are in early 2025."

Trump administration pulling almost all USAID workers off the job worldwide

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration said Tuesday that it is pulling almost all U.S. Agency for International Development workers off the job and out of the field worldwide, moving to all but end a six-decade mission to shore up American security by fighting starvation, funding education and working to end epidemics.

The administration notified USAID workers in emails and a notice posted online, the latest in a steady dismantling of the aid agency by returning political appointees from President Donald Trump's first term and billionaire Elon Musk's government-efficiency teams who call much of the spending on programs overseas wasteful.

The order takes effect just before midnight Friday and gives direct hires of the agency overseas — many of whom have been frantically packing up households in expectation of layoffs — 30 days to return home unless they are deemed essential. Contractors not determined to be essential also would be fired, the notice said.

The move had been rumored for several days and was the most extreme of several proposals considered for consolidating the agency into the State Department. Other options had included closures of smaller USAID missions and partial closures of larger ones.

Thousands of USAID employees already had been laid off and programs worldwide shut down after Trump imposed a sweeping freeze on foreign assistance. Despite outcry from Democratic lawmakers, the aid agency has been a special target as the new administration and Musk's budget-slashing Department of Government Efficiency look to shrink the federal government.

They have ordered a spending stop that has paralyzed U.S.-funded aid and development work around the world, gutted the senior leadership and workforce with furloughs and firings, and closed Washington headquarters to staffers Monday. Lawmakers said the agency's computer servers were carted away.

"Spent the weekend feeding USAID into the wood chipper," Musk boasted on X.

The mass removal of thousands of staffers overseas and in Washington would doom billions of dollars in projects in some 120 countries, including security assistance to partners such as Ukraine as well as development work for clean water, job training and education, including for schoolgirls under Taliban rule in Afghanistan.

The U.S. is the world's largest humanitarian donor by far. It spends less than 1% of its budget on foreign assistance, a smaller share of its budget than some countries.

Health programs like those credited with helping end polio and smallpox epidemics and an acclaimed HIV/AIDS program that saved more than 20 million lives in Africa already have stopped. So have monitoring and deployments of rapid-response teams for contagious diseases such as an Ebola outbreak in Uganda.

Hundreds of millions of dollars of food and medication already delivered by U.S. companies are sitting in ports because of the administration's sudden shutdown of the agency.

Democratic lawmakers and others say the USAID is enshrined in legislation as an independent agency, and cannot be shut down without congressional approval. Supporters of USAID from both political parties say its work overseas is essential to countering the influence of Russia, China and other adversaries and rivals abroad, and to cementing alliances and partnerships.

The decision to withdraw direct-hire staff and their families earlier than their planned departures will likely cost the government tens of millions of dollars in travel and relocation costs.

Staff being placed on leave include both foreign and civil service officers who have legal protection against arbitrary dismissal and being placed on leave without reason.

The American Foreign Service Association, the union which represents U.S. diplomats, sent a notice to

its members denouncing the decision and saying it was preparing legal action to counter or halt it.

Locally employed USAID staff, however, do not have much recourse and were excluded from the federal government's voluntary buyout offer.

USAID staffers and families faced wrenching decisions as the rumors layoffs loomed, including whether to pull children out of school midyear. Some gave away pet cats and dogs, fearing the Trump administration would not give them time to complete the paperwork to bring the animals with them.

Tuesday's notice said it would consider case-by-case exceptions for those needing more time. But with most of the agency's staff soon off the job, it was unclear who would process such claims or other paperwork needed for the mass removal of thousands of overseas staffers.

Musk's teams had taken USAID's website offline over the weekend and it came back online Tuesday night, with the notice of recall or termination for global staffers its sole post.

The announcement came as Secretary of State Marco Rubio was on a five-nation tour of Central America and met with embassy and USAID staff at two of the region's largest USAID missions: El Salvador and Guatemala on Monday and Tuesday.

Journalists accompanying Rubio were not allowed to witness the so-called "meet and greet" sessions in those two countries, but had been allowed in for a similar event in Panama on Sunday in which Rubio praised employees, particularly locals, for their dedication and service.

At a news conference earlier Tuesday, Rubio said he has "long supported foreign aid. I continue to support foreign aid. But foreign aid is not charity." He noted that every dollar the U.S. spends must advance its national interests.

The online notice says those who will be exempted from leave include staffers responsible for "mission-critical functions, core leadership and specially designated programs" and would be informed by Thursday afternoon.

"Thank you for your service," the notice concluded.

Middle East latest: Trump suggests Palestinians leave Gaza as talks on ceasefire resume

By The Associated Press undefined

President Donald Trump suggested Tuesday that displaced Palestinians be permanently resettled outside Gaza and proposed the U.S. take "ownership" in redeveloping the area. His remarks drew swift opposition and were certain to roil the ceasefire talks between Hamas and Israel.

Trump outlined his thinking as he held talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House. Netanyahu is facing competing pressure from his right-wing coalition to end a temporary truce against Hamas militants in Gaza and from war-weary Israelis who want the remaining hostages home and for the war to end.

The first phase of the ceasefire began last month, and Hamas said Tuesday it had begun talks with international mediators in the second phase of the negotiations. The first phase halted fighting, allowed more humanitarian aid into Gaza and exchanged Palestinian prisoners for Israeli hostages taken during the Oct. 7, 2023, attack that started the war.

The negotiations for the second phase of the ceasefire were expected to be much more difficult. The later negotiations were likely to include further hostage and prisoner releases, an indefinite extension of the truce and who will govern Gaza after hostilities end.

Here's the latest:

Australia, New Zealand still support a 2-state solution

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese says his government continues to support a two-state solution in the Middle East, "where both Israelis and Palestinians could live in peace and security."

"We've supported a ceasefire, we've supported hostages being released and we've supported aid get-

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ting into Gaza," he told reporters Wednesday in Canberra when asked about Trump's remarks. "That is consistent with what Australia governments have always done, which is to provide support."

Albanese did not directly respond to reporters' questions about how he would characterize Trump's Gaza plan.

"I'm not going to have a running commentary on statements by the president of the United States," he said. "I've made that very clear."

Trump's remarks on Gaza rejected by Hamas, shock Mideast

President Donald Trump's proposal to resettle Palestinians out of Gaza upset a Middle East still shaken by the Israel-Hamas war.

The pan-Arab broadcaster Al Jazeera, based in Qatar which has been a key negotiator for the ceasefire holding in the war, called Trump's comments a "shock announcement."

Hamas says it rejects Trump's suggestion that Gaza residents should leave the territory.

"Instead of holding the Zionist occupation accountable for the crime of genocide and displacement, it is being rewarded, not punished," Hamas said in a statement. "We reject Trump's statements in which he said that the residents of the Gaza Strip have no choice but to leave, and we consider them a recipe for creating chaos and tension in the region."

Saudi Arabia says its call for an independent Palestinian state is unwavering

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The reaction came swiftly in the Mideast from President Donald Trump's suggestion of the U.S. taking over the Gaza Strip. In Saudi Arabia, its Foreign Ministry issued a sharply worded statement early Wednesday that their long call for an independent Palestinian state was a "firm, steadfast and unwavering position."

The statement noted Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the country's de facto ruler, has said that "Saudi Arabia will not stop its tireless work towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital, and that the kingdom will not establish diplomatic relations with Israel without that."

Saudi Arabia has been in negotiations with the U.S. over a deal to diplomatically recognize Israel in exchange for a security pact and other terms.

"The kingdom of Saudi Arabia also stresses what it had previously announced regarding its absolute rejection of infringement on the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, whether through Israeli settlement policies, annexation of Palestinian lands or efforts to displace the Palestinian people from their land," the statement added. "The duty of the international community today is to work to alleviate the severe human suffering endured by the Palestinian people, who will remain committed to their land and will not budge from it."

It added: "This firm position is not subject to negotiation or outbidding."

The kingdom has supported the Palestinians having an independent state comprised of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, with east Jerusalem as their capital. It's a stance the wider Mideast holds on the conflict.

— Jon Gambrell in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Trump suggests Palestinians be resettled outside Gaza

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump suggested that displaced Palestinians in Gaza be permanently resettled outside the war-torn territory and proposed the U.S. take "ownership" in redeveloping the area.

Trump's proposal appears certain to roil the talks meant to extend the tenuous ceasefire between Israel and Hamas and secure the release of the remaining hostages held in Gaza.

Talks are ramping up this week for sending more humanitarian aid and reconstruction supplies to help the people of Gaza recover from the war. Now Trump wants to push roughly 1.8 million people to leave the land they have called home and claim it for the U.S., perhaps with American troops.

Trump outlined his thinking as he met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House.

"I don't think people should be going back," Trump said. "You can't live in Gaza right now. I think we need another location. I think it should be a location that's going to make people happy."

Trump said the U.S. would take ownership of the Gaza Strip and redevelop it after Palestinians are resettled elsewhere. "We'll make sure that it's done world class," Trump said.

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Egypt, Jordan and other U.S. allies in the Mideast have cautioned Trump that relocating Palestinians from Gaza would threaten Mideast stability and risk expanding the conflict.

Funeral held in Gaza for al-Qassam commander

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — Hamas' military wing, the al-Qassam Brigades, held a funeral Tuesday for Ghazi Abu Tamaa, its weapons and combat services commander who was killed during the war in Gaza.

Associated Press footage showed al-Qassam fighters riding in multiple vehicles, raising their rifles in tribute and playing music while carrying a poster bearing his image. Multiple mourners fired shots into the air as others carried his casket to a courtyard, where relatives gathered as they cried and prayed for him.

The group's spokesperson, Abu Obeida, confirmed Abu Tamaa's death as well as the death of senior leader Mohammed Deif in a video statement Thursday. The spokesperson didn't provide details about their deaths.

The Israeli military had previously said that Abu Tamaa was killed in an airstrike in March of last year along with Marwan Issa, al-Qassam's deputy leader.

Qatar is committed to supporting Lebanese army, prime minister says

BEIRUT — Qatar's prime minister reaffirmed his country's commitment to supporting the Lebanese army during a visit to Beirut on Tuesday.

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani's remarks came after meeting Lebanon's president, former army commander Joseph Aoun, whose election in January ended a two-year presidential vacuum.

Qatar has been a source of support for Lebanon's military in recent years, particularly as the army struggled with unpaid salaries amid the country's ongoing economic crisis.

"We look forward to working on joint projects between the two countries after forming the government," Thani, who is also Qatar's foreign minister, said in a news conference alongside his Lebanese counterpart. "Our visit today is a support visit from the State of Qatar, which always stands by Lebanon and its people."

Thani did not specify which sectors Qatar would invest in, but in 2022, Qatar joined TotalEnergies and Eni in offshore gas exploration off the coast of Lebanon.

Piles of garbage add to problems amid rubble of Gaza City

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — Large piles of garbage have risen among the rubble from destroyed buildings in Gaza City — another sign of the difficulties Palestinians face as they return to homes under the Israel-Hamas ceasefire.

Associated Press footage this week showed hills of garbage lining streets in Gaza City. Children picked through one pile, searching for food or anything of use for their families.

"It spreads disease among people and itching and coughing among children," resident Abu Saad Saleh said. "People burn it and the smoke enters our homes. It has destroyed us. For God's sake, remove this garbage from us."

Much of Gaza City and surrounding areas of north Gaza were decimated by repeated Israeli offensives against Hamas militants during 15 months of war. Municipal services like garbage collection collapsed early on.

With the start of the ceasefire, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who fled south have returned to Gaza City. Many have nowhere to live after homes were destroyed, water is in short supply and electricity is nearly nonexistent.

2 soldiers killed, 8 injured in West Bank attack, officials say

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military says two soldiers were killed and eight wounded in a shooting attack on an army post in the West Bank.

The military had reported the attack earlier Tuesday, saying the shooter was killed without immediately providing details on its own casualties.

Israel has been carrying out a major military operation in the city of Jenin, near to where the attack took place. The military says it is trying to clamp down on Palestinian militants.

The West Bank has seen a surge in violence since Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack out of Gaza triggered

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the war there.

The Israeli military has carried out near-daily arrest raids that often spark gunbattles. There has also been a rise in Palestinian attacks on Israelis and settler violence against Palestinians.

Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want all three territories for their future state.

Hamas officials say they've started talks on second phase of ceasefire

JERUSALEM — Hamas officials say they've begun talks with international mediators over the second phase of the ceasefire while claiming Israel hasn't abided by some of the terms of the first phase.

Abdel-Latif al-Qanoua, a spokesperson for the militant group, said Tuesday that it had started "communications and negotiations" over the next phase, which is expected to include further hostage releases and Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

The group also claimed in a statement Tuesday that Israel had delayed and obstructed the flow of aid into the enclave.

"What has been implemented in these aspects is much less than what was agreed on," Hazem Qassam, the group's spokesperson, said in a statement.

Negotiations of the ceasefire's second phase were set to begin Monday. Netanyahu's office said Tuesday that he would send a delegation to Qatar this weekend to continue negotiations.

The second phase is expected to be more difficult to negotiate than the first phase agreement. Israel has said it won't agree to a complete withdrawal from Gaza until Hamas' military and political capabilities are eliminated. Hamas says it won't hand over the last hostages until Israel removes all troops from the territory.

Palestinian Authority forms committee to manage recovery in Gaza

RAMALLAH, West Bank — The Palestinian Authority says it has formed a committee to manage reconstruction and recovery efforts in the Gaza Strip.

It was unclear if the committee would be able to operate inside Gaza. Hamas, though weakened, still controls most of the territory, and Israel has ruled out any role for the Western-backed Palestinian Authority in postwar Gaza.

The office of Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa said during a Cabinet meeting Tuesday that officials set up a working group "to manage the affairs of the Gaza Strip." The committee would work to provide basic services like water, electricity, health and education, specifically in the southern Gaza Strip, with the help of "various partners," the statement said, without elaborating.

A Palestinian official, who was not authorized to brief media and spoke on condition of anonymity, said the working group would be made up of technocrats, including independent figures from Gaza.

Hamas, which won parliamentary elections in 2006, drove the Palestinian Authority's forces from Gaza the following year in a week of street battles.

It's unclear where the Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, fits into Trump's plans for the region.

— By Isabel DeBre

Turkey will host 15 Palestinian prisoners released as part of ceasefire

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey will host 15 Palestinian prisoners who were released and deported as part of the ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Israel.

The Turkish intelligence organization, MIT, is taking steps to facilitate the arrival of the 15 Palestinians from Egypt, the state-run Anadolu Agency said Tuesday.

Arrangements were made to ensure the Palestinians can live "peacefully and securely" in Turkey, Anadolu said.

The news agency did not name the Palestinians that Ankara was preparing to take in. Those who were deported have been convicted of serious crimes.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said Sunday that Turkey was prepared to support the Palestinian people, including providing medical treatment for those wounded in the conflict and taking in released

prisoners who would be deported from the region.

Unlike its Western allies, Turkey does not consider Hamas to be a terror organization. A strong critic of Israel's military actions in Gaza, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has hosted several Hamas officials over the years.

Family members of Thai hostages released by Hamas visit them in Israeli hospital

JERUSALEM — Family members of Thai hostages released by Hamas last week after over 15 months of captivity in the Gaza Strip have visited them at the Israeli hospital where they are recuperating.

The Thai Embassy in Israel said the family members flew in Tuesday and met with the freed hostages at the Shamir Medical Center.

Hamas released five Thai hostages last week along with three Israeli captives who were freed as part of a ceasefire agreement in exchange for 110 Palestinian prisoners.

Hamas militants kidnapped 31 Thai nationals along with scores of Israelis and a few other foreigners during its Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel.

Tens of thousands of Thai farmers work in Israel, where they can make higher wages than they can at home. Many lived in compounds on the outskirts of southern Israeli farming communities and towns that were overrun by Hamas-led militants.

During an earlier ceasefire in November 2023, 23 Thai nationals were released in a deal negotiated between Thailand and Hamas, with assistance from Qatar and Iran.

Fast fashion, laptops and toys are likely to cost more due to US tariffs on Chinese imports

By HALELUYA HADERO Associated Press

A sweeping new U.S. tariff on products made in China is expected to increase the prices American consumers pay for a wide array of products, from the ultra-cheap apparel sold on online shopping platforms to toys and electronic devices such as computers and cellphones.

An additional 10% tariff on all Chinese goods took effect Tuesday, while the U.S. Postal Service announced it will stop accepting parcels inbound from China and Hong Kong until further notice.

The previous day, President Donald Trump agreed to pause his threatened tariffs against Mexico and Canada for 30 days following negotiations on Trump's demands for the North American nations to take steps to reduce illegal immigration and the flow of drugs such as fentanyl into the U.S.

After failing to get a similar White House reprieve, China struck back with retaliatory tariffs on some U.S. goods that are set to begin next week.

The sheer volume and variety of the China-made merchandise sold in the U.S. means residents would probably see the prices of many typically inexpensive items tick higher if the tit-for-tat tariffs persist.

These are some of the products most likely to be impacted:

Electronics, home supplies and car parts

The U.S. imported about \$427 billion worth of goods from China in 2023, the most recent year with complete data, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Consumer electronics, including cellphones, computers and other tech accessories, make up the biggest import categories.

China is a dominant production engine for tech gear, including for American companies like Apple that have their products assembled in the country. In 2023, China accounted for 78% of U.S. smartphone imports and 79% of laptop and tablet imports, the Consumer Technology Association trade group reported.

The tariffs also may affect how much consumers pay for typically inexpensive clothing, shoes and kitchen items like pots and pans, as well as the big-ticket items, such as appliances, furniture and auto parts.

Jay Salaytah, 43, who runs his own auto repair shop in Detroit, said he bought some pieces of equipment sooner than he might have, anticipating they would cost more if Trump implemented his campaign promise to use import tariffs as a tool to promote U.S. manufacturing.

"I knew the costs were going to go up, and these are manufactured in China," Salaytah said of a probe test light he purchased before Tuesday's tariff went into effect.

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Low-cost apparel and accessories

In addition to imposing a new tariff on Chinese imports, Trump's executive order also suspended a little-known trade exemption that allowed goods worth less than \$800 to come into the U.S. duty-free. The order left open the possibility for the loophole to still be used with shipments from other countries.

The trade rule, known as "de minimis," has existed for nearly a century. It came under greater scrutiny in recent years due to the rapidly growing number of low-cost items coming into the U.S. from China, mainly from prominent China-founded online retailers such as Shein, Temu and Alibaba's AliExpress.

Former President Joe Biden's administration proposed a crackdown on the loophole in September, but the rules did not take effect before Biden left office.

Shein and Temu have gained global popularity by offering a quickly updated assortment of ultra-inexpensive clothes, accessories, gifts and gadgets shipped mostly from China, allowing the two e-commerce companies to compete on the home turf of American companies.

Seattle-based Amazon is trying to compete with them through an online storefront that mimics their business model by offering cheap products shipped directly from China.

Chinese exports of low-value packages soared to \$66 billion in 2023, up from \$5.3 billion in 2018, according to report released last week by the Congressional Research Service. In the U.S., Temu and Shein comprise about 17% of the discount market for fast fashion, toys and other consumer goods, the report said.

How much will prices go up?

It's unclear. Under de minimis, Shein, Temu and AliExpress could bypass taxes collected by customs authorities. But under the changes effective Tuesday, company shipments from China will now be subject to existing duties plus the new 10% tariff imposed by Trump, analysts said.

"The vast majority of these orders are valued less than \$800, which means all or virtually all of them are going to get caught in that," Youssef Squali, an analyst at Truist Financial, said.

Juozas Kaziukenas, founder of e-commerce intelligence firm Marketplace Pulse, said he thinks the price increases on platforms like Shein and Temu will be "pretty small" and the products they sell will remain cheap. However, the rule change is likely to result in delivery delays since the packages now have to go through customs, Kaziukenas said.

The new tariffs will also hit third-party sellers on Amazon that import products from China, according to Squali. He expects sellers to eat some of the costs and pass the rest onto customers, which he thinks could result in percentage price increases in the mid-single digits. Other e-commerce sites that host businesses, such as Etsy, are also going to be impacted, Squali said.

Temu, which is owned by China's PDD Holdings, has previously said its growth did not depend on the de minimis policy. Though most of its products are shipped from China, Temu has been recruiting Chinese merchants to store inventory in the U.S., a move that experts said would allow it to not be as exposed to changes around the trade rule.

In January, China also introduced measures to help cross-border e-commerce build overseas warehousing by offering them tax rebates or tax exemptions

What are US retailers saying?

The day after November's U.S. presidential election, Briane Olson, CEO of teen clothing chain PacSun, went to Hong Kong to meet with factory executives to figure out ways to prepare for Trump's tariff plan.

Roughly 35% to 40% of PacSun's garments are made in China, even as the chain has accelerated moves to diversify with suppliers in countries like Cambodia and Vietnam.

But Olson said Trump's 10% tariff on Chinese goods was less extreme than the company anticipated. For now, PacSun doesn't plan to increase prices on its products or move its manufacturing of knitwear and denim out of China.

Toys are another category of consumer products that relies heavily on imports from China. Greg Ahearn, the president and CEO of The Toy Association trade group, said he thinks toy companies that source in China are going to absorb the cost of the new tariff in the short term.

Eventually, those price hikes will be moved onto the consumer, Ahearn said.

A timeline of last week's air disaster in Washington, the deadliest in the US since 2001

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press/Report for America

It has been nearly a week since a commercial jetliner and an Army helicopter collided in midair near Washington's Ronald Reagan National Airport, killing 67 people in the deadliest U.S. air disaster since 2001.

Even as salvage crews continue to haul the wreckage out of the Potomac River, investigators are seeking answers about what happened.

From the minutes before the crash to the ensuing days of questions, here is a look at the timeline of events:

Jan. 29

At around 8:15 p.m. American Airlines Flight 5342, with 64 people on board, begins its initial descent into Reagan National.

At 8:43, from the airport's tower, a controller asks the plane's pilots to switch from landing on Runway 1 to Runway 33. Nearby an Army Black Hawk helicopter, referred to as PAT25 by air traffic control, is flying south over the River. The skies are clear.

At 8:46, the controller radios the Black Hawk crew to say a passenger jet, referred to as CRJ, is at 1,200 feet (365 meters) and circling to Runway 33.

At 8:47, as the two aircraft near each other, the controller again radios: "PAT25, do you have the CRJ in sight?" Then, again: "PAT25, pass behind the CRJ."

A crewmember on the helicopter replies that the aircraft "is in sight" and requests "visual separation" with the incoming plane -- allowing it to fly closer than otherwise may have been allowed if the pilots didn't see the plane. Controllers approve the request.

About 20 seconds later a commotion is heard on the audio. A flash appears in the sky, and both aircraft fall into the river. Moments later someone says over the radio, "Tower, did you see that?"

In the ensuing hours, helicopters and inflatable boats light up the Potomac in search of survivors.

Jan. 30

In the morning President Donald Trump tells reporters there are no survivors and says it is unclear what led to the collision.

The names of those on both flights begin to emerge online, appearing in Facebook eulogies or statements from grieving families.

By midday the bodies of all three soldiers in the helicopter have been recovered.

About 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) downriver from the crash site, Dean Naujoks, who patrols the Potomac for the Waterkeeper Alliance, finds pages from the flight manual, a piece of the plane's cabin wall and dozens of sugar packets stamped with the American Airlines logo. He turns the items over to the FBI.

In the evening the airplane's cockpit voice and flight data recorders are recovered and sent to labs for evaluation.

Jan. 31

It is raining as police boats comb the Potomac for victims and investigators search for clues as to what happened.

Officials announce that the Black Hawk's black box has recovered and the flight data is being reviewed, along with the actions of the military pilot and air traffic control.

Over 300 responders are on the scene throughout the day, including dive teams. By the afternoon the remains of 41 people have been pulled recovered.

The Army releases the names of two of the dead soldiers: Staff Sgt. Ryan Austin O'Hara, 28, of Lilburn, Georgia, the crew chief; and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Andrew Loyd Eaves, 39, of Great Mills, Maryland.

Feb. 1

The rain clears. A Coast Guard cutter outfitted with a crane waits nearby as recovery team members slip into the chilly water to continue the search.

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At a news conference, investigators say they are trying to work out a discrepancy in the altitude data between the helicopter and the airliner.

Investigators say they hope the helicopter's black box can help reconcile difference. The box was waterlogged, delaying retrieval of its data.

The Army identifies the third soldier who died in the helicopter: Capt. Rebecca M. Lobach. She is described by friends as "brilliant and fearless."

Feb. 2

Officials say the number of victims whose remains have been recovered has risen to 55 and they are confident the rest will be found.

As the search continues, salvage crews prepare to lift wreckage from the Potomac.

Col. Francis B. Pera of the Army Corps of Engineers says divers and salvage workers are adhering to strict protocols and will stop moving debris if a body is found.

The "dignified recovery" of remains takes precedence over all else, he says.

Feb. 3

Salvage crews recover an engine and large pieces of fuselage of the airliner and work to retrieve a wing. Portions of the helicopter and plane that were pulled from the water are loaded onto flatbed trucks and taken to a hangar for investigation.

Families of the victims gather on the banks of the Potomac.

Feb. 4

Early on in the day, crews working in choppy conditions raise a number of large pieces of the jetliner including the right wing, the center fuselage and parts of the forward cabin, cockpit, tail cone and rudder.

Investigators announce that they are examining new data that could shed light on the altitude discrepancy.

Authorities say the remains of all 67 victims of the collision have been recovered and all but one have been identified.

Trump won't rule out deploying US troops to support rebuilding Gaza, sees 'long-term' US ownership

By AAMER MADHANI, ZEKE MILLER and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Tuesday suggested that displaced Palestinians in Gaza be permanently resettled outside the war-torn territory and proposed the U.S. take "ownership" in redeveloping the area into "the Riviera of the Middle East."

Trump's brazen proposal appears certain to roil the next stage of talks meant to extend the tenuous ceasefire between Israel and Hamas and secure the release of the remaining hostages held in Gaza.

The provocative comments came as talks are ramping up this week with the promise of surging humanitarian aid and reconstruction supplies to help the people of Gaza recover after more than 15 months of devastating conflict. Now Trump wants to push roughly 1.8 million people to leave the land they have called home and claim it for the U.S., perhaps with American troops.

"The U.S. will take over the Gaza Strip, and we will do a job with it too," Trump said at an evening news conference with Netanyahu by his side. The president who made his name as a New York real estate developer added: "We'll make sure that it's done world-class. It'll be wonderful for the people — Palestinians, Palestinians mostly, we're talking about."

Trump outlined his thinking as he held talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House, where the two leaders also discussed the fragile ceasefire and hostage deal in the Israeli-Hamas conflict and shared concerns about Iran.

Trump said the U.S. would redevelop the territory after Palestinians are resettled elsewhere and turn the territory into a place where the "world's people"— including Palestinians — would live. He offered no detail about what authority the U.S. would use to take the land and develop it.

Allies reject the idea

Egypt, Jordan and other U.S. allies in the Mideast have cautioned Trump that relocating Palestinians from

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Gaza would threaten Mideast stability, risk expanding the conflict and undermine a decades-long push by the U.S. and allies for a two-state solution.

Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry issued a sharply worded reaction to Trump, noting their long call for an independent Palestinian state was a "firm, steadfast and unwavering position." Saudi Arabia has been in negotiations with the U.S. over a deal to diplomatically recognize Israel in exchange for a security pact and other terms.

"The duty of the international community today is to work to alleviate the severe human suffering endured by the Palestinian people, who will remain committed to their land and will not budge from it," the Saudi statement said.

Still, Trump insists the Palestinians "have no alternative" but to leave the "big pile of rubble" that is Gaza. He spoke out as his top aides stressed that a three-to-five-year timeline for reconstruction of the war-torn territory, as laid out in a temporary truce agreement, is not viable.

Last week, both Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and Jordanian King Abdullah II dismissed Trump's calls to resettle Gazans.

But Trump said he believes Egypt and Jordan — as well as other countries, which he did not name — will ultimately agree to take in Palestinians.

"You look over the decades, it's all death in Gaza," Trump said. "This has been happening for years. It's all death. If we can get a beautiful area to resettle people, permanently, in nice homes where they can be happy and not be shot and not be killed and not be knifed to death like what's happening in Gaza."

Trump also said he isn't ruling out deploying U.S. troops to support reconstruction of Gaza. He envisions "long-term" U.S. ownership of a redevelopment of the territory.

The president's proposal was greeted with alarm by Democrats and a measure of skepticism by his Republican allies.

"He's completely lost it," said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn. "He wants a U.S. invasion of Gaza, which would cost thousands of American lives and set the Middle East on fire for 20 years? It's sick."

"We'll see what our Arab friends say about that," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican and a Trump ally. "And I think most South Carolinians are probably not excited about sending Americans to take over Gaza. I think that might be problematic, but I'll keep an open mind."

A fragile ceasefire

The White House's focus on the future of Gaza comes as the nascent truce between Israel and Hamas hangs in the balance.

Netanyahu is facing competing pressure from his right-wing coalition to end a temporary truce against Hamas militants in Gaza and from war-weary Israelis who want the remaining hostages home and for the 15-month conflict to end.

Trump may be betting he can persuade Egypt and Jordan to come around to accept displaced Palestinians because of the significant aid that the U.S. provides Cairo and Amman. Hard-line right-wing members of Netanyahu's government have embraced the call to move displaced Palestinians out of Gaza.

"To me, it is unfair to explain to Palestinians that they might be back in five years," Trump's Mideast envoy, Steve Witkoff, said. "That's just preposterous."

Trump also signaled that he may be reconsidering an independent Palestinian state as part of a broader two-state solution to the decades-long Israel-Palestinian conflict.

"Well, a lot of plans change with time," he told reporters when asked if he was still committed to a plan like the one he laid out in 2020 that called for a Palestinian state. "A lot of death has occurred since I left and now came back."

Netanyahu's arrival in Washington for the first foreign leader visit of Trump's second term coincides with the prime minister's popular support sagging.

The prime minister is in the middle of weeklong testimony in an ongoing corruption trial that centers on allegations he exchanged favors with media moguls and wealthy associates. He has decried the accusations and said he is the victim of a "witch hunt."

Being seen with Trump, who is popular in Israel, could help distract the public from the trial and boost

Netanyahu's standing.

"We have the right leader of Israel who's done a great job," Trump said of Netanyahu.

Netanyahu praised Trump's leadership in getting the hostage and ceasefire deal. The prime minister also spoke glowingly of Trump thinking outside the box.

"You say things others refuse to say. And after the jaws drop, people scratch their heads and they say, 'You know he's right.'"

Hamas in a statement decried Trump's comments.

"We reject Trump's statements in which he said that the residents of the Gaza Strip have no choice but to leave, and we consider them a recipe for creating chaos and tension in the region," the group said.

Netanyahu met with White House national security adviser Mike Waltz and Witkoff on Monday to begin the daunting work of brokering the next phase of a ceasefire agreement.

The Israeli leader said he would send a delegation to Qatar to continue indirect talks with Hamas that are being mediated by the Gulf Arab country, the first confirmation that those negotiations would continue. Netanyahu also said he would convene his security Cabinet to discuss Israel's demands for the next phase of the ceasefire when he returns to Israel at the end of the week.

Witkoff, meanwhile, said he plans to meet with Qatar's prime minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, in Florida on Thursday to discuss the next phase in the ceasefire. Qatar and Egypt have served as key intermediaries with Hamas throughout the conflict.

Netanyahu is under intense pressure from hard-right members of his governing coalition to abandon the ceasefire and resume fighting in Gaza to eliminate Hamas. Bezalel Smotrich, one of Netanyahu's key partners, vows to topple the government if the war isn't relaunched, a step that could lead to early elections.

Hamas, which has reasserted control over Gaza since the ceasefire began last month, has said it will not release hostages in the second phase without an end to the war and Israeli forces' full withdrawal. Netanyahu, meanwhile, maintains that Israel is committed to victory over Hamas and the return of all hostages captured in the Oct. 7, 2023, attack that triggered the war.

Making climate-friendly lifestyle choices isn't always easy. India learned the hard way

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BENGALURU, India (AP) — For nearly four years, India's government pushed an initiative to get people to think about how to make lifestyle choices that pollute less, like cycling instead of driving or using less plastic.

But in the country's yearly budget announcement last weekend, the once-flagship program failed to get a mention — or any promise of future funding.

The Lifestyle for Environment Initiative — or Mission Life as it's more commonly known — was once championed by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other senior ministers as a major step toward the country's climate goals. The idea was to get the whole population working to slash emissions by cutting electricity use or skipping unnecessary private car journeys. But it's fallen out of favor: Mission Life's dedicated government website used to provide monthly updates on the initiative's progress, but there hasn't been an update since March 2024.

It shows how difficult making large-scale changes in people's everyday lives really is, especially without financial incentives, experts say. But lessons learned can help shape policy in the future that could be more successful at getting a significant percentage of the population to ditch their more polluting habits.

Why is it so hard to make climate-friendly choices?

Latha Girish, who owns a company in Bengaluru that makes plastic packaging for industrial-scale food storage and refrigeration, says she's occupied with making sure her business survives, not its emissions. Many small business owners "don't have the luxury of thinking about the environment," she said. "Ask anybody in our sector, I'm sure they won't know about Mission Life or any other such initiative."

Anything that puts her business' prices up — like using more sustainable raw materials — means she

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loses out on customers who just want the lowest price. "They are looking only at how competitive you are and don't look at what you are doing or not doing for the environment or sustainability," she said.

But Sunil Mysore, the CEO of sustainability solutions company Hinren Engineering, said climate-friendly changes can be made as long as there is a motivation to live a "better life."

"My home is completely off the grid now," said Mysore. He said they reuse all the waste they produce to make energy, and their rooftop garden provides them with vegetables. They also harvest rainwater at home, meaning the household is better shielded from a growing number of water crises in Bengaluru, where he lives.

Prasad Gawade, who runs an ecotourism company where travelers stay with Indigenous communities in western India, agrees. He said his efforts to run an environmentally-friendly business are in spite of, not because of, government initiatives because smaller businesses don't get the kind of incentives bigger ones do.

Part of the problem is that major projects that could change people's habits — like changing a city's infrastructure to make it more convenient to get around with electric trams or trains over private cars — weren't part of Mission Life, said Sanjib Pohit, a senior fellow at the New Delhi-based National Council for Applied Economic Research. "Drastic infrastructure changes are needed for (Mission Life) to be successful," he said.

India's environment ministry did not respond to an Associated Press request for comment about the Mission Life program.

Could energy efficiency initiatives be a solution?

One way of cutting emissions without changing people's lifestyles and habits is by simply making their current habits more efficient.

Everything that uses electricity or some form of energy — from refrigerators to lightbulbs — has the potential to be more efficient at how it uses that energy. Experts say efficient energy systems can be "low-hanging fruit" that can cut carbon pollution with little additional costs.

But the federal budget allotted no additional funds for energy conservation schemes or the regulatory bodies tasked with making India's energy systems more efficient.

Girish, who owns the plastic packaging business, said investing in making her company more efficient would mean high upfront costs, which is unaffordable for her without government support.

According to the International Energy Agency, global energy efficiency improved only by a little over 1% in 2023. That same year, countries agreed to double energy efficiency by the end of the decade.

Efficient systems can get more out of existing infrastructure, said Jon Creyts, the CEO of the RMI climate thinktank. "It's about being thrifty. It's about saving. It's about, in the end, producing less of something," he said.

Does changing personal habits really make a difference?

While each person's emissions or their small business' don't contribute much — the world makes about 41 billion tons of carbon pollution a year — addressing both individual emissions and calling on major polluters to address theirs is important, scientists say.

"Changing behavior is tricky and difficult," said Ramya Natarajan from the Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy in Bengaluru. But Natarajan acknowledged that simply getting people to be conscious about their decisions — as Mission Life has set out to do — can make an impact.

"It is a forward-looking program and more of an advisory that everyone can adopt and follow, I think it's been relatively successful in triggering thinking about this," she said.

For Mysore, the sustainable solutions CEO in Bengaluru, finding more climate-friendly ways to live is about more than just slashing emissions.

"For me, it's the pure joy of being sustainable," he said. "I know that just me doing these things will not reduce carbon emissions in any great measure, but you never know when a spark can change into a fire."

First military flight lands in Guantanamo Bay with migrants deported from the US

By TARA COPP and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The first U.S. military flight deporting migrants from the United States to Guantanamo Bay landed in Cuba on Tuesday evening, according to a U.S. official. It was the first step in an expected surge in the number of migrants sent to the U.S. naval base, which for decades was primarily used to detain foreigners associated with the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

President Donald Trump has eyed the facility as a holding center and said it has the capacity to hold as many as 30,000.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, who was assigned to Guantanamo Bay when he was on active duty, has called it a “perfect place” to house migrants. Additional U.S. troops have arrived at the facility in the past few days to help prepare.

Amy Fischer, director of the Refugee and Migrant Rights Program at Amnesty International USA, decried the use of Guantanamo.

“Sending immigrants to Guantanamo is a profoundly cruel, costly move. It will cut people off from lawyers, family and support systems, throwing them into a black hole so the U.S. government can continue to violate their human rights out of sight. Shut Gitmo down now and forever!” Fischer said in a statement.

In addition, the U.S. flew Indian immigrants back to India on Monday, a second U.S. official said. Both officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide details not yet made public.

There had previously been seven deportation flights, to Ecuador, Guam, Honduras and Peru. In addition, Colombian officials flew to the U.S. and took two flights of migrants back to their country.

There are approximately 300 service members supporting the holding operations at Guantanamo Bay, and the numbers will fluctuate based on the requirements of the Department of Homeland Security, which is the lead federal agency. At least 230 of those service members are U.S. Marines from the 6th Marine Regiment, who began deploying on Friday.

There are more than 725,000 immigrants from India living in the U.S. without authorization, the third most of any country after Mexico and El Salvador, according to the Pew Research Center.

Recent years have also seen a jump in the number of Indians attempting to enter the country along the U.S.-Canada border. The U.S. Border Patrol arrested more than 14,000 Indians on the Canadian border in the year ending Sept. 30, which amounted to 60% of all arrests along that border and more than 10 times the number two years ago.

China counters with tariffs on US products. It will also investigate Google

By KEN MORITSUGU and HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China announced retaliatory tariffs on select American imports and an antitrust investigation into Google on Tuesday, just minutes after a sweeping levy on Chinese products imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump took effect.

American tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico were also set to go into effect Tuesday before Trump agreed to a 30-day pause, as the two countries acted to address his concerns about border security and drug trafficking. Trump planned to talk with Chinese President Xi Jinping in the coming days.

“It is being scheduled and will happen very soon,” White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said Tuesday.

This isn’t the first round of tit-for-tat actions between the two countries. China and the U.S. engaged in an escalating trade war in 2018, when Trump repeatedly raised tariffs on Chinese goods and China responded each time.

This time, analysts said, China is much better prepared, announcing a slew of measures that go beyond tariffs and cut across different sectors of the U.S. economy. The government is also more wary of upset-

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ting its own fragile and heavily trade-dependent economy.

"It's aiming for finding measures that maximize the impact and also minimize the risk that the Chinese economy may face," said Gary Ng, a senior economist at Natixis Corporate and Investment Banking in Hong Kong. "At the same time ... China is trying to increase its bargaining chips."

John Gong, a professor at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, called the response a "measured" one. "I don't think they want the trade war escalating," he said. "And they see this example from Canada and Mexico and probably they are hoping for the same thing."

Counter-tariffs

China said it would implement a 15% tariff on coal and liquefied natural gas products as well as a 10% tariff on crude oil, agricultural machinery and large-engine cars imported from the U.S. The tariffs would take effect next Monday.

"The U.S.'s unilateral tariff increase seriously violates the rules of the World Trade Organization," China's State Council Tariff Commission said in a statement. "It is not only unhelpful in solving its own problems, but also damages normal economic and trade cooperation between China and the U.S."

The WTO confirmed Tuesday it received notice of China's request for consultations with the United States regarding the tariffs imposed on Chinese goods. The move sets off a 60-day period for the two sides to resolve their differences, and if not, the case can be brought before a three-judge panel at the Geneva-based trade body.

However, the WTO's dispute-resolution process has been stymied in recent years as multiple U.S. administrations blocked appointments of judges on its appeals court.

The impact of China's measures on U.S. exports may be limited. Though the U.S. is the biggest exporter of liquid natural gas globally, it does not export much to China. In 2023, the U.S. exported 173,247 million cubic feet of LNG to China, about 2.3% of its total natural gas exports, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

China imported less than 110,000 vehicles from the U.S. last year, though auto market analyst Lei Xing thinks the tariffs will be painful for GM, which is adding the Chevrolet Tahoe and GMC Yukon to its China line-up, and for Ford, which exports the Mustang and F-150 Raptor pickup.

The response from China appears calculated and measured, said Stephen Dover, chief market strategist and head of the Franklin Templeton Institute, a financial research firm. However, he said, the world is bracing for further impact.

"A risk is that this is the beginning of a tit-for-tat trade war, which could result in lower GDP growth everywhere, higher U.S. inflation, a stronger dollar and upside pressure on U.S. interest rates," Dover said.

Further export controls on critical minerals

China announced export controls on several elements critical to the production of modern high-tech products. The measure took effect upon announcement on Tuesday.

They include tungsten, tellurium, bismuth, molybdenum and indium, many of which are designated as critical minerals by the U.S. Geological Survey, meaning they are essential to U.S. economic or national security that have supply chains vulnerable to disruption.

The export controls are in addition to ones China placed in December on key elements such as gallium.

"They have a much more developed export control regime," Philip Luck, an economist at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and former State Department official, said at a panel discussion on Monday.

"We depend on them for a lot of critical minerals: gallium, germanium, graphite, a host of others," he said. "They could put some significant harm on our economy."

Going after Google

China's State Administration for Market Regulation said Tuesday it is investigating Google on suspicion of violating antitrust laws. The announcement did not mention the tariffs but came just minutes after Trump's 10% tariffs on China were to take effect.

It is unclear how the probe will affect Google's operations. The company has long faced complaints from Chinese smartphone makers over its business practices surrounding the Android operating system,

Gong said.

Overall, Google has a smaller presence in China than many markets, with its search engine blocked like many other Western platforms. Google exited the Chinese market in 2010, after refusing to comply with censorship requests from the Chinese government and following a series of cyberattacks on the company.

Google did not immediately comment.

Tommy Hilfiger in the crosshairs

The Commerce Ministry also placed two American companies on an unreliable entities list: PVH Group, which owns Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger, and Illumina, which is a biotechnology company with offices in China. The listing could bar them from engaging in China-related import or export activities and from making new investments in the country.

The ministry says investigations show these two U.S. companies have "disrupted normal business with Chinese companies, taken discriminatory measures against Chinese companies and severely harmed the legitimate rights of Chinese companies"

Beijing began investigating PVH Group in September last year over "improper Xinjiang-related behavior" after the company allegedly boycotted the use of Xinjiang cotton.

Illumina competes with the Chinese biotech firm BGI in gene-sequencing.

In a statement, Illumina said it has a long-standing presence in China and that it complies with all laws and regulations wherever it operates. "We are assessing this announcement with the goal of finding a positive resolution," the company said.

Putting these U.S. companies on the unreliable entities list is "alarming" because it shows that the Chinese government is using the list to pressure U.S. companies to take a side, said George Chen, managing director for The Asia Group, a Washington D.C.-headquartered business policy consultancy.

"It's almost like telling American companies, what your government is doing is bad, you need to tell the government that if you add more tariffs or hurt U.S.-China relations at the end of the day it'll backfire on American companies," Chen said.

Senate confirms Pam Bondi as US attorney general, putting Trump ally at Justice Department's helm

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate confirmed Pam Bondi as U.S. attorney general Tuesday evening, putting a longtime ally of Donald Trump at the helm of a Justice Department that has already been rattled by the firings of career employees seen as disloyal to the Republican president.

The vote fell almost entirely along party lines, with only Sen. John Fetterman, a Pennsylvania Democrat, joining with all Republicans to pass her confirmation 54-46.

Bondi, a former Florida attorney general and corporate lobbyist, is expected to oversee a radical reshaping of the department that has been the target of Trump's ire over the criminal cases it brought against him. She enters with the FBI, which she will oversee, in turmoil over the scrutiny of agents involved in investigations related to the president, who has made clear his desire to seek revenge on his perceived adversaries.

Republicans have praised Bondi as a highly qualified leader they contend will bring much-needed change to a department they believe unfairly pursued Trump through investigations resulting in two indictments.

"Pam Bondi has promised to get the department back to its core mission: prosecuting crime and protecting Americans from threats to their safety and their freedoms," said Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D.

But Bondi has faced intense scrutiny over her close relationship with the president, who during his term fired an FBI director who refused to pledge loyalty to him and forced out an attorney general who recused himself from the Justice Department's investigation into potential ties between Russia and his 2016 presidential campaign.

While Bondi has sought to reassure Democrats that politics would play no part in her decision-making, she

also refused at her confirmation hearing last month to rule potential investigations into Trump's adversaries. And she has repeated Trump's claims that the prosecutions against him amounted to political persecution, saying the Justice Department "had been weaponized for years and years and years, and it's got to stop."

Sen. Peter Welch, D-Vt., praised Bondi as "accomplished and competent" but said his "grave concern is really about President Trump and what he is clearly demanding."

"That clearly is a loyalty oath to him as opposed to a demand for straightforward, candid advice, including if the president is asking for something to be done like the prosecution of a political adversary," Welch said.

Bondi's confirmation vote came just hours after FBI agents sued the Justice Department over efforts to develop a list of employees involved in the Jan. 6 prosecutions, which agents fear could be a precursor to mass firings.

Acting Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove last week ordered the acting FBI director to provide the names, titles and offices of all FBI employees who worked on the Jan. 6 cases — which Trump has described as a "grave national injustice." Bove, who defended Trump in his criminal cases before joining the administration, said Justice Department officials would carry out a "review process to determine whether any additional personnel actions are necessary."

Justice Department officials have also recently forced out senior FBI executives, fired prosecutors on special counsel Jack Smith's team who investigated Trump and terminated a group of prosecutors in the D.C. U.S. attorney's office who were hired to help with the massive Jan. 6 investigation.

Bondi repeatedly stressed at her confirmation hearing that she would not pursue anyone for political reasons, and vowed that the public, not the president, would be her client. But her answers at times echoed Trump's campaign rhetoric about a politicized justice system.

"They targeted Donald Trump," Bondi told lawmakers. "They went after him — actually starting back in 2016, they targeted his campaign. They have launched countless investigations against him." She added, "If I am attorney general, I will not politicize that office."

Trump nominated Bondi for attorney general after it became clear that his initial pick, former Rep. Matt Gaetz, could not win enough support from Republican senators to be confirmed.

Bondi has been a fixture in Trump's orbit for years, and a regular defender of the president-elect on news programs amid his legal woes. In a 2023 Fox News appearance, she suggested that "bad" Justice Department prosecutors would be investigated under the Trump administration.

"The investigators will be investigated," she said.

Smith has said politics played no part in his decisions and the evidence his team gathered was sufficient for Trump to have been convicted at trial on charges of scheming to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

Smith dropped that case and a separate one charging Trump with illegally hoarding classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, after Trump's election win in November, citing longstanding Justice Department policy prohibiting criminal cases against a sitting president.

Waffle House is passing along the sky high cost of eggs to diners with a 50 cent surcharge

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Waffle House restaurant chain is putting a 50 cent per egg surcharge in place because of the biggest bird flu outbreak in a decade.

The 24-7 restaurant said that the resulting egg shortage has led to a dramatic increase in its costs.

Bird flu is forcing farmers to slaughter millions of chickens a month, pushing U.S. egg prices to more than double their cost in the summer of 2023. And it appears there may be no relief in sight with Easter approaching.

The average price per dozen eggs nationwide hit \$4.15 in December. That is not quite as high as the \$4.82 record set two years ago, but the Agriculture Department predicts egg prices are going to soar another 20% this year.

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The Waffle House, a reliable source of a cheap breakfast, said that its egg surcharge became effective this week and that it applies to all of its menus. The restaurant's two-egg breakfast, which comes with toast and a side, was listed at \$7.75 on Tuesday.

"While we hope these price fluctuations will be short-lived we cannot predict how long this shortage will last," the company said.

The company continues to monitor egg prices and said that it will adjust or remove the surcharge as market conditions allow.

Last month, the first U.S. human fatality linked bird flu was reported in Louisiana. There have been 67 confirmed bird flu infections of humans in the U.S. since 2024, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The H5N1 bird flu has been spreading widely among wild birds, poultry, cows and other animals. Its growing presence in the environment increases the chances that people will be exposed, and potentially catch it, officials have said, though it remains rare.

Health officials urge anyone who has contact with sick or dead birds to take precautions, including respiratory and eye protection and gloves when handling poultry.

Waffle House, based in Georgia, has more than 1,900 locations in 25 states.

Pete & Gerry's Organics also faced a difficult situation with its eggs in Antrim Township, Pennsylvania, when 100,000 of them were stolen from the back of its distribution trailer Saturday night, according to Pennsylvania State Police. Law enforcement are investigating the theft of roughly \$40,000 worth of eggs.

Trump says he's exploring option to send jailed US criminals to other countries

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) — President Donald Trump said Tuesday that he was exploring whether he can move forward with El Salvador's offer to accept and jail violent American criminals in the "most severe cases" even as he and Secretary of State Marco Rubio both say it raises clear legal issues.

Rubio reached an unusual agreement with Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele a day earlier that the Central American country would accept U.S. deportees of any nationality, including American citizens and legal residents who are imprisoned for violent crimes.

"I'm just saying if we had a legal right to do it, I would do it in a heartbeat," Trump told reporters Tuesday in the Oval Office. "I don't know if we do or not, we're looking at that right now."

At a news conference earlier in San Jose with Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves, Rubio said there were "obviously legalities involved. We have a Constitution."

But Rubio noted that it was "a very generous offer. No one's ever made an offer like that — and to outsource, at a fraction of the cost, at least some of the most dangerous and violent criminals that we have in the United States."

Immigration — a Trump administration priority — was again the topic of the day during Rubio's first foreign trip as America's top diplomat. On his five-country Central America tour, he has faced major upheaval at the U.S. Agency for International Development, leaving many at the aid agency and the State Department fearful for their jobs.

While Rubio has been overseas this week, USAID staffers and Democratic lawmakers were blocked from its Washington headquarters after Elon Musk, who is running a budget-slashing Department of Government Efficiency, announced Trump had agreed with him to shut the aid agency.

Thousands of USAID employees already had been laid off and programs worldwide shut down after Trump imposed a sweeping freeze on foreign assistance after taking office. Rubio later offered a waiver for life-saving programs, but confusion over what is exempt from stop-work orders — and fear of losing U.S. aid permanently — is still freezing aid and development work globally.

"I would say if some organization is receiving funds from the United States and does not know how to apply a waiver, then I have real questions about the competence of that organization," he said. "Or I

wonder whether they're deliberately sabotaging it for purposes of making a political point."

Rubio also said he has "long supported foreign aid. I continue to support foreign aid. But foreign aid is not charity." He noted that every dollar the U.S. spends must advance its national interest.

Amid the turmoil back home, Rubio and Chaves spoke of immigration and security challenges that Costa Rica faces as it has become not just a transit country for migrants headed to the U.S. but also a destination as thousands of Nicaraguans since that country cracked down on opposition starting in 2018.

Costa Rica also has struggled against soaring drug-related violence during the past two years. "We also understand that we need to strengthen our fight against international organized crime," Chaves said, adding that Rubio had offered to continue U.S. support through waivers to allow that foreign assistance to continue flowing.

Rubio went from Costa Rica to Guatemala City to meet with President Bernardo Arévalo.

That is after meeting in San Salvador on Monday with Bukele, who confirmed the deportation offer in a post on X, saying El Salvador has "offered the United States of America the opportunity to outsource part of its prison system."

Bukele said his country would accept only "convicted criminals" and would charge a fee that "would be relatively low for the U.S. but significant for us, making our entire prison system sustainable."

The State Department describes El Salvador's overcrowded prisons as "harsh and dangerous." Its country information webpage says, "In many facilities, provisions for sanitation, potable water, ventilation, temperature control, and lighting are inadequate or nonexistent."

El Salvador has lived under a state of emergency since March 2022, when the country's powerful street gangs went on a killing rampage. Bukele responded by suspending fundamental rights like access to lawyers, and authorities have arrested more than 83,000 people with little to no due process.

In 2023, Bukele opened a massive new prison with capacity for 40,000 gang members and cut prisoners' meals to twice a day. Prisoners there do not receive visits, and there are no programs preparing them for reinsertion into society after their sentences and no workshops or educational programs.

El Salvador, once one of the most dangerous countries in the world, closed last year with a record low 114 homicides, newfound security that has propelled Bukele's soaring popularity in the country of about 6 million residents.

Migration has been the top issue for Rubio on his trip spanning Panama, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic. But he was dogged by other changes that the Trump administration has been making soon after taking office.

Rubio told reporters in San Salvador that he was now the acting administrator of USAID but had delegated that authority so he would not be running its day-to-day operations. In a letter Rubio sent to lawmakers that was obtained by The Associated Press, he said the State Department would work with Congress "to reorganize and absorb certain bureaus, offices and missions of USAID."

He said the processes at the agency, which has been hit by Trump's freeze on all foreign assistance, are not well coordinated and that "undermines the President's ability to carry out foreign relations."

"In consultation with Congress, USAID may move, reorganize, and integrate certain missions, bureaus and offices into the Department of State, and the remainder of the Agency may be abolished consistent with applicable law," Rubio wrote.

At least 10 killed at adult education center in what officials say is Sweden's worst mass shooting

By STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

At least 10 people, including the gunman, were killed Tuesday at an adult education center in what Sweden's prime minister called the country's worst mass shooting. But a final death toll, a conclusive number of wounded and a motive hadn't yet been determined hours later.

Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson gave a news conference in the aftermath of the tragedy, which happened on the outskirts of Orebro. The city is about 200 kilometers (125 miles) west of Stockholm.

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The school, called Campus Risbergsgka, serves students over age 20, according to its website. Primary and upper secondary school courses are offered, as well as Swedish classes for immigrants, vocational training and programs for people with intellectual disabilities.

"Today, we have witnessed brutal, deadly violence against completely innocent people," Kristersson told reporters in Stockholm. "This is the worst mass shooting in Swedish history. Many questions remain unanswered, and I cannot provide those answers either.

"But the time will come when we will know what happened, how it could occur, and what motives may have been behind it. Let us not speculate," he said.

Gun violence at schools is very rare in Sweden. But there have been several incidents in recent years in which people were wounded or killed with other weapons such as knives or axes.

Justice Minister Gunnar Strömmer called the shooting "an event that shakes our entire society to its core."

While Swedes read about such violence in other places, Strömmer said that the country previously felt it wouldn't happen there. Other tragedies in Swedish schools weren't to the extent of Tuesday's attack, he said, calling it "indescribably sad" for the community.

The shooting also sent shock waves through Europe, with officials in Brussels expressing their outrage at the carnage.

"What happened today in Örebro is truly horrifying," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen wrote on social media. "Such violence and terror have no place in our societies — least of all in schools. In this dark hour, we stand with the people of Sweden."

The damage at the crime scene was so extensive that investigators were unable to be more definitive about the number of fatalities, said Roberto Eid Forest, head of the local police.

Police said that the death toll could rise. Eid Forest told reporters that the suspected gunman was among those killed. Police believe the perpetrator acted alone, and he wasn't previously known to police, officials said.

Authorities said that there were no suspected connections to terrorism at this point, but police didn't provide a motive.

"Of course, we all want to understand why this happened, what occurred, and what motives the perpetrator may have had," Kristersson said. "We will have to wait for those answers — in due time, the picture will become clearer."

Police raided the suspect's home after Tuesday's shooting, but it wasn't immediately clear what they found. Eid Forest said there were no warning signs before the attack. Authorities were working to identify the deceased.

Swedish King Carl XVI Gustaf praised police and the rescue and medical personnel who responded to the shooting, and issued words of comfort to the families of the victims.

"It is with sadness and dismay that my family and I have received the information about the terrible atrocity in Örebro," the monarch said in a statement. "We send our condolences tonight to the families and friends of the deceased. Our thoughts at this time also go to the injured and their relatives, as well as to others affected."

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen expressed support to neighboring Sweden, calling Tuesday's shooting "a terrible situation."

"I am so sad and all my thoughts are with the victims and their families and with the entire Swedish community and society," she said after a meeting with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer in London. "It's a terrible situation. And of course, our neighboring countries have all of our support."

The shooting erupted after many students had gone home following a national exam. Police vehicles and ambulances, lights flashing, blanketed the parking lots and streets around the school as a helicopter buzzed overhead.

Teacher Lena Warenmark told SVT News that there were unusually few students on the campus Tuesday afternoon after the exam. She also told the broadcaster that she heard probably 10 gunshots.

Students sheltered in nearby buildings. Other parts of the school were evacuated following the shooting, which began at around 12:30 p.m. local time (1130 GMT).

Andreas Sundling, 28, was among those forced to barricade themselves inside the school. "We heard three bangs and loud screams," he told Expressen newspaper while sheltering in a classroom.

Remains of all 67 victims of the midair collision near DC recovered as NTSB probes altitude data

By SERKAN GURBUZ and MARYCLAIRE DALE Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Va. (AP) — The remains of all 67 victims of last week's midair collision of an American Airlines flight and an Army helicopter near the nation's capital have been recovered, authorities said Tuesday. All but one has been identified.

Meanwhile the NTSB said it was examining new data that could put the helicopter above its 200-foot (61-meter) flight ceiling. The airport's air traffic control screen — relying on radar sensors and other data — had it at 300 feet (91 meters), the agency said. However that figure would have been rounded to the nearest 100 feet, according to authorities.

Investigators said they need to get more information from the still-submerged Black Hawk to verify the data.

The jet's flight recorder showed its altitude as 325 feet (99 meters), plus or minus 25 feet (7.6 meters).

Earlier in the day, crews working in choppy conditions raised a number of large pieces of the jetliner from the Potomac River, including the right wing, the center fuselage and parts of the forward cabin, cockpit, tail cone and rudder.

"Our hearts are with the victims' families as they navigate this tragic loss," officials said in a joint statement from the city and federal agencies involved in the search and recovery, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Navy dive teams and Washington police and fire crews.

The chief medical examiner will be working to positively identify the final set of remains, officials said.

The collision occurred last Wednesday night as the plane was about to land at nearby Ronald Reagan National Airport, killing everyone on board both aircraft.

Authorities said early on that they expected to recover the remains of everyone who died, and they are now focusing on retrieving the jet and hope to recover the helicopter later this week.

On Monday salvage crews were able to pull one of the two jet engines from the river, along with large pieces of the plane's exterior, Col. Francis B. Pera of the Army Corps of Engineers said.

Sixty passengers and four crew were on the American Airlines flight from Wichita, Kansas, including figure skaters returning from the 2025 U.S. Figure Skating Championships there.

The Black Hawk was on a training mission. Army Staff Sgt. Ryan Austin O'Hara, 28, of Lilburn, Georgia; Chief Warrant Officer 2 Andrew Loyd Eaves, 39, of Great Mills, Maryland; and Capt. Rebecca M. Lobach, of Durham, North Carolina, were aboard.

Federal investigators are trying to piece together the events that led to the collision. Full investigations typically take a year or more, but they hope to have a preliminary report within 30 days.

Wednesday's crash was the deadliest in the U.S. since Nov. 12, 2001, when a jet slammed into a New York City neighborhood just after takeoff, killing all 260 people on board and five on the ground.

El Salvador's offer to take in US deportees and violent criminals is unlike any other migrant deal

By PHILIP MARCELO and MARCOS ALEMÁN Associated Press

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — El Salvador has offered to take in people deported from the U.S. for entering the country illegally and to house some of the country's violent criminals — even if they're American citizens.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, after a meeting Monday with El Salvador President Nayib Bukele, proclaimed it the most "unprecedented, extraordinary" offer the country has yet received during the ongoing wave of global migration.

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Details on the deal are scant, and immigration and constitutional experts question its legality. Here's what you need to know:

What's El Salvador offering?

Bukele, who took office in 2019, says he's offering a release valve for America's vast prison system.

Writing on X, he said the Central American nation will allow the U.S. to "outsource" part of its inmate population, but it will only take in convicted criminals.

The U.S. would have to pay El Salvador to house the prisoners, though he did not disclose an asking price.

Bukele said the going rate would be "relatively low" for the U.S., but significant for his country — enough to make its "entire prison system sustainable."

Where do they want to house U.S. criminals?

Bukele has proposed housing U.S. criminals in the mega-prison his administration opened in 2023 to tame MS-13 and other powerful street gangs.

The maximum-security facility is about 45 miles (72 kilometers) southeast of the capital city of San Salvador and is known as CECOT, a Spanish acronym that translates to "terrorism confinement center."

The facility can house up to 40,000 people across eight sprawling pavilions, where each cell holds up to 70 prisoners.

Human rights organizations say the bare-bones setting is overly harsh. Inmates are not allowed visitors or time outside.

They are served just one meal a day and are not offered educational or reintegration programs typically found at other prisons, save for the occasional motivational talk or exercise regimen under strict supervision.

The prison's dining halls, break rooms, gym and board games are for guards only, and administration officials have said inmates will never return to their communities.

Is this even legal?

Deporting foreign nationals to countries other than their native land is legal, but deporting American citizens is almost certainly not.

Under U.S. immigration law, a country such as El Salvador can accept someone deported from the U.S. who isn't a citizen of that country if the person's homeland refuses to accept them, says Theresa Cardinal Brown, a former homeland security official under the administrations of Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

What's more, she noted, deportation is a legal term that applies only to someone physically removed from the country because they have violated some provision of the immigration act, which applies only to "aliens."

So what about American citizens?

Naturalized U.S. citizens, in rare cases, can be denaturalized and revert to green-card status, such as if they lied on their initial immigration forms or committed a serious crime such as funding a terrorist group, according to Stephen Yale-Loehr, an immigration law expert and retired Cornell Law School professor.

Green card holders can then be deported if they're convicted of any number of crimes, including murder, assault, burglary, tax evasion, domestic violence and illegal firearms possession, he said.

Natural-born U.S. citizens, however, maintain their citizenship through the U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment, which outlines the rights guaranteed to all citizens, such as due process and equal protection under the law.

"So, just as President Trump can't eliminate birthright citizenship by himself, so too the U.S. government cannot deport U.S. citizens, even if they have committed crimes," Yale-Loehr said.

Why is El Salvador doing this?

El Salvador is attempting to turn the page on decades of civil war and violence from MS-13 and other street gangs that long made it one of the most dangerous countries in the world.

Under Bukele, the country of 6 million residents declared a state of emergency in 2022, suspending constitutional rights and launching a fierce crackdown on gangs that's led to the arrest of more than 80,000 people.

Bukele's popularity has soared as crime plummeted to a record low of 114 homicides last year, but human

rights groups have complained that many people are being unjustly detained without due process rights. Has this been done before elsewhere?

The U.S. and other nations have reached deals to deal with migrants but nothing quite like what El Salvador's leader proposes.

Britain has an agreement with Rwanda to send asylum-seekers to the East African country, though the accord has been stymied in the U.K. courts.

Trump also struck agreements with El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras to take in U.S. asylum seekers in 2019, during his first term as president.

Guatemala was the only one of the three agreements that took effect. More than 900 people from El Salvador and Honduras were sent, but few sought asylum and instead continued on to their own countries in what became known as "deportation with a layover."

President Joe Biden canceled the three agreements in 2021.

What are the next steps?

Trump praised the offer Tuesday, saying it would serve as "great deterrent" but acknowledged it might not pass legal muster.

"I'm just saying if we had a legal right to do it, I would do it in a heartbeat," he said in the Oval Office. "I don't know if we do or not. We're looking at that."

Rubio similarly called El Salvador's offer "generous," but stressed that the Republican administration will need to study the proposal before making any commitments.

"There are obviously legalities involved," he said Tuesday at a news conference in San Jose, Costa Rica, with Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves. "We have a constitution. We have all sorts of things."

That hasn't stopped Bukele from making the most of the renewed attention.

He's joked El Salvador would even take in disgraced former U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez, who was sentenced last week to 11 years in federal prison for accepting bribes of gold and cash and acting as an agent of Egypt.

"Yes," Bukele wrote on X, "we'll gladly take him in."

Trump's tariff tactics carry higher economic risks than during his first term

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Donald Trump started the biggest trade war since the 1930s in his first term, his impulsive combination of threats and import taxes on U.S. trading partners created chaos, generated drama -- and drew criticism from mainstream economists who favor free trade.

But it didn't do much damage to the U.S. economy. Or much good. Inflation stayed under control. The economy kept growing as it had before. And America's massive trade deficits, the main target of Trump's ire, proved resistant to his rhetoric and his tariffs: Already big, they got bigger.

The trade war sequel that Trump has planned for his second term -- if it unfolds the way he's described it -- would likely be a different matter altogether. Trump appears to have grander ambitions and is operating in a far more treacherous economic environment this time.

His plans to plaster tariffs of 25% on goods from Mexico and Canada and 10% on China -- and to follow those up by targeting the European Union -- would threaten growth, and push up prices in the United States, undermining his campaign pledge to eliminate the inflation that plagued President Joe Biden.

The tariffs would be paid by U.S. importers, who would then try to pass along the higher costs to consumers through higher prices.

Trump himself has warned of possible fallout. "WILL THERE BE SOME PAIN? YES, MAYBE (AND MAYBE NOT!)," Trump said in a social media post Sunday. "BUT WE WILL MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN, AND IT WILL ALL BE WORTH THE PRICE THAT MUST BE PAID."

For now, some of the hostilities are on hold. Trump on Monday paused the tariffs on Canada and Mexico for 30 days to allow more negotiations after those countries agreed to do more to stop the flow of illegal drugs and undocumented workers into the United States.

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But he went ahead with the 10% tariffs on China Tuesday. Beijing promptly retaliated by imposing tariffs on U.S. products, including coal and big cars. It also is restricting exports of critical minerals and launching an antitrust investigation into Google.

Trump views tariffs – taxes on imports – as an economic elixir that can restore factories to the American heartland, raise money for the government and pressure foreign countries to do what he wants.

During his first term, Trump put tariffs on most Chinese goods and on imported solar panels, washing machines, steel and aluminum. The tax increases might have raised prices on those items, but they had little or no impact on overall inflation, which remained modest. Nor did they do much to restore factory jobs.

Economists agree that a second Trump trade war could be far costlier than the first.

“That was then. This is now,” said trade analyst William Reinsch of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. That is why the stock market briefly fell sharply Monday on anticipation of the tariffs, before rebounding on news of the pause with Mexico and Canada.

During Trump’s first term, his trade team carefully focused its tariff hit list to avoid or at least delay the impact on consumers. They targeted industrial products and not those “that would show up on Walmart’s shelves,” said Reinsch, a former U.S. trade official. “That tamped down the impact.”

This time, by contrast, the tariffs are across the board – although the tariffs Trump had planned and then paused would have limited the levy on Canadian energy to 10%, showing that he was mindful of how much Americans in northern and midwestern states depend on oil and electricity from north of the border.

In Boca Raton, Florida, the toy company Basic Fun is preparing to raise prices and absorb a hit to profits when the tariffs land.

Ninety percent of Basic Fun’s toys come from China, including Tonka and Care Bears. CEO Jay Foreman says the price on the Tonka Classic Steel Mighty Dump Truck is likely to rise later this year from \$29.99 to as much as \$39.99.

Five years ago, the Trump administration spared toys, exempting them from its China tariffs. This time, Foreman said, “we are now just going to forecast a lot of money draining out of the company.”

In addition to the threats to Canada, Mexico and the EU, Trump has threatened a worldwide tariff of 10% to 20%. The breadth of his potential targets means it will be much harder for companies to escape his tariffs.

In his first term, many companies dodged his China tariffs by moving production to Mexico or Vietnam. Now, suppliers anywhere could wind up in Trump’s crosshairs. “It sends the signal that no place is safe,” said Mary Lovely, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics.

Also worrying, economists say, is a retaliation clause the Trump team inserted in the tariff orders he signed Saturday.

If other countries retaliate against Trump’s tariffs with tariffs of their own – as China did and Canada and Mexico have threatened -- Trump will lash back with still more tariffs. That risks “setting off a spiraling trade war” of tit-for-tat tariffs and counter-tariffs, said Eswar Prasad, professor of trade policy at Cornell University.

But the biggest difference is the economic backdrop Trump must contend with this time.

Six years ago, inflation was low — maybe even too low, the Federal Reserve fretted. Trump’s first-term tariffs didn’t make a dent.

Inflation isn’t so benign anymore. Prices surged in the unexpected boom that followed the end of COVID-19 lockdowns. Inflation has come down from the four-decade high it hit in mid-2022, but it’s still stuck above the Fed’s 2% target and hasn’t shown much improvement since summer.

Trump’s tariffs could rekindle the inflationary trend and convince the Fed to cancel or postpone the two interest rate cuts it had anticipated this year. That would risk keeping “interest rates at their current elevated level for a longer period in 2025. That will push up mortgage and loan borrowing rates ... and reduce real growth,” said Boston College economist Brian Bethune.

For now, businesses, investors and U.S. trading partners are waiting to see what the unpredictable Trump will do next. Will he re-impose the tariffs on Canada and Mexico after 30 days? Will he really go after the EU? Or make good on his threat of a universal tariff?

Outside a Harris Teeter supermarket near downtown Raleigh, North Carolina, Jacobs Ogadi had in his shopping bag an avocado, which almost certainly came from Mexico.

The 62-year-old mechanic said it "doesn't take a rocket scientist" to know that Trump's tariffs run counter to his promises to rein in inflation. "If it goes up 25%, it's not the government, it's not the Mexican people paying for it," he said. "Who pays for it? Us."

Tulsi Gabbard, Trump's pick to oversee US spy agencies, clears Senate committee

By DAVID KLEPPER and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Tulsi Gabbard's nomination to be President Donald Trump's director of national intelligence cleared a key Senate committee Tuesday despite concerns raised about her past comments sympathetic to Russia and a meeting with Syria's now-deposed leader.

A former Democratic congresswoman, Gabbard is one of Trump's most divisive nominees, with lawmakers of both parties also pointing to her past support for government leaker Edward Snowden. But the Senate Intelligence Committee advanced her nomination in a closed-door 9-8 vote, with the committee's Democrats voting no.

Gabbard's nomination now heads to the full Senate for consideration. A vote has not been scheduled yet.

Following a contentious confirmation hearing last week, where some Republican senators questioned Gabbard harshly, GOP support for her fell into place following a pressure campaign over the weekend unleashed by Trump supporters and allies, including Elon Musk.

Until three GOP members seen as swing votes announced their support, it wasn't clear her nomination would advance beyond the Intelligence Committee. Given strong Democratic opposition and thin Republican margins, Gabbard will need almost all GOP senators to vote yes to win confirmation to the top intelligence job.

Though some Republicans have questioned Gabbard's past views, they support her calls to overhaul the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, which coordinates the work of 18 federal agencies focused on intelligence collection and analysis. GOP lawmakers have also taken aim at the office, saying it's grown too large and politicized.

Senate Intelligence Chairman Tom Cotton, an Arkansas Republican, said Tuesday that he looked forward to working with Gabbard to "bring badly needed reforms" to ODNI.

Gabbard is a lieutenant colonel in the National Guard who deployed twice to the Middle East and ran for president in 2020. She has no formal intelligence experience, however, and has never run a government agency or department.

Gabbard's past praise of Snowden drew particularly harsh questions during the nomination hearing. The former National Security Agency contractor fled to Russia after he was charged with revealing classified information about surveillance programs.

Gabbard said that while Snowden revealed important facts about surveillance programs she believes are unconstitutional, he violated rules about protecting classified secrets. "Edward Snowden broke the law," she said.

A 2017 visit with Syrian President Bashar Assad is another flash point. Assad was recently deposed following a brutal civil war in which he was accused of using chemical weapons. Following her visit, Gabbard faced criticism that she was legitimizing a dictator and then more questions when she said she was skeptical that Assad had used chemical weapons.

Gabbard defended her meeting with Assad, saying she used the opportunity to press the Syrian leader on his human rights record.

She has also repeatedly echoed Russian propaganda used to justify the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine and in the past opposed a key U.S. surveillance program.

Democrats said Gabbard's response to questions about her past views did little to satisfy them. Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly of Arizona said Gabbard lacks the judgment to take on a job that is so critical to

the nation's security.

"Healthy skepticism is a good thing, but when someone consistently embraces sensational, but poorly supported claims while dismissing the thorough assessments of our intelligence community, it becomes dangerous," Kelly said in a statement explaining his vote. "But rather than ease my concerns, she confirmed them."

In the latest instance of the "Make America Great Again" base pressuring senators to support Trump's nominees, Musk blasted Republican Sen. Todd Young of Indiana as a "deep-state puppet" in a now-deleted social media post before the two men spoke and Musk later called him an ally.

Young, whose critical questioning of Gabbard had prompted speculation he might oppose her, confirmed Tuesday he would back Gabbard. Young said his tough questions for Gabbard were just part of the process.

"I have done what the framers envisioned for senators to do: use the consultative process to seek firm commitments, in this case commitments that will advance our national security," he wrote in statement announcing his support for Gabbard.

Elon Musk tightens grip on federal government as Democrats raise alarms

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Elon Musk is rapidly consolidating control over large swaths of the federal government with President Donald Trump's blessing, sidelining career officials, gaining access to sensitive databases and dismantling a leading source of humanitarian assistance.

The speed and scope of his work has been nothing short of stunning. In a little more than two weeks since Trump took office, the world's richest man has created an alternative power structure inside the federal government for the purpose of cutting spending and pushing out employees. None of this is happening with congressional approval, inviting a constitutional clash over the limits of presidential authority.

Trump says Musk is doing his bidding

Musk has been named as a special government employee, which subjects him to less stringent rules on ethics and financial disclosures than other workers. Trump has given Musk office space in the White House complex where he oversees a team of people at the so-called Department of Government Efficiency. The team has been dispersed throughout federal agencies to gather information and deliver edicts. Some of them were spotted on Monday at the Department of Education, which Trump has vowed to abolish.

Republicans defend Musk as simply carrying out Trump's slash-and-burn campaign promises. Trump made no secret of his desire to put Musk, the billionaire entrepreneur behind the electric automaker Tesla and the rocket company SpaceX, in charge of retooling the federal government.

"Elon can't do and won't do anything without our approval," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office on Monday.

The Republican president also played down concerns about Musk's conflict of interests as he flexes his power over the bureaucracy even though his businesses face regulatory scrutiny and have federal contracts.

"Where we think there's a conflict or there's a problem, we won't let him go near it, but he has some very good ideas," Trump said.

Musk persists in spite of Democrats' outrage

Democrats, for their part, accused Musk of leading a coup from within the government by amassing unaccountable and illegal power.

"We will do everything in our power in the Senate and the House to stop this outrage," Sen. Chris Van Hollen of Maryland said. "And in the meantime, since we don't have many Republican colleagues who want to help us, we are doing everything we can with our colleagues through the courts to make sure that we uphold the rule of law."

The apex of Musk's work so far came on Monday at the Washington headquarters for the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, where yellow police tape blocked access to the lobby and hundreds

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of employees were locked out of computer systems. Musk said Trump had agreed to let him shutter the agency.

"It's not an apple with a worm in it, what we have is just a ball of worms," Musk said of the world's largest provider of humanitarian, development and security assistance. "You've got to basically get rid of the whole thing. It's beyond repair."

Federal workers are in uncharted territory

Musk has also turned his attention to the General Services Administration, or GSA, which manages federal government buildings. An email sent last week from the Washington headquarters instructed regional managers to begin terminating leases on roughly 7,500 federal offices nationwide.

The initiative is being led by Nicole Hollander, according to an agency employee who requested anonymity to discuss internal matters. Hollander describes herself on LinkedIn as an employee at X, Musk's social media platform.

"This has gone beyond the pale. This is out of control. This is not a normal situation," said Keya Chatterjee, executive director of Free DC, a local advocacy organization. She participated in a protest on Monday outside the Office of Personnel Management, which is one of the lesser-known federal agencies key to Musk's agenda.

Musk's work has unnerved federal employees who are being nudged toward the exits. On Sunday night, concerns swept through the workforce that they could be locked out of internal human resources system, denying them access to their own personnel files that showed pay history, length of service and qualifications. Supervisors in some agencies encouraged employees to download their records, called an SF-50, to personal computers so that they could prove their employment history in the event of disputes.

Musk's penchant for dabbling

Musk has been tinkering with things his entire life, learning to code as a child in South Africa and becoming rich with the online payment company PayPal. He bought the social media platform Twitter a little more than two years ago, renamed it X and slashed its workforce while turning it into his personal political megaphone.

Now Musk is popping open the hood on the federal government like it's one of his cars or rockets.

"The Silicon Valley playbook to disrupt the status quo — by disregarding and disobeying rules that you don't like — is in full effect here," said Rob Lalka, an expert on entrepreneurship and innovation in business at Tulane University.

One of the most significant steps was gaining access to the U.S. Treasury payment system, which is responsible for 1 billion payments per year totaling \$5 trillion. It includes sensitive information involving bank accounts and Social Security payments.

"No one outside of the staff doing the work ever asked to have access to the payment files," said Richard Gregg, who spent four decades working for Treasury and oversaw the payment system as fiscal assistant secretary.

It's unclear what Musk wants to do with the payment system. He's claimed that he could trim \$1 trillion from the federal deficit "just by addressing waste, fraud and abuse."

"That's the biggest data hack ever in the world," Sen. Tammy Baldwin, a Wisconsin Democrat, told reporters in Madison. "I am outraged about it."

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat from New York, said Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent must revoke Musk's access to the payment system.

"We must halt this unlawful and dangerous power grab," he said on Capitol Hill.

A group representing retirees and union workers sued Bessent and the Treasury Department on Monday to get them to stop sharing personal and financial information with DOGE.

Trump rewards Musk's fealty

Musk's role is partially a reward for his work on behalf of Trump during the campaign. He spent roughly \$250 million supporting Trump through America PAC, which included door-to-door canvassing and digital advertising.

Although the PAC has not announced its next plans, Musk has suggested that he could endorse primary challenges to Republican lawmakers who defy Trump's agenda.

"The more I've gotten to know President Trump, the more I like him," Musk said in a conversation streamed live on X. "Frankly, I love the guy. He's great."

Musk also described his work overhauling the federal government in existential terms, making it clear that he would push as hard and as far as he could.

"If it's not possible now, it will never be possible. This is our shot," he said. "This is the best hand of cards we're ever going to have. If we don't take advantage of this best hand of cards, it's never going to happen."

As hundreds of quakes rattle Greek islands, a few brave tourists have Santorini to themselves

By DEREK GATOPOULOS Associated Press

SANTORINI, Greece (AP) — The hundreds of earthquakes that have rattled Greek islands on the Aegean Sea are a "seismic swarm" and could continue for weeks before eventually diminishing, the Santorini mayor told The Associated Press on Tuesday — pausing to chuckle as new tremors shook items on his desk.

"This phenomenon may play out with small quakes or a single, slightly stronger one, followed by gradual subsidence," said Mayor Nikos Zorzos, adding he was cautiously optimistic after speaking to seismologists who described the swarm as a series of tremors of similar magnitude occurring in clusters.

Thousands of residents and seasonal workers have left the Cycladic Islands as quakes up to magnitude 5 have been recorded in the volcanic region since Friday. Ferry and commercial flight operators have added services to accommodate departures. More Greek islands closed schools Tuesday.

A handful of hardy tourists enjoyed having Santorini's stunning views to themselves.

Santorini earlier canceled public events, restricted travel to the island and banned construction work in certain areas. The quakes have caused cracks in some older buildings, but no injuries have been reported.

Efthimios Lekkas, head of the state-run Earthquake Planning and Protection Organization, said the epicenter of the earthquakes in the Aegean was moving northward away from Santorini, and emphasized there was no connection to the area's dormant volcanoes.

"This may last several days or several weeks. We are not able to predict the evolution of the sequence in time," Lekkas told state-run television.

In Santorini's main town, Fira, the narrow, whitewashed streets along the island's clifftops were deserted — a rare sight even in the off-season — except for small pockets of tour groups, many from Asian countries.

Joseph Liu, from Guangzhou in southern China, said he had wanted to visit Santorini for years after seeing it in a documentary.

"This place is amazing, really beautiful," he said, adding that the tour group leader had told him and others about the quakes before they arrived, "so it was not a surprise."

Retired police officer and ship worker Panagiotis Hatzigeorgiou, who has lived on Santorini for more than three decades, said he has turned down offers to stay with relatives in Athens.

"Older residents are used to the earthquakes ... But it's different this time. It's not the same to have earthquakes every two to three minutes. The main thing is not to worry," he said, adding with a laugh: "Now we can listen to music alone and have coffee by ourselves." ___ Associated Press journalists Lefteris Pitarakis and Petros Giannakouris in Santorini contributed.

RFK Jr. appears on track to become US health secretary as he wins key Republican senator's support

By AMANDA SEITZ and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a vocal vaccine skeptic and activist lawyer, appeared on track to become the nation's health secretary after winning the crucial support of Republican Sen. Bill

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Cassidy, a doctor who says Kennedy has assured him he would not topple the nation's childhood vaccination program.

In a starkly partisan vote, the Republican-controlled Senate Finance Committee advanced Kennedy's nomination 14-13, sending his bid to oversee the \$1.7 trillion U.S. Health and Human Services agency for a full vote on the Senate floor.

All Democrats on the committee opposed Kennedy, whose family name had been synonymous with their party for generations before he aligned with President Donald Trump during the 2024 presidential campaign. They sounded an alarm on Kennedy's work to sow doubt around vaccine safety and his potential to profit off lawsuits over drugmakers.

A full Senate vote has not yet been scheduled, but with Cassidy's vote no longer in doubt Kennedy's nomination is likely to succeed absent any last-minute vote switches. Kennedy has been among the more contentious of Trump's Cabinet choices, and Republicans coalescing around him showed another powerful measure of near lockstep allegiance to the president.

Cassidy had publicly detailed his personal struggle, as a doctor who has seen the lifesaving ability of vaccines, with Kennedy's confirmation. "Your past, undermining confidence in vaccines with unfounded or misleading arguments, concerns me," Cassidy told Kennedy last week.

Yet when it came to his vote Tuesday, he advanced Kennedy with a simple "aye."

Cassidy, who is up for reelection next year and could face a primary challenge, later described "intense conversations" with Kennedy and Vice President JD Vance that started over the weekend and continued into Tuesday morning, just before the vote. Those conversations yielded "serious commitments" from the administration, Cassidy said. His reelection campaign had "absolutely zero to do with the decision," he told reporters.

Cassidy said in a speech later on the Senate floor that, in exchange for his support, Kennedy has promised not to make changes to existing vaccine recommendations that have been made by a federal advisory committee and has agreed not to scrub the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of statements that clarify vaccines do not cause autism. In addition, Cassidy said Kennedy will consult with him on new hires for the agency and appear if asked quarterly before the Senate's health committee, which Cassidy chairs. A 30-day notice will be sent to the committee if Kennedy seeks to make changes federal vaccine safety monitoring programs.

"He will be the secretary," Cassidy said. "But I believe he will also be a partner in working for this end."

Cassidy said Kennedy's formidable following waged a maximum pressure campaign, bombarding his office with thousands of messages daily. Pediatricians reached out, too, expressing fears of rampant disease outbreaks and deaths among children if a man who has a history of denigrating inoculations is installed as the nation's health secretary, he said.

Republican Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina, another vulnerable vote that Kennedy worked to win over, said he was reassured last week by the health secretary nominee's promise to let scientists at the public health agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institutes for Health, work "independently."

"The only way that Bobby Kennedy will get crosswise is if he does take a position against the safety of proven vaccines," Tillis said. "That will be a problem to me."

Republican Sens. Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Mitch McConnell of Kentucky have also been seen as potentially unsecured votes, because they voted against Trump's defense secretary nominee and have expressed concerns about Kennedy's anti-vaccine work. Kennedy could lose support from all three of those senators and still become the health secretary.

Democrats, meanwhile, have continued to raise alarms about Kennedy's potential to financially benefit from changing vaccine guidelines or weakening federal lawsuit protections against vaccine makers.

"It seems possible that many different types of vaccine-related decisions and communications — which you would be empowered to make and influence as Secretary — could result in significant financial compensation for your family," Democratic Sens. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Ron Wyden of Oregon

wrote in a letter sent over the weekend to Kennedy.

Kennedy said he'll give his son all of the referral fees in legal cases against vaccine makers, including the fees he gets from referring clients in a case against Merck. Kennedy told the committee he's referred hundreds of clients to a law firm that's suing Merck's Gardasil, the human papillomavirus vaccine that prevents cervical cancer. He's earned \$2.5 million from the deal over the past three years.

As secretary, Kennedy would be responsible for food and hospital inspections, providing health insurance for millions of Americans and researching deadly diseases.

US aid freeze puts at risk Ukraine's wartime help for frontline evacuees

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

PAVLOHRAD, Ukraine (AP) — In what used to be the concert hall in this town in eastern Ukraine, cots are arranged on stage. Instead of music, the room is filled with the muffled sobs of local people driven from their homes by fighting in the country's almost three-year war with Russia.

The Russian army's recent advances have engulfed towns and villages in the area. The Pavlohrad concert hall was requisitioned as a temporary center for local civilians fleeing the relentless Russian bombardment.

"It's good here. There's food, warmth, and a place to wash," said 83-year-old Kateryna Odraha, who lived through the Nazi German occupation of her village during World War II.

That refuge may now be in peril.

The shelter costs the equivalent of \$7,000 a month to run, and 60% of that was being covered by U.S. funds sent to help Ukraine.

President Donald Trump's decision last week to freeze for 90 days the humanitarian aid that the United States provides to countries overseas was felt in places far from Washington, including here, a few kilometers from the front line in eastern Ukraine.

Trump's decision immediately halted thousands of U.S.-funded humanitarian, development and security programs. The consequences have rippled across the world.

"This news was abrupt and unexpected," said Illia Novikov, the coordinator of the Pavlohrad transit center, which is run by the charity organization Relief Coordination Center. "At this moment, we have no idea what the future holds."

The U.S. funding covered fuel for evacuation vehicles, salaries for aid workers, legal and psychological support, and tickets to help evacuees reach safer locations, he said.

Usually about 60 people pass through the shelter each day, but when the Russian bombardment worsens, that can climb to more than 200, according to Novikov.

Many people heading here have spent months living in their basement without electricity, running water or enough food.

Vasyl Odraha, 58, remained in his local village for months, even as artillery fire and Russian guided bomb strikes became more frequent as the war moved closer.

He said he initially believed that Trump would stop the war within 24 hours of taking office, as he had promised during his election campaign.

"We pinned our hopes on Trump's election," he said, sitting on a cot beside his 83-year-old mother.

When the fighting didn't stop, and the front line moved to within less than 3 kilometers (2 miles) of where they lived, they fled at dawn.

"If we hadn't left, we would have died that very night," said Kateryna Odraha.

Across Ukraine, many other sectors are reeling from the aid freeze, which places additional strain on Ukraine's stretched wartime finances.

Energy projects, veteran support programs, psychological helplines, cybersecurity, health care, independent media, and even border infrastructure projects have been affected. The aid was intended to help cushion the war's impact.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says his government expects \$300-400 million in aid to be cut. Most of that was for the energy sector that has been targeted by Russia.

Ukraine hopes to make up the shortfall from European sources of aid or internal ones, Zelenskyy said.

The World Health Organization, a U.N. agency which Trump wants the U.S. to leave, launched an emergency appeal Tuesday to raise \$110 million for its humanitarian response in Ukraine where it said almost 13 million people are "in dire need" of assistance.

"The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine has reached a scale of undeniable severity," the WHO said in a statement.

In the latest devastating Russian attack on a civilian area, authorities said a ballistic missile smashed into an administrative building in downtown Iziun, a city in Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv region, killing five people and injuring 50 others, including three children.

U.S. military aid has not been frozen, according to Zelenskyy, but Ukraine has received only about 42% of the money approved by Congress.

There is no clear sign the war might be close to ending, and that means Ukrainian civilians will need more help.

"Evacuations will continue for a long time," Novikov, the transit center's coordinator, said. "There may be new front lines, new affected communities, so we must be prepared to keep providing assistance."

How an ancient asteroid strike carved out 2 grand canyons on the moon

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — New research shows that when an asteroid slammed into the moon billions of years ago, it carved out a pair of grand canyons on the lunar far side.

That's good news for scientists and NASA, which is looking to land astronauts at the south pole on the near, Earth-facing side untouched by that impact and containing older rocks in original condition.

U.S. and British scientists used photos and data from NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter to map the area and calculate the path of debris that produced these canyons about 3.8 billion years ago. They reported their findings Tuesday in the journal Nature Communications.

The incoming space rock passed over the lunar south pole before hitting, creating a huge basin and sending streams of boulders hurtling at a speed of nearly 1 mile a second (1 kilometer a second). The debris landed like missiles, digging out two canyons comparable in size to Arizona's Grand Canyon in barely 10 minutes. The latter, by comparison, took millions of years to form.

"This was a very violent, a very dramatic geologic process," said lead author David Kring of the Lunar and Planetary Institute in Houston.

Kring and his team estimate the asteroid was 15 miles (25 kilometers) across and that the energy needed to create these two canyons would have been more than 130 times that in the world's current inventory of nuclear weapons.

Most of the ejected debris was thrown in a direction away from the south pole, Kring said.

That means NASA's targeted exploration zone around the pole mostly on the moon's near side won't be buried under debris, keeping older rocks from 4 billion plus years ago exposed for collection by moonwalkers. These older rocks can help shed light not only on the moon's origins, but also Earth's.

Kring said it's unclear whether these two canyons are permanently shadowed like some of the craters at the moon's south pole. "That is something that we're clearly going to be reexamining," he said.

Permanently shadowed areas at the bottom of the moon are thought to hold considerable ice, which could be turned into rocket fuel and drinking water by future moonwalkers.

NASA's Artemis program, the successor to Apollo, aims to return astronauts to the moon this decade. The plan is to send astronauts around the moon next year, followed a year or so later by the first lunar touchdown by astronauts since Apollo.

Russian attacks near Ukrainian nuclear infrastructure heighten scrutiny of Kyiv's preparedness

By SAMYA KULLAB and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Moscow's renewed attacks on Ukraine's electricity infrastructure this winter have heightened scrutiny over the Ukrainian Energy Ministry's failure to protect the country's most critical energy facilities near nuclear power sites.

Despite more than a year of warnings that the sites were vulnerable to potential Russian attacks, the Energy Ministry failed to act swiftly, current and former Ukrainian officials in Kyiv told The Associated Press.

Two years of punishing Russian strikes on its power grid have left Ukraine reliant on nuclear power for more than half of its electricity generation. Especially vulnerable are the unprotected nuclear switchyards located outside the perimeters of its three functioning nuclear plants, which are crucial to transmitting power from the reactors to the rest of the country.

"The switchyards that handle electrical routing from nuclear power plants are a vital component of Ukraine's nuclear energy infrastructure — powering homes, schools, hospitals and other critical civilian infrastructure," said Marcy R. Fowler, head of the office for research and analysis at Open Nuclear Network, a program of the U.S.-based NGO PAX sapiens that focuses on reducing nuclear risk.

"Given Ukraine's heavy reliance on nuclear energy, military attacks on these switchyards would be devastating, severely impacting civilian life and undermining the resilience of the energy grid," she said.

Only in the fall, after Ukrainian intelligence agencies warned of potential Russian strikes targeting the nuclear switchyards, was action taken to begin building protection — far too late in the event of an attack, analysts said.

"If two (nuclear switchyards) are hit, we are out of supply for a minimum of 30 to 36 hours, and there will be a huge limitation on energy supply for at least three weeks, best-case scenario," said Oleksandr Kharchenko, a Ukrainian energy industry expert.

He said it would take three to five weeks to transport and install new equipment, a miserable scenario for Ukraine's people during the bitterly cold winter months.

Even more worrying, nuclear switchyards also have a second critical function: delivering electricity to nuclear plants from the offsite grid that is essential to cooling their reactors and spent fuel. A disruption could potentially spell disaster, the U.N. nuclear agency has repeatedly warned since the Russian attacks began in August.

And while Ukraine's nuclear plants have backup emergency power systems, these "are designed to provide temporary support," Fowler said. "Without functioning switchyards, the backup systems alone would not be sufficient to sustain operations or prevent safety risks during an extended outage."

Lawmakers cited failure to protect these sites in a resolution last month calling for the removal of Energy Minister Herman Haluschenko. The list of grievances, which also censured Haluschenko for alleged systematic corruption and inadequate oversight of the energy sector, must still be voted on by parliament.

Haluschenko maintained at a news conference Tuesday the allegations were "a manipulation" and that fortifications for the electrical grid were "done." But he would not answer direct questions about whether Ukraine's nuclear switchyards in particular were protected.

"Today we have light, we have no restrictions" on electricity, he said, suggesting that was proof that despite "massive attacks" on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, fortifications were in place.

Delays in fortifying nuclear switchyards

Russian attacks in November and December came dangerously close to the country's nuclear power plants, causing five out of its nine operating reactors to reduce power generation. The attacks did not strike the nuclear switchyards about a kilometer (half-mile) away from reactor sites but came alarmingly close.

The task of building protections for energy transmission substations, both nuclear and non-nuclear, fell to state and private companies, with the Energy Ministry supervising.

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Three layers of fortifications were ordered: sandbags followed by cement barricades capable of withstanding drone attacks and — the most costly and least complete — iron-and-steel-fortified structures.

Following a government decree in July 2023, many state energy companies began immediately contracting to build first- and second-layer fortifications for their most critical power facilities. In the spring of 2024, the government repeated the urgent call to get the work done.

But nuclear switchyards, under the responsibility of Ukraine's state nuclear company Energoatom, did not issue contracts to build second-layer concrete fortifications until this fall. By then, state energy company Ukrenergo, which manages the high-voltage substations that transmit power from the nuclear reactors to the grid, had already completed 90% of its 43 sites.

The bidding process for two nuclear plants — in Khmelnytskyi and Mykolaiv — only started in early October, according to documents seen by the AP. The tender for the Rivne Nuclear Power Plant was even later, at the end of November.

Construction is not expected to be completed until 2026, the contract documents said.

A chorus of warnings is ignored

Concerns over the delays were raised repeatedly in closed-door meetings and letters sent to energy officials over the last year, three current and former government officials told the AP, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the foot-dragging by the Energy Ministry.

"We wrote officially to the Energy Ministry several times stating this problem over the last 12 to 14 months," said Volodymyr Kudrytskyi, the former head of Ukrenergo, who was fired in September and blamed for the failures to protect the energy infrastructure — a move widely criticized as politically motivated.

Energy Minister Haluschenko gave reassurances the situation was under control and prioritized other projects, including lobbying for parliamentary approval for the construction of costly nuclear reactors that take up to a decade to build.

Ukraine's Western partners were also repeatedly told "all" critical infrastructure was protected, according to two Western diplomats with knowledge of Western financial assistance to the country's energy sector, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the issue.

Energoatom did not respond to requests for comment from the AP about the delays, citing the sensitivity of the issue.

Over the summer and again in December, Ukraine raised the alarm internationally about potential Russian attacks targeting nuclear infrastructure and compromising nuclear safety. In mid-December it convened an extraordinary session of the International Atomic Energy Agency after attacks a month earlier damaged electrical substations deemed crucial to Ukraine's nuclear safety, heightening the possibility of a nuclear emergency.

The U.N. nuclear agency sent teams in December to electrical substations at Ukraine's Khmelnytskyi, Rivne, and South Ukraine nuclear power plants to document damage and gathered evidence "highlighting the electricity grid's vulnerabilities as a result of attacks," the agency's Director General Rafael Grossi said in a statement in January.

"These attacks impact grid stability and jeopardize the reliability of the off-site power supply, creating risks to nuclear safety," Grossi said, warning of similar concerns at the Russian-held Zaporizhzhia plant, Europe's largest.

The presence of the IAEA inspection teams led some in the Ukrainian government to believe the country's nuclear sites were off-limits for Russian attacks, said a senior Ukrainian official who requested anonymity to speak candidly about the delays.

But that has proven to be a major miscalculation.

"Why didn't they react?" Kudrytskyi, the former Ukrenergo director, said of the Energy Ministry's failure to quickly respond to the series of warnings. "I don't have an answer to that."

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What USAID does, and why Trump and Musk want to get rid of it

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Dozens of senior officials put on leave. Thousands of contractors laid off. A freeze put on billions of dollars in humanitarian assistance to other countries.

Over the last two weeks, President Donald Trump's administration has made significant changes to the U.S. agency charged with delivering humanitarian assistance overseas that has left aid organizations agonizing over whether they can continue with programs such as nutritional assistance for malnourished infants and children.

Then-President John F. Kennedy established the U.S. Agency for International Development, known as USAID, during the Cold War. In the decades since, Republicans and Democrats have fought over the agency and its funding.

Here's a look at USAID, its history and the changes made since Trump took office.

What is USAID?

Kennedy created USAID at the height of the United States' Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union. He wanted a more efficient way to counter Soviet influence abroad through foreign assistance and saw the State Department as frustratingly bureaucratic at doing that.

Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act and Kennedy set up USAID as an independent agency in 1961.

USAID has outlived the Soviet Union, which fell in 1991. Today, supporters of USAID argue that U.S. assistance in countries counters Russian and Chinese influence. China has its own "belt and road" foreign aid program worldwide operating in many countries that the U.S. also wants as partners.

Critics say the programs are wasteful and promote a liberal agenda.

What's going on with USAID?

On his first day in office Jan. 20, Trump implemented a 90-day freeze on foreign assistance. Four days later, Peter Marocco — a returning political appointee from Trump's first term — drafted a tougher than expected interpretation of that order, a move that shut down thousands of programs around the world and forced furloughs and layoffs.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has since moved to keep more kinds of strictly life-saving emergency programs going during the freeze. But confusion over what programs are exempted from the Trump administration's stop-work orders — and fear of losing U.S. aid permanently — is still freezing aid and development work globally.

Dozens of senior officials have been put on leave, thousands of contractors laid off, and employees were told Monday not to enter its Washington headquarters. And USAID's website and its account on the X platform have been taken down.

It's part of a Trump administration crackdown that's hitting across the federal government and its programs. But USAID and foreign aid are among those hit the hardest.

Rubio said the administration's aim was a program-by-program review of which projects make "America safer, stronger or more prosperous."

The decision to shut down U.S.-funded programs during the 90-day review meant the U.S. was "getting a lot more cooperation" from recipients of humanitarian, development and security assistance, Rubio said.

What do critics of USAID say?

Republicans typically push to give the State Department — which provides overall foreign policy guidance to USAID — more control of its policy and funds. Democrats typically promote USAID autonomy and authority.

Funding for United Nations agencies, including peacekeeping, human rights and refugee agencies, have been traditional targets for Republican administrations to cut. The first Trump administration moved to reduce foreign aid spending, suspending payments to various U.N. agencies, including the U.N. Population Fund and funding to the Palestinian Authority.

In Trump's first term, the U.S. pulled out of the U.N. Human Rights Council and its financial obligations

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to that body. The U.S. is also barred from funding the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, or UNRWA, under a bill signed by then-President Joe Biden last March.

As a Florida senator, Rubio often called for more transparency on foreign assistance spending, but was generally supportive. In a 2017 social media post, Rubio said foreign assistance was “not charity,” that the U.S. “must make sure it is well spent” and called foreign aid “critical to our national security.”

In 2023, Rubio sponsored a bill that would have required U.S. foreign assistance agencies to include more information on what organizations were implementing the aid on the ground.

Why is Elon Musk going after USAID?

Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency, known as DOGE, has launched a sweeping effort empowered by Trump to fire government workers and cut trillions in government spending. USAID is one of his prime targets. Musk alleges USAID funding been used to launch deadly programs and called it a “criminal organization.”

What is being affected by the USAID freeze?

Sub-Saharan Africa could suffer more than any other region during the aid pause. The U.S. gave the region more than \$6.5 billion in humanitarian assistance last year. HIV patients in Africa arriving at clinics funded by an acclaimed U.S. program that helped rein in the global AIDS epidemic of the 1980s found locked doors.

There are also already ramifications in Latin America. In Mexico, a busy shelter for migrants in southern Mexico has been left without a doctor. A program to provide mental health support for LGBTQ+ youth fleeing Venezuela was disbanded.

In Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Guatemala, so-called “Safe Mobility Offices” where migrants can apply to enter the U.S. legally have shuttered.

The aid community is struggling to get the full picture—how many thousands of programs have shut down and how many thousands of workers were furloughed and laid off under the freeze?

How much does the U.S. spend on foreign aid?

In all, the U.S. spent about roughly \$40 billion in foreign aid in the 2023 fiscal year, according to a report published last month by the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.

The U.S. is the largest provider of humanitarian assistance globally, although some other countries spend a bigger share of their budget on it. Foreign assistance overall amounts to less than 1% of the U.S. budget.

What do Americans think of foreign aid?

About 6 in 10 U.S. adults said the U.S. government was spending “too much” overall on foreign aid, according to a March 2023 AP-NORC poll. Asked about specific costs, roughly 7 in 10 U.S. adults said the U.S. government was putting too much money toward assistance to other countries. About 9 in 10 Republicans and 55% of Democrats agreed that the country was overspending on foreign aid. At the time, about 6 in 10 U.S. adults said the government was spending “too little” on domestic issues that included education, health care, infrastructure, Social Security and Medicare.

Polling has shown that U.S. adults tend to overestimate the share of the federal budget that is spent on foreign aid. Surveys from KFF have found that on average, Americans say spending on foreign aid makes up 31% of the federal budget rather than closer to 1% or less.

Could Trump dissolve USAID on his own?

Democrats say presidents lack the constitutional authority to eliminate USAID. But it’s not clear what would stop him from trying.

A mini-version of that legal battle played out in Trump’s first term, when he tried to cut the budget for foreign operations by a third.

When Congress refused, the Trump administration used freezes and other tactics to cut the flow of funds already appropriated by Congress for the foreign programs. The Government Accountability Office later ruled that violated a law known as the Impoundment Control Act.

It’s a law we may be hearing more of.

“Live by executive order, die by executive order,” Musk said on X Saturday in reference to USAID.

Rubio says El Salvador offers to accept deportees from US of any nationality, including Americans

By MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio left El Salvador on Tuesday with an agreement from that country's president to accept deportees from the U.S. of any nationality, including violent American criminals now imprisoned in the United States.

President Nayib Bukele "has agreed to the most unprecedented, extraordinary, extraordinary migratory agreement anywhere in the world," Rubio said after meeting with Bukele at his lakeside country house outside San Salvador for several hours late Monday.

"We can send them, and he will put them in his jails," Rubio said of migrants of all nationalities detained in the United States. "And, he's also offered to do the same for dangerous criminals currently in custody and serving their sentences in the United States even though they're U.S. citizens or legal residents."

Rubio was visiting El Salvador to press a friendly government to do more to meet President Donald Trump's demands for a major crackdown on immigration.

Bukele confirmed the offer in a post on X, saying El Salvador has "offered the United States of America the opportunity to outsource part of its prison system." He said his country would accept only "convicted criminals" and would charge a fee that "would be relatively low for the U.S. but significant for us, making our entire prison system sustainable."

Elon Musk, the billionaire working with Trump to remake the federal government, responded on his X platform, "Great idea!!"

After Rubio spoke, a U.S. official said Trump's Republican administration had no current plans to try to deport American citizens but called Bukele's offer significant. The U.S. government cannot deport American citizens, and such a move would be met with significant legal challenges.

The State Department describes El Salvador's overcrowded prisons as "harsh and dangerous." On its current country information webpage it says, "In many facilities, provisions for sanitation, potable water, ventilation, temperature control, and lighting are inadequate or nonexistent."

El Salvador has lived under a state of emergency since March 2022, when the country's powerful street gangs went on a killing rampage. Bukele responded by suspending fundamental rights like access to lawyers, and authorities have arrested more than 83,000 people with little to no due process.

In 2023, Bukele opened a massive new prison with capacity for 40,000 gang members and boasted about serving only one meal per day. Prisoners there do not receive visits, and there are no programs preparing them for reinsertion into society after their sentences and no workshops or educational programs.

El Salvador, once one of the most dangerous countries in the world, closed last year with a record low 114 homicides, a newfound security that has propelled Bukele's soaring popularity in the country of about 6 million residents.

Rubio arrived in San Salvador shortly after watching a U.S.-funded deportation flight with 43 migrants leave from Panama for Colombia. That came a day after Rubio delivered a warning to Panama that unless the government moved immediately to eliminate China's presence at the Panama Canal, the U.S. would act to do so.

Migration, though, was the main issue of the day, as it will be for the next stops on Rubio's five-nation Central American tour of Costa Rica, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic after Panama and El Salvador.

His tour is taking place at a time of turmoil in Washington over the status of the government's main foreign development agency.

Trump's administration prioritizes stopping people from making the journey to the United States and has worked with regional countries to boost immigration enforcement on their borders as well as to accept deportees from the United States.

The agreement Rubio described for El Salvador to accept foreign nationals arrested in the United States for violating U.S. immigration laws is known as a "safe third country" agreement. Officials have suggested this might be an option for Venezuelan gang members convicted of crimes in the United States should

Venezuela refuse to accept them, but Rubio said Bukele's offer was for detainees of any nationality.

Rubio said Bukele then went further and said his country was willing to accept and to jail U.S. citizens or legal residents convicted of and imprisoned for violent crimes.

Human rights activists have warned that El Salvador lacks a consistent policy for the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees and that such an agreement might not be limited to violent criminals.

Manuel Flores, the secretary general of the leftist opposition party Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, criticized the "safe third country" plan, saying it would signal that the region is Washington's "backyard to dump the garbage."

After meeting with Bukele, Rubio signed a memorandum of understanding with his Salvadoran counterpart to advance U.S.-El Salvador civil nuclear cooperation. The document could lead to a more formal deal on cooperation in nuclear power and medicine that the U.S. has with numerous countries.

While Rubio was out of the U.S., staffers of the U.S. Agency for International Development were instructed Monday to stay out of the agency's Washington headquarters after Musk announced Trump had agreed with him to shut the agency.

Thousands of USAID employees already had been laid off and programs shut down. Rubio told reporters in San Salvador that he was now the acting administrator of USAID but had delegated that authority so he would not be running its day-to-day operations.

The change means that USAID is no longer an independent government agency as it had been for decades — although its new status will likely be challenged in court — and will be run out of the State Department by department officials.

In his remarks, Rubio stressed that some and perhaps many USAID programs would continue in the new configuration but that the switch was necessary because the agency had become unaccountable to the executive branch and Congress.

Today in History: February 5

Senate acquits Donald Trump in first impeachment

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, Feb. 5, the 36th day of 2025. There are 329 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Feb. 5, 2020, the Senate voted to acquit President Donald Trump, bringing to a close the third presidential trial in American history. Though a majority of senators expressed unease with Trump's pressure campaign on Ukraine that resulted in the two articles of impeachment, just one Republican, Mitt Romney of Utah, broke with the GOP and voted to convict.

Also on this date:

In 1917, the U.S. Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1917 over President Woodrow Wilson's veto, an act that severely curtailed Asian immigration and mandated immigrant literacy testing.

In 1918, more than 200 people were killed during World War I when the Cunard liner SS Tuscania, which was transporting over 2,000 American troops to Europe, was torpedoed by a German U-boat in the Irish Sea.

In 1971, Apollo 14 astronauts Alan Shepard and Edgar Mitchell stepped onto the surface of the moon in the first of two lunar excursions.

In 1973, services were held at Arlington National Cemetery for U.S. Army Col. William B. Nolde, the last official American combat casualty before the Vietnam ceasefire took effect.

In 1993, President Bill Clinton signed the Family and Medical Leave Act, granting workers up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for family emergencies.

In 1994, white separatist Byron De La Beckwith was convicted in Jackson, Mississippi, of murdering civil rights leader Medgar Evers in 1963 and was sentenced to life in prison.

In 2017, Tom Brady led one of the greatest comebacks in NFL history, highlighted by a spectacular Julian Edelman catch that helped lift New England from a 25-point deficit against the Atlanta Falcons to the

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Patriots' fifth Super Bowl victory, 34-28; it was the first Super Bowl to end in overtime.

In 2023, Beyoncé won her 32nd Grammy to become the most decorated artist in the history of the award.

Today's birthdays: Tony-winning playwright John Guare is 87. Football Hall of Famer Roger Staubach is 83. Film director Michael Mann is 82. Actor Charlotte Rampling is 79. Racing Hall of Famer Darrell Waltrip is 78. Actor Barbara Hershey is 77. Actor Christopher Guest is 77. Actor-comedian Tim Meadows is 64. Actor Jennifer Jason Leigh is 63. Actor Laura Linney is 61. Rock musician Duff McKagan (Guns N' Roses) is 61. Golf Hall of Famer Jose Maria Olazabal is 59. Actor-comedian Chris Parnell is 58. Singer Bobby Brown is 56. Actor Michael Sheen is 56. Country singer Sara Evans is 54. Actor-singer Darren Criss is 38. Soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo is 40. Actor Henry Golding is 38. Soccer star Neymar is 33.