

Groton Daily Independent

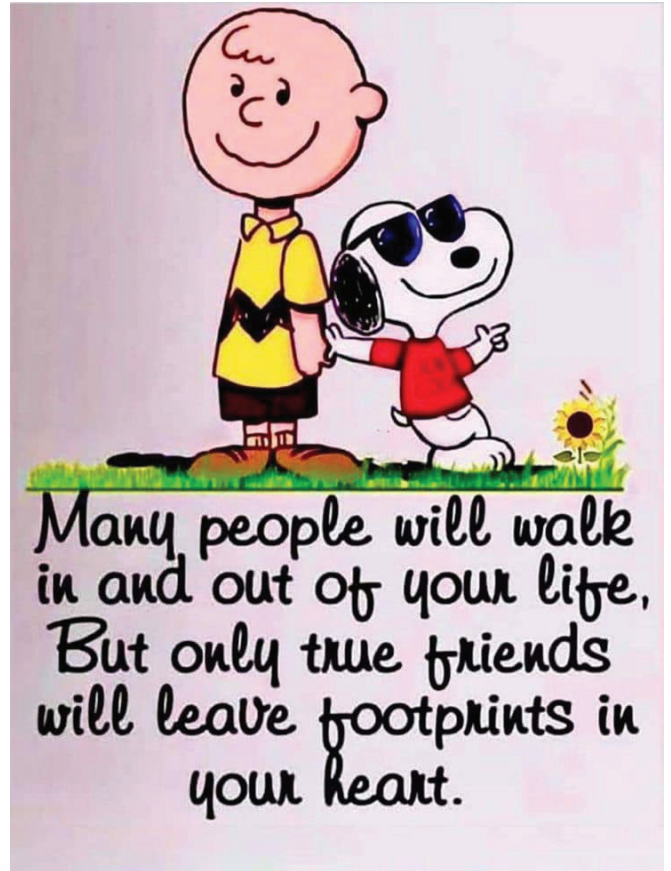
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Wednesday, Feb. 12

Senior Menu: Chicken tetrazzine, mixed vegetables, accini depepi salad, whole wheat bread.
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.
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. 13

Senior Menu: Lemon baked fish, rice, California blend, peach crisps, whole wheat bread.
Parent-Teacher Conferences, 1:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Early dismissal of school.
Groton Lions Club meeting, 6 p.m., 104 N Main
Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 14

VALENTINE'S DAY
Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, wild rice, glazed carrots, cheesecake with frost glaze, dinner roll.
No School, Faculty In-service
Community Blood Drive, 8:45 a.m. to noon, Groton Community Center

Saturday, Feb. 15

Basketball Double-Header at Moberidge-Pollock.
Boys 8th at 11 a.m., boys 7th at noon, girls C at 11 a.m., boys C at noon, girls varsity and boys varsity to follow.
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.

Abdullah Meets Trump

President Donald Trump met with Jordan's King Abdullah II at the White House yesterday, reiterating his proposal to control and develop the Gaza Strip while relocating 2 million Palestinians to neighboring countries. Though Abdullah dismissed the proposal last week, he offered to receive 2,000 sick Palestinian children in the meeting. An estimated 5,000 children are critically ill in the territory.

Jordan, as well as most Arab states, condemns the idea of resettling more Palestinians in their countries, with Jordanian lawmakers proposing a bill last week banning the policy. Israel's eastern neighbor hosts more Palestinian refugees than any other country, with more than 2 million registered and accounting for 20% of the country's population.

The talks come as the three-week-old ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip faces a potential breakdown. Hamas warned Monday it would pause hostage releases due to reported Israeli violations of the ceasefire, prompting Israel to threaten to end the truce this weekend.

Monty the Giant Schnauzer

Monty, a giant schnauzer, was crowned Best in Show yesterday at the 2025 Westminster Kennel Club dog competition—the second-longest continuously held sporting event in the US (behind the Kentucky Derby).

The 149th prestigious US canine show, which began in 1877, returned to its traditional home at Madison Square Garden in New York City after a four-year hiatus. Over three days, roughly 2,500 pampered pups representing 201 breeds competed for Best of Breed, with the winners of those categories competing against each other in their broader respective groups.

A total of seven dogs then competed for Best in Show. Those dogs included Monty (working group); Bourbon the Whippet (hound group), who won the runner-up prize; Freddie the English Springer Spaniel (sporting group); Archer the Skye Terrier (terrier group); Comet the Shih Tzu (toy group); Neal the Bichon Frisé (non-sporting group); and Mercedes the German Shepherd (herding group).

Border Wall Fraud Case

Steve Bannon pleaded guilty yesterday to one felony count of fraud in connection with a fundraising campaign that aimed to construct a wall along the US-Mexico border. The former adviser to President Donald Trump will avoid prison time and restitution payments in exchange for a three-year conditional discharge.

The initiative, launched in 2018, raised more than \$20M by promising donors 100% of their contributions would fund the construction of the wall. Prosecutors alleged Bannon funneled some of the donor money to pay salaries and personal expenses. Bannon maintains that he did not personally profit. He received a federal pardon from Trump in 2021 for similar charges; however, state prosecutors pursued the case independently, as presidential pardons do not apply to state crimes. Two codefendants have already been convicted and sentenced.

Bannon's plea deal bars him from fundraising for or managing charitable organizations in New York. This marks Bannon's second criminal conviction after serving four months in federal prison for contempt of Congress last year.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Super Bowl LIX hauls in 127.7 million viewers across all platforms, a new record and 3% jump over last year.

UEFA Champions League knockout phase kicks off; see latest matchups.

Shopify pulls down Yeezy website run by Ye, formerly known as Kanye West, after the online store began selling T-shirts with swastikas on them.

YouTube viewership via TV surpasses phone and desktop viewing for first time.

Disney to change content warnings ahead of some classic films as part of overhaul to company DEI policies.

Science & Technology

Tests of AI chatbots suggest platforms struggle to answer questions about the news roughly half the time; about one in five answers include factual errors.

Chinese electric vehicle maker BYD to add self-driving capabilities across its auto lines, including the roughly \$10K economy Seagull hatchback; BYD passed Tesla as world's biggest EV maker last year.

Researchers report third known case of resistance to inherited Alzheimer's; man in his mid-70s shows no cognitive decline despite genetic mutation causing symptoms around age 50.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.0%, Dow +0.3%, Nasdaq -0.4%) as Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell urges caution on rate cuts, says central bank won't create its own digital currency.

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau senior leaders announce resignations after acting Director Russell Vought instructs staff to cease working.

Drone maker Anduril Industries to take over managing Microsoft's \$22B augmented reality headset program for US Army.

Activist investor Elliott Investment Management builds more than \$2.5B stake in Phillips 66, wants the energy company to sell or spin off its oil transport and storage unit.

Politics & World Affairs

US Senate expected to hold vote today for Tulsi Gabbard's confirmation for director of national intelligence.

President Donald Trump and Elon Musk appear together to defend efforts to downsize federal government and limit spending.

Ukraine offers rare earth deal to President Donald Trump in exchange for more US military aid; rare earth elements are essential to consumer technology, including cellphones and hard drives.

American schoolteacher Marc Fogel released from Russian custody after his 2021 arrest on drug charges.

Dual winter storms to bring heavy snow, ice, and severe weather from the US Midwest to the East Coast this week; largest snowfall of up to 12 inches to hit Washington, DC, area.

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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 as-sorted 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. Bet-sie Voucher book, puppy, mini chocolate hearts. Behind the dog a bag of heart bear gummies and a small box of mix chocolates. \$12



Groton Area Tigers Dominate Leola-Frederick in High-Scoring Battle

It was a wild night at Groton Area Arena as two Brown County powerhouses clashed in an electrifying showdown with Groton Area posting a 92-65 win. The visiting Leola-Frederick Titans came out firing, taking a commanding 16-7 lead midway through the first quarter. They were nearly unstoppable, shooting an impressive 73% from the field, while the Tigers fought to keep pace at 50%. Westyn Thorpe led the Titans with nine points, matching Groton's Ryder Johnson, who drained two three-pointers to keep his team within reach. By the end of the first period, Leola-Frederick held a 22-17 advantage.

The momentum began to shift in the second quarter. Groton Area went on a crucial five-point run to seize their first lead at 31-30, igniting the home crowd. The Tigers' offense found its rhythm, shooting 67% from the field, while Leola-Frederick struggled at 27%. By halftime, Groton had built a solid 44-36 lead, flipping the script on what had started as a Titans-dominated game.

Coming out of the break, the Tigers showed no signs of slowing down. Their relentless defense and efficient shooting extended the lead to 64-47 by the end of the third quarter. Noah Kippley tried to keep the Titans afloat with seven points in the period, but the Tigers had full control.

The fourth quarter was an offensive clinic for Groton Area. Karson Zak erupted for nine points, leading the Tigers to a blistering 92% shooting performance in the final frame. They outscored Leola-Frederick 28-18, sealing a 92-65 victory—their highest-scoring game of the season.

Ryder Johnson was the star of the night for Groton, finishing with 26 points and four steals. Keegen Tracy added 17 points and five assists, while Becker Bosma had 12 points and snagged six rebounds. Karson Zak contributed 11 points and four assists. The Tigers were dominant inside, hitting 24 of 32 two-pointers for 75%, and knocked down eight three-pointers at a 44% clip.

Groton also made an impact on the defensive end, recording 17 total rebounds, with Becker Bosma leading the way with six. The Tigers tallied 20 assists and 13 steals, using their aggressive defense to create transition opportunities. However, foul trouble was a factor, as Groton racked up 24 team fouls, with four players finishing with four fouls each.

The Tigers also showed their presence in the paint, registering five blocks. Gage Sippel was a defensive force with three blocks, while Becker Bosma and Logan Warrington each added one.



Becker Bosma

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Taylor Diegel

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Turnovers played a crucial role in the game. Groton Area committed 10 turnovers, but the Titans were only able to capitalize on three of them for four points. On the other hand, Leola-Frederick turned the ball over 15 times, with the Tigers taking advantage of seven of them for 12 points.

With the victory, Groton Area improved to 11-5 on the season and now turns their focus to a road matchup against Mobridge-Pollock on Saturday. Meanwhile, Leola-Frederick, now 15-2, looks to bounce back in their next contest.

JV and C-Team Results

Groton's junior varsity squad dominated as well, rolling to a 48-13 win. Easton Weber led with 12 points, while Jaden Schwan and Ethan Kroll added nine each, Anthony Tracy had eight, Jace Johnson and Ryder Johnson each had four, and Logan Warrington added two. Lucas Gulbranson led the Titans with six while Erik Losure had five and Howard Sumption two. The C-team also secured a 33-6 victory, with Ethan Kroll leading the way with 10 points followed by Asher Johnson with six. Ryder Schelle, Jordan Schwan and Anthony Tracy each had four, Jace Johnson had three and Connor Kroll two. Preston Sumption had four. Leola-Frederick and Howard Sumption and Jayden Ellwein each added one.

It was a night to remember for the Tigers, who showcased their depth and firepower in a commanding performance.

- Story compiled by ChatGPT



Ryder Johnson

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Blake Pauli

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton Area:

Ryder Johnson: 26 points, 2 rebounds, 2 assists, 4 steals, 4 fouls.

Keegen Tracy: 17 points, 1 rebound, 5 assists, 3 steals, 4 fouls.

Becker Bosma: 12 points, 6 rebounds, 3 assists, 1 steal, 3 fouls, 1 block.

Karson Zak: 11 points, 1 rebound, 4 assists, 2 steals, 4 fouls.

Gage Sippel: 8 points, 2 rebounds, 4 fouls, 3 blocks.

Easton Weber: 6 points, 2 rebounds, 2 assists, 2 steals, 1 foul.

Turner Thompson: 6 points, 2 rebounds, 2 fouls.

Jayden Schwan: 3 points, 2 assists, 2 fouls.

Logan Warrington: 1 steal, 1 foul.

Taylor Diegel: 3 points, 1 rebound, 2 assists.

2-Pointers: 24-32 75%, 3-Pointers: 8-18 44%, Free Throws: 17 rebounds, 10 turnovers, 20 assists, 13 steals, 24 fouls, 5 blocks.

Leola-Frederick: Westyn Thorpe 21, Noah Kippley 14, Gavin Nickelson 9, Ethan Petrich 5, Jace Thorpe 5, Milo Sumption 4, Zander Hoffman 3, Erik Losure 3, Lucas Gulbranson 1. Field Goals: 20-46 44%, Free Throws: 20-30 67%, 21 fouls, 15 turnovers.

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Four seniors were recognized at the basketball game Tuesday night. Emily Overacker, Teylor Diegel, Turner Thompson and Blake Pauli. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Aspen Beto played the National Anthem Tuesday night at the boys basketball game.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



The Life of Faye Stohr



Services for Faye Stohr, 76, of Aberdeen will be 11:00 a.m., Saturday, February 15th at the Claremont Community Church. Rev. Rodney Ulmer will officiate. Entombment will follow in Sunset Memorial Gardens Mausoleum, Aberdeen under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton. Services will be live streamed through the Claremont Church Facebook page.

Visitation will be held at the funeral chapel on Friday from 5-7 p.m. with a prayer service at 7:00 p.m.

Faye passed away February 7, 2025 at Primrose Cottages in Aberdeen.

Faye Nereim was born on February 22, 1948 in Aberdeen to Orville and Fern (Sanderson) Nereim. She was raised and attended school in Claremont, graduating in 1966. Faye continued her education at NDSU, later transferring to Northern State where she earned her Bachelor's Degree in Education. Faye used her double major in Math and History as a teacher in Anchorage, Alaska for several years before returning to teach in Hecla. On August 7, 1969, she was united in marriage with Jeff Stohr in Claremont and together they were blessed with one son, Jacob.

Faye was an active member of the United Methodist Women, where she held many offices including President of the ND/SD UMW. She was involved in the Langford School Board for 18 years, where she also served as President. Faye was a skilled piano player and taught lessons for many years. Faye also enjoyed cross stitching and spending time with her family, especially her grandson.

Celebrating her life is her husband, Jeff of Aberdeen, her son, Jacob (Mattie) Stohr and their son, Maverick of Aberdeen, and her sister, Kaye (Larry) Johnke of Irene.

Preceding her in death were her parents and one sister, Karen Tchida.

Casketbearers will be Kevin Tchida, Terry Tchida, Tim Johnke, Brock Johnke, Landra Knodel, Kendall Johnke, Bryce Johnke and Trent Johnke.

Memorials may be directed to the Claremont Community Church Memorial Fund, 201 6th Street, Claremont, SD 57422.

Death Notice: Mary Fliehs

Mary K. Fliehs, 78, of Groton passed away February 10, 2025 at Bethesda Home of Aberdeen. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

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The Life of Lester Herr



Lester Herr, 102, of Bristol, peacefully passed away, February 5, 2025, at Sundial Manor Nursing Home in Bristol.

Memorial services will be at 11:00 am Wednesday, February 12, 2025, at Fiksdal Funeral Service. Burial will be at a later date.

Memorial visitation will be Tuesday, 5-7 pm at the funeral home.

Condolences may be sent to Sun Dial Manor, Avera Hospice, or Prairie Mound Cemetery.

Lester Emil Herr was born on June 3, 1922, to Emil and Augusta (Nolte) Herr in Day County, South Dakota. He was baptized and confirmed at Butler Lutheran Church in Butler. He attended school in Butler and graduated from Butler High School in 1940. After his education, he farmed the family farm alongside his father in Valley Township, west of Butler.

On June 18, 1944, he married Virginia Clausen at Butler. The couple made their home and farmed in the Butler area. To this union seven children were born, Shirley, Larry, Linda, Gloria, Gayle, Michael, and Kathryn. Lester faithfully worked the fields farming well into his 90's. Virginia passed in 1990. Lester continued to live on the farm until 2015, when he moved to assisted living in Bristol.

Lester had a daily routine of coffee with his buddies at Bristol and Butler. He enjoyed woodworking and building things. He had an inventive mind, constructing parts for machinery when needed. He enjoyed his farm cats and just tinkering around the farm. Lester was very involved in the community. He was an avid cheerleader for all his grandchildren's and great grandchildren's extra-curricular activities. Lester was a lifelong member of Butler Lutheran Church where he served on the board. He also served on the following boards: Sun Dial Manor, Bristol School, Day County Museum, Day County Hospital, Valley Township, and Bristol Farmers Union. He was also instrumental in the formation of Sun Dial Manor.

Above all else, Lester cherished time with his family. He will be greatly missed by his children, Shirley (Paul) Halvorsen of Webster, SD, Larry (Judy) Herr of Bristol, SD, Gloria (Morris) Forsting of Sioux Falls, SD, Gayle (Steve) Horter of Andover, SD, Michael (Tammie) Herr of Bristol, SD, and Kathryn (Shayne) Schmiege of Andover, SD, 16 grandchildren, 38 great grandchildren, and 5 great-great grandchildren with one on the way! He was preceded in death by his parents, wife Virginia, infant daughter Linda, grandsons Mark Halvorsen and Matthew Forsting, and sisters Edna Jensen, Eleanore Whitmyre, and Irene Whitmyre.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Lawmakers advance bill requiring SD schools to teach Native American history, culture

BY: SETH TUPPER - FEBRUARY 11, 2025 3:52 PM

South Dakota public schools would be required to teach a specific set of Native American historical and cultural lessons if a bill unanimously endorsed by a legislative committee Tuesday in Pierre becomes law.

The bill would mandate the teaching of the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings. The phrase "Oceti Sakowin" refers to the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota people. The understandings are a set of standards and lessons adopted seven years ago by the South Dakota Board of Education Standards with input from tribal leaders, educators and elders.

Use of the understandings by public schools is optional. A survey conducted by the state Department of Education indicated use by 62% of teachers, but the survey was voluntary and hundreds of teachers did not respond.

Republican state Sen. Tamara Grove, who lives on the Lower Brule Reservation, proposed the bill and asked legislators to follow the lead of Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate Chairman J. Garret Renville. He has publicly called for a "reset" of state-tribal relations since the departure of former Gov. Kristi Noem, who was barred by tribal leaders from entering tribal land in the state.

"What I'm asking you to do today," Grove said, "is to lean into the reset."

Joe Graves, the state secretary of education and a Noem appointee, testified against the bill. He said portions of the understandings are already incorporated into the state's social studies standards. He added that the state only mandates four curricular areas: math, science, social studies and English-language arts/reading. He said further mandates would "tighten up the school days, leaving schools with much less instructional flexibility."

Members of the Senate Education Committee sided with Grove and other supporters, voting 7-0 to send the bill to the full Senate.

The proposal is one of several education mandates that lawmakers have considered this legislative session. The state House rejected a bill this week that would have required posting and teaching the Ten Commandments in schools, and also rejected a bill that would have required schools to post the state motto, "Under God the People Rule."

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.

House defeats bill requiring South Dakota state motto or seal in classrooms

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 11, 2025 3:38 PM

A bill requiring public school districts in South Dakota to display the state motto "Under God, the People Rule" in classrooms failed Tuesday in the House of Representatives.

Rep. Phil Jensen, R-Rapid City, introduced the bill, which the House voted 38-30 to reject. It would have required schools to display the motto or the state seal, which includes the motto.

Jensen introduced similar legislation in 2019 requiring each public school building to display the national motto, "In God We Trust." That legislation became law.

Supporters of this year's House Bill 1105 included Rep. Dylan Jordan, R-Clear Lake, who said he doesn't "see anything wrong" with posting the state seal and motto in classrooms.

But lawmakers opposed to the legislation said it should be up to schools to decide if, how and where to display state symbols. Brookings Republican Rep. Mellissa Heermann told lawmakers school districts can already display the information if they choose, and some likely do.

"This is not needed legislation," she said.

The chamber also defeated legislation on Monday to require displays of the Ten Commandments in public schools.

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.

McCook Lake flood recovery bill advances to budget committee

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 11, 2025 2:20 PM

State lawmakers advanced a bill 12-1 on Tuesday at the Capitol in Pierre to establish a fund for the cleanup and restoration of McCook Lake, the site of devastating flooding in June.

The amount of funding is to be determined by lawmakers serving on a separate budget committee. The funds would support repairs to the lake's pumping system, debris removal and future flood mitigation planning. The money would not be available to the owners of 103 homes along the lake that were damaged or destroyed. Some of those homeowners have received federal disaster aid.

Rep. Chris Kassin, R-Vermillion, is the bill's main sponsor. He said the flood is "one of the worst things I've ever seen in my life." The lake remains filled with sediment, fallen trees and debris.

McCook Lake Association President Dirk Lohry said the group has spent about \$20 million maintaining and improving the lake in the last 20 years. He said that without state funding, the lake will remain unusable due to the sheer volume of debris — estimated at 160,000 cubic yards.

The lake was used as a flood diversion channel to protect the nearby and larger communities of North Sioux City and Dakota Dunes, which intensified damage to the lake from the record amount of water that came down the Big Sioux River.

"The lake was sacrificed," Lohry said, "to be able to protect the business district and Dakota Dunes from those floods."

The diversion plan was developed in 1977 when there was less development around the lake and the record crest of the Big Sioux was lower.

The state Bureau of Finance and Management opposed the bill. Duncan Koch, representing the bureau, said the state's emergency and disaster fund and federal assistance should be the primary sources of aid. He said the state has spent about \$3.4 million on flood preparations and recovery. The Federal Emergency Management Agency gave victims in Union County, which includes McCook Lake, \$3.5 million to cover portions of their losses.

Koch cautioned that creating a fund for McCook Lake would set a precedent for other communities affected by natural disasters to seek direct state appropriations.

The debate over the bill occurs as the state anticipates a potential lawsuit. Some McCook Lake residents have formally notified the state of their intent to sue, claiming the flood diversion decisions worsened their damage.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Property tax credits rise from the 'ashes' of failed SD school choice legislation

BY: SETH TUPPER - FEBRUARY 11, 2025 1:55 PM

A bill described as an "opportunity for a phoenix to rise out of the ashes" of South Dakota's school choice debate advanced out of a legislative committee Tuesday at the Capitol in Pierre.

The legislation from state Sen. John Carley, R-Piedmont, would provide property tax credits to help families pay for private school, homeschooling or other forms of alternative instruction.

Rapid City resident Tonchi Weaver, representing the conservative political action group Citizens for Liberty, made the "phoenix" comment while testifying in support of the bill. She was referencing failed attempts from earlier in the legislative session to create publicly funded savings accounts for families' nonpublic education costs.

Weaver said tax credits are another way to provide that help.

"I think this is a conversation that needs to be had and an idea that needs to be put forward," she said.

Property owners could use the credit for their own children, or contribute it to support other children. A cap would limit a taxpayer's credits to 80% of what the state allots for a public school student in the South Dakota education funding formula. Carley said that would initially set the cap at about \$6,000 per taxpayer.

Schools and counties both receive property tax revenue. Carley said the credits would only apply to the school portion of taxes.

The bill would cost school districts a combined \$14 million to \$21 million per year in lost revenue, according to Carley, who attributed the estimate to a fiscal note prepared by the Legislative Research Council. The fiscal note was not yet publicly available Tuesday morning.

Dianna Miller, a lobbyist for South Dakota's large school districts, said the bill would transfer a greater education funding burden onto the state. She said the funding formula works like a glass of water, with school districts pouring their property taxes in first and the state — which is funded primarily by sales taxes — filling the rest of the glass.

"You're cutting the local effort that's going to be poured in there by giving a tax incentive to people," Miller said. "So the state is going to end up paying more."

Miller was one of several public school representatives who testified against the bill. The state Department of Revenue also opposed it, saying it would create a new administrative burden for county and state officials tasked with managing the program.

Opponents also raised concerns about accountability, saying there is nothing in the bill — other than a requirement to turn in receipts for expenses — requiring families benefiting from the program to prove their children are being educated.

Sam Nelson, a lobbyist for the Sioux Falls School District, said the bill would set a bad precedent by allowing people to use taxes for their own priorities rather than shared needs like public schools.

"If we're going to allow people to opt out of supporting a bedrock of their communities, when can I opt out of paying for roads and bridges in Lincoln County that I don't use or that don't service me every day?" Nelson said. "I'd really like to pour a new driveway for my house. Can I opt out and pay for that?"

Ultimately, there were enough supporters of the concept on the Senate Education Committee to send it to the full Senate on a 4-3 vote.

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.

Congress urged to move faster to provide billions for mass deportations

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - FEBRUARY 11, 2025 5:00 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate Budget Committee chairman warned Tuesday that immigration and border security funding is running low, and urged House Republicans to go along with a plan that would provide hundreds of billions in spending before Congress takes up changes to tax laws later this year.

Sen. Lindsey Graham said following a closed-door briefing with border czar Tom Homan and White House budget director Russ Vought that the two “begged” lawmakers to quickly provide more funding for border security.

The South Carolina Republican said that instead of taking the time to negotiate agreement among GOP lawmakers on a massive package that would include border security, energy policy, defense funding and tax law, Congress should instead pass three of those initiatives now and leave the debate on taxes until later.

“I still want one, big, beautiful bill, but I cannot — after hearing what I heard today — not act,” Graham said. “After that briefing, if the Republican Party cannot provide the money to the Trump administration to do all the things they need to do to make us safe, we have nobody to blame but ourselves, because we have the ability through reconciliation to do this. And I just want to do this sooner rather than later.”

Vought told senators in the private meeting that Immigration and Customs Enforcement is quickly running out of money, Graham said.

Republicans in Congress have been debating since after the elections whether to move the major policy changes through one or two bills. And while that would normally be an inside-the-beltway discussion, the House and Senate must get on the same page if they want to use the reconciliation process.

Otherwise the GOP will have to negotiate with Democrats or scrap their proposals altogether.

A first step

The first step in the arduous process requires the House and Senate agree on a budget resolution that includes reconciliation instructions for all the committees that will take part in drafting the package.

Graham released the Senate’s budget resolution last week. The committee plans to mark it up on Wednesday and Thursday, before voting to send the proposal to the Senate floor.

The House Budget Committee is set to debate and vote on its own budget later this week, though the panel had yet to release the resolution as of Tuesday afternoon.

Normally, the House and Senate could draft their separate bills however they want and then go to conference to work out the differences. But because GOP leaders want to use the complicated, strict budget reconciliation process to enact their changes, they need to agree on whether it will be one bill or two in the budget resolution.

Graham’s budget resolution would set up Congress to first pass a bill providing hundreds of billions of dollars for the Pentagon and Homeland Security Department as well as some energy policies.

The House budget resolution is expected to include reconciliation instructions that would move all of the core policy goals — border security, defense, energy and tax — within one package.

House and Senate Republicans failing to agree to a budget resolution that has one set of reconciliation instructions would mean they cannot use that process to get around the Senate’s 60-vote legislative filibuster and therefore couldn’t get any of their bills to President Donald Trump’s desk.

Graham said during the press conference that he still hopes Congress can pass one big package, but that he believes lawmakers must get ICE, Customs and Border Protection and the Defense Department the funding they say they need as soon as possible.

“All I can tell my House colleagues: Whatever you need to do to get to one, beautiful bill, do it, do it now, you have my blessing, you have my support,” Graham said. “But if we can’t do it quickly, we need to go to Plan B.”

Graham said Senate Republicans have made a commitment to pay for the total cost of the border

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security-defense-energy reconciliation package by “taking money away from other parts of the government that are less worthy.”

“We’re going to spend the money in four years. That will be enough to enact the Trump immigration agenda on the security side for the entire four years and we’re going to pay for it in four years,” Graham said.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said he views his chamber’s work on the budget resolution as “complementary with the House.”

“Now granted, they are on a different track, but that’s why we have this process,” Thune said. “We will figure out how to get to the finish line and the one thing that we’re all interested in and concerned about is unlocking this process, getting started and getting an outcome.”

Committees split up funding

Graham’s budget resolution would give the Armed Services Committee about \$150 billion in funding, while Commerce, Science and Transportation would be able to spend \$20 billion; Environment and Public Works would have a topline of \$1 billion; Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs would receive a funding level of \$175 billion; and Judiciary would have a spending allocation of \$175 billion.

The funding GOP lawmakers plan to put in their reconciliation bills would be in addition to the funds that Congress provides in the dozen annual appropriations bills.

Congress approved \$61.8 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Homeland Security and \$825 billion for the Department of Defense in the last full-year spending bills that lawmakers passed in March 2024.

The DHS spending level was broken down among several agencies, including ICE, which received \$9.6 billion, and CBP, which got \$19.6 billion. Those funding levels were \$1.1 billion and \$3.2 billion more than the previous year’s levels, respectively, according to a summary from House Republicans.

Congress was supposed to pass the latest round of annual spending bills before the Oct. 1 start of the fiscal year, but decided instead to rely on two stopgap spending bills to extend those funding laws through March 14.

More officers, detention space

Homan, whom Trump tapped to carry out his campaign promise of mass deportations, has acknowledged that funding from Congress is key for immigration enforcement, from the hiring of more officers to additional detention space.

Enacting mass removals of millions of people in the country without proper legal status is resource heavy. ICE has a staff of 21,000 personnel, with 7,700 officers dedicated to removal and enforcement operations.

Another issue is detention space. ICE is funded to hold about 41,500 detention beds. ICE has started issuing requests for information on increasing detention capacity, according to government contracting data.

Additionally, the president has directed the Department of Defense to start holding up to 30,000 migrants at Guantanamo Bay.

Ariana Figueroa contributed to this report.

Jennifer covers the nation’s capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

Elon Musk's DOGE targets U.S. Department of Education for millions in funding cuts

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - FEBRUARY 11, 2025 3:02 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Education Department was hit with hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts after the Department of Government Efficiency announced its latest terminations of contracts Monday.

The 45-year-old department has been on the chopping block as President Donald Trump and his administration continue to take sweeping steps to slash federal government spending.

The president also campaigned heavily on a pledge to eliminate the Education Department and could soon issue an executive order that diminishes the agency.

Trump's nominee to lead the very department he wants to abolish — former World Wrestling Entertainment executive Linda McMahon — is set to appear before a Senate panel for her confirmation hearing Thursday.

Trump said he wants McMahon "to put herself out of a job."

The Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, said in a post on social media Monday it terminated 89 contracts totaling \$881 million.

DOGE, which billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk leads, also said it cut 29 diversity, equity and inclusion training grants worth \$101 million.

One of those initiatives "sought to train teachers to 'help students understand / interrogate the complex histories involved in oppression, and help students recognize areas of privilege and power on an individual and collective basis,'" DOGE said.

Stats and research unit contracts axed

Meanwhile, the Institute of Education Sciences, part of the Education Department focused on statistics and research, is also a major target of the cuts.

Nearly 170 contracts were terminated within IES, according to the American Educational Research Association and the Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics on Monday.

Part of the institute includes the National Center for Education Statistics, which is the "primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education in the United States and other nations."

Sen. Patty Murray, a Democrat representing Washington state, lambasted DOGE's decision to effectively gut the research arm of the Education Department.

In a Monday statement, Murray said "an unelected billionaire is now bulldozing the research arm of the Department of Education — taking a wrecking ball to high-quality research and basic data we need to improve our public schools."

"Cutting off these investments after the contract has already been inked is the definition of wasteful," Murray said, adding that "Musk doesn't care if working class kids in America get a good education, so whittling down the Department of Education means nothing to him."

The Department of Education did not immediately respond to a request for comment Tuesday regarding the cuts.

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.

Legislative committee endorses ban on medical debt reporting to credit scoring agencies

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - FEBRUARY 11, 2025 12:29 PM

Debt collectors would be prohibited from reporting medical debts to credit scoring agencies under legislation endorsed by a legislative committee Tuesday at the South Dakota Capitol in Pierre.

About 18% of South Dakota adults have medical debt, which is the highest percentage in the nation and twice the national average, according to the national health advocacy group KFF.

Health care systems send overdue medical bills to debt collectors, which currently can share that information with credit scoring agencies. Lenders reference credit scores to rate a person's likelihood of paying a loan back on time.

Medical debt is commonly disputed and is often "thrust upon" families after emergency situations, said Rep. Brian Mulder, R-Sioux Falls, who introduced House Bill 1058.

"When you have a low credit score and this compounding debt, it just makes it harder in every other aspect," Mulder said, "whether you're looking for housing, even renting, or you're looking for a car to get to work."

Health care systems would still be able to send medical bills to collection agencies, Mulder said. Time Rave, executive director of South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations — which represents hospitals, health systems and post-acute care providers across South Dakota — told lawmakers the organization "doesn't have a position" on the bill.

Several health advocacy groups supported the legislation, including advocates for South Dakota's elderly, disabled and tribal populations. A representative for the Rosebud Sioux Tribe told lawmakers that tribal members are often hounded by collection agencies when they are referred to a non-Indian Health Service provider and the provider does not receive timely reimbursement from the federal government.

Opponents included business and banking advocacy organizations. Karl Adam, president of the South Dakota Bankers Association, said the bill would disadvantage people with other debts, such as home mortgages, auto loans, student loans and credit card debt. He also said lenders couldn't paint a "full and accurate picture" of a person's financial assessment without medical debt.

Lawmakers on the House Health and Human Services Committee voted 9-4 to pass the bill onto the House floor. Sioux Falls Republican Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt endorsed the bill, although she was concerned about accountability.

"The responsibility to pay for bills lies on the person, and if it does not lie on the patient, ultimately, it becomes all of our responsibilities to pay," Rehfeldt said.

An accompanying medical debt bill introduced by Mulder that would prohibit hospitals from sending medical debt to a collector unless certain conditions were met was shot down by the committee in a 10-3 vote.

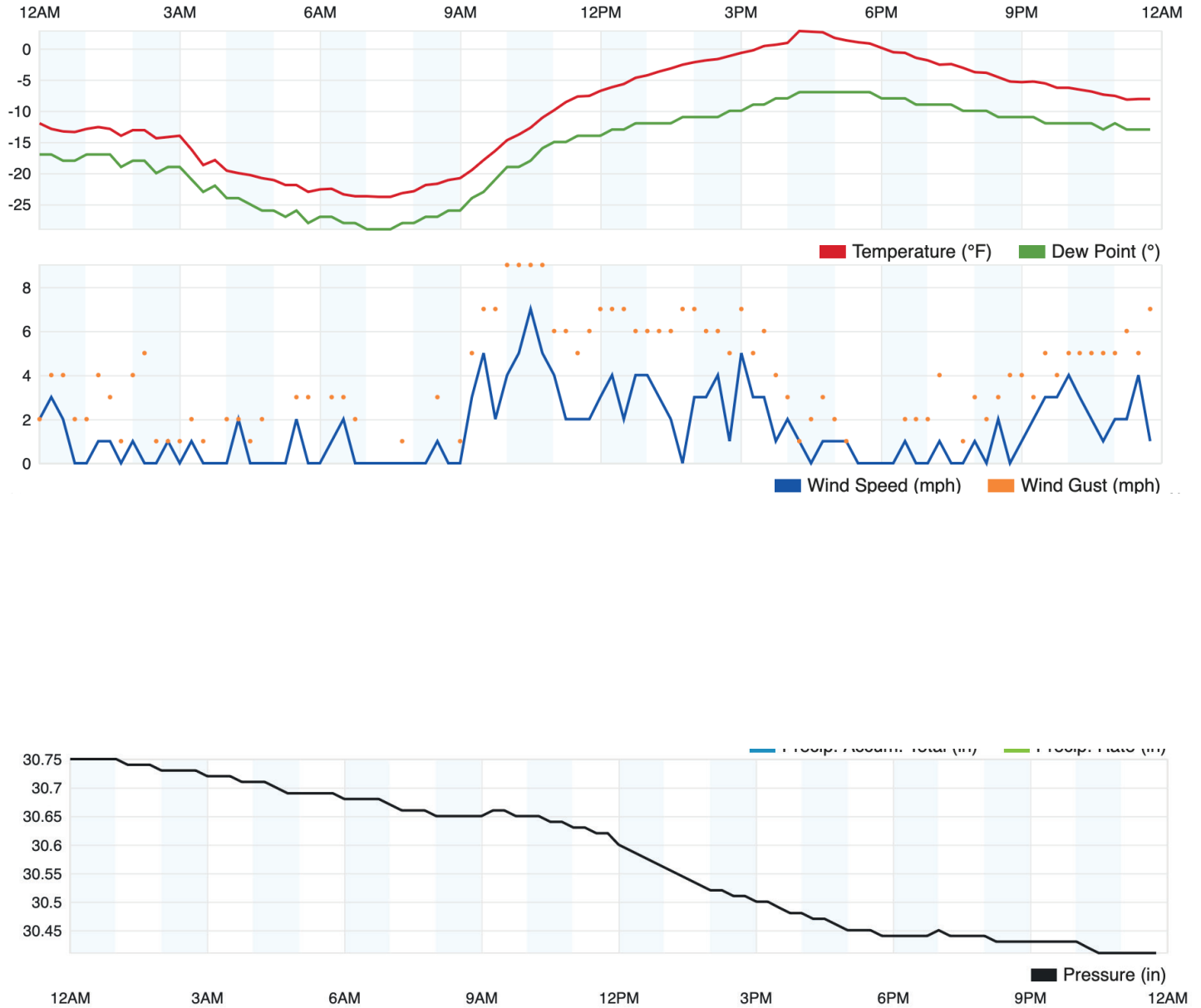
Representatives for Avera, Sanford and Monument health care systems and the South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations opposed the bill, saying the legislation was too vague and potentially costly. They also said health care systems already have policies and processes in place to connect patients to financial assistance before sending medical debt to collection agencies.

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.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs




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Cold ...

Today

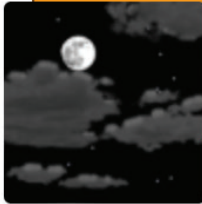


High: 3 °F

Cold

Cold Weather Advisory


Tonight



Low: -25 °F

Partly Cloudy


Thursday



High: 15 °F

Sunny


Thursday Night



Low: 0 °F

Increasing Clouds

Friday



High: 20 °F

Chance Snow
50%



Cold Temperatures and Wind Chills

February 12, 2025
3:29 AM

- Very cold wind chills continue this morning and Thursday morning (red boxes)
 - As low as -30 to -40°
- Use caution when heading outside, dress in several layers covering all exposed skin.
- Remember to bring your pets inside!

Minimum Wind Chill Forecast (°F)

	2/12 Wed												2/13 Thu																	
	5am	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm	12am	1am	2am	3am	4am	5am	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am
Aberdeen	-22	-22	-24	-23	-20	-19	-18	-15	-16	-14	-12	-14	-16	-19	-24	-25	-27	-28	-31	-30	-32	-22	-23	-24	-23	-34	-35	-33	-29	-24
Britton	-29	-32	-36	-33	-29	-24	-23	-22	-20	-18	-17	-15	-16	-19	-20	-26	-27	-28	-28	-31	-33	-34	-36	-37	-39	-39	-40	-39	-33	-28
Brookings	-6	-5	-6	-5	-3	0	-8	-7	-6	-5	-6	-4	-6	-10	-12	-18	-21	-26	-26	-27	-28	-28	-19	-20	-21	-20	-20	-19	-15	-22
Chamberlain	-3	-3	-3	-3	-10	-11	-11	-9	-9	-8	-5	-7	-7	-8	-13	-14	-14	-16	-16	-8	-9	-12	-12	-12	-23	-26	-26	-21	-16	
Clark	-15	-16	-18	-18	-15	-14	-10	-10	-10	-10	-13	-15	-18	-22	-24	-26	-26	-27	-27	-29	-29	-28	-29	-28	-31	-32	-34	-26	-22	
Eagle Butte	-29	-31	-32	-33	-31	-28	-26	-23	-21	-18	-17	-14	-15	-17	-18	-21	-22	-21	-23	-25	-27	-27	-29	-32	-31	-31	-32	-31	-26	-19
Ellendale	-31	-32	-36	-33	-31	-28	-26	-22	-21	-19	-17	-18	-19	-22	-27	-29	-30	-32	-34	-35	-35	-36	-36	-38	-37	-40	-39	-39	-36	-29
Eureka	-15	-30	-38	-39	-38	-34	-32	-30	-28	-26	-26	-21	-24	-25	-27	-30	-31	-32	-31	-32	-33	-36	-36	-39	-39	-37	-38	-37	-32	-28
Gettysburg	-24	-26	-27	-28	-28	-26	-23	-22	-21	-19	-17	-14	-16	-19	-19	-20	-22	-22	-20	-12	-23	-26	-28	-31	-29	-31	-31	-30	-26	-21
Huron	-4	-4	-4	-3	-8	-8	-7	-4	-4	-3	-5	-5	-9	-14	-17	-21	-22	-22	-24	-23	-22	-14	-15	-16	-16	-16	-25	-28	-26	-21
Kennebec	-17	-17	-15	-19	-18	-17	-16	-14	-12	-10	-7	-4	-6	-9	-9	-12	-15	-15	-14	-7	-9	-10	-21	-25	-25	-26	-26	-24	-20	-14
McIntosh	-42	-45	-49	-46	-44	-41	-36	-33	-30	-27	-25	-20	-18	-21	-22	-25	-26	-30	-32	-36	-36	-38	-40	-41	-40	-41	-40	-36	-33	-26
Milbank	-11	-12	-14	-11	-7	-4	-9	-7	-6	-4	-5	-7	-10	-15	-18	-20	-21	-22	-24	-25	-29	-30	-31	-31	-30	-28	-28	-26	-22	-18
Miller	-18	-18	-19	-20	-17	-16	-14	-13	-12	-10	-7	-9	-9	-12	-18	-18	-19	-20	-21	-21	-19	-21	-21	-22	-23	-25	-24	-23	-19	-15
Mobridge	-26	-32	-38	-37	-35	-30	-26	-24	-20	-18	-15	-12	-13	-14	-13	-8	-11	-12	-13	-15	-17	-17	-17	-29	-30	-32	-29	-28	-25	-19
Murdo	-12	-16	-22	-24	-25	-24	-22	-19	-15	-13	-10	-7	-8	-9	-10	-13	-14	-16	-15	-17	-20	-21	-25	-25	-26	-27	-26	-25	-20	-12
Pierre	-6	-17	-23	-24	-26	-22	-20	-17	-15	-12	-11	-8	-4	-7	-7	-10	-10	-4	-5	-7	-8	-9	-10	-11	-20	-22	-21	-20	-18	-13
Redfield	-22	-22	-19	-21	-19	-17	-16	-14	-13	-13	-13	-9	-12	-16	-18	-23	-23	-24	-24	-24	-26	-24	-25	-27	-26	-25	-28	-30	-26	-20
Sisseton	-24	-25	-28	-24	-20	-17	-13	-11	-11	-11	-14	-11	-14	-16	-19	-24	-25	-25	-28	-29	-30	-30	-32	-34	-33	-34	-31	-29	-28	-22
Watertown	-18	-17	-8	-7	-4	-9	-8	-6	-5	-4	-4	-6	-9	-13	-17	-18	-21	-24	-25	-24	-28	-28	-28	-30	-19	-19	-28	-30	-26	-22
Webster	-17	-21	-27	-25	-20	-17	-15	-14	-13	-12	-16	-16	-18	-22	-23	-24	-26	-27	-30	-29	-31	-30	-31	-32	-35	-34	-34	-32	-28	-23
Wheaton	-17	-18	-31	-18	-13	-19	-16	-15	-15	-15	-13	-15	-16	-18	-22	-23	-25	-27	-27	-28	-31	-34	-32	-35	-32	-32	-32	-30	-26	-23



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Cold Weather Advisories are in place for this morning and Thursday morning due to wind chills as low as -30 to -40°. Use caution when heading outside, and dress appropriately.

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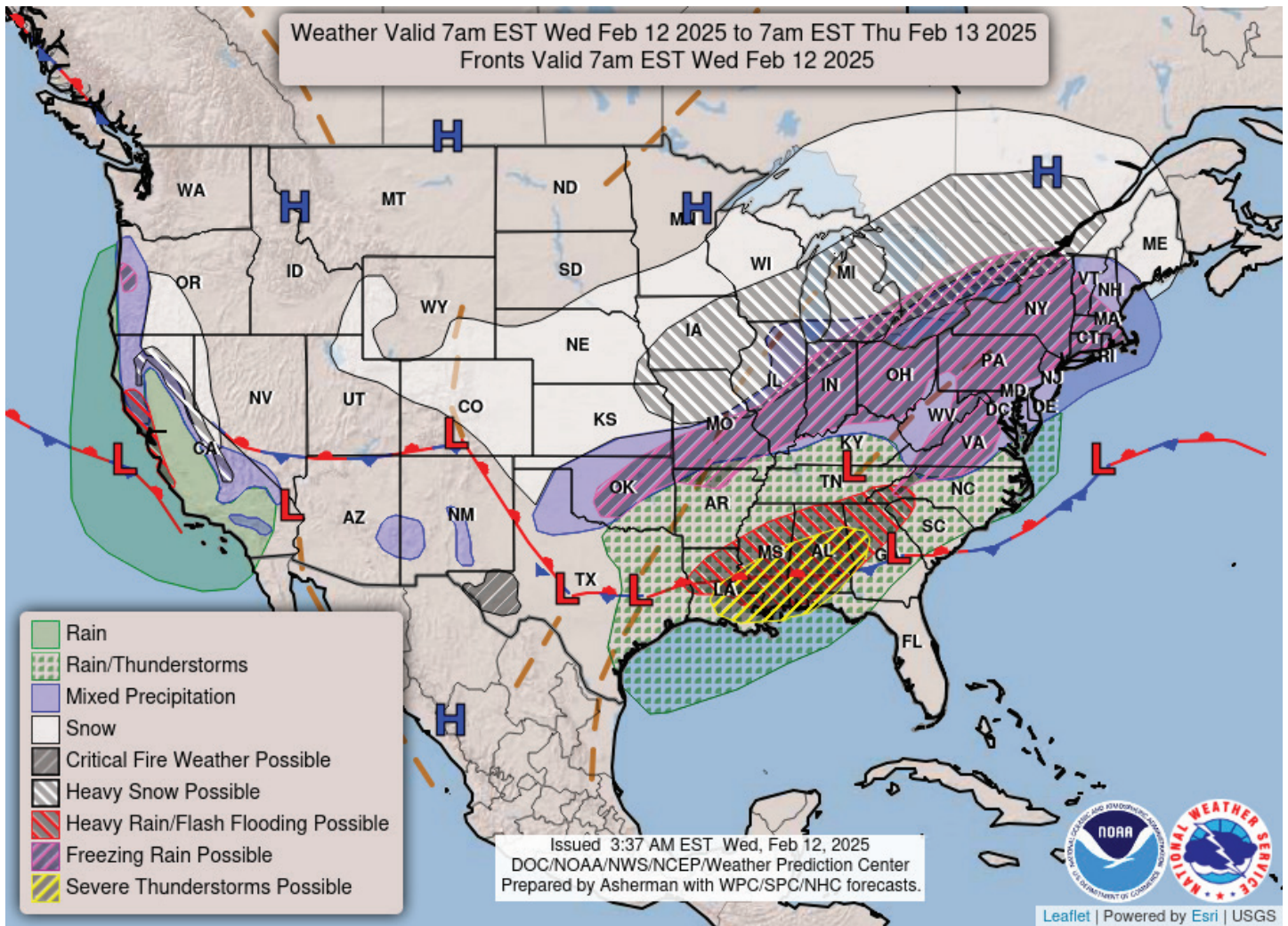
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 3 °F at 4:17 PM
Low Temp: -24 °F at 6:39 AM
Wind: 11 mph at 10:02 AM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 21 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 62 in 1921
Record Low: -36 in 1905
Average High: 28
Average Low: 5
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.24
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.20
Average Precip to date: 0.79
Precip Year to Date: 0.20
Sunset Tonight: 5:57:07 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:34:31 am



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Today in Weather History

February 12, 1905: On this date in weather history, record low temperatures occurred across northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota, with lows in the 30s below zero. Sisseton, Aberdeen, and Watertown all had record lows. Sisseton fell to 31 degrees below zero, Watertown saw 35 degrees below zero, and Aberdeen dropped to 36 degrees below zero in 1905. In central South Dakota, Kennebec fell to 34 degrees below zero.

1784: Ice floes were spotted in the Gulf of Mexico after passing out the Mississippi River in February 1784. Ice blocked the river in New Orleans, Louisiana. The ice in New Orleans is one of two times that this occurred during the Great Arctic Outbreak of 1899. The eruption of Laki in Iceland from June 8, 1783, through February 7, 1784, is the likely cause for the severe winter of 1783 - 1784.

1899: The bitter cold outbreak of February 1899 continued across the southern Plains, Texas, and the Deep South. The mercury dipped to 8 degrees below zero at Fort Worth, Texas, and 22 degrees below zero at Kansas City, Missouri. Nebraska's temperature at Camp Clarke plunged to 47 degrees below zero to establish a state record. The all-time record low for Oklahoma City was set when the temperature fell to a frigid 17 degrees below zero, breaking the previous record low of 12 below zero, set on the previous day. Washington D.C. hit 15 degrees below zero, while Charleston, SC, received a record four inches of snow. Snow was also reported in Fort Myers, Tampa, and Tallahassee in Florida.

1958: Snow blanketed northern Florida, with Tallahassee reporting a record 2.8 inches. A ship in the Gulf of Mexico, 25 miles south of Fort Morgan, Alabama, reported zero visibility in heavy snow on the afternoon of the 12th.

1960 - A snowstorm in the Deep South produced more than a foot of snow in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A storm in the eastern U.S. produced high winds from North Carolina to Maine. A storm in the western U.S. produced up to thirty inches of snow in the Sierra Nevada Range of California. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A classic "nor'easter" formed off the Carolina coast and intensified as it moved up the Atlantic coast bringing heavy snow to the northeastern U.S. Totals ranged up to 26 inches at Camden NY and Chester MA. Arctic cold gripped the north central U.S. Duluth MN was the cold spot in the nation with a low of 32 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Unseasonably mild weather prevailed across Alaska. Morning lows of 29 degrees at Anchorage and 31 degrees at Fairbanks were actually warmer than those in northern Florida. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Strong southerly winds ahead of an arctic cold front pushed temperatures into the 70s as far north as Iowa and Nebraska. Twenty-one cities in the central U.S., seven in Iowa, reported record high temperatures for the date. Lincoln NE reported a record high of 73 degrees, and the afternoon high of 59 degrees at Minneapolis MN smashed their previous record for the date by twelve degrees. Springfield IL reported a record forty-eight consecutive days with above normal temperatures. (The National Weather Summary)

2006 - An intense snow squall off of Lake Michigan cuts visibility to zero along a section of US 31. The resulting whiteout causes 96 cars to pile up. 25 were injured.

2017: There was an imminent failure of the auxiliary spillway on the Oroville Dam in California.



IS IT HOW LONG OR HOW WELL?

Most people who know a little about the Bible at least know that Methuselah lived to be 969 years old. Some might even know that he was the son of Enoch and the grandfather of Noah. Even though we know that he walked and talked, we have no idea where he walked or who he might have walked with or even what he talked about. He walked and talked.

Imagine holding the world record for having more birthdays than anyone else who ever lived but being remembered for nothing else.

According to the Bible, Methuselah lived when the earth was full of wickedness. Everywhere he walked, he was surrounded by sin and sinners. But he never mentioned a word about God or God's grace. In fact, he had nothing to do with God.

Imagine the influence he could have had on the multitudes of individuals whom he must have seen or talked with. Consider what he might have done for God if he had followed in the footsteps of his father. Enoch, Scripture tells us "enjoyed a close relationship with God throughout all of his life – then he suddenly disappeared because God took him!"

Methuselah lived almost three times as long as his father, Enoch. Yet, when he died, he left no legacy of having made a difference for God or for good. In the final analysis, it is not how long we live but whether or not we enjoy a close relationship with God and honor Him.

Prayer: Help each of us, Father, to recognize the importance of living and walking for and with You. May our lives reflect Your love and salvation each day we live. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Altogether, Methuselah lived a total of 969 years, and then he died. Genesis 5:27
Tags: Genesis 5:27

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: 02.11.25

7 30 39 41 70 13

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$129,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 18 Mins 8 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.10.25

7 10 13 31 50 5

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$23,620,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 33 Mins 8 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.11.25

8 25 28 41 46 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 48 Mins 8 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.08.25

11 20 26 28 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$32,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 48 Mins 8 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.10.25

2 21 34 38 44 19

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 17 Mins 9 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.10.25

2 17 18 29 43 3

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$154,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 17 Mins 9 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 49, Ipswich 36
Baltic 42, Elkton-Lake Benton 41
Beresford 64, Garretson 58
Bon Homme 51, Burke 45
Brandon Valley 56, Sioux Falls Washington 53
Bridgewater-Emery 61, Avon 37
Castlewood 77, Florence-Henry 43
Chester 50, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 44
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Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Storm makes for treacherous travel as snow and ice track through the mid-Atlantic

By BEN FINLEY and JOHN RABY Associated Press

A snowstorm blew into the mid-Atlantic states Tuesday, causing dozens of accidents on icy roads, prompting school closures and stoking worries about possible power outages.

The heaviest snowfall — up to 10 inches (25 centimeters) — was expected in parts of Virginia and West Virginia. Ice accumulations could range from a glaze in Kentucky and West Virginia to a half-inch (1.3 centimeters) in some higher elevations of West Virginia and the Roanoke Valley of southwestern Virginia, the National Weather Service said. Power outages and tree damage were likely in places with heavy ice buildups.

“Did you think winter was over? Think again!” the weather service’s office in Blacksburg, Virginia, said in a post on the social platform X. Snow and sleet blew into western Virginia and North Carolina early in the day, with the system expected to give way to freezing rain in the afternoon, the weather service said.

Appalachian Power, which serves 1 million customers in West Virginia, Virginia and Tennessee, said it requested 700 additional workers from neighboring utilities to assist with problems.

About 65 Virginia National Guard soldiers were at facilities along the Interstate 95 and state Route 29 corridors and in southwest Virginia to support the storm response, guard officials said. Another 20 soldiers and members of the Virginia Defense Force were in support roles.

Troops with heavy-duty trucks were organized in chainsaw teams to help clear roads and power line routes. Black Hawk helicopters with rescue hoist capabilities were also on standby.

Winter storm warnings extended from Kentucky to southern New Jersey, and the snow-and-ice mix was expected to become all rain by Wednesday afternoon as temperatures climb.

Meanwhile a separate storm system was expected to dump heavy snow on an area stretching from Kansas to the Great Lakes starting Tuesday night, the weather service said. The Kansas Legislature canceled Wednesday meetings because of the weather, and Gov. Laura Kelly closed state offices in the capital, Topeka.

Treacherous travel

In Virginia, where Gov. Glenn Youngkin declared a state of emergency and schools and government offices were closed Tuesday, state police reported dozens of accidents, including four injuries. The Department of Transportation advised people to stay off the roads.

With snow in the forecast for the Washington, D.C., area, the Office of Personnel Management recommended that federal workers leave their offices early in the afternoon. Schools in and around Baltimore also let out early.

In southern West Virginia, multiple crashes temporarily shut down several major highways. Smith’s Tow-

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ing and Truck Repair responded to at least 15 calls, mostly from tractor-trailer drivers who got stuck on Interstate 64 in Greenbrier County near the Virginia border, dispatcher Kelly Pickles said.

"Basically they just get sucked over into the median or they go off of the interstate just a little bit on the right-hand side," she said. "And they just don't have enough power in their vehicles to get back onto the road due to the icy conditions."

'A wonderland'

Paige Williams, who owns Downtown Books in Lexington, Virginia, described a kind of "fluffy snow that sticks to things" that was coming down heavily and limiting visibility at her home outside the city in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

"It makes it just like a wonderland," Williams said. "It's beautiful out here. It's sticking to the evergreens and to some of the rock walls. And it's really just gorgeous."

Williams, 58, closed her store with as much as 9 inches (about 23 centimeters) of snow in the forecast. She hoped to reopen Wednesday, noting that Lexington and surrounding Rockbridge County are dependable when it comes to clearing the roads.

But with temperatures on either side of freezing Tuesday night and Wednesday, the rain that is supposed to follow could make the roads better or worse.

"It's just going to depend on where those temperatures go," Williams said. "Rain can clear things off. And rain can also freeze. And then you have a lot of skating rinks instead of roads."

Frigid temperatures

An Arctic air mass stretched from Portland, Oregon, to the Great Lakes.

In Detroit, where temperatures dropped into the lower teens (about minus 11 Celsius), two children under age 10 died, likely from exposure, after they were discovered with other family members Monday in a van in a casino parking garage, police said. Their family may have been living in the van.

The temperature bottomed out Tuesday morning at minus 31 degrees (minus 35 degrees Celsius) in Butte, Montana, where over the past two winters at least five people died from cold exposure, said Brayton Erickson, executive director of the Butte Rescue Mission.

Advocates for the homeless in the city of about 35,000 were out on the streets distributing sleeping bags, jackets, mittens and other cold weather gear to anyone who needed them, according to Erickson. Overnight Monday into Tuesday, 36 people were jammed into the 16-bed rescue mission to escape the cold.

"When it gets this cold, we kind of pull out all the stops," Erickson said.

In North Dakota, all 12 beds at the Minot Area Men's Winter Refuge were full, executive director Mike Zimmer said, as the temperature dipped to minus 17 (minus 27 Celsius).

"You go outside, that wind is like steak knives going into your body within the first couple seconds," Zimmer said.

In Oregon's Multnomah County, officials extended a state of emergency through at least Thursday. Five emergency shelters were set to open Tuesday night through Wednesday afternoon. Midweek wind chill readings could dip to 10 degrees (minus 12 Celsius) in Portland, the weather service said.

Atmospheric river

Forecasters said an atmospheric river was expected to arrive in California starting Thursday, according to Brian Hurley, a senior meteorologist with the service's Weather Prediction Center. The forecast was for heavy rain along the coast and into the central valleys along with heavy snowfall in the Sierra Nevada through Saturday.

Kremlin says unidentified Russian freed in US in exchange for Moscow's release of Marc Fogel

By The Associated Press undefined

The Kremlin said Wednesday that a Russian citizen was freed in the United States in exchange for Moscow's release of American Marc Fogel, but refused to identify them until they arrive in Russia.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that the unidentified individual would return to Rus-

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sia "in the coming days," and when they are on the Russian soil, their name would be revealed — unlike during past prisoner exchanges between Moscow and Washington, when Russians and Americans were released simultaneously and their identities were revealed right away.

Fogel, an American history teacher who was deemed wrongfully detained by Russia, has been released and was returned to the U.S. on Tuesday in what the White House described as a diplomatic thaw that could advance negotiations to end the war in Ukraine. Fogel was arrested in August 2021 and was serving a 14-year prison sentence.

Steve Witkoff, a special envoy for U.S. President Donald Trump, left Russia with Fogel and brought him to the White House, where Trump greeted him.

"I feel like the luckiest man on Earth right now," Fogel said as he stood next to Trump with an American flag draped around his shoulders.

Fogel, who is from Pennsylvania and was expected to be reunited with his family by the end of the day, said that he would forever be indebted to Trump.

The president declined to say if he spoke with Russian President Vladimir Putin about Fogel, but Fogel praised the Russian leader as "very generous and statesmanlike in granting me a pardon."

Asked about the terms of the deal, Trump said: "Very fair, very, very fair, very reasonable. Not like deals you've seen over the years. They were very fair."

He didn't say what the United States provided in exchange for Fogel's release.

Middle East latest: Israeli military says it struck 2 people in Gaza who were flying a drone

By The Associated Press undefined

The Israeli military said Wednesday it struck two people in the southern Gaza Strip who were flying a drone, which was observed entering Gaza from Israel after past attempts to use drones to smuggle in weapons.

Gaza's Health Ministry says a 44-year-old man was killed in an Israeli strike near the southern city of Rafah on Wednesday, without providing further details.

Munir al-Bursh, director general of the ministry, said Tuesday that at least 92 Palestinians have been killed and more than 800 wounded by Israeli fire since the fragile ceasefire took hold last month.

The Israeli military says it has fired upon people who approach its forces or enter certain areas in violation of the truce.

Hamas has threatened to delay the next scheduled release of hostages on Saturday, accusing Israel of violating the agreement by firing on people and by not allowing the stipulated amounts of tents, shelters and other vital aid to enter the territory.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with the support of President Donald Trump, has warned that Israel would resume fighting if hostages are not freed on Saturday. Trump has threatened that "all hell" will break out if the militant group does not release the remaining Israeli hostages held in Gaza by Saturday.

Here's the latest:

The family of a Gaza doctor says he was tortured in Israeli detention

JERUSALEM — The family of a prominent Gaza Strip physician who was detained by Israeli forces when they raided a hospital in December says he was tortured by the army and kept in solitary confinement for 24 days.

Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya's family said he's currently in the Ofer prison near Jerusalem, where he met with a lawyer for the first time on Tuesday. They said there are no charges against him, hoping that means he could be released soon.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military or the Prison Service

The Al Mezan rights group said one of its lawyers was able to visit him on Tuesday for the first time since his detention. The group said the physician was initially taken to the Sde Teiman facility in southern

Israel, where former detainees and rights groups have reported rampant abuses.

"He reported being forcibly stripped, having his hands tightly shackled, and being made to sit on sharp gravel for approximately five hours by Israeli forces," it said, adding that he was also beaten with batons and subjected to electric shocks.

Abu Safiya was the director of the Kamal Adwan Hospital, one of the last functioning medical facilities in northern Gaza that was raided in December. Israel's military said Hamas militants were using the facility and that over 240 suspects were detained.

Israel has raided several Gaza hospitals during the 15-month war sparked by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attack. It accuses Hamas and other militants of using hospitals for military purposes, something hospital officials have denied.

Philippine investigators file criminal complaints against vice president over assassination threats

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Philippine government investigators filed criminal complaints, including sedition, against Vice President Sara Duterte on Wednesday over her public threat to have the president assassinated if she herself was killed in an escalating political storm.

National Bureau of Investigation Director Jaime Santiago said at a news conference that the complaints of inciting to sedition and grave threats against Duterte were filed at the Department of Justice, which would decide whether to dismiss the complaints outright or elevate them to court.

The vice president, a lawyer and daughter of former President Rodrigo Duterte, reacted briefly by saying that she had expected the move by the NBI. She has accused her political rivals of taking steps to prevent her from seeking the presidency when President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s term ends in 2028.

The vice president's father himself, whose presidential term ended in 2022, is facing legal troubles. The International Criminal Court has been investigating the widespread killings under a brutal anti-drug crackdown he oversaw while in office as a possible crime against humanity.

Sara Duterte ran as Marcos' vice presidential running mate in 2022. Their whirlwind political alliance, however, quickly frayed and deteriorated into a bitter feud in an Asian democracy that has long been hamstrung by clashing political clans.

Last week, the vice president was impeached by the House of Representatives on a range of accusations that included her threat to have Marcos, his wife and House Speaker Martin Romualdez killed if she herself were fatally attacked in an unspecified plot that she brought up in an online news conference in November.

The impeachment complaint, which was signed by majority of the more than 300 members of the House, which is dominated by Marcos' allies, also included allegations of largescale corruption and misuse of her office's confidential funds. The 24-member Senate plans to tackle the impeachment complaint after Congress reopens in June.

The vice president has vaguely denied that what she said amounted to a threat against Marcos, his wife and Romualdez, the president's cousin, but her remarks still sparked a national security alarm at the time and investigations, including by the NBI.

The vice president said at a news conference last week that her lawyers were preparing for a legal battle in her upcoming impeachment trial, but she refused to say if resignation was an option so that she could preempt a possible conviction that would bar her from running for president in the future.

Did prices jump in January? Inflation report will provide latest update on consumer costs

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inflation likely stayed elevated last month in the latest sign that consumer price growth has gotten stuck after declining for much of last year.

On Wednesday the Labor Department is expected to report that in January the consumer price index rose 2.9% from a year ago, according to economists surveyed by FactSet. If accurate, it would be unchanged from December and up from a 3 1/2 year low of 2.4% in September.

Wednesday's inflation report will be closely watched to see if a recent trend that has bedeviled the inflation-fighters at the Federal Reserve will continue: In January 2024, prices jumped sharply in part because many companies raise prices at the beginning of each year. With inflation still elevated, some of those increases have been larger than usual.

Most economists expect the effect will be more muted this time — consumers are more price-sensitive than a year ago — but if it happens again, inflation could tick higher.

Either way, inflation's recent uptick is a major reason the Federal Reserve has paused its interest rate cuts, after implementing three of them last year. On Tuesday, Fed Chair Jerome Powell said "we do not need to be in a hurry" to implement further reductions in testimony to the Senate Banking Committee.

The Fed's benchmark rate is now about 4.3%, down from a two-decade high of 5.3% in August.

Excluding the volatile food and energy categories, core consumer prices are forecast to have risen 3.2% from a year earlier, according to FactSet, the same as the previous month. The Fed closely watches core prices because they typically provide a better sense of where inflation is headed.

The cost of new and used cars likely fell last month, economists forecast, along with clothing prices, holding down inflation.

Yet the cost of groceries, a major pain point for most households, is expected to have risen last month, driven higher by another jump in egg prices. An avian flu epidemic has forced egg breeders to cull their flocks by millions of chickens. Some store chains are limiting purchases and some restaurants are tacking on surcharges for egg dishes.

Most Fed officials — and economists in the private sector — expect inflation will resume its decline in the coming months. Apartment rental cost growth is cooling and other sources of inflation, such as sharp increases in car insurance prices, are expected to grow more slowly.

Still, the Trump administration's tariff policy could lift prices in the coming months. Trump on Monday imposed 25% taxes on steel and aluminum imports, and has pledged to impose more tariffs. Economists at Goldman Sachs forecast that yearly core inflation would fall almost a full percentage point, to 2.3%, by the end of this year, absent any import duties. But they expect tariffs will raise end-of-year inflation to 2.7%.

On Tuesday, Fed Chair Powell acknowledged that higher tariffs could lift inflation and limit the central bank's ability to cut rates, calling it "a possible outcome."

But he emphasized that it would depend on how many imports are hit with tariffs and for how long.

"In some cases it doesn't reach the consumer much, and in some cases it does," Powell said. "And it really does depend on facts that we we haven't seen yet."

Netanyahu threatens to resume fighting in Gaza if hostages aren't released Saturday

By JOSEF FEDERMAN and SAM METZ Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday threatened to withdraw from the ceasefire in Gaza and directed troops to prepare to resume fighting Hamas if the militant group does not release more hostages on Saturday.

Hamas said Monday — and reiterated Tuesday — that it planned to delay the release of three more hostages after accusing Israel of failing to meet the terms of the ceasefire, including by not allowing an agreed-upon number of tents and other aid into Gaza.

Amid the mounting tensions, U.S. President Donald Trump emboldened Israel to call for the release of even more remaining hostages on Saturday.

Trump questions ceasefire's durability

After meeting with Jordan's King Abdullah II at the White House on Tuesday, Trump predicted Hamas would not release all the remaining hostages as he had demanded.

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"I don't think they're going to make the deadline, personally," the president said of Hamas. "They want to play tough guy. We'll see how tough they are."

Since the ceasefire took effect, Hamas has released 21 hostages in a series of five exchanges for more than 730 Palestinian prisoners. A second phase calls for the return of all remaining hostages and an indefinite extension of the truce. However, Trump's statements about both the pending releases and plans for post-war Gaza have destabilized its fragile architecture.

It wasn't immediately clear whether Netanyahu's threat referred to the three hostages scheduled for release on Saturday or all the remaining hostages, which would be a departure from the terms of the ceasefire. Netanyahu's office said it "welcomed President Trump's demand."

As Trump spoke to reporters in Washington and reasserted his demands, an Israeli official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a private meeting, said Israel was "sticking to Trump's announcement regarding the release of the hostages. Namely, that they will all be released on Saturday."

Netanyahu's office also said it ordered the military to mobilize troops on and around the Gaza Strip in preparation for scenarios that could arise.

Trump has said Israel should cancel the entire ceasefire if all of the roughly 70 hostages aren't freed by Saturday. Hamas brushed off his threat Tuesday, doubling down on its claim that Israel has violated the ceasefire and warned that it would only continue releasing hostages if all parties adhered to the ceasefire.

"Trump must remember there is an agreement that must be respected by both parties. This is the only way to bring back prisoners," Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said Tuesday. "The language of threats has no value; it only complicates matters."

The group later condemned Trump's White House remarks, saying they amounted to a "call for ethnic cleansing" and accusing Trump of seeking to "liquidate the Palestinian cause and deny the national rights of the Palestinian people."

It said in a statement it remained committed to the ceasefire, yet did not address its plans to suspend the hostages releases outlined in the first phase of the agreement.

Jordan — a U.S. ally — faces new pressures

Trump hosted King Abdullah II in Washington as he escalates pressure on Jordan to take in refugees from Gaza, perhaps permanently, as part of his audacious plan to remake the Middle East.

"We're not going to buy anything. We're going to have it," Trump said of U.S. control of Gaza as the Jordanian king stood by.

Abdullah II was asked repeatedly by reporters about Trump's plan to remake the Middle East, but didn't make substantive comments. He also did not comment on the idea that a large number of refugees from Gaza could be welcomed in Jordan, where millions of Palestinian refugees already reside.

The king said, however, that Jordan would be willing "right away" to take as many as 2,000 children in Gaza who have cancer or are otherwise ill.

Last week, the top World Health Organization official for Gaza said between 12,000 and 14,000 patients still need medical evacuation from the territory — including 5,000 children.

Palestinians and the international community have seethed over Trump's recent comments that any Palestinians potentially expelled from Gaza would not have a right to return.

During the first six-week phase of the ceasefire, Hamas committed to freeing 33 hostages captured in its Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel, while Israel said it would release nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. The sides have carried out five swaps since Jan. 19.

The war could resume in early March if no agreement is reached on the more complicated second phase of the ceasefire. But if it does, Israel will face a drastically different battlefield. After forcing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to evacuate to southern Gaza in the early stages of the war, Israel allowed many of those displaced people to return to what is left of their homes, posing a new challenge to its ability to move ground troops through the territory.

Snow and freezing rain pummel the mid-Atlantic while California prepares for likely flooding

By BEN FINLEY and JOHN RABY Associated Press

Snow, sleet and freezing rain were expected to continue pummeling the central Appalachians and mid-Atlantic states Wednesday, while California readied for a storm that could flood areas ravaged by the recent wildfires.

Especially heavy snowfall — up to nearly 14 inches (25 centimeters) — was expected in parts of Virginia and West Virginia, according to the National Weather Service. Ice accumulations could reach more than a third of an inch (8.4 millimeters) in Stanleytown, Virginia, and a quarter of an inch (6.3 millimeters) in Glendale Springs, North Carolina.

In California, an atmospheric river — a long band of water vapor that can transport moisture from the tropics to more northern areas — was expected to move in late Wednesday, likely flooding urban areas across central and Southern California, according to the weather service.

The snowstorm that blew into the mid-Atlantic states on Tuesday caused accidents on icy roads and prompted school closures. By Tuesday night, nearly 12,000 people in Virginia had lost power, according to PowerOutage.us.

“Stay home and off the roads tonight, Virginia,” the Virginia Department of Transportation posted on social media Tuesday night, alongside a meme of Dorothy from “The Wizard of Oz” saying, “There’s no place like home.”

In parts of Baltimore and Washington, an inch (2.5 centimeters) of snow was falling each hour, according to the weather service. All Washington public schools were closed Wednesday due to the weather.

Appalachian Power, which serves 1 million customers in West Virginia, Virginia and Tennessee, said Tuesday it had 5,400 workers dedicated to restoring power.

About 65 Virginia National Guard soldiers were at facilities along the Interstate 95 and state Route 29 corridors and in southwest Virginia to support the storm response, guard officials said. Another 20 soldiers and members of the Virginia Defense Force were in support roles.

Winter storm warnings extended from northwest North Carolina to southern New Jersey, and the snow-and-ice mix was expected to become all rain by Wednesday afternoon as temperatures climb.

Meanwhile a separate storm system was expected to dump heavy snow on an area stretching from Kansas to the Great Lakes starting Tuesday night, the weather service said. The Kansas Legislature canceled Wednesday meetings because of the weather, and Gov. Laura Kelly closed state offices in the capital, Topeka.

Hundreds of accidents

In Virginia, where Gov. Glenn Youngkin declared a state of emergency and schools and government offices were closed Tuesday, state police reported 700 accidents and dozens of injuries Tuesday. Although Matt Demlein, a spokesperson for the Virginia State Police, said they can’t say definitively that all were weather related.

In southern West Virginia, multiple crashes temporarily shut down several major highways Tuesday. Smith’s Towing and Truck Repair responded to at least 15 calls, mostly from tractor-trailer drivers who got stuck on Interstate 64 in Greenbrier County near the Virginia border, dispatcher Kelly Pickles said.

“Basically they just get sucked over into the median or they go off of the interstate just a little bit on the right-hand side,” she said. “And they just don’t have enough power in their vehicles to get back onto the road due to the icy conditions.”

‘Skating rinks instead of roads’

Paige Williams, who owns Downtown Books in Lexington, Virginia, closed her store Tuesday because of the weather. She hoped to reopen Wednesday, noting that Lexington and surrounding Rockbridge County are dependable when it comes to clearing the roads.

But with temperatures on either side of freezing Tuesday night and Wednesday, the rain that is supposed

to follow could make the roads better or worse.

"It's just going to depend on where those temperatures go," Williams said. "Rain can clear things off. And rain can also freeze. And then you have a lot of skating rinks instead of roads."

Bitter cold temperatures

An Arctic air mass stretched from Portland, Oregon, to the Great Lakes.

The temperature bottomed out Tuesday morning at minus 31 degrees (minus 35 Celsius) in Butte, Montana, where over the past two winters at least five people died from cold exposure, said Brayton Erickson, executive director of the Butte Rescue Mission.

Advocates for homeless people in the city of about 35,000 were out on the streets distributing sleeping bags, jackets, mittens and other cold weather gear to anyone who needed them, according to Erickson.

"When it gets this cold, we kind of pull out all the stops," Erickson said.

In Oregon's Multnomah County, officials extended a state of emergency through at least Thursday. Five emergency shelters were set to open Tuesday night through Wednesday afternoon. Midweek wind chill readings could dip to 10 degrees (minus 12 Celsius) in Portland, the weather service said.

California rains

The atmospheric river was expected to arrive in California starting late Wednesday and to peak Thursday, according to Miles Bliss, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service. Along with flooding, heavy snowfall was expected in the Sierra Nevada.

More than 700,000 sandbags have been arranged across central and Southern California, according to the California Department of Water Resources.

Russia releases imprisoned American Marc Fogel in what US calls a step toward the end of Ukraine war

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Marc Fogel, an American history teacher who was deemed wrongfully detained by Russia, has been released and returned to the U.S. in what the White House described as a diplomatic thaw that could advance negotiations to end the war in Ukraine.

Steve Witkoff, a special envoy for President Donald Trump, left Russia with Fogel and brought him to the White House, where Trump greeted him.

"I feel like the luckiest man on Earth right now," Fogel said as he stood next to Trump with an American flag draped around his shoulders.

Fogel, who is from Pennsylvania and was expected to be reunited with his family by the end of the day, said he would forever be indebted to Trump.

Trump said another American would be released on Wednesday, though he declined to name the person or say from what country, only saying it was someone "very special."

The president declined to say if he spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin about Fogel, but Fogel praised the Russian leader as "very generous and statesmanlike in granting me a pardon."

Asked about the terms of the deal, Trump said: "Very fair, very, very fair, very reasonable. Not like deals you've seen over the years. They were very fair."

He did not say what the United States exchanged for Fogel's release.

Fogel was arrested in August 2021 and was serving a 14-year prison sentence. His family and supporters said he had been traveling with medically prescribed marijuana, and he was designated by President Joe Biden's administration as wrongfully detained in December.

Michael Waltz, Trump's national security adviser, said the U.S. and Russia "negotiated an exchange" to ensure Fogel's release. He did not say what the U.S. side of the bargain entailed. Previous negotiations have occasionally involved reciprocal releases of Russians by the U.S. or its allies.

Waltz said the development was "a sign we are moving in the right direction to end the brutal and terrible war in Ukraine." Trump, a Republican, has promised to find a way to end the conflict.

Trump also has talked about having a good relationship with Putin, who launched a full-scale invasion of

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Ukraine in 2022. Last month, Trump said his administration was having “very serious” conversations with Russia about the war.

Speaking to reporters at the White House earlier Tuesday, Trump said, “We were treated very nicely by Russia, actually. I hope that’s the beginning of a relationship where we can end that war.”

Asked whether the U.S. had given up anything in return, Trump replied “not much” but did not elaborate.

Fogel’s relatives said they were “beyond grateful, relieved and overwhelmed” that he was coming home. “This has been the darkest and most painful period of our lives, but today, we begin to heal,” they said. “For the first time in years, our family can look forward to the future with hope.”

There was no immediate comment from Moscow about Fogel’s release on Tuesday.

The U.S., Russia and other nations carried out a large prisoner swap in August that resulted in the release of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich and American corporate security executive Paul Whelan, among others.

But that deal left out numerous other Americans jailed in Russia, including Fogel. Some omitted then were also not included in Tuesday’s release, including several who have had major milestones in their cases since then.

Among them is U.S.-Russian dual national Ksenia Khavana, who was convicted of treason in a Russian court shortly after last August’s prisoner swap and sentenced to 12 years in prison on charges stemming from a donation of about \$52 to a charity aiding Ukraine. John Kirby, a national security spokesman at the Biden White House at that time, called the conviction and sentencing “nothing less than vindictive cruelty.”

Last October, American Robert Gilman was sentenced to more than seven years in prison in Russia for allegedly assaulting law enforcement officers while serving a sentence for another assault, while American Stephen Hubbard was sentenced to prison in a closed trial for allegedly fighting as a mercenary in Ukraine.

As the Russia-Ukraine war nears the end of its third year, Trump’s plan for securing an end to the conflict remains unclear, though he has said that both sides will need to make concessions and suggested that Ukraine would have to accept the loss of at least some territory.

Fogel’s release and Trump’s announcement that he will send Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to Kyiv for talks with Ukraine’s leaders could signal that plans may be beginning to take shape.

Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Trump’s special envoy for Russia and Ukraine, retired Gen. Keith Kellogg, will all be traveling later this week to the Munich Security Conference, where the situation in Ukraine will be a major topic of discussion.

Kellogg told The Associated Press on Monday that he and the others would be talking to European officials about the very broad outlines of what Trump would like to see and gauging their interest.

“We will deliver our expectation to the allies,” Kellogg said. “When we come back from Munich — we want to deliver to the president the options, so when he does get (directly) involved in the peace process, he knows what it will look like for him.”

Relatives of Israeli hostages are terrified as the Gaza ceasefire teeters

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — After 16 months of excruciating uncertainty, Idit Ohel finally received word this week that her 24-year-old son, a hostage in Gaza, is still alive.

She said she fainted upon hearing the brutal details of his captivity from freed hostages who had been held with him by Hamas since Oct. 7, 2023. Bound by chains in an underground tunnel, Alon Ohel has subsisted on a piece of bread or less each day.

“He hasn’t seen sunlight in 493 days,” she told reporters on Monday.

As the fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas seems increasingly at risk of falling apart — Hamas says it will not free three hostages on Saturday as planned, and Israel says it’s ready to resume the war if it doesn’t — families of the hostages are struggling to maintain hope. They are pleading with Prime

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Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to give up on the ceasefire framework, and to speed up the timeline of releases if possible.

Their worries about the ceasefire collapsing have been exacerbated by President Donald Trump's demand that all of the hostages be freed by Saturday — and his insistence that Gaza be emptied of all Palestinians and redeveloped as a tourist enclave controlled by the United States.

The emaciated state of three hostages released last Saturday has infuriated Israelis and terrified families of the remaining hostages, especially as more details come out about the conditions of their captivity.

The situation is especially difficult for relatives of hostages who are not on the list of 33 hostages expected to be released in the ceasefire's first, six-week phase, which began on Jan. 19. The agreement requires Israel to free 2,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees, whose families are also worried about how their enemy treats them.

Two hostages released on Saturday, Or Levy and Eli Sharabi, were held together with Alon Ohel, and a fourth hostage, Eliya Cohen. The four were held underground since their kidnapping, Idit Ohel said.

Cohen is expected to be released in the ceasefire's first stage; Ohel would be freed in the second stage, if Israel and Hamas reach that point.

Levy, Ohel, and Cohen were kidnapped from a bomb shelter near a music festival in southern Israel, along with Hersh Goldberg-Polin, an American-Israeli who was killed in captivity in August.

"It breaks my heart to know he was chained and to know what happened to him in the tunnels from people in the tunnels," Cohen's fiancée, Ziv Abud, 27, told reporters on Tuesday.

The returned hostages said that Cohen had lost more than 20 kilograms (44 pounds) and had a bullet in his leg that did not receive medical attention. While they were with him, Cohen was unaware that Abud had survived the Hamas attack on the bomb shelter where they were hiding.

During the Oct. 7 attack, militants tossed grenades and sprayed bullets inside the concrete bomb shelter near the music festival, where almost 30 people had crammed inside. At least 16 people inside the shelter were killed.

Abud said she was protected by the crush of bodies above her. Going in and out of consciousness, she spent hours laying beneath the bodies of her nephew and his girlfriend.

For families of hostages who are not scheduled for release in the first phase of the ceasefire, its uncertainty is even more difficult to bear.

Israel and Hamas were set last week to begin talks on a second phase of the ceasefire that would include an end to the war and the release of the remaining hostages. But those efforts have been frozen while the two sides trade accusations about whether the other is living up to the terms of the first phase.

Tamir Nimrodi, 20, an Israeli soldier kidnapped from his post at a main crossing between Israel and Gaza, is not on the list to be freed in the first stage.

His mother, Herut, said Hamas' plan to delay the next hostage release came as a shock.

"We try to analyze it, think, what are the possibilities? Is this psychological terrorism they are pulling on us?" she said.

It's been difficult watching the hostage releases over the past few weeks, Nimrodi said, especially the emotional videos of hostages reuniting with their families.

On the one hand, each reunion is a step closer to bringing back her son, whom she described as a creative person who loves riding horses and drinking sweet cocktails made with pineapple juice. But Nimrodi does not know if her son, who also holds German citizenship, is alive.

The other two soldiers he was kidnapped with were killed, and she has not received any sign of life from him.

"I know there is a chance I won't get to the point where I can hold my son," she said.

According to Israeli media, returning hostages have provided proof of life for at least seven Israeli hostages, including Cohen and Ohel.

Nimrodi doesn't know what is worse — to believe her son is dead, or to receive information that he is alive, but held in conditions like Alon Ohel. "I'm scared if Tamir is still alive, I have no idea what he's going through, I'm scared to even imagine," she said.

Idit Ohel received the information about her son's condition less than an hour before she went on Israel's Channel 12 news program earlier this week.

She sat at the news desk sobbing on live TV, pleading with the government to continue to the second stage of the ceasefire and bring all of the hostages home as soon as possible.

Alon, who also has German and Serbian citizenship, is a talented pianist. The family has placed pianos across Israel in his honor, many of which are yellow, the color associated with the struggle for the hostages.

The family marked Alon's second birthday in captivity on Monday evening in Tel Aviv, where his mother addressed the Israeli government. "After all the sights you saw, after all the testimonies you heard from the survivors of captivity, how do you allow this situation to continue?" she said.

Alon did remember his younger sister, Inbar, had a birthday on Saturday and delivered her a message through the hostages who were released that day.

"She got her birthday wish, to hear from her brother, which is incredible," Idit said, through tears.

Amnesty International details gruesome impact of gang violence on children in Haiti

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Haiti's children are increasingly caught in the crossfire of gang violence, forced to carry weapons, spy on police and rival gangs and run errands for gunmen, according to a report released Wednesday by Amnesty International.

One of 51 children interviewed by the human rights group said he was constantly pressured by a gang to fight alongside it.

"They killed people in front of me and asked me to burn their bodies. But I don't have the heart for that," the unidentified boy was quoted as saying.

An estimated 30% to 50% of gang members are now children, according to UNICEF.

Amnesty International said the children "had no choice, and that their involvement was predominantly out of hunger or fear."

Nearly two million people are on the verge of starvation in Haiti, and more than one million children are estimated to be living in gang-controlled areas, with 85% of the capital of Port-au-Prince under their rule.

One unidentified boy, 16, said he's paid to run errands for a gang.

"(The gangs) are in control. And there is nothing you can do about it," he was quoted as saying.

If children refuse to follow a gang's orders, they or their family would be killed, according to the report, which relied on a total of 112 interviews and research done from May to October last year.

Children are not only in danger of gangs, but of vigilantes and police officers who believe they're working for them, according to Amnesty International.

Girls and young women also have been collectively raped by gang members and infected with sexually transmitted diseases, often ending up pregnant in a country where health care is extremely limited.

One teen was raped by six men, and her sister by five others.

"There was so much blood," the unidentified younger sister said in an interview.

Another teen recounted how she drank bleach to try and kill herself after having a baby after being raped by three men who then left her naked in public.

"People found me on the street and put a dress on me," she said.

Amnesty International said many of those interviewed "scoffed at the idea of reporting their attacks to authorities."

A 16-year-old girl who was abducted and raped by several gang members said: "Are you kidding me? It's not possible...There is no police...The only chief in town are the gang members."

The violence also has led to injury and death.

One girl, 14, recounted how a ricocheting bullet pierced her lip in September 2024. Three months before that, her 17-year-old brother died from a stray bullet.

"I lost a huge presence in my life. Since then, I don't know how to be happy," the girl said.

The violence is especially punishing on children with disabilities, with some recounting how they had to leave behind crutches and wheelchairs during sudden gang attacks in their neighborhoods.

Amnesty International called on the Haitian government to better support children, restore education, provide mental health services, and resume court proceedings against children suspected of ties to gangs who are being held without charge.

It also said more resources including training and security are needed to help reintegrate children into society.

"The international community cannot continue to make empty promises," the report said. "The country needs immediate and sustained technical and financial assistance to rescue a generation of boys and girls from being lost to repeated cycles of gang violence."

In 2023, 128 children were reported killed, according to the U.N. While the figure wasn't available for last year, more than 5,600 people were reported killed in 2024, the organization found.

Haiti's National Police, which is severely underfunded and understaffed, is working alongside a U.N.-backed mission led by Kenyan police to help quell gang violence.

However, the mission lacks funding and personnel, and the U.S. and other countries have been pushing to transform it into a U.N.-peacekeeping mission.

Trump administration battles employee lawsuit to block dismantling of USAID

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration will present an unforgiving argument for dismantling the U.S. Agency for International Development to a federal judge Wednesday: USAID is rife with "insubordination" and must be shut down for the administration to decide what pieces of it to salvage.

The argument, made in an affidavit by political appointee and deputy USAID administrator Pete Marocco, comes as the administration confronts a lawsuit by two groups representing federal employees.

USAID staffers deny insubordination and call the accusation a pretext to break up the more than 60-year-old agency, one of the world's biggest donors of humanitarian and development assistance.

Accounts of USAID staffers filed Tuesday in support of the lawsuit revealed new details of the destruction of the agency.

That includes a sworn statement from a USAID staffer describing a specific leader in billionaire Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency teams allegedly directing USAID staffers on Monday in the immediate termination of about 200 USAID programs without proper authorization or process.

U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols, an appointee of President Donald Trump, dealt the administration a setback Friday in its dismantling of the agency, temporarily halting plans to pull all but a fraction of USAID staffers off the job worldwide.

Nichols is due to hear arguments Wednesday on a request from the employee groups to keep blocking the move to put thousands of staffers on leave as well as broaden his order. They contend the government has already violated the judge's order, which also reinstated USAID staffers already placed on leave but declined to suspend the administration's freeze on foreign assistance.

Trump and Musk's cost-cutting DOGE have hit USAID particularly hard as they look to shrink the size of the federal government, accusing its work of being wasteful and out of line with Trump's agenda.

In the court case, a government motion shows the administration pressing arguments by Vice President JD Vance and others questioning if courts have the authority to check Trump's power.

"The President's powers in the realm of foreign affairs are generally vast and unreviewable," government lawyers argued.

USAID staffers and supporters call the aid agency's humanitarian and development work abroad essential to national security.

They argue each step of the administration's breakup of USAID has been unnecessarily cruel to its thou-

sands of workers and devastating for people around the world who are being cut off from clean water, life-saving medical care, education, training and more since Trump signed an executive order on Jan. 20 freezing foreign assistance.

"This is a full-scale gutting of virtually all the personnel of an entire agency," Karla Gilbride, attorney for the employee associations, told the judge last week.

The American Foreign Service Association and the American Federation of Government Employees argue that Trump lacks the authority to shut down the agency without approval from Congress. Democratic lawmakers have made the same argument.

In an affidavit ahead of Wednesday's hearing, Marocco, a returning USAID political appointee from Trump's first term, presents without evidence a description of agency workers stalling and resisting the administration's orders to abruptly cut off funds for programs worldwide and subject each one to a rigorous review.

In the face of "deceit," "noncompliance" and "insubordination," USAID's new leaders "ultimately determined that the placement of a substantial number of USAID personnel on paid administrative leave was the only way to ... faithfully implement the pause and conduct a full and unimpeded audit of USAID's operations and programs," Marocco stated.

Staffers deny resisting the funding freeze. They argue that the cutoff of money and resulting collapse of U.S.-funded programs abroad, the shutdown of the agency's website and lockout of employees from systems made it impossible for those reviews to take place.

Nichols also agreed last week to block an order giving thousands of overseas USAID workers who were being placed on administrative leave 30 days to move back to the U.S. on government expense.

Both moves would have exposed the workers and their spouses and children to unwarranted risk and expense, the judge said.

Nichols pointed to accounts that the Trump administration had cut off some workers from government emails and emergency alert systems they needed for their safety.

"Administrative leave in Syria is not the same as administrative leave in Bethesda," the judge said last week, referring to the Washington, D.C., suburb.

Nichols cited statements from agency employees who had no home to go to in the U.S. after decades abroad, who faced pulling children with special needs out of school midyear and other difficulties.

When does a heartbeat start? South Carolina Supreme Court again takes up abortion issue

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — With a heartbeat abortion ban solidly in place in South Carolina, lawyers for the state and Planned Parenthood return to the state's highest court Wednesday to argue how restrictive the ban should be.

The law is being enforced in South Carolina as a ban on almost all abortions around six weeks after conception, setting that mark as the time cardiac activity starts.

But Planned Parenthood and other abortion rights groups are arguing the 2023 law includes alternative definitions about the timing of a fetal heart forming and a "heartbeat" starting and the true ban should start around nine or 10 weeks.

Both sides are set to argue for just over an hour at the South Carolina Supreme Court in Columbia. The justices likely will take several months to decide the case. In the meantime, the abortion ban around six weeks likely will remain in place after a lower court upheld it.

The 2023 law says abortions cannot be performed after an ultrasound can detect "cardiac activity, or the steady and repetitive rhythmic contraction of the fetal heart, within the gestational sac."

South Carolina and several other states place that at six weeks into development. But what follows the "or" in the sentence could require that a heart has formed, and medical experts say that doesn't happen until around nine weeks.

The legal fight has been brewing since the state Supreme Court reversed itself after overturning a similar

ban in 2021. The Republican-dominated General Assembly then made small changes and a justice who voted in the majority in the 3-2 decision to overturn the ban reached retirement age and was replaced.

In the decision upholding the new ban, the state Supreme Court itself noted the different definitions saying resolving them would be a question "for another day."

That day is Wednesday. Since then, more inconsistencies in the law's language have been brought up. The law refers to a fetal heartbeat, but most experts consider a fertilized egg to be an embryo for about 10 weeks after conception before transitioning into a fetus.

Lawyers for the state said the parsing of the language ignores the intent of the Legislature. Both supporters and opponents of the bill called it nearly exclusively a six-week ban during debate in the House and Senate.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 and ended a nationwide right to abortion, most Republican-controlled states have started enforcing new bans or restrictions and most Democrat-dominated ones have sought to protect abortion access.

Currently, 13 states are enforcing bans on abortion at all stages of pregnancy, with limited exceptions, and South Carolina and three others have bans that kick in at or about six weeks into pregnancy -- often before women realize they're pregnant.

The latest lawsuit was filed by South Carolina resident Taylor Shelton, who said she had sought medical attention for pain from her intrauterine device and was stunned to find out, just two days after missing her regularly-tracked period, that she was pregnant.

She ended up in North Carolina, driving for hours to several appointments to undergo an abortion because doctors in South Carolina were unsure how to define a heartbeat. Shelton couldn't be completely sure she was within six weeks.

Some Republicans in South Carolina are also pushing for an outright abortion ban, but while legislation was introduced this January when the General Assembly started its two-year session, no hearings have been held.

Trump readies matching tariffs on trade partners, possibly setting up a major economic showdown

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is taking additional action to upset the world trade system, with plans to sign an order as soon as Wednesday that would require that U.S. tariffs on imports match the tax rates charged by other countries.

"It's time to be reciprocal," Trump told reporters earlier this week. "You'll be hearing that word a lot. Reciprocal. If they charge us, we charge them."

The president had suggested that the order would come on Tuesday or Wednesday. But when Tuesday passed without the tariffs being officially announced, Trump was asked if he would sign the order on Wednesday and Trump answered: "We'll see what happens."

As Trump has unleashed a series of tariffs after being in power for less than a month, he has fully taken ownership of the path of the U.S. economy. It's a bet that his economic ideas can eventually deliver meaningful results for voters, even if by Trump's own admission the import taxes could involve some financial pain in the form of inflation and economic disruptions. For all of Trump's talk, the impact will likely depend on the details of the tariffs and how other nations respond.

A reciprocal tariffs order could amount to a substantial tax hike to be shouldered largely by U.S. consumers and businesses as the Census Bureau reported that the country had total imports of \$4.1 trillion last year. The tariffs could set off retaliatory measures by trading partners that could roil growth around the globe and reset where the United States stands with allies and rivals alike.

By signing the order, Trump would fulfill his long-standing pledge to raise taxes on most imported goods, a clear break with his recent White House predecessors who saw tariffs as either targeted tools to use strategically or barriers worth lowering. Trump has broken with that precedent by saying he wants to

return the United States to the 1890s when taxes on imports were the government's dominant source of revenues.

But should job gains never materialize and should inflation stay high, it's an easy line of attack for Democratic lawmakers and candidates that Trump helped the ultrawealthy at the expense of the middle class.

"No matter which way you slice it, costs are going to climb for consumers," Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York said earlier this month. "I will work with my colleagues to undo this mess, get costs down and get these billionaires out of the way."

Trump put 10% tariffs on China over its contributions to the production of the illicit drug fentanyl, and China has taken retaliatory measures. He said he is ready if necessary on March 1 — after a 30-day suspension — to put tariffs on Mexico and Canada over his belief they should do more to fight illegal immigration and drug smuggling.

On Monday, he closed the exemptions to his 2018 tariffs on steel and aluminum, in addition to raising the tariff rates on aluminum. He has also talked about additional taxes on imported autos, computer chips and pharmaceutical drugs.

Many of America's dominant trading partners are preparing for an economic rupture in reaction to Trump's possible actions.

In response to the steel and aluminum tariffs, European Union chief Ursula von der Leyen said Tuesday: "Unjustified tariffs on the EU will not go unanswered — they will trigger firm and proportionate countermeasures." That means motorcycles, jeans, bourbon and peanut butter from the United States could face new taxes abroad. Mexico and Canada — America's two largest trading partners — have also prepared countermeasures.

Multiple Trump aides have privately said that Trump's long-standing goal with tariffs has been reciprocity. But Trump has also portrayed tariffs as a diplomatic tool to try to force Canada and Mexico to spend more resources on stopping illegal immigration and drug trafficking into the United States. He also suggested repeatedly that tariffs would be a source of revenues that could offset his planned income tax cuts.

But even before Trump formally signed the order, analysts at Goldman Sachs on Tuesday concluded it was unlikely to be the final word on tariffs.

"Of course, even if President Trump views reciprocal tariffs as an alternative to more sweeping measures at the moment, we are entering only the fourth week of a four-year presidential term and it seems likely there will be many further tariff announcements," the investment bank's analysts wrote.

Michael Zezas, a strategist at Morgan Stanley, wrote in a Sunday note that the "tariff trajectory" would shape what happens with growth, inflation, interest rates and Federal Reserve policies this year.

"It's a major shift from the era of globalization, when companies shrank expenses by pursuing lower-cost labor and materials offshore," Zezas said. "This transition is likely to take many years, creating challenges for some and substantial opportunities for others."

Paul McCartney rocks the Bowery. Inside his surprise NYC concert

By JAKE COYLE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Paul McCartney's previous New York-area performance took place three years ago at MetLife Stadium, capacity 82,500. His surprise show Tuesday night at the Bowery Ballroom fit, at most, 575.

It was probably less than that since McCartney's sound board and gear — too much to fit backstage — occupied a portion of the floor space at the venerable downtown theater. The whole thing felt like, and was, a lark. McCartney announced the show just hours before taking the stage.

Like an echo of Beatlemania, the news swept through Manhattan and beyond earlier in the day, sending New Yorkers sprinting down Delancey Street for a chance to snag one of the few tickets at the Bowery. Most in attendance, including McCartney, himself, could hardly believe it was happening.

"So, here we are," McCartney said, grinning. "Some little gig. New York. Why not?"

Later, he added before launching into "Let Me Roll It": "I can't quite believe we're here, doing this. But we are here, doing this."

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It was not McCartney's first impromptu concert. The Beatles, of course, famously performed atop the roof of their Apple Corps headquarters at 3 Savile Row in London in 1969. Since then he's made something of a habit of it on trips to New York.

In 2009, McCartney returned to the Ed Sullivan Theater, site of the Beatles' famous U.S. debut, and performed above the marquee. In 2018, he popped up in Grand Central Terminal to promote the release of his "Egyptian Station."

With temperatures in the low 30s on Tuesday, McCartney, 82, this time opted for an intimate, indoor show. Tickets were sold only physically at the venue, one per person. All were snapped up within about 30 minutes.

For those quick enough, it was like hitting the lottery.

Amy Jaffe, 69, was at home about 30 blocks north when she saw the announcement on Instagram. "I thought: I can do this," Jaffe said before the show. "I put on jeans, grabbed a coat, called a Lyft."

Jaffe has seen McCartney many times before, including with the Beatles in 1964 in Forrest Hills, Queens. But she was still incredulous, smiling and shaking her head: "I don't actually believe it."

Phil Sokoloff, 31, was on his way to work nearby when he saw the news. He ran in and told his co-worker, Mat Fuller, and they rushed over to the Bowery Ballroom.

"We just got lucky," Sokoloff said. "I'm always learning about these things the day after."

McCartney took the stage roughly on time at 6:30 p.m. with his regular band, along with a three-member horn section. They had only rehearsed once, the day before, McCartney said. Someone shouted: "You don't need to rehearse!"

If the location was stripped down, the former Beatle didn't come with a minimized show, packing in a blistering tour through his entire catalog, from Beatles classics to Wings hits. He began with "A Hard Day's Night" and also performed "Got To Get You Into My Life," "Maybe I'm Amazed," "Lady Madonna," "Jet," "Get Back," "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da," "Let it Be" and "Hey Jude."

"Blackbird" was a solo number on acoustic guitar, and afterward McCartney reflected on how he wrote it for the Civil Rights Movement, a memory that brought back his first trips to the United States.

"We were just kids," McCartney said. "I've got grandchildren older than that now."

In the early days, he said, he and John Lennon were always writing for the audience, and the songs were all about reaching out: "I Want to Hold Your Hand," "From Me to You."

"It had everything to do with the fans, really," McCartney said.

Before playing the Wings song "Mrs. Vanderbilt," McCartney spoke of playing it in front of 350,000 people in Kyiv, when Ukraine was exuberant with a newfound freedom. "Let's hope it gets back to that soon," he said.

Conversation, mixed with shouts from the audience, peppered the set. After one particularly shrill scream, McCartney responded. "That was a Beatles scream." Then he asked for more, saying, "OK, let's get it out of the way. Girls, give me a Beatles scream." All in attendance obliged.

McCartney also performed the so-called last Beatles song, "Now and Then," a ballad penned by Lennon in the late '70s but only released in 2023 with the help of some of the technology used in Peter Jackson's 2021 documentary, "The Beatles: Get Back." The song made McCartney wistful for his songwriting partner, whom he noted loved New York.

"Let's hear it for John," he said.

McCartney, who was spotted Sunday at the Super Bowl in New Orleans chatting with Adam Sandler, was in New York for the upcoming "Saturday Night Live" 50th anniversary festivities. He's to be a guest on the star-studded television special Sunday.

It was unclear if McCartney was playing a single show or preparing for something more. He wrapped the Got Back Tour in December and has said he's hoping to finish a new album this year.

For now, though, it was a one-night-only event. One crowd member asked McCartney if it could go all night. "Some of us need to get some sleep, you know," he replied.

McCartney still came back, bouncing on the stage for an encore. He closed with the rousing "Abbey Road" send off of "Carry That Weight" and "The End," concluded with its immortalized final lines: "And in

the end/ The love you take/ Is equal to the love you make.”

The crowd, still in disbelief, spilled out into the street. Snow had begun to fall.

White House bars AP reporter from Oval Office because of AP style policy on ‘Gulf of America’

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The White House blocked an Associated Press reporter from an event in the Oval Office on Tuesday after demanding the news agency alter its style on the Gulf of Mexico, which President Donald Trump has ordered renamed the Gulf of America.

The reporter, whom the AP would not identify, tried to enter the White House event as usual Tuesday afternoon and was turned away. Later, a second AP reporter was barred from a late-evening event in the White House Diplomatic Room.

The highly unusual ban, which Trump administration officials had threatened earlier Tuesday unless the AP changed the style on the Gulf, could have constitutional free-speech implications.

Julie Pace, AP’s senior vice president and executive editor, called the administration’s move unacceptable.

“It is alarming that the Trump administration would punish AP for its independent journalism,” Pace said in a statement. “Limiting our access to the Oval Office based on the content of AP’s speech not only severely impedes the public’s access to independent news, it plainly violates the First Amendment.”

The Trump administration made no immediate announcements about the moves, and there was no indication any other journalists were affected. Trump has long had an adversarial relationship with the media. On Friday, the administration ejected a second group of news organizations from Pentagon office space.

Before his Jan. 20 inauguration, Trump announced plans to change the Gulf of Mexico’s name to the “Gulf of America” — and signed an executive order to do so as soon as he was in office. Mexico’s president responded sarcastically and others noted that the name change would probably not affect global usage.

Besides the United States, the body of water — named the Gulf of Mexico for more than 400 years — also borders Mexico.

The AP said last month, three days after Trump’s inauguration, that it would continue to refer to the Gulf of Mexico while noting Trump’s decision to rename it as well. As a global news agency that disseminates news around the world, the AP says it must ensure that place names and geography are easily recognizable to all audiences.

AP style is not only used by the agency. The AP Stylebook is relied on by thousands of journalists and other writers globally.

Barring the AP reporter was an affront to the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which bars the government from impeding the freedom of the press, said Tim Richardson, program director of journalism and misinformation for PEN America.

The White House Correspondents Association called the White House move unacceptable and called on the administration to change course.

“The White House cannot dictate how news organizations report the news, nor should it penalize working journalists because it is unhappy with their editors’ decision,” said Eugene Daniels, WHCA’s president.

This week, Google Maps began using “Gulf of America,” saying it had a “longstanding practice” of following the U.S. government’s lead on such matters. The other leading online map provider, Apple Maps, was still using “Gulf of Mexico” earlier Tuesday but by early evening had changed to “Gulf of America” on some browsers, though at least one search produced results for both.

Trump also decreed that the mountain in Alaska known as Mount McKinley and then by its Indigenous name, Denali, be shifted back to commemorating the 25th president. President Barack Obama had ordered it renamed Denali in 2015. AP said last month it will use the official name change to Mount McKinley because the area lies solely in the United States and Trump has the authority to change federal geographical names within the country.

Musk appears at White House defending DOGE's work but acknowledging mistakes

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's most powerful adviser, Elon Musk, made a rare public appearance at the White House on Tuesday to defend the swift and extensive cuts he's pushing across the federal government while acknowledging there have been mistakes and will be more.

Musk stood next to the Resolute Desk with his young son as Trump praised Musk's work with his Department of Government Efficiency, saying they've found "shocking" evidence of wasteful spending. The Republican president signed an executive order to expand Musk's influence and continue downsizing the federal workforce.

Despite concerns that he's amassing unaccountable power with little transparency, Musk described himself as an open book as he took questions from reporters for the first time since joining the Trump administration as a special government employee. He joked that the scrutiny over his sprawling influence over federal agencies was like a "daily proctology exam."

He also claimed that DOGE's work was being shared on its website and on X, the social media platform owned by Musk. However, the DOGE website has no information, and the postings on X often lack many details, including which programs are being cut and where the organization has access.

The White House has also been moving to limit independent oversight. The inspector general for the U.S. Agency for International Development was fired a day after warning that it had become nearly impossible to monitor \$8.2 billion in humanitarian funds after DOGE began dismantling the agency.

Musk defended DOGE's work as "common sense" and "not draconian or radical."

"The people voted for major government reform, and that's what the people are going to get," he said. "That's what democracy is all about."

Musk acknowledged, in response to a question about false statements that the U.S. was spending \$50 million on condoms for Gaza, that some of the claims he's made about government programs have been wrong.

"Some of the things that I say will be incorrect and should be corrected. So nobody can bat 1,000," he said. He promised that he would act quickly to correct errors, and acknowledged that DOGE could be making errors as well.

"We are moving fast, so we will make mistakes, but we'll also fix the mistakes very quickly," Musk said.

He said there are some good people in the federal bureaucracy, but they need to be accountable. Musk described the workforce as an "unelected" fourth branch that had "more power than any elected representative."

The executive order signed by Trump said a DOGE representative will need to approve almost all new hiring, a dramatic consolidation of personnel management across the federal government.

"The agency shall not fill any vacancies for career appointments that the DOGE Team Lead assesses should not be filled, unless the Agency Head determines the positions should be filled," the order said.

In addition, the Office of Management and Budget will require that agencies "hire no more than one employee for every four employees that depart." There would be exceptions when it comes to immigration, law enforcement and public safety.

Agency leaders were also directed to plan for "large-scale reductions in force." Government functions not required by statute would be prioritized for elimination.

Trump and Musk are already pushing federal workers to resign in return for financial incentives, although their plan is currently on hold while a judge reviews its legality. The deferred resignation program, commonly described as a buyout, would allow employees to quit and still get paid until Sept. 30. Administration officials said more than 65,000 workers have taken the offer.

Hundreds of people gathered for a rally Tuesday across the street from the U.S. Capitol in support of federal workers.

Janet Connelly, a graphic designer with the Department of Energy, said she's fed up with emails from

the Office of Personnel Management encouraging people to take the deferred resignation program.

She tried to use her spam settings to filter out the emails but to no avail. Connelly said she has no plans to take the offer.

"From the get-go, I didn't trust it," she said.

Connelly said she thinks of her work as trying to do an important service for the American public.

"It's too easy to vilify us," she said.

Others have said fear and uncertainty have swept through the federal workforce.

"They're worried about their jobs. They're worried about their families. They're also worried about their work and the communities they serve," said Helen Bottcher, a former Environmental Protection Agency employee and current union leader in Seattle.

Bottcher participated in a press conference hosted by Sen. Patty Murray, a Democrat from Washington.

Murray said workers "deserve better than to be threatened, intimidated and pushed out the door by Elon Musk and Donald Trump." She also said that "we actually need these people to stay in their jobs or things are going to start breaking."

A government lawyer, who spoke to the Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because of fears of retaliation, said it was a terrifying time to be a federal worker.

She said people are worried that their phones and computers are being monitored. She's a single mother with a young daughter, and her father is urging her to take a safer job in the private sector.

But she's skeptical of the deferred resignation program, emphasizing that accepting the offer means workers can't sue if they're not paid what they're promised.

The idea, she said, was insane.

US aid freeze paralyzes NGOs working to help millions of internally displaced people in Somalia

By OMAR FARUK Associated Press

MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — In a desolate makeshift camp on the fringes of Somalia's capital, tens of thousands of internally displaced people sit under the baking sun not sure if they can have access to food rations and medication following U.S. President Donald Trump's decree to freeze most of his country's foreign aid.

Trump's decision, which will remain in force for 90 days following his Jan. 20 executive order, threatens to collapse the humanitarian aid economy that sustains the livelihoods of some of the world's most vulnerable people. The U.S. provides more foreign aid globally than any other country, budgeting about \$60 billion in 2023, or about 1% of the U.S. budget.

Somalia, a Horn of Africa nation that struggles with a homegrown Islamic extremist insurgency, depends almost entirely on foreign aid to look after people displaced by armed conflict, amounting to 3 million, according to the UN refugee agency. The east African country also grapples with the effects of natural disasters, particularly drought, and food insecurity.

The United States Agency for International Development, or USAID, spent \$369 million in Somalia in 2021, supporting everything from sanitation programs to emergency nutrition with funds channeled through government and non-governmental groups.

Ayan Ali Hussein, chairwoman of the Dooxdoox IDP camp on the outskirts of Mogadishu, said Trump's order provoked almost immediate stop-work orders addressed to USAID partners, shutting down basic services.

Suddenly "there are no facilities to treat malnourished children," she said. "Women who had experienced gender-based violence once had access to care, counseling, protection, medication, financial support, and clothing, none of which are available anymore."

Hussein's camp looks after eight sites, home to nearly 8,000 households of internally displaced Somalis who will "lack basic items like plastic sheets" for temporary shelter.

The suspension of USAID, "left a huge void in our lives" she said.

One of the camp's residents, an 85-year-old mother of eight, Ruqiya Abdulle Ubeyd, said she was shocked by Trump's decision and asked "the U.S. government to restore the aid it used to give to vulnerable people," she said.

The fund freeze has also caused major concern among those in need of urgent medical care, including people with HIV, as it disrupted the work of almost all NGOs in Somalia.

One of the hard-hit organizations is the Somali Young Doctors Association, or SOYDA, a key provider of medical assistance in the camps. Its founder, Dr. Abdiqani Sheikh Omar, previously a top official in Somalia's health ministry, said the abruptness of Trump's announcement has destabilized their programs.

In 2025, Somalia was to receive \$125 million in USAID support for programs that could now become "null and void," he said. To cope with funding shortages, his group decided to prioritize critical nutrition and hygiene programs.

Many of his workers also face immediate job losses, and the organization is "engaging our volunteer health professionals to cover this emergency staff funding gap through part-time shifts," he said.

SODYA also provides medication for people who can't afford it.

"Previously, whenever our children got sick, we would come straight to (the SODYA) center for help," said Hussein Abikar, a father of five who lives in the camp with his family.

"There is no other place where we could find such support," Abikar said.

US aid freeze sets back fight against human trafficking in Cambodia

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — President Donald Trump's freeze on foreign assistance has dealt a blow to organizations fighting human trafficking and forced labor in Cambodia, where tens of thousands of people are held captive and forced to work in call centers running telephone scams.

Hundreds of thousands of people work in remote compounds in countries including Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos where they run online scams targeting people all over the world, including Americans, according to U.N. estimates. Some are trafficked and lured to the jobs under false pretenses and forced to work against their will.

A shelter for people who manage to leave these compounds run by the Catholic charity Caritas recently let some victims go and may stop accepting further victims due to the funding squeeze, two sources with direct knowledge of the situation said. The shelter, in the capital Phnom Penh is the only one not operated by the government which takes in victims of scam compounds, both foreign and Cambodian. The sources declined to be named because they were concerned about retaliation from the Trump administration.

The funding freeze has also halted civil-society-assisted rescue work and related programs on preventing human trafficking.

The compounds operate with support from some local elites. Last October, the U.S. sanctioned Ly Yong Phat, a leading member of the ruling Cambodian People's Party of Prime Minister Hun Manet, for owning businesses that have trafficked people and forced to work in online scam centers.

The blow to civil society efforts comes as a small network of society and independent media addressing Cambodia's scam compounds are already under intense government pressure. Independent media outlets have been shuttered, and a prominent Cambodian investigative journalist who had reported on the issue was arrested.

The Trump Administration froze U.S. foreign assistance in January, upending projects all over the world that ranged from providing medications to HIV patients to humanitarian assistance to people displaced by conflict.

While there are other shelters in Cambodia, the one operated by Caritas "is the only qualified and competent shelter," said Jake Sims, a co-founder of Shamrock, a public-private coalition working to combat transnational organized cybercrime. It offers victims trauma-informed care, as well as help with visas and legal support so they can go back to their home countries.

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The Caritas shelter received financial support from Winrock International, USAID's partner in Cambodia. It was due to receive about \$1 million from USAID over the course of two years, the sources said. The shelter was also partially funded by IOM, a United Nations agency which is largely funded by the U.S.

Neither USAID, IOM nor the government of Cambodia responded to requests for comment.

Some people manage to leave the compounds, either making their own escapes — sometimes jumping out of windows — or relying on a few rescue operators who assist the Cambodian police. There's also a Cambodian government rescue hotline.

When victims do get out, they often have trouble returning home. They are usually held in police custody and then sent on to immigration detention where they may linger for months. Many don't have any savings and may need legal help if they entered the country illegally with smugglers, rescuers say.

Shelters are critical for ensuring victims don't wind up being trafficked again, said Mina Chiang, founder of Humanity Research Consultancy, which has conducted research on the scam compounds in the region.

"In 2022, my team and I have learnt cases where Taiwanese survivors became homeless on the streets of Cambodia after escaping the scam compounds," she said. "There have also been cases where survivors were hunted down by criminals after they had escaped."

Li Ling, a rescue worker who has referred cases to the Caritas shelter, said she has had to stop assisting in rescues of scam workers because of the funding freeze.

Six victims left the shelter as soon as it got a stop-work order, and two of them have subsequently disappeared, said Li, who's also a PhD student at Ca'Foscari University of Venice studying cyber-enabled modern slavery. She had asked them to stay in regular contact after their departure and said she is concerned they may have wound up back in a scam compound, as they did not have any savings and planned to look for jobs for food and shelter.

Other organizations that support scam center victims have also taken a hit from the funding freeze, such as one which provides medical assistance to victims who injured in escapes, said Li.

For example, last year, they had helped someone who jumped out of a building to escape a scam compound. The organization helped pay for the emergency surgery for the victim, but that source of funds has also stopped.

The funding freeze has also led to the cancellation of other related programs focused on preventing human trafficking.

One non-profit organization registered in the region was due to start a training program with community journalists across Southeast Asia to raise awareness about scam compounds and their recruitment processes. Another labor-focused organization was due to start a training program with labor unions in six Southeast Asian countries on recognizing signs of trafficking, the sources with knowledge of the funding said.

The organizations asked to not be named due to the fear of government retaliation.

Ongoing research funded by to keep track of the latest developments in the scam compounds and the Cambodian government response has also been halted, the source with knowledge of the funding said. Research consultants funded by USAID's counter-trafficking program wrote internal reports for the agency on the criminal activity that are also sometimes shared with Congressional staff, as well as different parts of the U.S. government.

"With U.S. government support now abruptly removed, we can expect an acceleration in civil society repression," Jake Sims.

Last October, the Cambodian government arrested a well-known investigative journalist who had reported extensively on the proliferation of scam compounds in the country.

After widespread international attention and the support of local media organizations, journalist Mech Dara was released on bail after about a month. Afterward, he made a public statement that he would quit journalism.

Even if new funding is secured, restarting anti-trafficking programs could be more costly, since programs have already been shuttered and contract workers have been let go.

"The knock-on effect of the USAID funding freeze extends beyond the trafficking and re-trafficking of

vulnerable people; it strengthens criminal networks, allowing them to expand their operations," said Humanity Research Consultancy's Chiang.

How Elon Musk \$97.4 billion bid complicates matters for OpenAI

By MATT O'BRIEN, THALIA BEATY and KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writers

PARIS (AP) — OpenAI CEO Sam Altman has dismissed a \$97.4 billion takeover bid led by rival Elon Musk, but the unsolicited offer could complicate Altman's push to transform the maker of ChatGPT into a for-profit company.

"We are not for sale," Altman said Tuesday at an artificial intelligence summit in Paris.

Musk's bid, announced Monday, is the latest in a bitter years-long battle with Altman over control of the AI startup they both helped found a decade ago as a nonprofit and is now a leading force in the global boom surrounding generative AI technology.

"OpenAI has a mission," Altman told France's AI minister in an on-stage discussion Tuesday mobbed by tech industry workers and investors. "We are an unusual organization and we have this mission of making AGI benefit all humanity. And we are here to do that."

Its stated aim since its founding in 2015 is to safely build futuristic, better-than-human AI known as artificial general intelligence, or AGI. Musk, an early investor and board member, quit OpenAI in 2018 after an internal power struggle left Altman in charge.

Their public feud has escalated over the past year as Musk sued OpenAI and is working to grow his own AI company called xAI, part of a business empire that includes Tesla, SpaceX and social media platform X. Musk also now holds power as a top adviser to President Donald Trump in reshaping the U.S. government, and has publicly questioned OpenAI's Trump-backed private investment project for building AI data centers in the United States.

What happens next?

The offer complicates OpenAI's plan to shift its structure away from its nonprofit roots to a company beholden to shareholders.

OpenAI's nonprofit board will need to consider Musk's offer. It's not Altman alone who can accept or reject it, though the chair of the board, Bret Taylor, echoed Altman's approach and declared "OpenAI is not for sale" at a Wall Street Journal event Tuesday in Palo Alto, California.

Taylor said Musk's move was "largely a distraction" from the board's fiduciary duty to its mission.

As a nonprofit board, said Taylor, "our job is very simple, which is to basically evaluate every strategic decision of the organization through that one test, which is, 'Does this actually further the mission of ensuring AGI benefits humanity?' And I have a hard time seeing how this would."

The board will need to weigh not just the value of the company's assets but also the value of controlling the company developing this technology. Musk's offer also seems to set a floor for how much the nonprofit should be paid if it does relinquish control of its subsidiaries.

Rose Chan Loui, executive director for the Lowell Milken Center on Philanthropy and Nonprofits at UCLA Law, said the board should consider the credibility of Musk's offer, including if he and his investors will pay in cash. And they should consider whether a new board under the control of Musk and other investors would be independent and what guarantees they can give about protecting its public mission.

Musk's \$44 billion Twitter takeover in 2022 also started with an unsolicited offer and a legal fight with Twitter's board, which was also led by Taylor, a former Facebook and Salesforce executive. However, taking over OpenAI would be more complicated because of its charitable purpose.

"There is a legally binding purpose," said Jill Horwitz, a professor at UCLA School of Law. "It is the promise that was made to the public when OpenAI, the nonprofit, was formed. That promise is legally enforceable."

The sudden popularity of ChatGPT two years ago brought worldwide fame and new commercial possibilities to OpenAI and also heightened internal turmoil over the future of the organization and the advanced AI it was trying to develop. Its nonprofit board fired Altman in late 2023. He came back days later with a new board.

OpenAI's nonprofit complications

OpenAI's nonprofit purpose, as defined most recently in 2020, is "(to) ensure that artificial general intelligence benefits all of humanity, including by conducting and/or funding artificial intelligence research."

The question is, can it do that if it sells its assets and loses control of the company developing this technology?

"To make the promise to the world that you are bound by a legal purpose and to build with that promise, including telling your investors not to expect any returns and to think of your investments as more akin to a donation than an investment," said Horwitz. "And then to say once you've gotten big enough, 'You know what? We'd like to own this.' That seems like a real violation of the promise."

Musk sued OpenAI last year, first in a California state court and later in federal court, alleging it had betrayed its founding aims as a nonprofit research lab that would benefit the public good. A lawyer for Musk has said he invested about \$45 million in the startup from its founding until 2018.

Lawyers for OpenAI and Musk faced off in a California federal court last week as a judge weighed Musk's request for a court order that would block OpenAI's for-profit conversion.

The judge hasn't yet ruled on Musk's request but in the courtroom said it was a "stretch" for Musk to claim he will be irreparably harmed if she doesn't intervene to stop OpenAI from moving forward with its planned transition. But she also suggested Musk had plausible enough arguments to take to a jury trial.

Who else is backing Musk's OpenAI bid?

Along with Musk and xAI, others backing the bid announced Monday include Baron Capital Group, Valor Management, Atreides Management, Vy Fund, and firms run by Musk allies Ari Emanuel and Jon Lonsdale.

Musk attorney Marc Toberoff said in a statement that if Altman and OpenAI's current board "are intent on becoming a fully for-profit corporation, it is vital that the charity be fairly compensated for what its leadership is taking away from it: control over the most transformative technology of our time."

Altman told employees this week that OpenAI's structure "ensures that no individual can take control of OpenAI" and he has sought to characterize Musk's tactics as those of a competitor trying to catch up.

"I think he's probably just trying to slow us down. He obviously is a competitor," Altman told Bloomberg TV at the Paris summit on Tuesday.

Continuing their deeply personal feud, Altman said Musk is probably not a "happy person."

"Probably his whole life is from a position of insecurity. I feel for the guy," Altman said.

O'Brien reported from Providence, Rhode Island, and Beaty from Seattle.

Her parents were injured in a Tesla crash. She ended up having to pay Tesla damages

By ELSIE CHEN, ERIKA KINETZ and DAKE KANG Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Zhang Yazhou was sitting in the passenger seat of her Tesla Model 3 when she said she heard her father's panicked voice: The brakes don't work! Approaching a red light, her father swerved around two cars before plowing into an SUV and a sedan and crashing into a large concrete barrier.

Stunned, Zhang gazed at the deflating airbag in front of her. She could never have imagined what was to come: Tesla sued her for defamation for complaining publicly about the car's brakes — and won. A Chinese court ordered Zhang to pay more than \$23,000 in damages and publicly apologize to the \$1.1 trillion company.

Zhang is not the only one to find herself in the crosshairs of Tesla, which is led by Elon Musk, among the richest men in the world and a self-described "free speech absolutist." Over the last four years, Tesla has sued at least six car owners in China who had sudden vehicle malfunctions, quality complaints or accidents they claimed were caused by mechanical failures.

The company has also sued at least six bloggers and two Chinese media outlets that wrote critically about the company, according to a review of public court documents and Chinese media reports by The Associated Press. Tesla won all eleven cases for which AP could determine the verdicts. Two judgments,

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including Zhang's, are on appeal. One case was settled out of court.

It is not common practice for automakers — in China or elsewhere — to sue their customers. But Tesla has pioneered an aggressive legal strategy and leveraged the patronage of powerful leaders in China's ruling Communist Party to silence critics, reap financial rewards and limit its accountability.

The AP review of Tesla's record in China comes as Musk is wielding significant influence in President Donald Trump's new administration, leading an effort to rapidly shrink the size of the federal government and oust employees deemed disloyal to the president. His actions have raised concerns that Musk is weakening the U.S. system of checks and balances, in part, to benefit Tesla and his other companies.

In the United States, Musk has found a powerful ally in Trump. Together, they have ransacked the federal government, freezing spending, suspending programs and dismissing prosecutors, government watchdogs and others that have traditionally acted as guardrails.

Tesla officials in China and the United States did not reply to requests for comment.

Tesla's record in China shows how Musk has thrived in a system in which regulators, the media and the courts — which must all ultimately answer to the ruling Communist Party — are, by design, somewhat intertwined.

Tesla has profited from the largesse of the Chinese state, winning unprecedented regulatory benefits, below-market rate loans and large tax breaks. With a few pointed exceptions, Tesla has enjoyed largely ingratiating coverage in the Chinese press, and journalists told AP they have been instructed to avoid negative coverage of the automaker.

Tesla's windfall has extended to the courts — and not just in legal actions Tesla has brought against customers. In a review of public court documents, AP found that Tesla won nearly 90% of civil cases over safety, quality or contract disputes brought by customers.

"The government gave Tesla a super status that put consumers in a very vulnerable position," said Qiao Yudong, a former lawyer for American sports car company Saleen Automotive in China. "That's why some consumers had to resort to extreme actions."

One of those desperate customers was Zhang.

Burning with anger

The February 2021 crash in central China's Henan province sent Zhang's mother and father, who had a concussion, to the hospital for four days, medical records show. Zhang — who was unharmed in the accident, as was her baby niece — wanted to understand what had happened: How could her dream car have turned into such a nightmare?

Traffic police determined that the crash was her dad's fault because he hadn't maintained a safe following distance. Zhang, however, insisted that the brakes had malfunctioned, sending the car out of control. She filed a complaint with a local market regulator, requesting a refund and compensation. Teslas are among the most computerized cars on the market, so Zhang asked the automaker to turn over the full pre-crash data from her car, hoping it might help explain what went wrong. Tesla refused.

"Tesla's employees were very arrogant and tough in dealing with my complaints," Zhang said in an interview. "I was burning with anger."

After weeks of stewing, she draped her damaged car with a banner proclaiming "Tesla brake failure" in front of the Tesla dealership in Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan province, some 200 km (124 miles) from her home. She sat on the Tesla's roof and blared her protest through a bullhorn: "Tesla Model 3 brakes failed," she said. "A family of four almost died." The next month, she parked her damaged car outside an auto show in Zhengzhou. It was all to no avail — Tesla refused to turn over the full data and mediation went nowhere.

Figuring that top Tesla officials would attend an April auto show in Shanghai, she and a friend — who had also had a problem with her Tesla — donned matching T-shirts with the phrase "Brakes fail" and headed for Tesla's booth, determined to buttonhole executives. The automaker's officials avoided them, Zhang said, and they couldn't get anyone to hear them out.

Her friend, who was six months pregnant, started shouting, "Tesla brakes fail!"

Zhang clambered on top of a shiny red display model and started hollering, too.

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"Things escalated," said Zhang.

The moment — captured on cell phone videos shot by onlookers — went viral on Chinese social media. Burly security guards hauled Zhang out, and she was detained for five days.

Some observers speculated that Zhang's protest had been orchestrated -- perhaps by a competitor or by the Chinese government itself to pressure Tesla to conform with Chinese regulations. Tesla alleged that Zhang hadn't acted on her own. A top executive speculated to Chinese media that she "had someone behind her" and said Zhang was making a fuss because she just wanted higher compensation.

Zhang insisted she acted on her own — and out of anguish. Outraged, she sued Tesla for defamation, arguing that the executive's comments unjustly cast her as a troublemaker to deflect attention from the company's own shortcomings.

And then she found herself on the receiving end of a lawsuit filed by Tesla.

The odds are against you

Tesla said Zhang had deliberately spread false information that damaged the brand and asked for 5 million yuan (\$684,000) in damages.

The case, which a court took up in October 2021, came as Tesla faced a barrage of criticism in China.

Dozens of Tesla owners had been publicly complaining about alleged brake failures, battery fires, unintended acceleration and other defects, as well as what they claimed were misleading sales practices. The same month as Zhang's crash, Chinese regulators summoned Tesla to respond to quality concerns raised by such reports.

Zhang's emotional protest sparked a rare burst of criticism of Tesla in Chinese media. Under pressure from regulators, Tesla finally released the data from her car, which the company said showed her father had been driving nearly 120 km per hour (75 mph) and that the brakes had functioned to reduce the magnitude of the collision.

Tesla had finally given Zhang what she'd been asking for, but they'd published the data publicly and included her vehicle identification number. She said she and her family started getting threatened and doxed online. Besides, she wondered, how could she be sure Tesla hadn't modified or redacted the data from her car? It was less than the victory she'd hoped for. Feeling besieged, she sued Tesla a second time, in March 2022, for invading her privacy.

Zhang lost both cases she brought against Tesla.

Meanwhile, the defamation case against her was grinding along. Back in court as a defendant, Zhang was unable to prove that the brakes on her Tesla had indeed failed. In a closed trial, a Shanghai court ruled in May 2024 that Zhang's public complaints went beyond what magistrates considered reasonable, factual criticism and ordered her to publicly apologize and pay 170,000 RMB (\$23,000) to cover damages and the legal costs of the world's most valuable car company.

Zhang appealed the ruling. She maintains that her lawsuit is a cry for transparency and accountability and that a company as rich and powerful as Tesla should be able to tolerate legitimate criticism from its customers.

"I refuse to accept it," Zhang told the Associated Press, "As a consumer, even if I said something wrong, I have the right to comment and criticize. I spoke about my feelings as a user of the car. It has nothing to do with damaging their reputation."

Her odds of winning the appeal against Tesla do not look good. Tesla has not only won the defamation cases it brought against unhappy car owners and critical journalists, it's also prevailed in lawsuits customers have filed against it.

An AP review of a Chinese government database of court filings published online found 81 civil judgments in which car owners sued Tesla over safety and quality issues or contract disputes. Car owners won in only nine of those cases.

In a statement to AP, the Shanghai High People's Court said that judgments are the result of a "fair trial" based on "the objective facts of the case."

"It cannot be assumed that the party has received 'special protection' or 'special treatment' because of

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their victory," the court wrote.

While some auto industry experts in China say it's generally difficult for customers to win cases against car companies, others say it's remarkable for a foreign company to enjoy such blazing success in Chinese courts.

"For Tesla to win that percentage of the time is an anomaly," said Bill Russo, founder of Automobility Ltd., an advisory firm based in Shanghai, who also used to be regional head of Chrysler in northeast Asia. "The odds are stacked against you. It's like going to the casino and winning every hand."

The power of patronage

Tesla's commercial and political success in China has hinged on the support of a powerful patron: Li Qiang, the former party boss of Shanghai who is now China's premier, second in rank only to President Xi Jinping. It was under his watch, in 2019, that Tesla built its first overseas factory on the outskirts of China's financial capital.

With Li's support, Tesla became the first foreign automaker allowed to retain complete control over its China venture and got low-interest loans and generous tax breaks. China also adopted an emissions credit scheme modeled after a U.S. program that has generated billions in income for Tesla.

In January 2020, one year after breaking ground, Elon Musk unveiled the first Chinese-made Teslas on a stage in Shanghai. Tesla turned an annual profit for the first time in its history that year, and Musk was declared the world's richest person in January 2021.

China got what it wanted, too: Tesla was a potent catalyst for domestic production and consumption. Before Tesla's arrival, new energy vehicles accounted for around five percent of China's auto market. Today, analysts say, more than half of passenger vehicles sold retail in China are powered by an electric motor. Chinese battery maker CATL, a key Tesla supplier, has embedded itself in global supply chains to become the world's largest EV-battery maker. China's BYD is now the world's largest electric vehicle manufacturer and a growing competitive threat to legacy carmakers in the West.

"Tesla had a large part to play in that," said Tu Le, the managing director of Sino Auto Insights, a consulting firm. Tu said the way the government smoothed the way for Musk's factory was critical. "It was a swampy field on the outskirts of Shanghai. A year later they're rolling cars off the line," he said. "I don't know if that happens anywhere else in the world."

Requests for comment to the State Council, which is run by Li Qiang and oversees China's government ministries, went unanswered.

Musk still swings by to meet Li when he goes to China. Their encounters underscore the complexity of Musk's overlapping interests as a businessman and the most China-friendly member of Trump's inner circle.

Musk's "greater objective was winning influence over the people that mattered for him, that enabled him to get things done," said Russo, the auto strategist in Shanghai. "He's done a good job of it in China and he's done it now with the influence he purchased with his relationship with Trump."

A chilling effect

Safety advocates worry about the implications of Musk's proximity to power in the United States. Federal investigations and safety initiatives Musk has long railed against could be easily snuffed out by the new administration.

In the U.S., Tesla also has been subject to a raft of customer safety complaints and lawsuits over autopilot function, battery charging, alleged suspension defects, sudden braking or acceleration, faulty airbags and allegedly monopolistic practices on repairs and parts. Judges have dismissed some cases. In others, Tesla settled out of court or paid hefty settlements.

Tesla has not publicly sued any of its U.S. customers for speaking out, though in January, Musk said on X that "maybe it is time" to sue media outlets for coverage that could stain Tesla's brand. His post has been viewed more than 22 million times.

Tesla has already successfully done that in China.

Two Chinese journalists based in Shanghai told AP there is an unwritten rule to avoid critical coverage of Tesla. Both spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing retaliation.

"We were told by our editor that we should not write negatively about Tesla because it is a key company

that was introduced and protected by the Shanghai government,” a tech reporter told AP.

Those who have strayed have found themselves in court. Musk’s company sued media outlets PingWest and ifeng.com over negative coverage. It was unhappy about PingWest’s report that claimed Tesla’s Shanghai factory was a “sweatshop.” The news website ifeng.com drew Tesla’s ire over a story that explored the tribulations of car owners who fought Tesla. PingWest had to apologize and pay Tesla 100,000 yuan (\$13,700). AP could not determine the outcome of the case against ifeng.com.

Tesla is not the only company in its industry to sue its critics. BYD has also aggressively pursued media in court, including an unsuccessful lawsuit against Vice Media in the United States. More recently, electric vehicle makers Nio and Li Auto have stepped up defamation cases against bloggers in China who allegedly spread false information about their companies.

Tesla, however, stands out even among its cut-throat Chinese competitors — in going after car owners who suffered crashes.

“Tesla used their legal advantages to bully Chinese car owners and people who speak up for them,” said Feng Shiming, an auto blogger and Tesla owner who was ordered by a Shanghai court last year to pay Tesla 250,000 yuan (\$34,200) after he wrote about Tesla’s alleged brake failures. He has appealed the verdict. “Tesla wants to have a chilling effect on society and terrify people so they will be scared to say anything negative about Tesla.”

Chen Junyi got the message. He lost control of his Model 3 and plowed into a dozen cars in a parking lot at high speed in August 2020. He claimed the brakes had failed. He told Chinese media at the time that he broke his back and four ribs and had to have 30 centimeters (12 inches) of his small intestine removed. Chen took to social media and warned people not to buy Tesla, raising his shirt to reveal the long, gnarled scar that runs up his abdomen.

Tesla maintained the accident was Chen’s fault, citing a technical review that found the car was accelerating and not braking in the seconds before the crash, and sued him for making false claims.

“Tesla should proactively respond to consumers instead of using its superior resources and filing lawsuits against consumers who are at a disadvantage,” Chen said in a court statement reviewed by AP. “I almost lost my life because of the car accident. I lost my job and income. I am under tremendous economic pressure.”

Chen declined to speak with the AP, citing fear of retaliation. A Chinese court ordered Chen to pay the carmaker 50,000 yuan (\$6,800) as compensation — and to issue an apology.

“I deeply regret the serious negative impacts I have had on Tesla and its cars,” he wrote. “I hereby sincerely apologize to Tesla and to the people who were misled by my remarks.”

A month later, he apologized for his apology, saying the words were not his own.

White House fires USAID inspector general after warning about funding oversight, officials say

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House fired the inspector general for the U.S. Agency for International Development on Tuesday, U.S. officials said, a day after his office warned that the Trump administration’s dismantling of USAID had made it all but impossible to monitor \$8.2 billion in unspent humanitarian funds.

The White House gave no reason for the firing of Inspector General Paul Martin, one of the officials said. The officials were familiar with the dismissal but not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Inspectors general are typically independently funded watchdogs attached to government agencies and tasked with rooting out waste, fraud and abuse. The Trump administration earlier purged more than a dozen inspectors general.

On Monday, Martin’s office issued a flash report warning that the Trump administration’s freeze on all foreign assistance and moves to cut USAID staff had left oversight of the humanitarian aid “largely non-operational.”

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That includes the agency's ability to ensure none of the funding falls into the hands of violent extremist groups or goes astray in conflict zones, the watchdog said.

The dismissal, which was first reported by CNN, is the latest action by the Trump administration affecting the aid agency, including efforts to pull all but a fraction of its staffers worldwide off the job. Trump and ally Elon Musk say its work is out of line with the president's agenda.

American businesses partnering with USAID sue

A lawsuit filed Tuesday alleged that the unraveling of USAID is stifling American businesses on hundreds of millions of dollars in unpaid bills for work that has already been done.

The administration's abrupt foreign aid freeze also is forcing mass layoffs by U.S. suppliers and contractors for USAID, including 750 furloughs at one company, Washington-based Chemonics International, the lawsuit says.

"One cannot overstate the impact of that unlawful course of conduct: on businesses large and small forced to shut down their programs and let employees go; on hungry children across the globe who will go without; on populations around the world facing deadly disease; and on our constitutional order," the U.S. businesses and organizations said.

An organization representing 170 small U.S. businesses, major suppliers, the American Jewish group HIAS that aids displaced people abroad, the American Bar Association and others joined the legal challenge.

It was filed in U.S. District Court in Washington against President Donald Trump, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, acting USAID Deputy Administrator Peter Marocco, a Trump appointee who has been a central figure in hollowing out the agency, and Russell Vought, Trump's head of the Office of Management and Budget.

It is at least the third lawsuit over the administration's targeting of USAID and its programs worldwide. A lawsuit brought by federal employees associations has temporarily blocked the administration from pulling thousands of USAID staffers off the job.

The funding freeze and other measures have persisted, including the agency losing the lease on its Washington headquarters.

The new administration terminated contracts without the required 30-day notice and without back payments for work that was already done, according to a U.S. official, a businessperson with a USAID contract and an email seen by The Associated Press. They spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal by the Trump administration.

For Chemonics, one of the larger of the USAID partners, the funding freeze has meant \$103 million in unpaid invoices and almost \$500 million in USAID-ordered medication, food and other goods stalled in the supply chain or ports, the lawsuit says.

For the health commodities alone, not delivering them "on time could potentially lead to as many as 566,000 deaths from HIV/AIDS, malaria, and unmet reproductive health needs, including 215,000 pediatric deaths," the lawsuit says.

The filing asserts that the administration has no authority to block programs and funding mandated by Congress without approval.

Marocco defended the funding cutoff and push to put thousands of USAID staffers on leave in an affidavit filed late Monday in the lawsuit brought by the workers' groups.

"Insubordination" and "noncompliance" by USAID staffers made it necessary to stop funding and operations by the agency to allow the administration to carry out a program-by-program review to decide what U.S. aid programs could resume overseas, he wrote.

USAID workers deny insubordination, and call the accusation a pretext to dismantle the agency.

GOP lawmakers aim to save food aid program

Seven Republican lawmakers from farm states introduced legislation to safeguard a long-running \$1.8 billion food-aid program run by USAID, aiming to move the Food for Peace program under the Department of Agriculture.

Farmers, a politically important bloc for the Trump administration, have been affected by the administration's funding freeze as well.

Kansas Republican Sen. Jerry Moran, who announced the legislation, over the weekend thanked Rubio

for interceding to allow delivery of \$560 million in U.S.-grown commodities intended for hunger programs worldwide that had been stuck in ports because of the administration's abrupt cutoff of foreign assistance spending.

California's insurer for people without private coverage needs \$1 billion more for LA fires claims

By TRẦN NGUYỄN Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California's plan that provides insurance to homeowners who can't get private coverage needs \$1 billion more to pay out claims related to the Los Angeles wildfires, the state Insurance Department said Tuesday.

The FAIR Plan is an insurance pool that all the major private insurers pay into, and the plan then issues policies to people who can't get private insurance because their properties are deemed too risky to insure. The plan, with high premiums and basic coverage, is designed as a temporary option until homeowners can find permanent coverage, but more Californians are relying on it than ever. There were more than 452,000 policies on the Fair Plan in 2024, more than double the number in 2020.

The plan says it's expecting a loss of roughly \$4 billion from the Eaton and Palisades Fires, which sparked Jan. 7, destroyed nearly 17,000 structures and killed at least 29 people. Roughly 4,700 claims have been filed as of this week, and the plan has already paid out more than \$914 million.

Under a FAIR Plan request approved by the state Tuesday, all insurers doing business in California will have to bear half the cost and can pass on the rest to all policyholders in the form of a one-time fee. Insurers can collect that cost in the next two years. The state Insurance Department must approve those costs.

State officials didn't immediately have details on how large the fee would be. In approving the request, the state allowed the plan to send out notices and collect funding from marketplace insurers within 30 days.

It's the first time the Fair Plan has sought approval for additional money in more than 30 years, the department said.

"I took this necessary consumer protection action with one goal in mind: the FAIR Plan must pay claims just like any other insurance company," Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara said in a statement.

"I reject those who are hoping for the failure of our insurance market by spreading fear and doubt," Lara said. "Wildfire survivors can't cash 'what ifs' to pay for food and rent, but they can cash FAIR Plan checks."

The plan also expects to receive \$1.45 billion in reinsurance to help pay out claims. It anticipates it will have roughly \$400 million left by July.

According to the plan, 45% of the wildfire claims filed so far are reported as total losses, 45% as partial losses and 10% as fair rental value.

Insurers on Tuesday said they're committed to helping the recovery process after the fires and that the ability to recoup some of the cost from ratepayers will prevent companies from leaving the state.

"This is essential to prevent even greater strain on California's already unbalanced insurance market and avoiding widespread policy cancellations that would jeopardize coverage for millions of Californians," said Mark Sektnan of the American Property Casualty Insurance Association, the largest national trade association for home, auto and business insurers.

But a consumer watchdog group, which opposed a rule that allows insurers to pass off costs to policyholders, said it will challenge the effort.

"Consumer Watchdog is exploring every legal option to stop a bailout if any insurance company seeks to make consumers pay," Carmen Balber, executive director of Consumer Watchdog, said in a statement.

California is undergoing a yearslong effort to stabilize its insurance market after several major insurance companies either paused or restricted new business in the state in 2023, which pushed hundreds of thousands of homeowners onto the FAIR Plan. Wildfires are becoming more common and destructive in California due to climate change, and insurers say that's making it difficult to truly price the risk on properties.

Of the top 20 most destructive wildfires in state history, 15 have occurred since 2015, according to the

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

The state now gives insurers more latitude to raise premiums in exchange for issuing more policies in high-risk areas. That includes regulations allowing insurers to consider climate change when setting their prices and allowing them pass on the costs of reinsurance to California consumers.

Appeals court rejects Trump administration push to reinstate spending freezes on grants and loans

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal appeals court on Tuesday rejected a Trump administration push to reinstate a sweeping pause on federal funding, a decision that comes after a judge found the administration had not fully obeyed an earlier order.

The Boston-based 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals turned back the emergency appeal, the latest in a string of court losses that is increasingly frustrating top administration officials as it slows President Donald Trump's wide-ranging agenda.

The appeals court also said it expected the lower court judge to clarify his original order. The Trump administration quickly pushed to withhold Federal Emergency Management Agency money sent to New York City to house migrants, saying it had "significant concerns" about the spending under a program appropriated by Congress.

The Justice Department had previously asked the appeals court to let it implement sweeping pauses on federal grants and loans, calling the lower court order to keep promised money flowing "intolerable judicial overreach."

U.S. District Court Judge John McConnell in Rhode Island is presiding over a lawsuit from nearly two dozen Democratic states filed after the administration issued a boundary-pushing memo purporting to halt all federal grants and loans, worth trillions of dollars. The plan sparked chaos around the country.

The administration has since rescinded that memo, but McConnell found Monday that not all federal grants and loans had been restored. He was the first judge to find that the administration had disobeyed a court order.

Money for things like early childhood education, pollution reduction and HIV prevention research has remained tied up even after his Jan. 31 order halting the spending freeze plan, the states said.

McConnell, who was appointed by former President Barack Obama, ordered the Trump administration to "immediately take every step necessary" to unfreeze all federal grants and loans.

He also said his order blocked the administration from cutting billions of dollars in grant funding from the National Institutes of Health, a move announced last week.

The Justice Department said McConnell's order prevents the executive branch from exercising its lawful authority, including over discretionary spending or fraud.

"A single district court judge has attempted to wrest from the President the power to 'take care that the laws be faithfully executed.' This state of affairs cannot be allowed to persist for one more day," government attorneys wrote in their appeal.

The states, meanwhile, argued that the president can't block money that Congress has approved, and the still-frozen grants and loans are causing serious problems for their residents. They urged the appeals court to keep allowing the case to play out in front of McConnell.

Judges have also blocked, at least temporarily, Trump's push to end birthright citizenship for anyone born in the U.S., access to Treasury Department records by billionaire Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency and a mass deferred resignation plan for federal workers.

The Republican administration previously said the sweeping funding pause would bring federal spending in line with the president's priorities, including increasing fossil fuel production, removing protections for transgender people and ending diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

A different federal judge in Washington has also issued a temporary restraining order against the fund-

ing freeze plan and since expressed concern that some nonprofit groups weren't getting their funding.

After meeting with Trump, Jordan's king says his country opposes displacing Palestinians in Gaza

By ZEKE MILLER, CHRIS MEGERIAN and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump hosted Jordan's King Abdullah II at the White House on Tuesday and renewed his insistence that Gaza could somehow be emptied of all residents, controlled by the U.S. and redeveloped as a tourist area.

It's an audacious, but highly unlikely, scheme to dramatically remake the Middle East and would require Jordan and other Arab nations to accept more Gazans — something Abdullah reiterated after their meeting that he opposes.

The pair met in the Oval Office with Secretary of State Marco Rubio also on hand. The president suggested he wouldn't withhold U.S. aid to Jordan or Egypt if they don't agree to dramatically increase the number of people from Gaza they take in.

"I don't have to threaten that. I do believe we're above that," Trump said. That contradicted the Republican president's previous suggestion that holding back aid from Washington was a possibility.

Abdullah was asked repeatedly about Trump's plan to clear out Gaza and overhaul it as a resort on the Mediterranean Sea. He didn't make substantive comments on it and didn't commit to the idea that his country could accept large numbers of Gazans.

He did say, however, that Jordan would be willing "right away" to take as many as 2,000 children in Gaza who are suffering from cancer or otherwise ill.

"I finally see somebody that can take us across the finish line to bring stability, peace and prosperity to all of us in the region," the king said of Trump in his statement at the top of the meeting.

Abdullah left the White House after about two hours and headed to Capitol Hill to meet with a bipartisan group of lawmakers. He posted on X that during his meeting with Trump, "I reiterated Jordan's steadfast position against the displacement of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank."

"This is the unified Arab position. Rebuilding Gaza without displacing the Palestinians and addressing the dire humanitarian situation should be the priority for all," Abdullah wrote.

That was despite Trump using his appearance with Abdullah to repeat suggestions that the U.S. could come to control Gaza. Trump also said Tuesday that it wouldn't require committing American funds but that the U.S. overseeing the war-torn region would be possible, "Under the U.S. authority," without elaborating what that actually was.

"We're not going to buy anything. We're going to have it," Trump said of U.S. control in Gaza. He suggested that the redeveloped area could have new hotels, office buildings and houses, "and we'll make it exciting."

"I can tell you about real estate. They're going to be in love with it," Trump, who built a New York real estate empire that catapulted him to fame, said of Gaza's residents, while also insisting that he personally would not be involved in development.

Trump has previously suggested that Gaza's residents could be displaced temporarily or permanently, an idea that leaders around the Arab world have sharply rebuked.

Additionally, Trump renewed his suggestions that a tenuous ceasefire between Hamas and Israel could be canceled if Hamas doesn't release all of the remaining hostages it is holding by midday on Saturday. Trump first made that suggestion on Monday, though he insisted then that the ultimate decision lies with Israel.

"I don't think they're going to make the deadline, personally," Trump said Tuesday of Hamas. "They want to play tough guy. We'll see how tough they are."

The king's visit came at a perilous moment for the ongoing ceasefire in Gaza. Hamas is accusing Israel of violating the truce and says it will delay future releases of hostages captured in its Oct. 7, 2023, attack.

In a statement, Hamas called Trump's Tuesday comments "racist" and "a call for ethnic cleansing." It

also accused the president of seeking to “liquidate the Palestinian cause and deny the national rights of the Palestinian people.”

Trump has repeatedly proposed the U.S. take control of Gaza and turn it into “the Riviera of the Middle East,” with Palestinians in the war-torn territory pushed into neighboring nations with no right of return.

Trump’s Tuesday comments contradicted his Monday suggestions that, if necessary, he would withhold U.S. funding from Jordan and Egypt — longtime U.S. allies and among the top recipients of its foreign aid — as a means of persuading them to accept additional Palestinians from Gaza.

Jordan is home to more than 2 million Palestinians. Jordan’s foreign minister, Ayman Safadi, said last week that his country’s opposition to Trump’s idea about displacing Gaza’s residents was “firm and unwavering.”

Besides concerns about jeopardizing the long-held goals of a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, Egypt and Jordan have privately raised security concerns about welcoming large numbers of additional refugees into their countries even temporarily.

Trump announced his ideas for resettling Palestinians from Gaza and taking ownership of the territory for the U.S. during a press conference last week with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The president initially didn’t rule out deploying U.S. troops to help secure Gaza but at the same time insisted no U.S. funds would go to pay for the reconstruction of the territory, raising fundamental questions about the nature of his plan.

After Trump’s initial comments, Rubio and White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt insisted that Trump only wanted Palestinians relocated from Gaza “temporarily” and sought an “interim” period to allow for debris removal, the disposal of unexploded ordnance and reconstruction.

But asked in an interview with Fox News’ Bret Baier that aired Monday if Palestinians in Gaza would have a right to return to the territory under his plan, he replied, “No, they wouldn’t.”

Salman Rushdie testifies about his shock and pain as an attacker repeatedly stabbed him on stage

By CAROLYN THOMPSON and HILLEL ITALIE Associated Press

MAYVILLE, N.Y. (AP) — With a mix of humor and graphic detail, Salman Rushdie calmly told a jury Tuesday about the frenzied moments in August 2022 when a masked man rushed at him on a stage in western New York and repeatedly slashed him with a knife, leaving him with terrible injuries.

“It occurred to me that I was dying. That was my predominant thought,” the renowned author said, adding that the people who subdued the assailant likely saved his life.

Just a short drive from where the attack at the Chautauqua Institution occurred, Rushdie took the stand during the second day of testimony at the trial of Hadi Matar, 27, who has pleaded not guilty to attempted murder and assault in the attack, which also wounded another man.

It was the first time since the stabbing that the 77-year-old writer found himself in the same room as Matar, whom Rushdie refused to even name when he looked back on the day in his 2023 memoir, “Knife.” The book called him “the A,” as in assassin, or assailant or asinine.

In the memoir Rushdie imagined a conversation with his assailant, fabricating a dialogue — a strained attempt at understanding — they might have had should the two ever speak.

But on Tuesday they hardly seemed to acknowledge each other. Rushdie on occasion looked off to his right, where the defendant sat some 20 feet (6 meters) away, but showed no sign of recognition. Matar, with attorneys on either side, rarely raised his head while Rushdie spoke.

District Attorney Jason Schmidt did not ask Rushdie to identify Matar. Rushdie testified that he got just a brief look at the man who rushed across the stage and stabbed him repeatedly with a 10-inch (25 centimeter) knife.

In testimony stricken from the record at the defense’s request, he added: “I was very struck by his eyes, which were dark and seemed very ferocious.”

Rushdie said he first thought his attacker was striking him with a fist. “But I saw a large quantity of blood pouring onto my clothes,” he said. “He was hitting me repeatedly. Hitting and slashing.”

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The testimony came just ahead of the 36th anniversary of the day — Feb. 14, 1989 — that Rushdie has ruefully referred to as the worst possible Valentine's Day, when Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a fatwa calling for his death because of the supposed blasphemy in his novel "The Satanic Verses."

Rushdie spent years in hiding, a wrenching adjustment for an otherwise engaging and sociable man. But after Iran announced that it would not enforce the decree, he had traveled freely over the past quarter century, and security lightened to the point where his Chautauqua talk was announced months in advance.

Several law enforcement cars were in front of the courthouse Tuesday morning, and security was also present on the rooftop of the jail across the street.

Matar is a dual Lebanese-U.S. citizen, born in the U.S. to immigrants from Yaroun in Hezbollah-dominated southern Lebanon near the Israeli border, according to the village's mayor. In a jailhouse interview with the New York Post, he did not refer directly to "The Satanic Verses" but called Rushdie someone "who attacked Islam."

On the trial's first day, Mahar calmly said "Free Palestine" while being led into the courtroom. On Tuesday he said in a dull chant, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."

The trial is expected to last around two weeks.

In a separate indictment, federal authorities allege that Matar was driven to act by a terrorist organization's 2006 endorsement of the fatwa. A later trial on federal terrorism charges will be scheduled in U.S. District Court in Buffalo.

Rushdie, dressed in a plain, dark suit, spoke in an even, mild tone, even when recounting how he lay in a "lake" of blood. He briefly bared to the jurors his now-blinded right eye, usually hidden behind a darkened eyeglass lens.

Born in India, raised in Britain and now a U.S. citizen, Rushdie is a Booker Prize-winning author who has been famous worldwide since "Midnight's Children" was published more than 40 years ago. He has long been known for his eloquence, candor and wit that can surface in unexpected moments.

Under direct examination Rushdie spoke of undergoing painful surgery to seal the lid of his blinded eye. He turned to the jurors, and joked, "I don't recommend it."

Under cross examination from public defender Lynn Schaffer, who challenged his memories of the attack, he acknowledged that it was hard to say precisely how many times he was stabbed: "I wasn't counting at the time. I was otherwise occupied."

Rushdie spent 17 days at a Pennsylvania hospital and more than three weeks at a New York City rehabilitation center, where he relearned basic skills like squeezing toothpaste from a tube. He detailed his months of recovery in "Knife."

"I think I'm not quite at 100%. I think I've substantially recovered, but it's probably 75% to 80%," Rushdie testified. "I'm not as energetic as I used to be. I'm not as physically strong as I used to be."

Rushdie's wife, Rachel Eliza Griffiths, sat in the second row in the courtroom. In 2022 she took an emergency private flight to be at his side after being told he was unlikely to survive, and he dedicated a chapter of his book to her.

Griffiths cried at times, fanning herself and gripping the hand of a friend sitting beside her. As Rushdie left the room after his testimony, she smiled warmly at him and clasped her hands across her chest.

Hamas' threat to delay the next release of Israeli hostages raises fears for Gaza ceasefire

JERUSALEM (AP) — Hamas' threat to delay the next planned release of Israeli hostages from the Gaza Strip has jolted a fragile ceasefire that's seen as having the potential to wind down the war.

It has brought new dismay for Israelis who watched the latest Hamas handover of hostages in growing horror over the weekend as the three emaciated men came into sight. Of the 17 hostages yet to be released from Gaza under this phase of the ceasefire, Israel has said eight are dead.

President Donald Trump responded to Hamas' threat by saying the ceasefire should be canceled if all

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the remaining hostages are not freed by midday Saturday, though he said that was Israel's decision to make. The militant group brushed off the threat, saying the hostages would only be returned if all sides held to the truce.

The next handover of three hostages had been scheduled for Saturday, and families say time is running out for those still alive. Israel now awaits what comes from a security Cabinet meeting moved up in response to Monday's Hamas announcement.

The developments also have led to new fear in Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians have surged to what remains of their homes in the territory's north after fleeing in the war's earliest weeks.

The uncertainty, just over halfway into the ceasefire's six-week first phase, complicates talks on the far more difficult second phase. It also jeopardizes the pause in the devastating fighting and the increase in humanitarian aid for Gaza that the truce has made possible.

Already, there had been concerns that the war would resume at the end of the first phase in early March. What happened?

Hamas accused Israel of not holding up its end of the deal by initially delaying the return of Palestinians to northern Gaza over an earlier dispute, carrying out strikes across the territory and hindering the entry of tents, mobile homes and medical supplies for hospitals.

The militant group, which quickly reasserted control over Gaza when the ceasefire began on Jan. 19, said the next hostage release would be delayed "until further notice."

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz called the delay "a complete violation" of the ceasefire agreement, and he instructed the military to be on highest alert. The prime minister's coordinator for hostages said the government intends to live up to its end of the deal.

A later Hamas statement called the postponement a "warning signal" to Israel and noted that five days remained for mediators – the United States, Qatar and Egypt -- to pressure Israel to act. "The door remains open for the exchange to proceed as planned if Israel abides by its obligations," it said.

There was no immediate public reaction from the other mediators.

What's Trump saying?

The Hamas announcement came as Trump pressed further on his stunning proposal to remove the Palestinian population from devastated Gaza and have the U.S. take "ownership" of the territory. He told Fox News on Sunday that the Palestinians would not have the right to return.

That deepened the shock among Palestinians, who live with the history of fleeing or being forced from their homes in what is now Israel during the 1948 war. And it brought new condemnation from Arab nations that have long pressed for an independent Palestinian state.

Trump's comments contradicted some of his own administration officials who had said the president was only calling for the Palestinians' temporary relocation.

Hamas has repeatedly condemned Trump's Gaza proposal but has not linked those objections to the future of the ceasefire.

Who and what is at stake?

In immediate limbo is the planned release on Saturday of three more Israeli hostages, along with dozens more Palestinian prisoners from Israeli custody.

Such exchanges — five so far in a gradual release of 33 hostages — have been sometimes tense and chaotic acts of trust that have gradually pushed the ceasefire forward, allowing its other measures to fall into place.

But the latest release brought home like no other the bleak and dangerous conditions for those still held in Gaza.

Relatives of the newly released hostages, at times sobbing, have described people being chained or held underground for months and eating half a piece of pita per day. Freed hostages have described going months without showering.

The accounts have put furious new pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government to begin the delayed talks on the ceasefire's second phase, which is meant to see dozens of remaining

hostages released and bring a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.

"The hostages are in a clear and present danger. Their lives are at risk," a doctor working with families of hostages, Hagai Levine, warned on Monday. "Delaying their release means that some of them will not survive."

New York City's mayor has 4 months to persuade Democratic voters he's not Trump's puppet

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

New York City Mayor Eric Adams declared Tuesday that he is "no longer facing legal questions" after the Justice Department moved to shield him from the bribery charges that have been hanging over his reelection campaign.

But now, with the Democratic primary just four months away, he faces a seemingly impossible political balancing act.

The Democrat may have to continue pleasing Republican President Donald Trump with his policies and public statements to keep the charges from being revived — while simultaneously convincing voters in a deep-blue city that he's still his own man.

Adams' fraught position is owed to a section of the extraordinary Justice Department memo that ordered prosecutors to drop the case but left open the possibility that the charges could be brought back.

In the memo, acting Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove told prosecutors in New York not to take "additional investigative steps" against the mayor until after the November election — when the new top prosecutor in the district will review the case and could potentially reinstate charges.

The decision was not based on the facts of the case, Bove wrote, but came instead because the prosecution was distracting Adams from campaigning and helping Trump carry out his hard-line immigration agenda in New York.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, a close ally of Adams' who holds sway among perhaps the mayor's most crucial voting bloc, said in a pointed statement Tuesday that the arrangement amounts to "essentially political blackmail."

"So if the Mayor were to disagree with the president, does that mean they have the right to call a trial on him at any time?" Sharpton asked. "It certainly sounds like President Trump is holding the mayor hostage."

Adams was already fending off accusations that he had become beholden to the president in order to secure leniency in his criminal case.

Now his primary challengers have a fresh angle of attack, arguing that everything the mayor does moving forward can be interpreted as an attempt to please a president who has unprecedented sway over a prominent Democrat who could have been a high-profile rival.

"Eric Adams no longer works for New Yorkers. He works for Donald Trump. Period," state Sen. Zellnor Myrie, a mayoral candidate, said at a news conference. "Mayor Eric Adams will be under the thumb and control under Donald Trump until November."

Adams, a former police officer, was indicted in September on federal conspiracy, wire fraud and bribery charges, with prosecutors alleging Adams allowed Turkish officials and businesspeople to buy his influence with illegal campaign contributions and lavish overseas trips in exchange for political favors.

Before the charges, Adams ran for office and governed as a centrist, often warring with New York City liberals that he castigates as unrealistic. He was a registered Republican for a period of time earlier in his political career.

Still, it is undeniable that Adams has significantly warmed to Trump since the case emerged and has built a relationship with the new administration, meeting with the Republican's so-called border czar on immigration enforcement and attending Trump's inauguration.

Adams late last year also suggested that he was open to changing political parties to become a Republican but walked the idea back after criticism that he was openly courting Trump.

On Monday, hours before the memo became public, Adams convened his top deputies to discuss the

city's response to Trump's policies, including a recent directive that appeared to open the door to further cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

During the meeting, Adams instructed his deputies not to publicly spar with Trump, warning it could put federal grants at risk, according to an official who attended the meeting. The person requested anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter.

Among Adams's other declared primary challengers are city Comptroller Brad Lander, former comptroller Scott Stringer, state Sen. Jessica Ramos and state Assemblyman Zohran Mamdani.

Former Gov. Andrew Cuomo has also been eyeing an entry into the race and could be a formidable candidate, despite having resigned from office following multiple sexual harassment allegations.

George Arzt, a veteran New York Democratic political operative, said Adams will have to proceed carefully.

"I think he'll know what to do with Trump. The problem is that he can be handcuffed to Trump in an election year, and he's got to be very, very careful," Arzt said. "Yes, he wants the charges dropped officially, but no, he doesn't want to be linked closely to Trump, even though he is already."

In his first public statement since the Justice Department memo became public, Adams maintained that he is innocent of the charges, saying: "I would never put any personal benefit above my solemn responsibility as your mayor."

"Despite the fact that I am no longer facing legal questions, I also understand that many New Yorkers will still question my character," Adams said in a speech. "And I know that I must continue to regain your trust."

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat who has the power to remove Adams from office but has repeatedly said she would not do so, told reporters Tuesday that everything Adams does will now be "under a spotlight."

"I don't know whether anyone is compromised in that situation. I truly do not know," she said. "I have to believe that the mayor is going to put the interests of New York City first."

"I just want to have a partner who has the same priorities that I do and that is focused on the people of this city and nothing else," she said.

NASA's 2 stuck astronauts may return to Earth sooner under new plan

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA's two stuck astronauts may end up back on Earth a little sooner than planned.

The space agency announced Tuesday that SpaceX will switch capsules for upcoming astronaut flights in order to bring Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams home in mid-March instead of late March or April. That will shave at least a couple weeks off their prolonged stay at the International Space Station, which hit the eight-month mark last week.

"Human spaceflight is full of unexpected challenges," NASA's commercial crew program manager Steve Stich said in a statement.

The test pilots should have returned in June on Boeing's Starliner capsule after what should have been a weeklong flight demo. But the capsule had so much trouble getting to the space station that NASA decided to bring it back empty and reassigned the pair to SpaceX.

Then SpaceX delayed the launch of their replacements on a brand new capsule that needed more prep-work, which added more time to Wilmore and Williams' mission.

With even more work still anticipated for the new capsule, NASA opted for its next crew to fly up on an older capsule, with liftoff now targeted for March 12. This older capsule had already been assigned to a private crew awaiting launch this spring.

The private flight arranged by the Houston company Axiom Space, featuring astronauts from Poland, Hungary and India, was bumped and will launch later to the space station, possibly still this spring.

NASA prefers having a new crew arrive before sending the old one back, in this case Wilmore, Williams

and two others up there since September. The new crew going up includes two NASA astronauts, as well as one from Japan and one from Russia.

NASA's latest change in plans comes two weeks after the space agency said it was working "expeditiously" to bring back Wilmore and Williams as soon as possible. Just a day earlier, President Donald Trump and SpaceX's Elon Musk had vowed to accelerate the astronauts' return.

Vance offers an 'America First' argument on AI deregulation in his first foreign policy speech

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — In his first big moment on the world stage, Vice President JD Vance delivered an unmistakable message: the United States under the 47th president has room for you on the Trump train — but it also has no problem leaving you behind.

Vance, speaking at the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit in Paris on Tuesday, hewed closely to President Donald Trump's "America First" outlook as he spoke of maintaining U.S. dominance in the surging industry.

He also pressed European nations to step back from "excessive regulation" of the AI sector that he said "could kill a transformative industry just as it's taking off."

"Now, just because we're the leader doesn't mean we want to or need to go it alone," Vance said. "But to create that kind of trust, we need international regulatory regimes that fosters the creation of AI technology rather than strangles it. And we need our European friends in particular to look to this new frontier with optimism rather than trepidation."

The message was centered on AI, but the tone and substance of Vance's remarks fall in line with a Trump administration that has been approaching policymaking — and its opponents — with the attitude that it's a juggernaut that will not be stopped.

Already, Trump has effectively shut down much of foreign aid through the United States Agency for International Development. He remains insistent that post-war Gaza will be taken over and redeveloped by the U.S. into a "Riviera of the Middle East," despite Palestinians and much of the Arab world flatly rejecting his plans. He has also threatened to take back the Panama Canal and turn Canada into 51st state.

Vance's remarks contrasted sharply with the overall tenor and content of the summit, which was largely focused on protecting democracies from disinformation and promoting the use of AI technology for the public interest.

"The United States of America is the leader in AI, and our administration plans to keep that," Vance said. "The AI future is not going to be won by hand-wringing about safety. It will be won by building."

Early in his address, he knocked former President Joe Biden's administration for being far too risk averse and referred derisively to a speech that then-Vice President Kamala Harris gave at a summit two years ago.

"I'm not here this morning to talk about AI safety, which was the title of the conference a couple of years ago," Vance said. "I'm here to talk about AI opportunity."

For Vance, the five-day overseas visit to Paris, and later Munich, for a pair of summits gives him an early chance to rub shoulders with world leaders and the titans of the tech industry.

But his boss threw a little shade at Vance ahead of the trip, telling Fox News that the vice president was "very capable" but that he wasn't ready to endorse him as his heir apparent in 2028.

"I think you have a lot of very capable people," Trump said. "So far, I think he's doing a fantastic job. It's too early. We're just starting."

The Paris summit was billed by organizers France and India as an opportunity for leaders to focus on solutions and standards for shaping a more sustainable AI that works for collective progress.

Vance told emerging AI innovators that America is open for business while expressing disbelief that some "foreign governments are considering tightening the screws on U.S. tech companies with international footprints."

"This administration will not be the one to snuff out the startups and the grad students, producing some of the most groundbreaking applications of artificial intelligence," Vance said. "Instead, our laws will keep

Big Tech, Little Tech and all other developers on a level playing field.”

The vice president arrived in Paris with Trump sparking new tension with world leaders, including some at the AI summit.

Trump on Sunday announced hours before Vance embarked for his trip that he would levy 25% tariffs on all foreign aluminum and steel.

The new tariffs didn't sit well with some U.S. allies. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen issued a statement early Tuesday that the U.S. tariffs “will not go unanswered.”

Hours later, von der Leyen and Vance sat down for talks at the U.S. embassy. Neither directly addressed the steel and aluminum tariffs in their brief appearance before reporters.

“We also want to make sure that we're actually engaged in a security partnership that's good for both Europe and the United States,” Vance said, as Trump has also been pressing for NATO members to dramatically increase domestic spending.

Von der Leyen, for her part, noted a moment in Vance's speech when he called for allies to be motivated by optimism instead of fear.

“I think the same should go for our transatlantic relations,” von der Leyen said. “We should look with optimism.”

Vance and his wife, Usha, were hosted for lunch with French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife, Brigitte, at the Elysee Palace.

In an address on the opening day of the summit, Macron took a jab at Trump, contrasting France's push for reducing its reliance on fossil fuels with Trump's belief that pumping more oil could be the answer to solving all that's wrong with the economy.

“In this world, where I have a good friend on the other side of the ocean saying, ‘Drill, baby, drill,’” Macron said. “Here, there's no need to drill. It's just plug, baby, plug.”

Vance will head on Thursday to Munich, where he's slated to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to discuss Russia's war on Ukraine, visit the site of the former Dachau concentration camp and deliver a much-anticipated address to the Munich Security Conference.

What to know about the Trump administration moving to drop corruption charges against NYC mayor

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City Mayor Eric Adams was thrown a lifeline when the Trump administration moved to drop federal corruption charges against the embattled leader of America's largest city.

It marked an extraordinary deviation from longstanding norms of federal prosecutions, but, in many ways, was entirely expected, given the months of political intrigue involving closed-door talks and public overtures between the Democratic mayor and Republican president.

Here's what you need to know:

Did the mayor just reach a plea deal or get a pardon?

Neither. The Justice Department on Monday simply ordered prosecutors to drop the charges before the case even goes to trial, which had been set for April.

In a two-page memo, acting Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove, second in command at the U.S. Justice Department, directed prosecutors in New York to dismiss the bribery charges against Adams “as soon as is practicable.”

He also ordered the office of the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York to halt the ongoing investigation into the mayor's conduct — at least for now. Bove said prosecutors should review the case sometime after the November mayoral election to see if the charges should be revived.

“There shall be no further targeting of Mayor Adams or additional investigative steps prior to that review,” Bove added.

Prosecutors in the U.S. attorney's office had yet to comment on the directive or file any paperwork with the court to begin the process of formally dropping the case.

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Why are the feds seeking to drop the charges?

The decision wasn't based on the "strength of the evidence" against Adams or the "integrity and efforts" of the career prosecutors who worked on the case, Bove said in his memo.

Instead, the high-profile prosecution — the first against a sitting New York City mayor — has "improperly interfered" with Adams' reelection campaign, he said.

The case has also been distracting the Democratic executive from advancing the priorities of the Republican White House, namely around immigration, argued Bove, who previously served on Trump's legal team when he was convicted of falsifying business records in New York last year.

"The pending prosecution has unduly restricted Mayor Adams' ability to devote full attention and resources to the illegal immigration and violent crime that escalated under the policies of the prior Administration," he wrote.

Is it unusual to drop a case against a public official like this?

Extremely. While prosecutions against elected officials occasionally fall apart for reasons related to the strength of the evidence, it is an extraordinary departure for the Justice Department to drop a case because an accused person is perceived to be a likely political ally.

And while judges and prosecutors do sometimes adjust the timing of a trial or an indictment to avoid the appearance that they are interfering in with an election, it is extremely rare to drop an existing case entirely for that reason.

Does this close the case for good?

Not quite. Bove's letter says the case should be dismissed without prejudice, giving prosecutors the flexibility to refile charges at a later date.

The letter also says the mayor has to agree in writing to that key caveat, giving Adams' critics concern that he will be under intense pressure to meet Trump's demands if he remains in office.

"The only thing worse for our city than Trump giving the mayor a get-out-of-jail-free card is the unspoken deal that comes with it," New York City Council member Shaun Abreu, a Democrat who represents upper Manhattan, said on social media. "Our mayor shouldn't be beholden to anyone but the voters. A dismissal without prejudice means Adams isn't off the hook; he's just on notice."

What was Adams accused of doing?

Adams was indicted in September on charges including conspiracy, wire fraud and bribery.

Prosecutors accused him of accepting illegal campaign contributions and lavish overseas trips while he was a local elected official in Brooklyn and while he was campaigning to become mayor.

The indictment said that in exchange, Adams did favors for foreign government officials and local businesspeople, including expediting city approvals for the Turkish consulate's new building in Manhattan.

What happens to others charged in the investigation?

It isn't clear. Prosecutors earlier this month said Mohamed Bahi, Adams' chief liaison to the Muslim community, planned to plead guilty to charges that he conspired to commit wire fraud by collecting campaign contributions made under the name of someone other than the true contributor.

A Brooklyn real estate magnate, Erden Arkan, previously pleaded guilty to conspiracy, admitting that he worked with a Turkish government official to funnel illegal campaign contributions to Adams.

What's next for Adams?

The mayor goes from the perils of a federal corruption probe to a bruising reelection fight.

He faces at least eight challengers, many of them more left-leaning and progressive. Among them are the current and the former city comptrollers, various state lawmakers and a handful of others who have never held political office.

Former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo has also been weighing a potential run. Cuomo resigned in 2021 following a state attorney general report that found he sexually harassed at least 11 women.

Adding to the political calculus, Adams hasn't ruled out the possibility of switching back to the GOP.

The Brooklynite, who was a registered Republican in the 1990s and early 2000s, attended Trump's inauguration last month and lunched with top New York Republicans in Washington.

He's also instructed officials to lawfully cooperate with Trump's agenda around immigration and other

issues, while flatly refusing to criticize the president or any of his policies.

As egg prices continue to soar, grocers like Trader Joe's limit how many cartons customers can buy

By JOSH FUNK and WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writers

Not only are eggs expensive because of the ongoing bird flu outbreak. Now they are getting hard to find. And when stores do have eggs, consumers are starting to face limits on how many they can buy.

Eggs have become such a hot commodity that there have even been a couple of heists where thieves seem to be treating the yolks as if they were made out of gold.

The problem isn't going away because the virus continues to mutate and infect more birds, other animals and some people. And anytime a chicken or turkey gets sick, the entire flock is slaughtered to help limit the spread.

The shortages tend to be isolated, so they might not be a problem at your store. But there's no way to predict when a massive farm with millions of birds might get hit, and just one of those cases can cause supply problems.

As a result, prices have skyrocketed.

Jose Castillo said it's becoming hard to keep the Cuban sandwiches and king cakes affordable at his Norma's Sweets Bakery in New Orleans because he's paying nearly four times as much for eggs now.

"Oh it's hurting man. It's crazy how expensive eggs are," said Castillo who is one of the bakery's co-owners. "Normally we'll get them for \$35, \$40 dollars a case and now we're paying like \$118, \$120 dollars."

Hard to find

Empty egg shelves are becoming more common across the country. Sometimes shoppers have to check two or three stores or seek out a local farmer to get their eggs.

This outbreak has taken a tremendous toll on poultry since it began in 2022. Nearly 158 million birds have been slaughtered overall with the majority being egg-laying chickens.

That hurts egg supplies and drives prices higher. But with more than 300 million chickens nationwide laying eggs for breakfast and baking, the industry can usually deal with the loss of a few million birds without many disruptions.

The problems come when larger numbers of birds have to be killed. Last month more than 23 million birds were killed, and that came right after 18 million were slaughtered in December.

And when egg farmers do have to kill their entire flocks it takes at least a month or two to get new birds because the carcasses must be disposed of and all the barns must be sanitized before the farm is cleared. So the effects linger.

Limiting purchases

Trader Joe's is capping purchases to one carton per customer each day, the Monrovia, California-based chain confirmed. That limit applies to all Trader Joe's locations across the country.

"We hope these limits will help to ensure that as many of our customers who need eggs are able to purchase them when they visit Trader Joe's," the company said in a statement sent to The Associated Press Tuesday.

In addition, consumers and several local media outlets have also reported varying limits at stores like Costco, Whole Foods, Kroger and Aldi locations. But not all those limits are nationwide.

A spokesperson for Kroger, for example, confirmed that the supermarket giant doesn't currently have "enterprise-wide limits" in place — but said some of regional divisions and store banners are asking customers to cap egg purchases to two dozen per trip.

Walmart says it also hasn't imposed national limits — except for bulkier purchases of 60-count cartons, which have been capped to two per purchase, the Bentonville, Arkansas-based retail giant confirmed Tuesday.

"Although supply is very tight, we're working with suppliers to try and help meet customer demand, while striving to keep prices as low as possible," Walmart said in an emailed statement.

An expensive option

The average price per dozen nationwide hit \$4.15 in December — more than double the price in the summer of 2023 — and it appears there may be no relief in sight, with the Agriculture Department predicting prices will soar another 20% this year.

Demand will rise as Easter approaches because eggs are popular for holiday dishes and traditional Easter egg hunts.

So when the Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes new numbers on Wednesday, egg prices are almost certain to be even higher, although they will probably still be short of the record \$4.82 set in January 2023.

But of course those are only average prices. Consumers are already paying more than \$10 a dozen in some places across the country — especially if they choose pricier organic or cage-free options.

Beyond grocery stores limits, U.S. consumers are also facing more expensive eggs in some restaurants. Last week, Waffle House, for example, said it would add a 50-cent surcharge per egg on all of its menus.

Cracking the case

With prices that high, it's no wonder that thieves have started to covet eggs.

Seattle police said they were investigating the theft of over 500 eggs from a restaurant last week.

Security camera footage from the early morning hours of last Wednesday showed two men entering a refrigerated shed at Luna Park Cafe in West Seattle. The men removed boxes containing some 540 eggs and liquid egg products -- as well as bacon, ground beef and blueberries -- and loaded them into a van before leaving the scene. The stolen breakfast items were worth about \$780, police said.

Earlier this month, 100,000 eggs were reported stolen from the back of a trailer in Pennsylvania. The eggs were snatched from a Pete & Gerry's Organics' distribution trailer on Saturday about 8:40 p.m. in Antrim Township, according to police.

Those stolen eggs are worth about \$40,000.

New York mayor vows to regain public's trust after Justice Department orders halt to prosecution

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City Mayor Eric Adams vowed to regain the public's trust Tuesday as the Justice Department moved to halt his criminal corruption case, an extraordinary directive that officials said would free him up to assist in the Trump administration's immigration crackdown.

In his first public comments since federal prosecutors were ordered to drop the case, Adams said he was eager to "put this cruel episode behind us and focus entirely on the future of this city."

He did not mention President Donald Trump by name but praised the Justice Department for its "honesty," adding that he would "never put any personal benefit above my solemn responsibility as your mayor."

The mayor's brief address at City Hall came one day after acting Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove told federal prosecutors in Manhattan to dismiss the bribery charges "as soon as is practicable."

In a two-page memo, Bove said the Justice Department reached the decision "without assessing the strength of the evidence." Rather, he claimed the case was politically motivated and said the dismissal would allow Adams to "devote full attention and resources" to combating illegal immigration and violent crime.

Adams, who was elected as a centrist Democrat, had already shifted rightward following his indictment in September, praising Trump and expressing a willingness to roll back some of the city's protections for undocumented migrants. But in the wake of the memo, he is facing a barrage of criticism from those who say he is now beholden to the Trump administration's agenda.

"It certainly sounds like President Trump is holding the Mayor hostage," Rev. Al Sharpton, an influential ally of Adams, said in a statement Tuesday. "I have supported the Mayor, but he has been put in an unfair position — even for him — of essentially political blackmail."

Several of the mayor's challengers in the Democratic Party also suggested Adams would now put Trump's interests over those of New Yorkers. Asked on Tuesday if the mayor was compromised, Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, responded: "I truly don't know."

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The task of carrying out the Justice Department's order now falls to Danielle Sassoon, a seasoned prosecutor who was appointed acting U.S. attorney in Manhattan just days after Trump took office.

Her office declined to comment and has not indicated what it plans to do next. In a letter sent last month, prosecutors in the Adams case praised the strength of the evidence, dismissing the mayor's claim of political prosecution as an attempt "to shift the focus away from the evidence of his guilt."

Sassoon has limited power to oppose the order. She can be replaced at will by the Justice Department. Trump in November nominated Jay Clayton, the former chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, to lead the office. His appointment must be confirmed by the Senate.

Under the terms laid out in the memo, the charges could still be refiled after the November mayoral election. Dismissal of the case should be conditional, Bove said, on Adams agreeing in writing that prosecutors are legally allowed to bring the charges back if they choose.

That means the threat of a renewed prosecution will hover over Adams in all of his dealings with the Trump administration while he is mayor.

"I have not seen anything like this before," said Arlo Devlin-Brown, the former chief of public corruption at the U.S. attorney's office in Manhattan. "For a case that's already been charged to be reversed in the absence of some real new development in the merits of the case is highly unusual."

Even with some uncertainty about what happens next, Adams struck a tone of vindication Tuesday, describing the criminal prosecution against him as an "unnecessary ordeal" that had been sensationalized in the media.

"Who I am is not in the headlines, it's in my history," he said. "As I said from the outset, I never broke the law and I never would."

Federal prosecutors charged Adams in September with accepting illegal campaign contributions and lavish travel perks worth more than \$100,000 — including expensive flight upgrades and luxury hotel stays — while serving in his previous job as Brooklyn borough president.

The indictment said a Turkish official who helped facilitate the trips then leaned on Adams for favors, including lobbying the Fire Department to allow a newly constructed diplomatic building to open in time for a planned visit by Turkey's president.

Prosecutors also said they had evidence Adams personally directed campaign staffers to solicit foreign donations, then disguised those contributions to qualify for a city program that provides a generous, publicly funded match for small donations. Foreign nationals are banned from contributing to U.S. election campaigns under federal law.

Adams was set to stand in trial in April.

In addition to the charges brought against him, federal prosecutors had homed in on several high-ranking members of his administration, producing a drumbeat of raids and subpoenas that prompted resignations from his police commissioner, schools chancellor and multiple deputy mayors, as well as the director of Asian affairs and other top advisers.

It was not immediately clear what, if anything, will become of those inquiries. It was also not known how the directive would affect defendants tied to Adams already facing charges.

Just last week, federal prosecutors said City Hall's chief liaison to the Muslim community would plead guilty to collecting illegal campaign contributions on behalf of the Adams campaign. In January, a Brooklyn real estate magnate pleaded guilty to helping channel illegal foreign campaign contributions to Adams.

Attorneys for those men did not immediately return messages seeking comment.

Plastic straws have come to symbolize a global pollution crisis. Trump wants them to stay

By JENNIFER McDERMOTT Associated Press

Straws might seem insignificant, inspiring jokes about the plastic vs. paper debate, but the plastic straw has come to symbolize a global pollution crisis over the past decade.

On Monday, President Donald Trump waded into the issue when he signed an executive order to reverse

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a federal push away from plastic straws, declaring that paper straws “don’t work” and don’t last very long. Trump said he thinks “it’s OK” to continue using plastic straws, although they’ve have been blamed for polluting oceans and harming marine life.

In 2015, video of a marine biologist pulling a plastic straw out of a turtle’s nose sparked outrage world-wide and countries and cities started banning them, starting with the Pacific Island nation Vanuatu and Seattle in 2018.

Here’s what to know about the larger fight over single-use plastics in the United States:

What happens to plastic straws?

More than 390 million plastic straws are used every day in the United States, most for 30 minutes or less, according to advocacy group Turtle Island Restoration Network.

Plastic straws are usually thrown away after one use, going on to litter beaches and waterways and potentially killing marine animals that mistake them for food.

The straws are not recyclable because they are so small. They take at least 200 years to decompose, the network said.

They break down into incredibly tiny bits of plastic smaller than a fraction of a grain of rice. These micro-plastics have been found in a wide range of body tissues. Though research is still limited overall, there are growing concerns that microplastics in the body could potentially be linked to heart disease, Alzheimer’s and dementia, and other problems.

Trump’s executive order claims that paper straws use chemicals that may carry risks to human health are more expensive to produce than plastic straws. Researchers from the University of Antwerp found forever chemicals known as PFAS to be present in paper, bamboo, glass and plastic straws, but not stainless steel ones, according to a 2023 study.

The advocacy group Beyond Plastics said that while plastics are often cheaper than paper products, the cheapest option is to skip the straw.

Judith Enck, a former Environmental Protection Agency regional administrator who now heads up Beyond Plastics, said she hopes that people react to the executive order by committing to using fewer plastic straws and that local and state governments do, too.

“It’s easy to just kind of almost poke fun of this, ignore it,” she said Tuesday. “But this is a moment that we as individuals and state and local policymakers can make a statement that they disagree with this executive order and are committed to using less plastic straws. It’s not that hard to do.”

Several states and cities have banned plastic straws and some restaurants no longer automatically give them to customers.

What is being done globally?

President Joe Biden administration’s had committed to phasing out federal purchases of single-use plastics, including straws, from food service operations, events and packaging by 2027, and from all federal operations by 2035.

The move was a way for the federal government to formally acknowledge the severity of the plastic pollution crisis and the scale of the response required to effectively confront it.

Erin Simon, an expert on plastics and packaging at the World Wildlife Fund, said at the time that it sent a message around the world: If we can make change happen at scale, so can you.

The declaration came in July, just a few months before negotiators met in South Korea to try to finish crafting a treaty to address the global crisis of plastic pollution. Negotiators didn’t reach an agreement late last year, but talks resume this year.

Under the Biden administration, the United States at first adopted a position viewed as favoring industry, stating that countries should largely develop their own plans instead of abiding by global rules. China, the United States and Germany are the biggest players in the global plastics trade.

The United States changed its position heading into South Korea. The delegation said it would support having an article in the treaty that addresses supply, or plastic production. More than 100 countries want an ambitious treaty that limits plastic production while tackling cleanup and recycling.

U.S. manufacturers have asked Trump to remain at the negotiating table but revert to the old position that focused on redesigning plastic products, recycling and reuse.

Aren't other plastics a problem?

The environment is littered with single-use plastic food and beverage containers — water bottles, takeout containers, coffee lids, straws and shopping bags.

Every year, the world produces more than 400 million tons of new plastic. About 40% of all plastics are used in packaging, according to the United Nations.

In 2023, Ocean Conservancy volunteers collected more than 61,000 plastic straws and stirrers polluting beaches and waterways in the United States. There were even more cigarette butts, plastic bottles, bottle caps and food wrappers, the nonprofit said.

Most plastic is made from fossil fuels. Negotiators at the United Nations climate talks known as COP28 agreed in 2023 the world must transition away from planet-warming fossil fuels and triple the use of renewable energy.

As pressure to reduce fossil fuels has increased globally, oil and gas companies have been looking more to the plastics side of their business as a market that could grow. Trump strongly supports and gets support from the oil and gas industry.

Fed chair says bank accounts 'safe' despite Trump's teardown of consumer protection agency

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans' bank accounts are safe despite the Trump administration's shutdown of a consumer financial regulatory agency, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said Tuesday.

Powell, testifying before the Senate Banking Committee, said "bank accounts overall across the economy are safe" and backed by government deposit insurance. Powell's comments followed partisan comments from Republican and Democratic senators regarding the Trump administration's order over the weekend for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to end all of its supervisory and rule-making work.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a Democrat from Massachusetts who pushed for its creation of the CFPB in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and recession, said, "I'd be really worried about doing business with a giant bank when there's no cop on the beat."

Powell, meanwhile, received little scrutiny from senators about the Fed's interest-rate policy, which has contributed to higher borrowing costs but has also been credited for helping bring down inflation.

And while several senators flagged the spike in inflation that followed the pandemic, Powell faced little questioning about when the Fed believes it could return inflation — now at 2.6%, according to the Fed's preferred measure — to its 2% target.

Sen. John Kennedy, a Republican from Louisiana, praised Powell and the Fed for bringing down inflation from a 7.2% peak in June 2022. Kennedy noted that many economists had forecast that the Fed's steep rate hikes in 2022 and 2023 would cause a recession. Yet, instead, the economy has continued to expand.

"The fact is, knock on wood, we have experienced a soft landing," Kennedy said. Fed officials "deserve credit" for that, he added.

Powell largely sought to avoid responding when asked about the potential impact of additional tariffs, which President Donald Trump has proposed, on inflation and the Fed's key rate, which is currently at about 4.3%, down from a two-decade high of 5.3% last year.

Powell instead underscored his previous comments that with the economy generally healthy the Fed can afford to wait and see how the economy evolves and whether tariffs affect growth and inflation before making any further rate cuts. The Fed cut its key rate three times last year, but last month left it unchanged.

"We do not need to be in a hurry to adjust our policy stance," Powell said in the first of two days of testimony on Capitol Hill.

Powell was quickly thrust into the partisan turmoil surrounding Trump's flurry of executive orders and

the efforts of billionaire Elon Musk, through the Department of Government Efficiency, to slash government programs.

Warren, who repeatedly referred to “co-president Musk,” also urged Powell to maintain the Fed’s support for the CFPB, which gets its funding from the Fed.

“Do not make the Federal Reserve an accomplice to this illegal act, and forever sully the reputation of the Fed,” Warren said.

Republican senators, however, downplayed the impact of dismantling the CFPB. The bureau has sought to cap overdraft fees, ban junk fees, and says it has returned \$20 billion to consumers since its inception.

Sen. Pete Ricketts, a Republican from Nebraska, said that state agencies can still provide consumers with regulatory protections.

“To say that nobody is out there looking after consumers is inaccurate and we ought not to try and scare consumers right now,” Ricketts said.

The Fed Chair also said the central bank has launched a second review of its policy strategies and its communications tools. Powell reiterated that the review would not focus on whether to change its 2% inflation target, which some economists argue is too low. Powell has repeatedly said that the Fed shouldn’t change the target while it is still struggling to get inflation down to 2%.

After the Fed’s last policy review in 2019, it said it would seek inflation that averaged 2% over time. Some economists have argued that the change led the Fed to react too slowly to the inflation spike in 2021 and 2022. The Fed didn’t begin raising its key interest rate until March 2022. Rate hikes are intended to slow borrowing and spending to cool inflation.

Last week, comments by many Fed officials — as well as a decline in the unemployment rate — suggested the odds of a rate cut anytime soon have dwindled.

Fewer cuts could translate into a longer period of elevated mortgage rates and higher costs to borrow money for everything from autos to credit cards. Still, mortgage rates are closely tied to the yield on the 10-year Treasury note, which can move independently of the Fed’s actions.

Last Friday, Fed governor Adriana Kugler said that the labor market was “stable” and that “gives us a little bit of time to make some decisions.”

“The cautious and the prudent step is to hold the (Fed’s key) rate where it is for some time,” Kugler said.

The government said last Friday that employers added a solid number of jobs last month while the unemployment rate ticked down for the second straight month to 4%, historically quite low. Hiring in November and December was revised much higher.

The jobs report “bolsters our confidence that the Fed cutting cycle is over,” economists at Bank of America wrote in a note Friday.

JD Vance rails against ‘excessive’ AI regulation in a rebuke to Europe at the Paris AI summit

By THOMAS ADAMSON and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — U.S. Vice President JD Vance on Tuesday warned global leaders and tech industry executives that “excessive regulation” could cripple the rapidly growing artificial intelligence industry in a rebuke to European efforts to curb AI’s risks.

The speech underscored a widening, three-way rift over the future of the technology — one that critics warn could either cement human progress for generations or set the stage for its downfall.

The United States, under President Donald Trump, champions a hands-off approach to fuel innovation, while Europe is tightening the reins with strict regulations to ensure safety and accountability. Meanwhile, China is rapidly expanding AI through state-backed tech giants, vying for dominance in the global race.

The U.S. was noticeably absent from an international document signed by more than 60 nations, including China, making the Trump administration an outlier in a global pledge to promote responsible AI development. The United Kingdom also declined to sign the pledge.

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Vance's debut

At the summit, Vance made his first major policy speech since becoming vice president last month, framing AI as an economic turning point but cautioning that "at this moment, we face the extraordinary prospect of a new industrial revolution, one on par with the invention of the steam engine."

"But it will never come to pass if overregulation deters innovators from taking the risks necessary to advance the ball," Vance added.

The 40-year-old vice president, leveraging the AI summit and a security conference in Munich later this week, is seeking to project Trump's forceful new style of diplomacy.

The Trump administration will "ensure that AI systems developed in America are free from ideological bias," Vance said and pledged the U.S. would "never restrict our citizens' right to free speech."

A global AI pledge—and the U.S. absence

The international document, signed by scores of countries, including European nations, pledged to "promote AI accessibility to reduce digital divides" and "ensure AI is open, inclusive, transparent, ethical, safe, secure, and trustworthy." It also called for "making AI sustainable for people and the planet" and protecting "human rights, gender equality, linguistic diversity, consumer rights, and intellectual property."

In a surprise move, China — long criticized for its human rights record — signed the declaration, further widening the distance between America and the rest in the tussle for AI supremacy.

The UK also declined to sign despite agreeing with much of the declaration because it "didn't provide enough practical clarity on global governance," said Tom Wells, a spokesman for Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

"We didn't feel it sufficiently addressed broader questions around national security and the challenge that AI poses to it," Wells said.

He insisted: "This is not about the U.S. This is about our own national interest, ensuring the balance between opportunity and security."

A growing divide

Vance also took aim at foreign governments for "tightening the screws" on U.S. tech firms, saying such moves were troubling. His remarks underscored the growing divide between Washington and its European allies on AI governance.

The agreement comes as the EU enforces its AI Act, the world's first comprehensive AI law, which took effect in August 2024.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stressed that, "AI needs the confidence of the people and has to be safe" and detailed EU guidelines intended to standardize the bloc's AI Act but acknowledged concerns over regulatory burden.

"At the same time, I know that we have to make it easier and we have to cut red tape and we will," she added.

She also announced that the "InvestAI" initiative had reached a total of €200 billion in AI investments across Europe, including €20 billion dedicated to AI gigafactories.

A race for AI dominance

The summit laid bare a global power struggle over AI—Europe wants strict rules and public funding, China is expanding state-backed AI, and the U.S. is going all-in on a free-market approach.

French President Emmanuel Macron pitched Europe as a "third way"—a middle ground that regulates AI without smothering innovation or relying too much on the U.S. or China.

"We want fair and open access to these innovations for the whole planet," he said, calling for global AI rules. He also announced fresh investments across Europe to boost the region's AI standing. "We're in the race," he declared.

China, meanwhile, is playing both sides: pushing for control at home while promoting open-source AI abroad.

Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing, speaking for President Xi Jinping, said Beijing wants to help set global AI rules. At the same time, Chinese officials slammed Western limits on AI access, and China's DeepSeek chatbot has already triggered security concerns in the U.S. China argues open-source AI will

benefit everyone, but critics see it as a way to spread Beijing's influence.

With China and the U.S. in an AI arms race, Washington is also clashing with Europe.

Vance, a vocal critic of European tech rules, has floated the idea of the U.S. rethinking NATO commitments if Europe cracks down on Elon Musk's social media platform, X. His Paris visit also included talks on Ukraine, AI's growing role in global power shifts, and U.S.-China tensions.

How to regulate AI?

Concerns over AI's potential dangers have loomed over the summit, particularly as nations grapple with how to regulate a technology that is increasingly entwined with defense and warfare.

"I think one day we will have to find ways to control AI or else we will lose control of everything," said Admiral Pierre Vandier, NATO's commander who oversees the alliance's modernization efforts.

Beyond diplomatic tensions, a global public-private partnership is being launched called "Current AI," aimed at supporting large-scale AI initiatives for the public good.

Analysts see this as an opportunity to counterbalance the dominance of private companies in AI development. However, it remains unclear whether the U.S. will support such efforts.

Separately, a high-stakes battle over AI power is escalating in the private sector.

A group of investors led by Musk — who now heads Trump's Department of Government Efficiency — has made a \$97.4 billion bid to acquire the nonprofit behind OpenAI. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, attending the Paris summit, said it is "not for sale."

Pressed on AI regulation, Altman also dismissed the need for further restrictions in Europe. But the head of San Francisco-based Anthropic, an OpenAI competitor, described the summit as a "missed opportunity" to more fully address the urgent global challenges posed by the technology.

"The need for democracies to keep the lead, the risks of AI, and the economic transitions that are fast approaching — these should all be central features of the next summit," said Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei in a written statement.

Trump ally Steve Bannon pleads guilty and avoids jail time in border wall fraud case

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Steve Bannon pleaded guilty on Tuesday to defrauding donors to a private effort to build a wall on the U.S. southern border, ending a case the conservative strategist decried as a "political persecution."

Spared from jail as part of a plea deal, he left court saying he "felt like a million bucks."

Bannon, a longtime ally of President Donald Trump, pleaded guilty in state court in Manhattan to one count of scheme to defraud, a low-level felony. The case involved We Build the Wall, a non-profit that Bannon himself once suspected was a scam.

Bannon, 71, must stay out of trouble for three years to avoid additional punishment, including possible jail time. He also can't raise money or serve as an officer or director for charities in New York and can't use, sell, or possess any data gathered from border wall donors.

Bannon had been scheduled to go to trial March 4.

His lawyer, Arthur Aidala, said Bannon wanted to "put up a fight," but opted to plead guilty after weighing how a jury in heavily Democratic Manhattan might judge him. Under the deal, prosecutors agreed to drop money laundering and conspiracy charges against him.

Bannon's plea deal came just days after U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi ordered the Justice Department to investigate what Trump called the "weaponization of prosecutorial power."

Outside court, Bannon urged Bondi to immediately open criminal investigations into Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, whose office prosecuted him, and New York Attorney General Letitia James, who sued Trump over his business practices and is leading legal challenges to his administration's policies. Both are Democrats.

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Bragg "can call a grand jury at any time" and "set up criminal charges on the most bogus efforts," Bannon said. He called James the "queen of lawfare" and warned that Trump and his allies "ought to be worried about this out-of-control city."

Bragg and James' office didn't immediately respond to Bannon's comments.

Bragg took up the case and charged Bannon with state offenses after Trump cut a federal prosecution short with a pardon in the final hours of his first term in 2021. Presidential pardons apply only to federal crimes, not state offenses.

Bannon was charged with falsely promising donors, including some in New York, that all money given to We Build the Wall would go toward erecting a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Instead, prosecutors alleged the money was used to enrich Bannon and others involved in the project.

The campaign, launched in 2018 after Trump fired Bannon as his chief strategist, quickly raised over \$20 million and privately built a few miles of fencing along the border. It soon ran into trouble with the International Boundary and Water Commission, came under federal investigation and drew criticism from Trump, the Republican whose policy the charity was founded to support.

"This resolution achieves our primary goal: to protect New York's charities and New Yorkers' charitable giving from fraud," Bragg said in a statement. He added that "New York has an important interest in rooting out fraud in our markets, our corporations, and our charities, and we will continue to do just that."

Until recently, Bannon appeared set on taking the case to trial.

He hired new lawyers, including Aidala, and began plotting an aggressive defense strategy after Judge April Newbauer ruled prosecutors could show jurors certain evidence, including an email they say showed Bannon was concerned the fundraising effort wasn't legit.

"Isn't this a scam? You can't build the wall for this much money," Bannon wrote in an email, according to prosecutor Jeffrey Levinson. He said Bannon went on to add: "Poor Americans shouldn't be using hard-earned money to chase something not doable."

In January, Bannon's lawyers filed papers asking Newbauer to throw out the case, calling it an "unconstitutional selective enforcement of the law." The judge had been expected to rule on Tuesday before Bannon's plea deal made the request moot.

Two other men involved in the We Build the Wall project, Brian Kolfage and Andrew Badolato, pleaded guilty to federal charges and were sentenced to prison. A third defendant, Timothy Shea, was convicted and also sentenced to prison.

Bannon went to prison in an unrelated case last year, serving four months at a federal lockup in Connecticut for defying a subpoena in the congressional investigation into the U.S. Capitol attack on Jan. 6, 2021. He was released in October.

Ukraine's rare earth elements could help keep US military aid flowing

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine has offered to strike a deal with U.S. President Donald Trump for continued American military aid in exchange for developing Ukraine's mineral industry, which could provide a valuable source of the rare earth elements that are essential for many kinds of technology.

Trump said that he wanted such a deal earlier this month, and it was initially proposed last fall by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as part of his plan to strengthen Kyiv's hand in future negotiations with Moscow.

"We really have this big potential in the territory which we control," Andrii Yermak, chief of staff to the Ukrainian president, said in an exclusive interview with The Associated Press. "We are interested to work, to develop, with our partners, first of all, with the United States."

Here is a look at Ukraine's rare earth industry and how a deal might come together:

What are rare earth elements?

Rare earth elements are a set of 17 elements that are essential to many kinds of consumer technology, including cellphones, hard drives and electric and hybrid vehicles.

It's unclear if Trump is seeking specific elements in Ukraine, which also has other minerals to offer.

"It can be lithium. It can be titanium, uranium, many others," Yermak said. "It's a lot."

China, Trump's chief geopolitical adversary, is the world's largest producer of rare earth elements. Both the U.S and Europe have sought to reduce their dependence on Beijing.

For Ukraine, such a deal would ensure that its biggest and most consequential ally doesn't freeze military support. That would be devastating for the country, which has been at war for nearly three years after Russia's full-scale invasion on Feb. 24, 2022.

The idea also comes at a time when reliable and uninterrupted access to critical minerals is increasingly hard to come by globally.

What is the state of the Ukrainian minerals industry?

Ukraine's rare earth elements are largely untapped because of the war and because of state policies regulating the mineral industry. The country also lacks good information to guide the development of rare earth mining.

Geological data is thin because mineral reserves are scattered across Ukraine, and existing studies are considered largely inadequate. The industry's true potential is clouded by insufficient research, according to businessmen and analysts.

In general, the outlook for Ukrainian natural resources is promising. The country's reserves of titanium, a key component for the aerospace, medical and automotive industries, are believed to be among Europe's largest. Ukraine also holds some of Europe's largest known reserves of lithium, which is required to produce batteries, ceramics and glass.

In 2021, the Ukrainian mineral industry accounted for 6.1% of the country's gross domestic product and 30% of exports.

An estimated 40% of Ukraine's metallic mineral resources are inaccessible because of Russian occupation, according to data from We Build Ukraine, a Kyiv-based think tank. Ukraine has argued that it's in Trump's interest to develop the remainder before Russian advances capture more.

The European Commission, the executive branch of the European Union, identified Ukraine as a potential supplier for more than 20 critical raw materials and concluded that if the country joins the 27-nation EU, it could strengthen the European economy.

What happens next?

Details of any deal will likely develop in meetings between U.S. and Ukrainian officials. Trump announced Tuesday that he would send Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to Ukraine to meet with Zelenskyy.

"This War MUST and WILL END SOON — Too much Death and Destruction. The U.S. has spent BILLIONS of Dollars Globally, with little to show," Trump said in a post on his social media network about the trip.

U.S. companies have expressed interest, according to Ukrainian business officials. But striking a formal deal would likely require legislation, geological surveys and negotiation of specific terms.

It's unclear what kind of security guarantees companies would require to risk working in Ukraine, even in the event of a ceasefire. And no one knows for sure what kind of financing agreements would underpin contracts between Ukraine and U.S. companies.

How photos lost in American disasters find their way home, with a little help from people who care

By ANNA FURMAN Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Hollowed-out homes. Cars entombed by mud. Unpeopled roads. Belongings reduced to dirt and debris.

It all took a toll on Taylor Schenker.

After Hurricane Helene last September, Schenker was upset by the deluge of images of Asheville, North

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Carolina. "This storm has taken so much," she said, "and it's so jarring to see the photos of the horrible devastation." So less than a week after the storm, she set out to do something about the wide-scale loss.

While helping a friend search for belongings cast downriver, she stumbled on a handful of photos of strangers — mud-caked, curled up in tree branches and stuck under river rocks. The images captured family reunions, newborn babies, weddings, birthday parties, beloved pets and school portraits.

"These tiny photos had been through so much and miraculously had washed up and were in decent enough condition that you could see what they were," said Schenker, 27. "It stuck with me."

To reclaim the search phrase "photos from Helene," she created an Instagram for "something positive, which is reuniting people with their memories." She set up a post-office box, linked up with a volunteer search and rescue crew, and ultimately uncovered more than 500 photos — or what she calls "little needles in a haystack."

When Schenker made her first match, she got chills.

Then, sitting in her car, she cried.

Something fragile, re-emerging from the muck

We hold onto photos to keep memories alive — of people, places and moments that might otherwise fade. Or sometimes are ripped away abruptly.

Schenker has since returned more than 70 such images. A stack of them were hand-delivered to Mary Moss, whose car was destroyed by an uprooted tree as she and her husband evacuated the Asheville home where they had lived for almost 40 years.

"It was really kind of overwhelming at first when she handed me those pictures. I just couldn't even speak," Moss said. "You don't expect something as fragile as photos to be retrieved."

Months later, they've received some FEMA assistance and found a temporary home, which they're gradually furnishing with church donations. But some things are irreplaceable.

"This is not really about losing the home and all the material stuff in there. But what's been devastating is that that was everything we had of Tommy," she said, of their son who died at age 12 from a genetic disorder. "It's those memories and the little things, the photos, that you can't replace."

As Schenker later understood it, "When they lost their home, they lost virtually all proof that this child existed."

"It is such a privilege to look into the intimate moments of people's lives," she said. "They've literally lost everything and they can't ever recreate those childhood photos."

In photos Schenker found nearly 3 miles (5 km) from the Moss' family home, Tommy is seen as a 2-year-old, dressed like an angel for a Christmas pageant. In another, he is wearing a toddler-sized suit; in yet another, he's playing at daycare alongside his younger brother Dallas.

"It is just breathtaking," Moss said. "This is one thing that the river didn't get to take — or didn't get to keep."

Lost images emerged from the California fires, too

More than 2,000 miles (3,200 km) away, in the Altadena foothills of Los Angeles, Claire Schwartz, 31, began to collect photos with a similar idea: Find images, post them online, try to unite them with their owners.

After the Eaton fire, but before the first rain, she panicked. When rain and ash mix, it makes lye, which destroys photos. "Someone has to do this ASAP," she remembers thinking to herself. "And I realized it had to be me — because nobody else was doing it."

Luca Ackerman, a New York-based photo conservator, cautions that mold can start to develop 48 hours after water exposure. To slow the deterioration process, he freezes such prints — and advised to not wipe off any surfaces, which can drag toxic oils across the print, "driving particles deeper into the material." Some photos are so brittle, too, that when touched they may disintegrate.

In the wake of disasters, conservators like Ackerman are deployed in volunteer rotations with the National Heritage Responders. Rapidly, he trains art handlers and museum staff how to treat sensitive materials, whether they are damaged by smoke, water, ash or soot.

Wearing a respirator, nitrile gloves and booties, Schwartz swiftly set out to salvage photos — finding them alongside pages from yearbooks, sheet music, and children's art in nearby parks, neighbors' front

yards and a golf course.

"The wind has scattered everything, everywhere. And trash is mixed in with precious mementos, everywhere you look," she said. "It's just absolutely bizarre how stuff clumps together and travels as a unit."

Finding the people behind wayward photographs

Normally, a local library would take in found items, but the Altadena Public Library, along with more than 9,000 homes, burned to the ground. Librarians are redirecting residents who have found photos to Schwartz.

She adopted parts of her process from what she learned as an archival intern at the Corita Art Center — protecting photos in acid-free, glassine envelopes and storing them in a waterproof box in a temperature-controlled room with good air circulation.

Last week, she made her first match: disposable camera photos of teenagers, smiling, in prom dresses and glittering tiaras. The image is flecked with damage, but all four corners are intact.

"It's funny — you formulate these ideas of who the person is," Schwartz said. "She was kind of exactly what I pictured, just really friendly and bubbly and lovely — you could tell that just from her photos."

Schwartz's house survived because her neighbors stayed behind to fight the fire themselves, but the landscape around it — full of burned-out lots, ghostly palm trees and blackened telephone poles — is otherworldly and changed. "It looks like the moon. It looks like another planet. It doesn't look like home."

Nearby is Joshua Simpson, a photographer who lost his Altadena home and studio, along with decades of film negatives, silver gelatin prints and camera equipment. But something meaningful survived.

"The very first thing we found was this beautiful vintage print of my mother-in-law holding my wife when she was a newborn baby." The black-and-white photo carries an extra layer of poignancy, as his mother-in-law died just few months ago. "We were both pretty overjoyed in that moment. It felt a little magical finding that one."

Above all else, Ackerman said, personal safety comes first. "When you're picking up people's heirlooms or family photographs, that can be traumatic — even if they're not yours," he said.

When people survive catastrophic events such as wildfires or hurricanes, and then are left to cope with loss, they may express a wide range of emotions — from overwhelmed to outraged to numb, sometimes all at once. Tragedies, though, can also strengthen the ties in communities, and people like Schenker and Schwartz are Exhibits A and B.

"Disasters like this really bring out the best in people," Moss said. "You know, I can laugh or I can cry about it — and I choose to laugh about it. Fortunately, we didn't lose the most important thing. That's lives."

Massachusetts top court rules Karen Read can be retried in her boyfriend's death

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — The state's top court ruled Tuesday that Karen Read can be retried on all the same charges in the death of her Boston police officer boyfriend, the latest twist in the long-running case that transfixed true crime fans nationwide.

Prosecutors have sought to retry Read this year on charges of second-degree murder, manslaughter and leaving the scene of a crime. They accused her of ramming into John O'Keefe with her SUV and leaving him to die in a snowstorm in January 2022. Read's attorneys argue she was framed to protect other law enforcement officers involved in O'Keefe's death.

A judge declared a mistrial in June after finding jurors couldn't reach an agreement, without polling the jurors to confirm their conclusions. Read's attorney Martin Weinberg argued that five jurors later said they were deadlocked only on the manslaughter count, and had unanimously agreed in the jury room that she wasn't guilty on the charges of second-degree murder and leaving the scene. But they hadn't told the judge.

The ruling from the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court clears the way for a new trial on all three charges.

"The jury clearly stated during deliberations that they had not reached a unanimous verdict on any of the charges and could not do so. Only after being discharged did some individual jurors communicate a

different supposed outcome, contradicting their prior notes," the judges wrote. "Such posttrial disclosures cannot retroactively alter the trial's outcome -- either to acquit or to convict."

The judges also found "no abuse of discretion" in Judge Beverly Cannone's decision to declare a mistrial. "After extensive, multiday deliberations, the jury submitted several increasingly emphatic notes about their inability to reach a unanimous verdict," they wrote, adding that the record before the judge "suggested complete deadlock."

Read's lawyer said they're considering their legal options.

"While we have great respect for the Commonwealth's highest court, Double Jeopardy is a federal constitutional right," Weinberg said in a statement. "We are strongly considering whether to seek federal habeas relief from what we continue to contend are violations of Ms. Read's federally guaranteed constitutional rights."

A spokesman for the Norfolk District Attorney's Office said it would have no comment on the ruling.

As for Read, she told Boston 25 News in an interview which ran Monday that she's ready for a second trial and isn't worried about who's on the prosecution team.

"I don't care who I face," she told the station. "I have the truth. I have the best attorneys. Do your worst."

Read could end up in prison — a fate she said she "thinks about that every day," but she said "it doesn't frighten me the way it did three years ago."

Weinberg had urged the court to allow an evidentiary hearing where jurors could be asked whether they had reached final not guilty verdicts on any of the charges.

Prosecutors maintained there's no basis for dismissing the charges of second-degree murder and leaving the scene. They argued that her lawyers should have sensed a mistrial was "inevitable or unavoidable" and that they had every opportunity to be heard in the trial courtroom.

The judges questioned Weinberg over the merits for holding an inquiry. Associate Justice Frank Gaziano noted that such inquiries are usually reserved for "extraneous information" such as "racisms in the jury room." Chief Justice Kimberly Budd wondered about the limits of allowing an inquiry, which she suggested could open the door for other defendants to argue a juror came to them to say "that's not really what happened."

Cannone ruled in August that Read could be retried on all three charges.

"Where there was no verdict announced in open court here, retrial of the defendant does not violate the principle of double jeopardy," Cannone said.

Prosecutors said Read, a former adjunct professor at Bentley College, and O'Keefe, a 16-year member of the Boston police, had been drinking heavily before she dropped him off at a party at the home of Brian Albert, a fellow Boston officer. They said she hit him with her SUV before driving away. An autopsy found O'Keefe had died of hypothermia and blunt force trauma.

The defense portrayed Read as the victim, saying O'Keefe was actually killed inside Albert's home and then dragged outside. They argued that investigators focused on Read because she was a "convenient outsider" who saved them from having to consider law enforcement officers as suspects.

Key things to know about how Tesla could benefit from Elon Musk's assault on government

By KIMBERLY KINDY and BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Elon Musk has long railed against the U.S. government, saying a crushing number of federal investigations and safety programs have stymied Tesla, his electric car company, and its efforts to create self-driving automobiles.

Now, Musk's close relationship with President Donald J. Trump means many of those federal headaches could vanish.

The Trump administration could quickly nix a host of federal probes and safety programs: crash investigations into Tesla's partially automated vehicles; a U.S. Department of Justice criminal investigation

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examining whether Musk and Tesla have overstated their cars' self-driving capabilities; and a government mandate to report crash data on vehicles using technology like Tesla's Autopilot.

Safety advocates, who credit such federal investigations and recalls with saving lives, say the consequences of such actions could prove dire.

"Musk wants to run the Department of Transportation," said Missy Cummings, a former senior safety adviser at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. "I've lost count of the number of investigations that are underway with Tesla. They will all be gone."

Here are some key things to know about what what experts think might happen:

Musk and Trump are aggressively seeking to revamp government

The White House and Musk is waging an unbridled war against the federal government — freezing spending and programs while sacking a host of career employees, including prosecutors and government watchdogs typically shielded from such brazen dismissals without cause.

The actions have sparked outcries from legal scholars who say the Trump administration's actions are without modern-day precedent and are already upending the balance of power in Washington.

The Trump administration has not yet declared any actions that could benefit Tesla or Musk's other companies. However, snuffing out federal investigations or jettisoning safety initiatives would be a much easier task than their audacious assault on regulators and the bureaucracy.

"Trump's election, and the bromance between Trump and Musk, will essentially lead to the defanging of a regulatory environment that's been stifling Tesla," said Daniel Ives, a veteran Wall Street technology and automobile industry analyst.

Federal government has a lot of power over Tesla

The federal government's power over Tesla is wide-ranging. It can investigate, order recalls and mandate crash data reporting. However, the Trump administration could quickly ease up on Tesla and on the other companies in Musk's sprawling business empire.

A host of Musk's other businesses — such as his aerospace company SpaceX and his social media company X — are subjects of federal investigations.

Tesla alone is facing federal probes from a litany of agencies, including the Justice Department, the Securities and Exchange Commission and the National Labor Relations Board.

The federal agency that has the most power over Tesla — and the entire automobile industry — is the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which is part of the Department of Transportation.

NHTSA sets automobile safety standards that must be met before vehicles can enter the marketplace. It also has a quasi-law enforcement arm, the Office of Defects Investigation, that has the power to launch probes into crashes and seek recalls for safety defects.

The agency has six pending investigations into Tesla's self-driving technology, prompted by dozens of crashes that took place when the computerized systems were in use.

"NHTSA has been a thorn in Musk's side for over the last decade and he's grappled with almost every three-letter agency in the Beltway," said Ives, the Wall Street analyst who covers the technology sector and automobile industry. "That's all created what looks to be a really big soap opera in 2025."

Victims and attorneys worry about a lack of oversight

People whose lives have been forever changed by Tesla crashes fear that dangerous and fatal accidents may increase if the federal government's investigative and recall powers are restricted.

They say they worry that the company may otherwise never be held accountable for its failures, like the one that took the life of 22-year-old Naibel Benavides Leon, who was killed when a Tesla blew through a three-way intersection in rural Florida.

Benavides Leon died at the scene; her boyfriend, Dillon Angulo, suffered injuries but survived. A federal investigation determined that Autopilot in Tesla's vehicles at this time was faulty and needed repairs.

"We, as a family, have never been the same," said Benavides' sister, Neima. "I'm an engineer and everything that we design and we build has to be by important codes and regulations. This technology cannot be an exception."

"It has to be investigated when it fails," she added. "Because it does fail."

Tesla's lawyers did not respond to requests for comment. In a statement on X in December 2023, Tesla pointed to an earlier lawsuit the Benavides family had brought against the driver who struck the college student. He testified that despite using Autopilot, "I was highly aware that it was still my responsibility to operate the vehicle safely."

Tesla also said that because the driver "was pressing the accelerator to maintain 60 mph" his actions effectively overrode Autopilot, which would have otherwise restricted the speed to 45 mph on the rural road, something Benavides' attorney disputes.

In the pending wrongful death lawsuit that Neima Benavides filed against Tesla after her sister's death, her attorney told a Miami district judge the lawsuit would have likely been dropped if NHTSA hadn't investigated and found defects with the Autopilot system.

"All along we were hoping that the NHTSA investigation would produce what it did, in fact, end up producing, which is a finding of product defect and a recall," attorney Doug Eaton said during a March court hearing. "And we had told you very early on in the case if NHTSA had not found that, we may very well drop the case. But they did, in fact, find this."

EU vows countermeasures to US tariffs. Bourbon, jeans, peanut butter, motorcycles are easy targets

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum "will not go unanswered," European Union chief Ursula von der Leyen vowed on Tuesday, adding that they will trigger tough countermeasures from the 27-nation bloc. It means iconic U.S. industries like bourbon, jeans and motorcycles should beware.

"The EU will act to safeguard its economic interests," von der Leyen said in a statement in reaction to U.S. President Donald Trump's imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminum on Monday.

"Tariffs are taxes — bad for business, worse for consumers," von der Leyen said. "Unjustified tariffs on the EU will not go unanswered — they will trigger firm and proportionate countermeasures."

The EU trade minister scheduled a first emergency video meeting on the bloc's response on Tuesday.

"It is also important that everyone sticks together. Difficult times require such full solidarity," said Prime Minister Donald Tusk of Poland, which holds the EU presidency.

EU could target a range of US exports from motorcycles to whiskey

Just as Trump imposed similar tariffs during his first presidency, the EU countermeasures could easily amount to those that were used to retaliate then if the measures come into force March 12.

Bernd Lange, the chair of the European Parliament's trade committee, warned that previous trade measures were only suspended and could legally be easily revived.

"When he starts again now, then we will, of course, immediately reinstate our countermeasures," Lange told rbb24 German radio. "Motorcycles, jeans, peanut butter, bourbon, whiskey and a whole range of products that of course also affect American exporters" would be targeted, he added.

The EU Commission, which negotiates trade relations on behalf of the bloc, said it is not clear what countermeasures would apply, but officials and observers have said they would target Republican states and traditionally strong U.S. exports.

In Germany, the EU's largest economy, Chancellor Olaf Scholz told parliament that "if the U.S. leaves us no other choice, then the European Union will react united," adding: "Ultimately, trade wars always cost both sides prosperity."

European steel will be hard hit in trade war

European steel companies are bracing for losses.

"It will further worsen the situation of the European steel industry, exacerbating an already dire market environment," said Henrik Adam, president of the Eurofer European steel association.

He said the EU could lose up to 3.7 million tons of steel exports. The United States is the second biggest

export market for EU steel producers, representing 16% of the total EU steel exports. "Losing a significant part of these exports cannot be compensated by EU exports to other markets."

Trump is hitting foreign steel and aluminum with a 25% tax in the hope that they will give local producers relief from intense global competition, allowing them to charge higher prices.

EU Commission Vice President Maroš Šefčovič said that the tariffs are "economically counterproductive, especially given the deeply integrated production chains established through our extensive transatlantic trade and investment ties."

"We will protect our workers, businesses and consumers," Šefčovič said, but added that "it is not our preferred scenario. We remain committed to constructive dialog. We stand ready for negotiations and to find mutually beneficial solutions where possible."

The EU estimates that the trade volume between both sides stands at about \$1.5 trillion, representing some 30% of global trade. "There is a lot at stake for both sides," he told the EU legislature.

While the bloc has a substantial export surplus in goods, it says that is partly offset by the U.S. surplus in the trade of services.

The EU says that trade in goods reached 851 billion euros (\$878 billion) in 2023, with a trade surplus of 156 billion euros (\$161 billion) for the EU. Trade in services was worth 688 billion euros (\$710 billion) with a trade deficit of 104 billion euros (\$107 billion) for the EU.

What to know about proposals to ban abortion pills and punish women who seek abortion

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Lawmakers in some states where abortion is already banned are seeking to explicitly bar abortion pills or take a step that most leading anti-abortion groups oppose: punish women who seek to end their pregnancies.

It's too early in some legislative sessions to know whether the measures will get serious consideration. But it does show that the policy debate continues to evolve following the Supreme Court's 2022 ruling that overturned *Roe v. Wade* and opened the door to state bans on abortion.

Here's a look at where things stand:

Some lawmakers target pills that are used in most abortions

Lawmakers in several states have introduced measures to classify the drugs mifepristone and misoprostol — which are used together in the majority of U.S. abortions — as controlled dangerous substances, making it a crime to possess them without prescriptions.

Louisiana last year became the first state to adopt such a law, despite concerns from doctors who contended that the restrictions would make it harder for them to access the drugs to perform life-saving procedures.

The measures have been introduced in states where Republicans control the government and where there are bans on abortion at all stages of pregnancy, with some exceptions.

The legislation has died or appears unlikely to advance in Indiana and Mississippi.

Elsewhere — including Idaho, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas — it's too early to know whether they have a chance.

In Oklahoma, Gov. Kevin Stitt, a staunch opponent of abortion, has vowed to sign any anti-abortion measure that comes to his desk.

And one scholar who follows abortion policy said that the bills can affect the debate even if they don't pick up momentum.

"The more often that they're introduced, the more normalized these sorts of bills and these sorts of concepts that they're pushing become," said Laura Hermer, a professor at Mitchell Hamline School of Law in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The pill fight is roaring even without additional state laws

Authorities in two states with stringent abortion laws have targeted a New York doctor for allegedly sending abortion pills to patients in those states.

Last month, a Louisiana grand jury indicted Dr. Maggie Carpenter on charges of criminal abortion by means of abortion-inducing drugs, a felony. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton sued Carpenter in civil court under similar circumstances.

The legal actions set up a test of laws in some Democratic-controlled states, including New York, that seek to protect health care providers who use telehealth to prescribe and then mail abortion pills to patients in states where they're banned. New York officials say they will not extradite the doctor to Louisiana.

Since Carpenter's indictment, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul signed a law that allows doctors to leave their names off prescription bottles for abortion pills as a way to further insulate them. Similar legislation has been introduced in Maine.

The attorneys general of Idaho, Kansas and Missouri are also suing in federal court to roll back federal approvals for mifepristone and bar prescriptions for it by telehealth.

Some advocates are calling on President Donald Trump to enforce an 1873 law to ban mailing medication or instruments used in abortion, but he has not done so.

While critics say the drugs are unsafe, some major medical groups disagree. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists says there is decades of evidence that mifepristone and misoprostol are safe and effective. The group cited a study showing that major adverse events such as significant infection and excessive blood loss occur in less than 0.32% of patients taking mifepristone for a medication abortion. Medical organizations say mifepristone's safety compares to that of the over-the-counter pain medication ibuprofen.

There are attempts to punish women, though they rarely gain traction

Bills in several states would open the door to criminal charges against women who seek or obtain abortions on charges including murder.

That's a step no state has taken so far, and which leading anti-abortion groups such as Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America and the National Right to Life Committee oppose.

Still, such bills have been introduced in Idaho and Indiana, where they're unlikely to advance, and Oklahoma, North Dakota and South Carolina, where they're all early in the legislative process.

South Carolina state Sen. Richard Cash, the sponsor of a bill introduced last week that allows for punishing women who obtain abortions, said he's aware that national groups oppose that aspect of legislation. But he disagrees.

"The bill does not single out women by any means," he said in an interview. "The bill simply acknowledges that if the unborn child is a human being, anyone involved in killing that human being should be held accountable to the law."

Top Justice Department official orders prosecutors to drop charges against New York Mayor Eric Adams

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The Justice Department on Monday ordered federal prosecutors to drop corruption charges against New York City Mayor Eric Adams, arguing in a remarkable departure from long-standing norms that the case was interfering with the mayor's ability to aid the president's crackdown on illegal immigration.

In a two-page memo obtained by The Associated Press, acting Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove told prosecutors in New York that they were "directed to dismiss" the bribery charges against Adams immediately.

Bove said the order was not based on the strength of evidence in the case, but rather because it had been brought too close to Adams reelection campaign and was distracting from the mayor's efforts to assist in the Trump administration's law-and-order priorities.

"The pending prosecution has unduly restricted Mayor Adams' ability to devote full attention and resources to the illegal immigration and violent crime," Bove wrote.

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The memo also ordered prosecutors in New York not to take "additional investigative steps" against the Democrat until after November's mayoral election, though it left open the possibility that charges could be refiled after that following a review.

The intervention and reasoning — that a powerful defendant could be too occupied with official duties to face accountability for alleged crimes — marked an extraordinary deviation from long-standing Justice Department norms.

Public officials at the highest level of government are routinely investigated by the Justice Department, including President Donald Trump during his first term, without prosecutors advancing a claim that they should be let off the hook to attend to government service.

An attorney for Adams, Alex Spiro, said the Justice Department's order had vindicated the mayor's claim of innocence. "Now, thankfully, the mayor and New York can put this unfortunate and misguided prosecution behind them," said Spiro, who has also represented Elon Musk.

A spokesperson for the acting U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, Danielle Sassoon, declined to comment. The case against Adams was brought under the previous U.S. attorney for the district, Damien Williams, who stepped down before Trump became president.

The memo follows months of speculation that Trump would take steps to end the case against Adams, who was charged in September with accepting bribes of free or discounted travel and illegal campaign contributions from foreign nationals seeking to buy his influence.

Adams, a Democrat elected on a centrist platform, has moved noticeably right following his indictment, rankling some within his own party.

Rather than restricting cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, as Adams once promised, he has expressed a willingness to roll back the city's so-called sanctuary policies and pledged not to publicly criticize a president whose policies he once described as "abusive."

In recent weeks, he implied that Trump's agenda would be better for New York than former President Joe Biden's.

Several of the mayor's opponents in the Democratic mayoral primary claimed Monday that Adams had agreed to do Trump's bidding because he hoped for leniency.

"Instead of standing up for New Yorkers, Adams is standing up for precisely one person," said Brad Lander, the city's comptroller and a mayoral challenger.

Zohran Mamdani, a state assemblymember who is also running for mayor, called for an investigation into whether Adams "cut any kind of deal with the Trump administration that involves breaking city law."

Trump, who was convicted last year of falsifying business records to cover up a hush money payment, has previously expressed solidarity with Adams. He hinted at the possibility of a pardon in December, telling reporters that the mayor had been "treated pretty unfairly."

He had also claimed, without offering evidence, that Adams was being persecuted for criticizing former President Joe Biden's policies on immigration.

"I know what it's like to be persecuted by the DOJ, for speaking out against open borders," Trump said in October at a Manhattan event attended by Adams. "We were persecuted, Eric. I was persecuted, and so are you, Eric."

The prosecutors in New York had noted that the investigation into Adams began before he began feuding with Biden over migrant funding.

Still, Bove, in his memo, echoed some of Trump's and Adams' claims about politicization.

"It cannot be ignored that Mayor Adams criticized the prior Administration's immigration policies before the charges were filed," Bove wrote.

The criminal case against Adams involves allegations that he accepted illegal campaign contributions and lavish travel perks worth more than \$100,000 — including expensive flight upgrades, luxury hotel stays and even a trip to a bathhouse — while serving in his previous job as Brooklyn Borough president.

The indictment said a Turkish official who helped facilitate the trips then leaned on Adams for favors, at one point asking him to lobby the Fire Department to allow a newly constructed, 36-story diplomatic building to open in time for a planned visit by Turkey's president.

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Prosecutors also said they had evidence of Adams personally directing campaign staffers to solicit foreign donations, then disguising those contributions in order to qualify for a city program that provides a generous, publicly-funded match for small dollar donations. Foreign nationals are banned from contributing to U.S. election campaigns under federal law.

As recently as Jan. 6, prosecutors had indicated their investigation remained active, writing in court papers that they continued to “uncover additional criminal conduct by Adams.”

The task of carrying out the order to dismiss the case will fall to Sassoon, who assumed job the day after Trump took office. Her role was intended to be temporary. Trump in November nominated Jay Clayton, the former chairman of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, to the post, an appointment that must be confirmed by the Senate.

Federal agents had also been investigating other senior Adams aides. Prior to the mayor’s indictment, federal authorities seized phones from a police commissioner, schools chancellor, multiple deputy mayors and the mayor’s director of Asian Affairs. Each of those officials denied wrongdoing but have since resigned.

In December, Adams’ chief adviser and closest confidant, Ingrid Lewis-Martin, was indicted by a state prosecutor — the Manhattan district attorney — on charges that she and her son accepted \$100,000 in bribes related to real estate construction projects.

Today in History: February 12, Clinton acquitted in impeachment trial

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, Feb. 12, the 43rd day of 2025. There are 322 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Feb. 12, 1999, the Senate voted to acquit President Bill Clinton in his impeachment trial of charges of perjury and obstruction of justice.

Also on this date:

In 1554, Lady Jane Grey, who had claimed the throne of England for nine days, and her husband, Guildford Dudley, were beheaded after being condemned for high treason.

In 1809, Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States, was born in a log cabin at Sinking Spring Farm near Hodgenville, Kentucky.

In 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in New York City.

In 1912, Pu Yi, the last emperor of China, abdicated, marking the end of the Qing Dynasty.

In 1914, groundbreaking took place for the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

In 2002, former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milošević went on trial in The Hague, charged with genocide and war crimes. (Milošević died in 2006 before the trial could conclude).

In 2019, Mexico’s most notorious drug lord, Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, was convicted in New York of running an industrial-scale drug smuggling operation, murder and money laundering. (Guzman is currently serving a life sentence at the federal supermax prison facility in Florence, Colorado.)

Today’s birthdays: Film director Costa-Gavras is 92. Author Judy Blume is 87. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak is 83. Country singer Moe Bandy is 81. Musician Michael McDonald is 73. Actor-talk show host Arsenio Hall is 69. Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh is 60. Actor Josh Brolin is 57. Filmmaker Darren Aronofsky is 56. Actor Christina Ricci is 45.