

Groton Daily Independent

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Monday, Feb. 24

Senior Menu: Hot pork sandwich, scalloped potato, corn, fruit cocktail.

Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Groton Community Center

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

Tuesday, Feb. 25

Senior Menu: Meatballs, mashed potato with gravy, Italian blend, peaches, whole wheat bread.

Region 1A Girls B basketball tournament in Groton (6:00 p.m.: Groton Area vs. Redfield, 20 minutes after that, Sisseton vs. Britton-Hecla)

Common Cents Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., 209 N Main.

Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., Groton Community Center
Groton United Methodist Bible Study, 10 a.m.
City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

Wednesday, Feb. 26

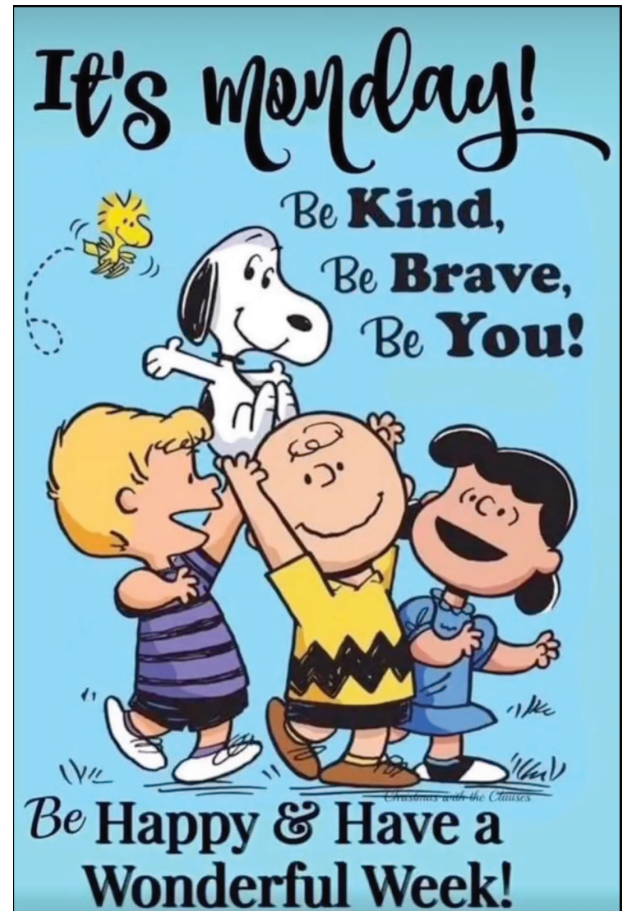
Senior Menu: Beef noodle stroganoff, capri blend, apple sauce, cookie, whole wheat bread.

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.



Thursday, Feb. 27

Senior Menu: Potato soup, chicken salad sandwich, mixed vegetables, fruit, whole wheat bread.

Girls and boys state wrestling at Rapid City
Region 1A Girls B basketball tournament

Friday, Feb. 28

Senior Menu: Spanish rice with hamburger, green beans, vanilla pudding with oranges, whole wheat bread.

Groton FFA CDE

Girls and boys state wrestling at Rapid City

Boys Basketball vs. Aberdeen Christian at the Aberdeen Civic Arena: 7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow.

Saturday, March 1

Girls and boys state wrestling at Rapid City
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 209 N Main

Groton Daily Independent
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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.

McConnell to Retire

Sen. Mitch McConnell (R) announced yesterday that he will not seek an eighth term in the Senate next year, almost a year after his decision to relinquish the top role in the upper chamber's GOP. The announcement came on the Kentucky lawmaker's 83rd birthday and prompted several state politicians to express interest in replacing him.

McConnell was first elected to the Senate in 1984, eventually becoming Republican leader in 2007. His 18-year tenure as a Senate party leader is the longest in US history. A thorough knowledge of Senate history and rules helped form McConnell's reputation as a master tactician, using procedural tools and a no-holds-barred approach to cut down Obama-era regulations, pass generational tax code reform, and reshape the federal judiciary via hundreds of confirmations. The end of his decadeslong career was marked by a rise in populism in the GOP under President Donald Trump, as well as a series of medical episodes involving mental lapses and falls.

Elsewhere in the Senate, former terrorism prosecutor Kash Patel was narrowly confirmed as FBI director in a 51 to 49 vote, with two Republicans voting against.

Bon Voyage SS United States

The SS United States, a historic 990-foot ocean liner, has begun its final journey from Philadelphia to become the world's largest artificial reef off Florida's Gulf Coast.

Tugboats are guiding the largest passenger ship built in America, nicknamed "the Big U," to Mobile, Alabama, where the crew will remove hazardous materials, including fuel. The process will take at least a year. The ship—more than 100 feet longer than the Titanic—will then continue its journey before resting roughly 180 feet underwater and 20 miles off the coast of Okaloosa County, Florida. The ship will sit upright on the seafloor, becoming a habitat for marine life. The voyage follows a legal battle and decades of decay while the vessel has been anchored in Philadelphia since 1996.

The SS United States ferried four US presidents and hosted numerous celebrities like Marilyn Monroe, Marlon Brando, and Grace Kelly. It set transatlantic speed records and completed roughly 800 crossings until its retirement in 1969 as air travel took off.

World Cup Kiss Conviction

Former Spanish soccer federation president Luis Rubiales was found guilty of sexual assault yesterday for kissing player Jenni Hermoso without consent after the 2023 Women's World Cup final. Spain's High Court fined Rubiales \$10,434 and ordered him to stay at least 200 meters from Hermoso and not communicate with her for a year. Rubiales and three codefendants were acquitted of a separate coercion charge for allegedly pressuring Hermoso to declare the kiss consensual.

The incident occurred during the medal ceremony following Spain's victory in Sydney. Hermoso, who plays in the Mexican soccer league and for Spain's national team, stated the kiss "tarnished" one of the happiest days of her life, while Rubiales claimed it was consensual. The Spanish penal code classifies a nonconsensual kiss as sexual assault. The scandal led to Rubiales' resignation and a three-year FIFA ban.

The case sparked a widespread debate about sexism in sports. A 2024 study found that 10.9% of US athletes have experienced unwanted sexual contact, with only 10.7% of those affected filing formal reports.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

"Conclave" wins top film prize for best cast at Screen Actors Guild awards while "Only Murders in the Building" and "Shōgun" bring home top TV awards.

Keke Palmer wins entertainer of the year, "The Six Triple Eight" wins best film at 56th NAACP Image Awards.

MLS season kicks off; see full season preview.

Mikaela Shiffrin wins record-extending 100th skiing World Cup race.

Science & Technology

OpenAI identifies, bans Chinese group that used ChatGPT to build AI-powered surveillance tools to monitor anti-Chinese government content across X, Facebook, Instagram, and other platforms.

Researchers report prototype battery material with a potential energy capacity double that of current Li-ion batteries; fluoride-ion device expected to find use in future electric vehicle applications.

Study of Viking skulls reveals the population suffered from a broad range of severe diseases and infections, including osteoarthritis, abnormal jaw and bone growth, and more.

Business & Markets

US stock markets drop Friday (S&P 500 -1.7%, Dow -1.7%, Nasdaq -2.2%) on reports of slowing business activity, tariff uncertainty; Dow sees worst week since late October.

Investor Warren Buffett releases annual Berkshire Hathaway investor letter; company reports fourth quarter earnings up 70% year-over-year, holds record \$334B in cash.

Shein annual profits drop by almost 40% in 2024; the Chinese fast fashion retailer reportedly under pressure to cut the valuation of its planned initial public offering this year.

Politics & World Affairs

President Donald Trump taps Air Force Lt. Gen. Dan Caine as new chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Trump administration puts majority of USAID staff on leave, eliminates 2,000 US-based positions ... and asks around 300 health researchers to return to posts after broad firings.

Elon Musk-led Department of Government Efficiency says federal employees must detail last workweek or risk termination; a number of agencies tell staff to ignore email.

Israel confirms the return of the body of Shiri Bibas after Hamas originally returned an unidentified body; Israel delays release of roughly 620 Palestinian prisoners over incident as first phase of ceasefire nears end.

France's largest child sex abuse trial begins today; former surgeon Joël Le Scouarnec is accused of molesting nearly 300 patients, mostly minors.

Northern State Announces Leadership Change in Men's Basketball Program

Aberdeen, S.D. – Northern State University Director of Athletics Nate Davis announced a change in leadership for the men's basketball program today, with Saul Phillips tenure concluding after six seasons.

"We have not met the high expectations we have for our men's basketball at Northern the past two seasons and a change in leadership is in the best interest of the program," Davis said. "We would like to thank Saul for his leadership and contributions the past six seasons and wish the very best for him and his family in their next endeavor."

During his time as the head coach at Northern State, Phillips won over 100 games and tallied three Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference regular season titles. A two-time NSIC Coach of the Year, Phillips led the Wolves to a pair of NSIC Basketball Tournament Championships in 2020 and 2021, advancing to the NCAA Tournament in 2020, 2021, and 2023.

"We want to keep our focus on the young men in our program through this transition and ensure they have the resources and support they need," said Davis. "Our national search for Northern's 23rd men's basketball coach is already underway. We are committed to finding the right person for the job. We will have an outstanding pool of candidates with this program's strong alignment with university leadership, exceptional facilities, a tradition of success, and passionate support of our fans, alumni, donors and the community."

Lucky for Life sales suspended

PIERRE, S.D. – Due to system error, Lucky for Life sales have been suspended in South Dakota.

The South Dakota Lottery is working diligently with its systems vendor to correct this issue. It should be noted that all existing Lucky for Life tickets with pending draws remaining are still valid.

The system error caused Lucky for Life tickets to display an inaccurate end date in some instances. It should be noted that a player may only purchase nine advanced Lucky for Life draws.

The South Dakota Lottery's other lotto games and scratch tickets are not affected by this error.

The South Dakota Lottery will provide further updates on its website when they are available.

Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

Last week we covered the quarterback position in our yearly roster breakdown, so this week we turn our attention to the ground game. The Vikings were 19th in the league with 109.1 rushing yards per game. There is certainly room for improvement, but it was still a massive improvement over the 2023 season when the Vikings ranked 29th with only 91.4 yards per game.

Aaron Jones, released by the Green Bay Packers last offseason, immediately signed with the Vikings and was inserted into the starting lineup on day one. Jones led the team with 255 carries for 1,138 yards and five rushing touchdowns. He signed a one-year contract so he will be a free agent this offseason, but Jones has mentioned to the media that he would like to be back next year. The problem is that he is 30 years old, which is usually when running backs start to decline. Will the Vikings elect to bring him back and try to squeeze one more productive season out of him? Or will the team look for a younger and/or cheaper option?

Cam Akers was the primary backup last year, carrying the ball 64 times for 297 yards and a touchdown, and he's had an interesting relationship with the Vikings. In September 2023, the Vikings sent a conditional 6th-round pick to the Los Angeles Rams for Akers and a conditional 7th-round pick. A month and a half later, Akers was injured and placed on IR, ending his season. He was then signed by the Houston Texans last offseason. In October 2024, the Vikings sent a conditional 6th-round draft pick to the Texans for Cam Akers and a conditional 7th-round pick. Like Jones, Akers is a free agent this offseason. Will the Vikings bring the 25-year-old back? Or will they let him sign somewhere else, then send that team a conditional 6th-round pick to get him back?

Ty Chandler is the only running back currently under contract for the Vikings in 2025. He was in line to be the primary backup last season, but he got bumped down to third on the depth chart after the Vikings brought back Akers. Chandler had 56 carries for 182 yards in 2024, which aren't great numbers, but he is relatively cheap and will likely be battling for the backup role this offseason.

At fullback, C.J. Ham is under contract through 2025. Ham is a local kid and a fan favorite, but the Vikings don't use a fullback much. With a \$3.4M cap hit, it's possible the Vikings cut him this offseason and put that money elsewhere.

What will the Vikings do at running back this offseason? There aren't a ton of free agent running backs this offseason, but luckily this is a good year to get one in the draft. The Vikings don't have a ton of picks this year, but I still expect the team to figure out a way to draft one. I also think if he's cheap enough, the Vikings will bring Jones back for one more season. With J.J. McCarthy in line to start next season, having a potent ground game will be vital for the young QB to be successful in 2025.

“Abnormal Electrical Signals”

Atrial fibrillation is probably a diagnosis you have heard of, if not because a friend or family member has it, because it has been mentioned in a public advertisement or pharmaceutical commercial. Atrial fibrillation (or “A-fib”) is the most common cardiac arrhythmia, a condition estimated by the American Heart Association to be present in more than five million Americans.

A-fib happens when abnormal electrical signals occurring throughout the cardiac atria (upper chambers of the heart) override the normal intrinsic electrical pacemaker. Sometimes this causes symptoms such as heart palpitations, dizziness, poor exercise tolerance, or heart failure. In many cases, however, patients have no symptoms

at all. I can recall numerous instances of finding A-fib in a patient simply by listening to their heart on a routine exam and finding the heart rhythm to be irregular. The widespread use of smartwatches and other monitoring devices is alerting people to the possibility of A-fib with greater frequency.

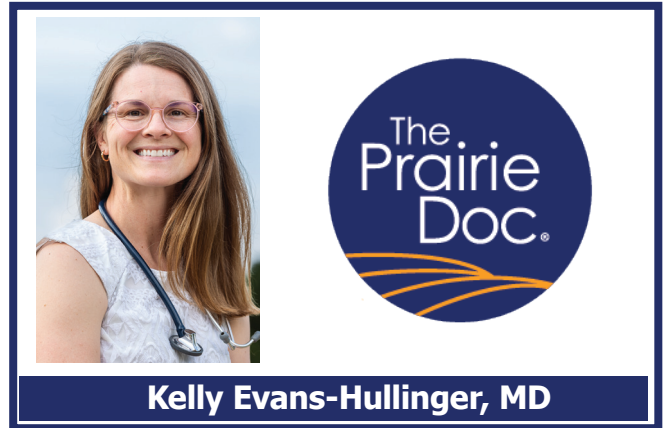
Atrial fibrillation is diagnosed by an electrocardiogram (ECG) or a longer term heart rhythm monitor. When we find A-fib, we should look for any underlying causes such as heart valve problems, heart failure, and even thyroid disease. More frequently, A-fib does not have any single cause; it can occur for no particular reason, but a person’s risk of it increases with numerous factors including obesity, heavy alcohol use, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, and of course advancing age.

Treatment of atrial fibrillation has various options, which include medication to keep the heart from going too fast, medication to keep the heart in a normal rhythm, shocking the heart back into normal rhythm, or a catheter procedure to ablate the abnormally-firing portions of the cardiac tissue.

Of utmost importance, because in A-fib the atrial chambers do not effectively pump and empty blood into the lower chambers with each heartbeat, blood pools in some areas and has the risk of forming clots. This is why patients with atrial fibrillation are at elevated risk of a stroke and why for many of those patients we recommend taking a blood thinner long-term. We have tools to estimate stroke risk in an individual patient, so the discussion of blood thinners is one you should have with your primary care provider or cardiologist.

In summary, atrial fibrillation is a very common diagnosis, especially as patients get older. Our individualized approach to treatment focuses on control of symptoms and quality of life as well as reducing the risk of stroke.

Kelly Evans-Hullinger, MD. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices Internal Medicine at Avera Medical Group in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org, and on social media. Watch On Call with the Prairie Doc, most Thursday’s at 7PM on SDPB and streaming on Facebook and listen to Prairie Doc Radio Sunday’s at 6am and 1pm.





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Republican SD lawmakers pursue a multifaceted crackdown on citizen-backed ballot measures

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - FEBRUARY 23, 2025 7:00 AM

Some Republicans, many of them aligned with anti-abortion groups, are tired of South Dakotans petitioning their ideas onto the ballot.

"There are things being put on the ballot that they can't get through the Legislature," said Brian Gosch, a Republican former state lawmaker who lobbies for clients including South Dakota Family Voice Action, which opposes abortion rights. "They're trying to bypass that process to go around it and then get their way through some other means."

Gosch was testifying recently on behalf of legislation that would limit how often similar ballot questions can be proposed to voters. The bill is one of many that Republican lawmakers have proposed during the current legislative session at the Capitol in Pierre to crack down on citizen-backed ballot measures. The bills include efforts to reduce the time for signature gathering, to require signatures from every legislative district in the state, to raise the threshold to pass a constitutional amendment to 60%, and more.

Rep. Erin Healy, D-Sioux Falls, said citizens putting issues on the ballot that their lawmakers will not entertain is a good thing.

"They're trying to let the people decide; they're trying to participate in democracy," Healy said. "And Republicans here in this building continue to try to completely just squash their voice, and that's wrong, and that's undemocratic, and I'm tired of it."

Nancy Turbak Berry is a Democratic former legislator who is co-chairing an effort to bring an abortion-rights measure to the ballot in 2026.

"The Legislature knows they are out of touch with what most South Dakotans want," she said. "So, they want to limit our ability to put stuff into law. Plain and simple."

The "Protect Our Initiatives Coalition" was recently launched in response to the wave of ballot measure legislation.

"The sponsors of these bills attacking our initiative process say they are trying to stop out-of-state money from flooding our elections, but we don't buy that the solution should be a systemic attack on the initiated process itself," said Chase Jensen of Dakota Rural Action, one of 10 coalition members.

The state has three types of statewide ballot measures: constitutional amendments, initiated measures and referendums.

To be placed on the ballot, citizen-backed constitutional amendments need petition signatures from registered voters equal to 10% of the votes cast in the last election for governor. The current signature requirement is 35,017. State lawmakers can also send constitutional amendments to the ballot.

Initiated measures propose an ordinary law, and referendums put a law passed by legislators on the ballot, with each requiring signatures equal to 5% of the votes cast in the last governor's race. That threshold is 17,508 signatures.

This year's legislation includes:

A bill that would move the deadline for filing ballot measure petition signatures from May up to February, shortening the time available for signature collection.

A bill that would require signatures for constitutional amendments to be gathered from every legislative district in the state.

A resolution that would ask voters to raise the approval threshold for constitutional amendments from

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a simple majority to 60% of votes cast.

A resolution that would ask voters to require defeated questions to wait for one general election before being submitted again.

A bill that would prohibit paying people to gather signatures for ballot measures and make violations a felony.

All of the bills are pending in various parts of the legislative process.

Signatures in every district

Rep. Rebecca Reimer, R-Chamberlain, is sponsoring the bill to require petition signatures from all legislative districts in the state. She said the bill addresses concerns that ballot measures advance with signatures concentrated in Minnehaha and Pennington counties, the two most populous in the state.

"This ensures amendments have real statewide support before they go to the voters," Reimer said.

The bill was supported by the state's most prominent anti-abortion group, South Dakota Right to Life, which played a leading role in defeating a ballot measure in November that would have restored abortions rights in the state.

"We believe that we will continue to see – unless there's a change – those who do not share our pro-life values using the current signature requirement mechanism to try and skew the process," said Dale Bartscher, South Dakota Right to Life's executive director.

The bill's opponents said South Dakotans from across the state already have their voices heard on ballot measures when they vote. They said the bill would make it harder for citizens to put a question on the ballot.

60% to amend the constitution

Rep. John Hughes, R-Sioux Falls, is sponsoring the effort to raise the vote threshold for constitutional amendments to 60%. He said the bill would make it harder for nonresidents of the state to change the state's constitution.

"This ensures only amendments with overwhelming public backing are adopted," Hughes said.

Hughes pointed to the 2024 abortion-rights ballot measure receiving large donations from Think Big America, an issue-advocacy nonprofit launched by Democratic Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker with a focus on supporting abortion rights. Pritzker's wife was raised in South Dakota. The measure was rejected by 59% of voters.

Less time for signatures

Another bill proposes amending the deadline for filing petitions to initiate a law or constitutional amendment in South Dakota. Rep. Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, introduced it. He serves on South Dakota Right to Life's board of directors.

Hansen's bill would move the deadline from May to February of a general election year, shortening the period petition sponsors could collect signatures by three months.

Hansen said the purpose of the change is to ensure sufficient time for legal challenges and verification of signatures. Hansen helped lead an effort to challenge the signatures for the 2024 abortion-rights measure.

"Six months is just not long enough to litigate these disputes," Hansen told fellow representatives in the House.

During the bill's committee hearing, opponents argued the changes would limit South Dakotans' ability to bring forward ballot measures, making the process more difficult.

Waiting period

A proposed constitutional amendment introduced by Republicans would require any new but similar ballot measures rejected by voters in the prior election to wait until at least one general election has passed before the question could appear on the ballot again.

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Zebediah Johnson is with the Voter Defense Association of South Dakota and testified against the measure. He said the bill would unduly restrict the initiative process while not imposing similar restrictions on the Legislature.

"A defeated initiative is not without merit," he said. "If the people of South Dakota decide to petition their government for change, they should be allowed to do so."

Former state Sen. Reynold Nesiba, a Sioux Falls Democrat, returned to Pierre during a committee hearing on the legislation. He mentioned South Dakota's status as the first state to allow initiatives and referendums in 1898, and he called citizen-backed ballot measures a safeguard against big money and power influencing the Legislature.

"Under God, the people rule," Nesiba said. "This is a fundamental part of who South Dakota is."

Bartscher, with South Dakota Right to Life, spoke in favor of the bill. He said abortion-rights groups continue to push for ballot measures.

"People are telling us across the state, they want a break," Bartscher said. "South Dakotans are tired. They're fatigued of all the campaigning, of all the commercials, and the postcards."

State lawmakers don't appear to be heeding that alleged fatigue. They have introduced 11 bills of their own this legislative session that would appear as questions on the 2026 ballot.

Other bills that would impact the ballot measure process include legislation that would require petition signers to list the address and county where they are registered to vote, rather than merely the address where they reside, and prevent the Secretary of State's Office from counting signatures without the information; change how petitions for ballot initiatives are formatted; allow fiscal estimates for ballot measures to be updated closer to elections; and require the secretary of state to review ballot initiatives for compliance with the state's single-subject rule. That review is already required for constitutional amendments.

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.

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EARTHTALK

Dear EarthTalk: Are increased shrub and tree plantings in the eastern U.S. in recent decades partially responsible for the recent uptick in wildfires across the region? – M. Major, New York, NY

Wildfires are uncontrolled destructive fires that spread over natural areas, like forests or brush. They can happen for many reasons, natural or manmade. Climate change has made wildfires increasingly more destructive throughout the world. One study from the University of Maryland suggests that current wildfires burn nearly six million more hectares of tree cover per year compared to wildfires from 2001.



Wildfires are becoming more and more common in the Eastern U.S., and researchers are still trying to figure out exactly how and why. Credit: Pexels.com.

The eastern U.S. is no exception to this devastation, with certain regions' wildfire frequencies having grown tenfold in the last 40 years. There are many explanations for this, but one example is flammable resin being applied to forests by timber companies. It is also theorized that increased shrub and tree planting efforts across the eastern United States are contributing to this uptick in major wildfires.

Researchers believe that these factors combine to explain increased wildfire odds. Per a recent study led by University of Florida researcher Victoria Donovan, in the east a one percent increase in woody cover leads to a 3.9 percent increase in odds of a wildfire the next year. Some recent studies have noted that the planting of invasive species can also increase wildfire frequency. UMass Amherst researchers noted that wildfire occurrences have increased by up to 230 percent because of eight species of nonnative grass.

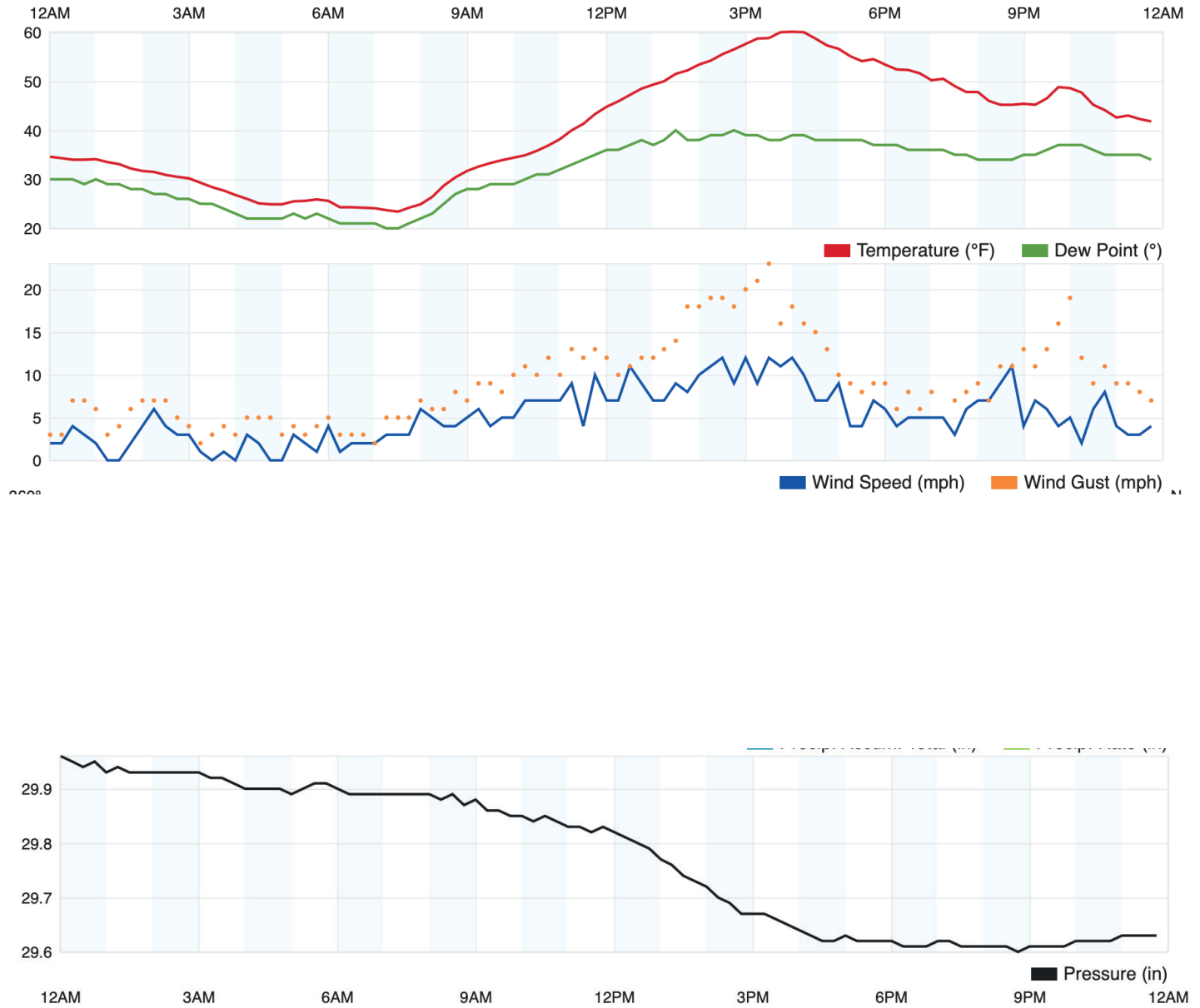
There are many ways that the average person can help combat wildfires. According to Donovan, reducing fuel usage is the easiest way to prevent wildfires. Supporting climate laws is also vital in achieving environmental justice. Signing the petition led by the Center for Biological Diversity urging FEMA to declare both extreme heat and wildfire smoke as major disasters will support such laws.

Despite research exhibiting a correlation between woody cover and wildfire odds, shrub and tree planting efforts are not in vain. One study published in Geophysical Research Letters noted that the temperature across the east actually dropped by 0.5 degrees F over the last century. "Some vegetation in those really harsh sites might actually facilitate tree establishment by providing shade," reports University of California, Davis researcher Derek Young. Compared to the whole nation, which actually warmed by 1.2 degrees F over the last century, this compelling evidence suggests that the current planting of trees across the east is a step in the right direction in combating global warming. However, officials also encourage thinning out forests and increasing planting of native vegetation to help prevent more wildfire risk.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today

Tonight

Tuesday

Tuesday Night

Wednesday



20% → 50%

High: 51 °F

Slight Chance
Rain then
Chance Rain



Low: 27 °F

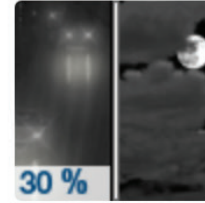
Partly Cloudy



30%

High: 54 °F

Partly Sunny
then Chance
Rain



30%

Low: 30 °F

Chance Rain
then Mostly
Cloudy



High: 49 °F

Mostly Sunny



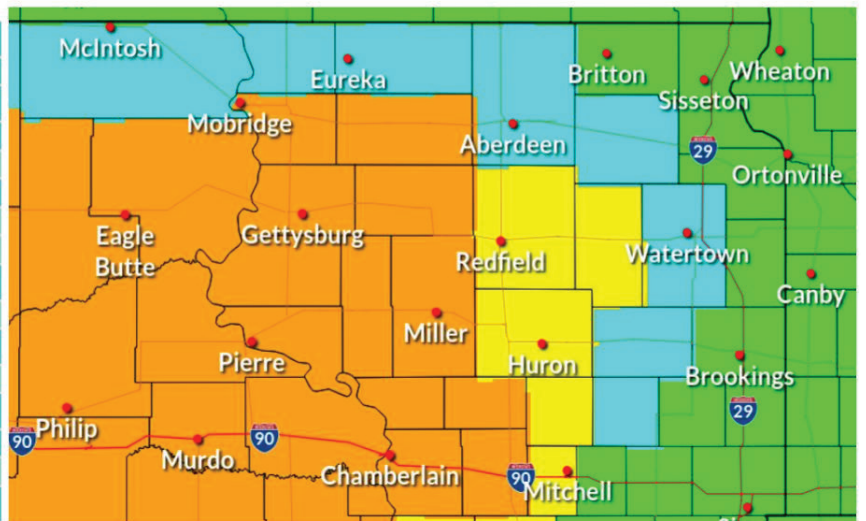
Breezy/Windy Today With Elevated Fire Danger

February 24, 2025
2:35 AM

Another Mild Day: Highs Around 60 Central SD to Upper 40s Far Northeast & WC MN

Wind Forecast	2/24 Mon						
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am
Aberdeen	23	24	31	32	26	18	12
Britton	23	25	25	25	21	15	10
Chamberlain	14	21	30	33	26	20	10
Clark	20	22	29	30	28	20	13
Eagle Butte	28	39	48	49	43	30	18
Eureka	22	28	36	37	30	21	13
Gettysburg	22	30	40	41	37	26	16
McIntosh	29	43	52	51	39	25	15
Milbank	24	26	28	26	23	18	14
Miller	22	29	37	39	33	24	16
Mobridge	21	29	38	39	31	21	13
Murdo	18	28	40	43	37	28	18
Pierre	14	25	40	43	35	23	13
Redfield	21	24	35	38	31	21	13
Sisseton	28	29	28	28	22	17	15
Watertown	23	26	29	30	26	21	14
Webster	24	26	29	29	26	21	15
Wheaton	24	26	26	23	18	15	14

Fire Danger Index



Low Moderate High Very High Extreme



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Extremely mild air, with temperatures again 15 to 25 degrees above average, and increasing winds will result in heightened Fire Danger for mainly central South Dakota. The rest of the week looks to remain mild with minimal chances for moisture.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 61 °F at 4:05 PM

Low Temp: 23 °F at 7:22 AM

Wind: 23 mph at 3:21 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 57 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 62 in 1976

Record Low: -26 in 1940

Average High: 32

Average Low: 10

Average Precip in Feb.: 0.52

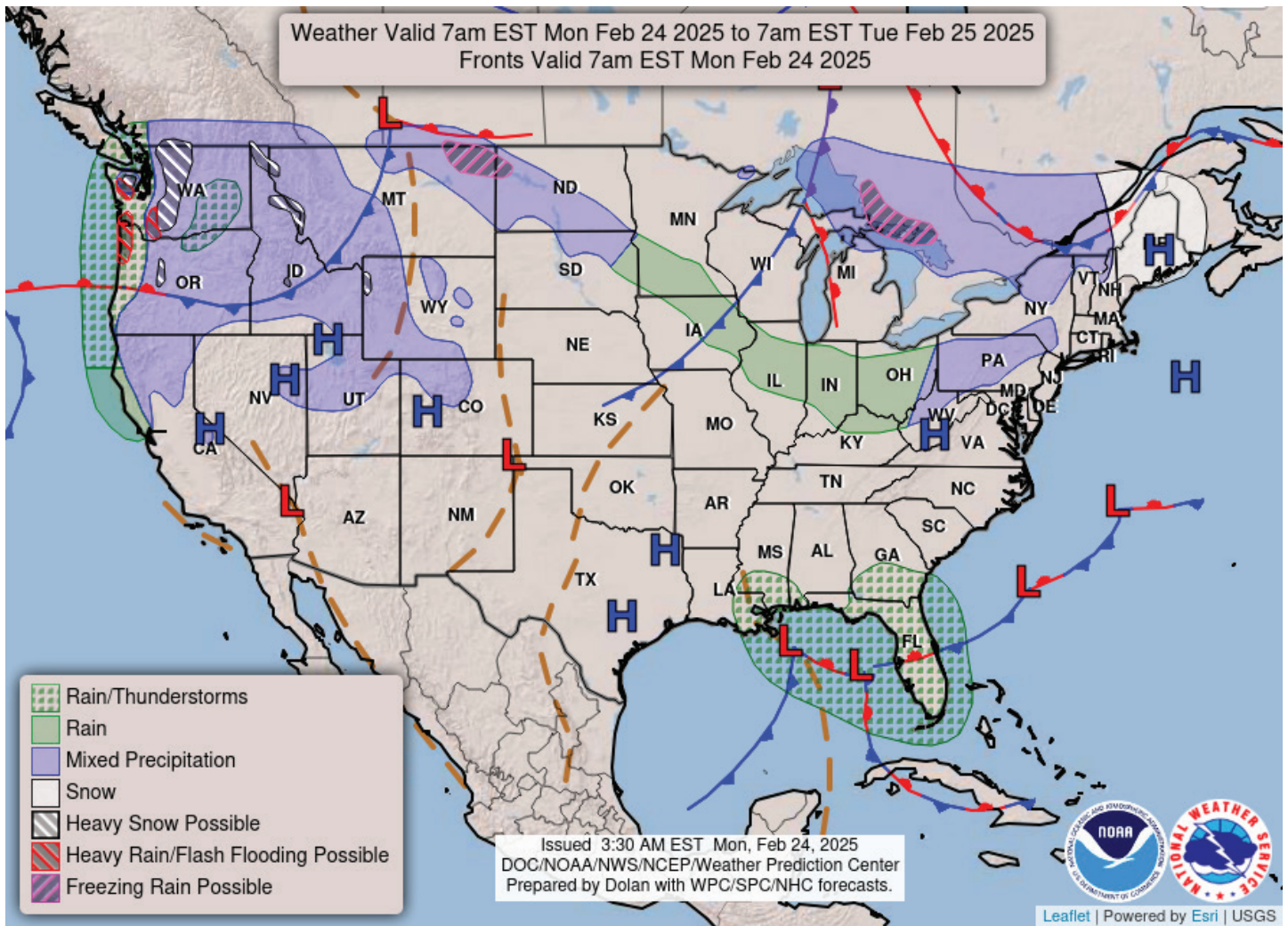
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.20

Average Precip to date: 1.07

Precip Year to Date: 0.20

Sunset Tonight: 6:14:13 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:15:02 am



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Today in Weather History

February 24, 2001: Heavy snow of 6 to 14 inches fell across central and northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota. Along with the heavy snow came blizzard conditions across northeastern South Dakota and west-central Minnesota during the morning hours of the 25th as northwest winds increased to 25 to 45 mph. As a result of the heavy snow and blizzard conditions, travel became difficult, if not impossible, resulting in some accidents and stranded motorists. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Waubay, Onida, Murdo, and Artas, 7 inches at Aberdeen, Faulkton, Ipswich, Kennebec, and Clark, and 8 inches at Miller, Castlewood, 23 N Highmore, and Pierre. In addition, nine inches of snow fell at Browns Valley, Wheaton, Clinton, Graceville, Dumont, Roy Lake, Mellette, Blunt, and Watertown. Other snowfall amounts included 10 inches near Summit, 11 inches at Webster, Ortonville, and Artichoke Lake, and 14 inches at Milbank.

1852 - The Susquehanna River ice bridge at Havre de Grace, MD, commenced to break up after forty days of use. A total of 1738 loaded freight cars were hauled along rails laid on the ice. (David Ludlum)

1936 - Vermont and New Hampshire received brown snow due to dust from storms in the Great Plains Region. A muddy rain fell across parts of northern New York State. (24th-25th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1969: The famous "100-Hour Storm" began in Boston, MA. Snow often fell between early on the 25th and noon on the 28th. The 26.3 inches at Logan Airport is the 2nd most significant snowstorm in Boston's history. In addition, 77 inches fell at Pinkham Notch Base Station in New Hampshire, bringing their February total to 130 inches. Their snow cover on the 27th was 164 inches. Mt. Washington, NH, received 172.8 inches of snow in the month.

1987 - A massive winter storm began to overspread the western U.S. In southern California, Big Bear was blanketed with 17 inches of snow, and Lake Hughes reported four inches of snow in just one hour. Snow pellets whitened coastal areas of Orange County and San Diego County, with three inches at Huntington Beach. The storm also produced thunderstorms with hail and waterspouts. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Strong winds produced snow squalls in the Great Lakes Region which created "white-out" conditions in eastern Upper Michigan. Squalls produced up to 14 inches of snow in Geauga County of northeastern Ohio. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A total of thirty-three cities in the eastern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date, and an Atlantic coast storm spread heavy snow from Georgia to southern New England. Snowfall totals in New Jersey ranged up to 24 inches in May County, with 19 inches reported at Atlantic City. Totals in North Carolina ranged up to 18 inches in Gates County, and winds along the coast of North Carolina gusted to 70 mph at Duck Pier. Strong winds gusting to 52 mph created blizzard conditions at Chatham MA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Strong northerly winds prevailed from Illinois to the Southern and Central Appalachians. Winds gusted to 68 mph at Sewickley Heights PA. High winds caused considerable blowing and drifting of snow across northern and central Indiana through the day. Wind gusts to 47 mph and 6 to 8 inches of snow created white-out conditions around South Bend IN. Traffic accidents resulted in two deaths and 130 injuries. Sixty-five persons were injured in one accident along Interstate 69 in Huntington County. Wind gusts to 60 mph and 4 to 8 inches of snow created blizzard conditions in eastern and northern Ohio. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2001: Over a dozen tornadoes spawned in central and eastern Arkansas. The strongest tornado (F3) was in Desha County, with parts of a farm shop found six miles away from where it was blown apart. An 18-month-old was killed in Fulton County by an F2 tornado.

2004 - Heavy snows blanket wide areas of northern New Mexico, closing schools and highways. The mountains east of Santa Fe receive 20 inches. Sandia Park, east of Albuquerque, measures 11 inches. 8 inches falls at Los Alamos. 2007: An EF3 tornado struck Dumas, Arkansas, injuring 28. Seven other tornadoes hit southeast Arkansas on this day, but no fatalities.

2016: A strong area of low pressure along with a cold front produced a severe weather outbreak from North Carolina to Pennsylvania. Not one but two rare February tornadoes occurred in central Virginia. The strongest tornado caused EF3 damage in Appomattox County. This is the first EF3 tornado ever in Appomattox County.



START IMMEDIATELY!

The great American novelist, Sinclair Lewis, was invited to give a lecture to a group of college students who wanted to become writers. As they sat quietly and waited expectantly, he opened his remarks by asking, "How many of you intend to become successful writers?"

Immediately, everyone in the audience held up a hand to declare their intentions.

"In that case," said Lewis, "my advice to you is to go home immediately and write."

Shortly after creating Adam, God directed him to care for and tend to the Garden that He had created for him. And, ever since then, man has been responsible to work with God and take care of His creation. Each day we are to accept every task that comes our way and do it as "though we are working for the Lord." Why? Because He has tasked us to care for His creation!

"Remember," said Paul, "the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward" if we "work hard and cheerfully" for Him. We must accept every task and each responsibility He offers us and recognize it as an opportunity to worship and serve Him every day. "Whatever we do – in word or deed – we are to do it for the glory of God!" We work for the Creator of the universe!

Prayer: Father, may we always remember that whatever we do, we are to do as an act of worship. We do this from hearts full of love because of Your salvation. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ. Colossians 3:23-24

Tags: Colossians 3:23-24work

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: 02.21.25

1 13 28 37 46 10

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$181,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 13 Mins
50 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.22.25

3 24 26 34 35 6

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$24,890,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 28 Mins 50
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.23.25

1 18 43 44 46 7

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 43 Mins 50
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.22.25

6 9 13 14 17

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$45,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 43
Mins 50 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.22.25

9 18 26 35 57 14

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 12 Mins 50
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 02.22.25

7 18 22 50 65 15

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$230,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 12 Mins 50
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

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Cluff's 17 lead South Dakota State past UMKC 70-65

By The Associated Press undefined

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Oscar Cluff's 17 points helped South Dakota State defeat UMKC 70-65 on Sunday. Cluff added 10 rebounds and four steals for the Jackrabbits (19-10, 10-4 Summit League). Jaden Jackson went 3 of 4 from the field (3 for 3 from 3-point range) to add 11 points. Kalen Garry shot 4 for 8 (1 for 4 from 3-point range) and 2 of 3 from the free-throw line to finish with 11 points.

Jamar Brown finished with 21 points, nine rebounds and three steals for the Kangaroos (11-18, 3-11). Babacar Diallo added 18 points, six rebounds, seven assists and three steals for UMKC.

Cluff put up 11 points in the first half for South Dakota State, which led 34-32 at the break. South Dakota State used an 8-0 second-half run come back from a seven-point deficit and take the lead at 62-61 with 2:18 left in the half before finishing off the victory. Garry scored 11 second-half points.

They told her women shouldn't box. Now she's Ghana's first female world champion

By NAA ADORKOR CUDJOE and ANNIE RISEMBERG Associated Press

ACCRA, Ghana (AP) — When Abigail Kwartekaa Quartey decided as a teenager to become a professional boxer — an unusual choice for a young woman in a working-class neighborhood of Ghana's capital of Accra — her family begged her to stop training.

Boxing is the pride of Jamestown, which is based around the fishing industry and also known for being home to many boxing stars. But like most sports in Ghana, boxing has often been seen as for men only, and women are discouraged from taking part.

But Quartey persisted.

And last year, at age 27, she became Ghana's first female world boxing champion and the first woman to travel the world as a member of the West African nation's national team.

"My aunts and siblings didn't like it when I started boxing. They would come here to beg my coach not to let me become a boxer," she said at the Jamestown neighborhood's Black Panthers Gym where Quartey has been training since her teenage years.

But when last November Quartey defeated British boxer Sangeeta Birdi in Jamestown's main boxing area, winning the WIBF World Super Bantamweight title, crowds of friends and supporters from the neighborhood celebrated wildly, seemingly forgetting about the prejudice against female boxers.

Triumph after challenges

Ghanaian media pronounced her win "history," but Quartey is quick to point out that she is by no means the first female boxer in Ghana.

"There were women in boxing before I ventured into boxing," she said. But they weren't allowed to travel outside the country, she added.

Quartey's long road to this spectacular victory highlights the many challenges that female athletes in African countries face in their careers.

Quartey grew up in Jamestown and, as a teenager, sold rice with her aunt to help the family make ends meet. The only people who supported her boxing dream were her brother, a fellow boxer, and her coach.

In 2017, she stopped boxing and started selling lottery tickets to earn money. It took a lot of convincing from her coach to get her back into the ring in 2021. She could not afford a manager, and feared she would not make it without one.

In Ghana, she said, "female boxers do not receive much support and it is difficult to keep training."

'Big deal' for everyone

Sarah Lotus Asare, a boxing coach and the project lead for the Girls Box Tournament, said Quartey's

world title meant a lot for all boxers in Ghana.

"Even for the male boxers, when they fight with non-Africans, it's very difficult for them to win, because they have a lot more facilities and equipment than we do," she said.

Quartey's title is "a big deal for her, the gym, the community, Ghana, Africa and the world at large," said her coach, Ebenezer "Coach Killer" Adjei, as he watched her train during an afternoon session at the Black Panthers Gym.

Follow me

But for Quartey, what counts the most is the impact on young women from her neighborhood.

She wants more women to become professional athletes.

"I am a world title holder and that confirms that what a man can do, a woman can also do," she said.

Training next to her was 18-year-old Perpetual Okaijah, who said her family had also tried to dissuade her from going to the gym, arguing that it was for men only. But she has kept on coming anyway.

"I look up to Abigail because she's a very tough girl," she said. "She inspires me, shows me the right thing."

Pope is awake, resting on 10th day of hospitalization after early stages of kidney problem detected

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis woke up and was continuing his therapies Monday after a quiet night, on the 10th day of his hospitalization for a complex lung infection that has provoked the early stages of kidney insufficiency, the Vatican said.

"The night passed well, the pope slept and is resting," it said. A medical bulletin was expected later Monday.

He is continuing to feed himself and is not receiving artificial or liquid nutrition, the Vatican said.

Late Sunday, doctors reported that blood tests showed "early, slight kidney insufficiency" that was nevertheless under control. They said Francis, 88, remained in critical condition but that he hadn't experienced any further respiratory crises since Saturday.

He was receiving high flows of supplemental oxygen and, on Sunday, was alert, responsive and attended Mass. They said his prognosis was guarded.

Doctors have said Francis' condition is touch-and-go, given his age, fragility and pre-existing lung disease. They have warned that the main threat facing Francis is sepsis, a serious infection of the blood that can occur as a complication of pneumonia.

To date there has been no reference to any onset of sepsis in the medical updates provided by the Vatican.

This hospitalization now looks set to be Francis' longest as pope. He spent 10 days at Rome's Gemelli hospital in 2021 after he had 33 centimeters (13 inches) of his colon removed.

In New York on Sunday, Cardinal Timothy Dolan acknowledged what church leaders in Rome weren't saying publicly: that the Catholic faithful were united "at the bedside of a dying father."

"As our Holy Father Pope Francis is in very, very fragile health, and probably close to death," Dolan said in his homily from the pulpit of St. Patrick's Cathedral, though he later told reporters he hoped and prayed that Francis would "bounce back."

Francis' condition has revived speculation about what might happen if he becomes unconscious or otherwise incapacitated, and whether he might resign.

Conservatives win German election while far-right party surges to second place

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Germany's mainstream conservatives led by Friedrich Merz won Germany's national election, ensuring that Ukraine has an even stronger supporter in the European Union's largest country and creating hopes for renewal in an economic powerhouse that has been badly battered in recent years.

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The far-right, anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) surged to become the nation's second-largest political force, gaining from a backlash against the high numbers of migrants and refugees the nation has absorbed over the past decade and a string of extremist attacks that has shaken its sense of security.

Merz, who is promising to unite Europe in the face of challenges from both Russia and the United States, is expected to become the country's next leader.

His first comments Monday after his party became the highest vote-getter in national elections were words of support for Ukraine, which is marking the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion.

"Europe stands unwaveringly by Ukraine's side," Merz posted on X. "Now more than ever, it holds true: We must put Ukraine in a position of strength."

"For a just peace, the attacked country must be part of peace negotiations," Merz added, in an apparent rebuke of the Trump administration, which has begun talks with Russia on ending the war that have so far cut out Ukraine and Europe.

Merz will likely partner with the center-left Social Democrats, who suffered a stinging defeat after their coalition collapsed. But the results were seen a rebuke for mainstream parties as AfD notched its best results ever — and the strongest for a far-right party since World War II.

The campaign was dominated by worries about large-scale migration, with Merz also vowing a tough approach, as well as the yearslong stagnation of Europe's biggest economy. The markets welcomed the victory of the fiscally conservative party, with stocks in major German companies rising Monday morning on hopes for a stable coalition government that could end policy gridlock and tackle the country's economic problems.

The election also took place against a background of growing uncertainty over the future of Ukraine and Europe's alliance with the United States.

The results released by the electoral authority showed Merz's Christian Democrats and the center-left Social Democrats winning a combined majority of seats in the national legislature after small parties failed to make the electoral threshold. Scholz has also supported Ukraine with arms and other aid, but some Western partners have said he could have done more, and faster.

Merz said on election night that he hopes to form a government by Easter at the latest. He has ruled out a coalition with the far-right AfD. For the time being, outgoing Chancellor Olaf Scholz, whose Social Democratic party suffered a major blow, will stay on as head of a caretaker government.

Mainstream parties hold majority as far-right surges

Merz's conservatives won 208 seats in the 630-seat Bundestag, while AfD won 152. The three parties in the former governing coalition lost seats, with SPD falling to 120 seats and the Greens to 85. The pro-business Free Democrats, which triggered early elections by pulling out of the coalition, failed to reach the 5% of the vote required to win seats.

The Left party got 64 seats, while the left-wing Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance came in just under the 5% hurdle.

AfD was jubilant on Sunday night, with leaders vowing to become the country's main party in the next election as its appeal expands. The party has established itself as a significant political force in the 12 years since it was founded, but it hasn't yet been part of any state or national government.

That's the result of what is often called a "firewall" against AfD. Other parties say they won't work with AfD, which is under observation by the domestic intelligence agency for suspected right-wing extremism, something the party objects to strongly. Its branches in three eastern states are designated "proven right-wing extremist" groups, which is particularly sensitive in view of Germany's Nazi past.

Yet a growing number of Germans feel that the mainstream parties have failed to manage the large-scale immigration and other problems in recent years, including responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The election took place seven months earlier than originally planned after Scholz's unpopular coalition collapsed in November, three years into a term that was increasingly marred by infighting. There was widespread discontent and not much enthusiasm for any of the candidates.

Merz says he's ready to face challenges from US and Russia

Merz said Sunday night that his top priority is to unify Europe in the face of challenges coming from the U.S. and Russia. Both U.S. Vice President JD Vance and Trump ally Elon Musk openly supported AfD. "I have no illusions at all about what is happening from America," he told supporters. "Take a look at the recent interventions in the German election campaign by Mr. Elon Musk."

He added that "the interventions from Washington were no less dramatic and drastic and ultimately outrageous than the interventions we have seen from Moscow. So we are under such massive pressure from two sides that my absolute priority now is really to create unity in Europe."

Germany is the most populous country in the 27-nation European Union and a leading member of NATO. It has been Ukraine's second-biggest weapons supplier, after the U.S, and will be central to shaping the continent's response to the challenges of the coming years, including the Trump administration's confrontational foreign and trade policy.

The conservative leader said that "the most important thing is to reestablish a viable government in Germany as quickly as possible."

"I am aware of the responsibility," Merz said. "I am also aware of the scale of the task that now lies ahead of us. I approach it with the utmost respect, and I know that it will not be easy."

"The world out there isn't waiting for us, and it isn't waiting for long-drawn-out coalition talks and negotiations," he told cheering supporters.

The Latest: Opposition leader Merz set to form Germany's next government

By The Associated Press undefined

Germany's mainstream conservatives won the country's national election, while a far-right party surged to become the nation's second-largest party, according to provisional results following Sunday's election.

Opposition leader Friedrich Merz claimed victory and Chancellor Olaf Scholz conceded defeat. Alternative for Germany, or AfD, had the strongest showing for a far-right party since World War II.

Merz's conservatives won 208 seats in the 630-seat Bundestag, while the AfD won 152. The three parties in the former governing coalition lost seats, with the center-left Social Democrats falling to 120 seats and the Greens to 85.

The Left party got 64 seats, while the left-wing Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance came in just under the 5% hurdle. The pro-business Free Democrats, which triggered early elections by pulling out of the coalition, also failed to reach the 5% of the vote required to win seats.

The election came as Germany and the rest of Europe grapple with the new Trump administration, the Russia-Ukraine war and security across the continent.

Here's the latest:

Germany's far-right leader says she missed Elon Musk's congrats call

Alice Weidel says she missed a congratulatory call from tech billionaire Elon Musk after the German election late Sunday. Her far-right party, the Alternative for Germany, finished in second place.

Weidel told reporters in Berlin that "this morning, when I turned my phone on or looked at it, I had received missed calls in the night from the USA, including from Elon Musk, who congratulated me personally."

Musk, an ally of President Donald Trump, has waded several times into German politics during the election campaign and openly supported Weidel's AfD.

Outgoing Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Friedrich Merz, who won the election, have sharply criticized Musk's efforts to influence the election in Germany.

Stocks in major German companies rise after election

Stocks in major German companies rose on Monday on hopes for a stable coalition government that could end policy gridlock and tackle the country's economic problems.

The DAX share index — which includes Mercedes-Benz Group, engineering firm Siemens AG and business software firm SAP — rose 0.74% to 22,452.04 in morning trading.

A two-party coalition between the conservative Christian Democratic Union and the center left Social

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Democrats "will likely be seen as positive by Germany's corporate sector," say analysts at Deutsche Bank.

The outgoing three-party coalition was at odds over how to fix the stagnating economy. Gains were tempered by the fact that parties of the far left and far right gained enough seats to block constitutional change. That could make it difficult to loosen restrictions on government borrowing that have hampered spending on pro-growth infrastructure and investment.

Despite finishing second, no place for far-right AfD in Germany's next governing coalition

Alternative for Germany has achieved the strongest showing by a far-right party since World War II, becoming the second strongest force in the national parliament and the most popular party in eastern Germany.

Yet the country's mainstream parties still refuse to work with it. The principle is known as a "firewall" against extreme right forces after the trauma of the Nazi era.

Merz has ruled out a coalition with the AfD and Olaf Scholz, whose Social Democrats party might be necessary as a junior party in the next government, said on Sunday that he hopes all political parties continue their traditional refusal to work with the far right.

"No cooperation with the extreme right," Scholz said.

Still, a growing number of Germans feel the other parties have failed to manage the large-scale immigration to Germany of the past decade.

Merz will invite Israel's prime minister to Germany despite an arrest warrant, Netanyahu's office says

The office of Israel's prime minister says Friedrich Merz will invite Benjamin Netanyahu to visit Germany despite an arrest warrant for the Israeli leader from the U.N.'s top war-crimes court.

The two spoke by phone on Sunday night as Netanyahu congratulated Merz on his victory, the prime minister's office said.

Merz's party confirmed the phone call with Netanyahu but said it doesn't comment on the contents of such conversations.

The ICC issued arrest warrants in November 2024 for Netanyahu, his former defense minister and Hamas' military chief, who was later confirmed killed in Gaza, accusing them of crimes against humanity in connection with the war in Gaza.

The warrant puts Netanyahu at risk of arrest whenever he travels to a country that is a member of the court. Neither Israel nor its top ally, the United States, are members of the court.

Merz promises to unify Europe despite challenges from the US and Russia

Merz says his top priority is to unify Europe in the face of challenges coming from the United States and Russia.

Both Vice President JD Vance and President Donald Trump's ally Elon Musk have openly supported the far-right AfD, which surged to second place in Sunday's election.

"I have no illusions at all about what is happening from America," Merz told supporters.

"We are under such massive pressure," he added. "My absolute priority now is really to create unity in Europe."

Turkish immigrant group in Germany criticizes far-right AfD's election gains

The leader of one of Germany's biggest immigrant groups has criticized AfD's second-place finish in Germany's election on Sunday.

Aslihan Yesilkaya-Yurtbay of the Turkish Community in Germany group says though the AfD won't be part of the next government, it will still have the power to "determine the discourse and drive this country against the wall."

About 25% of Germans have immigrant roots and people of Turkish descent are the biggest group.

Yesilkaya-Yurtbay adds that "many parties have followed the AfD's narrative to varying degrees and have promised to solve the 'migration problem' — with the aim of pushing the AfD back. This has been a resounding failure."

"People with a migrant roots are frightened and are thinking about leaving Germany," Yesilkaya-Yurtbay said. "Without migration our country has no future."

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NATO, Western allies and Zelenskyy congratulate Merz

NATO and Western allies, as well as Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy are congratulating Friedrich Merz on his election victory in Germany.

U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer wrote on X that he was looking "forward to working with the new government to deepen our already strong relationship, enhance our joint security and deliver growth for both our countries."

French leader Emmanuel Macron says he spoke to both Merz and Olaf Scholz following the election results — Merz to congratulate him, and Scholz to express his friendship to him.

"We are more determined than ever to achieve great things together for France and Germany and to work towards a strong and sovereign Europe," Macron wrote on X. "In this time of uncertainty, we stand united to face the great challenges of the world and our continent."

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called the results "a clear voice from the voters" and stressed the importance of the election to Europe.

"Europe must be able to defend itself, develop its industries, and achieve the necessary results. Europe needs shared successes, and those success will bring even greater unity to Europe," Zelenskyy wrote on X as Monday marked the third anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda wished Merz "success and prosperity" in leading Germany while Estonian Prime Minister Kristen Michal says Merz's victory is key to a stronger and united Europe.

"It is crucial to strengthen our support for Ukraine," Michal wrote on X.

European Council President Antonio Costa also congratulated Merz. "These might be challenging times. But I know that, just like in the past, the European Union will deliver and come out stronger," Costa wrote on X.

A political career once sidelined by iconic Angela Merkel

The top job has been late in coming for Friedrich Merz, a lawyer by profession, who saw his ascent derailed by former Chancellor Angela Merkel in the early 2000s and even turned his back on active politics for several years.

Merkel has described Merz as a brilliant speaker and complimented his desire for leadership, though she acknowledged this was a problem in their relationship.

"We are almost the same age ... We grew up completely differently, which was more of an opportunity than an obstacle," she wrote in her memoir "Freedom."

"But there was one problem, right from the start: We both wanted to be the boss," she said.

Merz aims to form new government by Easter

Friedrich Merz says he wants to form a new government by Easter, though it's not yet clear how easy that will be.

Merz said in a televised appearance with other party leaders Sunday evening: "We have nearly eight weeks until Easter now, and I think that should be enough time — the maximum time — to form a government in Germany."

Merz noted that, by then, Germany won't have had a government with a parliamentary majority for nearly six months.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's outgoing government will remain in office on a caretaker basis until the Bundestag elects the new chancellor.

Trump calls election result 'a great day for Germany'

President Donald Trump has called the election result "a great day for Germany" in a Truth Social post. He didn't name a party in his post.

"Looks like the conservative party in Germany has won the very big and highly anticipated election," he wrote.

The Union bloc is the conservative party, and won the election. However, Trump ally Elon Musk endorsed AfD before the election, and U.S. Vice President JD Vance met with AfD co-leader Alice Weidel on the sidelines of a recent conference in Germany.

"Much like the USA, the people of Germany got tired of the no common sense agenda, especially on

energy and immigration, that has prevailed for so many years," Trump wrote in a post that was entirely in capital letters.

Shariah court in Indonesia sentences 2 men to up to 85 lashes for having gay sex

By YAYAN ZAMZAMI Associated Press

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia (AP) — An Islamic Shariah court in Indonesia's conservative Aceh province on Monday sentenced two men to public caning for having gay sex.

The couple, aged 24 and 18, were arrested on Nov. 7, after neighborhood vigilantes in the provincial capital, Banda Aceh, suspected them of being gay and broke into their rented room to catch them naked and hugging each other.

The lead judge said that the two college students were "legally and convincingly" proven to have had gay sex and would receive 85 and 80 strokes respectively.

"During the trial it was proven that the defendants committed illicit acts, including kissing and having sex," said the judge, Sakwanah, who goes by a single name like many Indonesians. "As Muslims, the defendants should uphold the Shariah law that prevails in Aceh," she added.

She said the three-judge panel decided against imposing the maximum sentence of 100 lashes because the men were outstanding students who were polite in court, cooperated with authorities and had no previous convictions.

Prosecutors previously demanded each get 80 strokes, but the judges decided on a harsher punishment for the older man because they believed that he was the one who had encouraged and provided a place for sexual relations.

Both prosecutors and the lawyers for the two men said they accepted the sentence and will not appeal.

Aceh is considered more devout than other areas of Muslim-majority Indonesia and is the only province allowed to observe a version of Islamic Shariah law.

Indonesia's secular central government granted Aceh the right to implement Islamic Shariah law in 2006 as part of a peace deal to end a separatist war. A religious police and court system have been established, and the new law is a significant strengthening of Shariah in the region. Each year since then, more than 100 people have been publicly caned.

Aceh implemented an expansion of Islamic bylaws and criminal code in 2015 that extended Shariah law to the province's non-Muslims, who account for about 1% of the population, and allows up to 100 lashes for morality offenses including gay sex and sex between unmarried people. This will be the third time that Aceh has caned people for homosexuality.

Caning is also a punishment in Aceh for gambling, drinking alcohol, women who wear tight clothes and men who skip Friday prayers.

Human rights groups have criticized the law, saying it violates international treaties signed by Indonesia protecting the rights of minorities.

Indonesia's national criminal code doesn't regulate homosexuality, and the central government doesn't have the power to strike down Shariah law in Aceh. However, an earlier version of the law that called for people to be stoned to death for adultery was dropped because of pressure from the central government.

Friedrich Merz on course to take Germany's top job after election, vows to unite Europe

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Friedrich Merz, on course to become post-World War II Germany's 10th chancellor after the country's election, has vowed to prioritize European unity and the continent's security as it grapples with the new Trump administration and Russia's war on Ukraine.

Merz's task will be complicated by the need to form a coalition with the center-left Social Democrats of

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outgoing Chancellor Olaf Scholz. He has repeatedly pledged not to work with the far-right anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany party despite their second-place finish.

The 69-year-old conservative leader heads the center-right Union bloc, which won Germany's national election with 28.5% of the votes.

"I am also aware of the scale of the task that now lies ahead of us," he told supporters after his victory Sunday night. "The world out there isn't waiting for us, and it isn't waiting for long-drawn-out coalition talks and negotiations."

The top job has been late in coming for Merz, a lawyer by profession, who saw his ascent derailed by former Chancellor Angela Merkel in the early 2000s and even turned his back on active politics for several years. Despite his political experience, he is heading to the chancellery without previously having served in government.

The rivalry with Merkel

Merkel has described Merz as a brilliant speaker and complimented his desire for leadership, though she acknowledged this was a problem in their relationship.

"We are almost the same age ... We grew up completely differently, which was more of an opportunity than an obstacle," she wrote in her memoir "Freedom."

"But there was one problem, right from the start: We both wanted to be the boss," she said.

Merkel moved to consolidate her grip on Germany's center-right after the Union narrowly lost a national election in 2002. She pushed Merz aside as leader of its parliamentary group, taking the job herself in addition to the leadership of the Christian Democratic Union party she already held. She went on to lead Germany from 2005 to 2021.

A break from politics

Merz turned his back on active politics for several years after leaving the parliament in 2009.

He practiced law and headed the supervisory board of investment manager BlackRock's German branch. During that break, he often travelled for business to the United States and China, though he never lived outside Germany.

"Friedrich Merz is perhaps the most international chancellor Germany has had since the war — if he becomes chancellor," said Volker Resing, who wrote the recently published biography "Friedrich Merz: his path to power."

Merz "relies on personal initiative, on the freedom of the individual, on creativity and motivation. And only secondarily on the state," Resing said.

Political comeback

Merz launched his political comeback after Merkel stepped down as CDU leader in 2018 and announced that she wouldn't seek a fifth term of chancellor. However, he was narrowly defeated by centrist candidates more in Merkel's mold in party leadership votes in 2018 and early 2021.

Merz persisted and was elected party leader in the third attempt, after the center-right's defeat by current Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Germany's 2021 election. Merz cemented his power by also becoming the leader of the Union's parliamentary group.

According to Resing, Merz's "way of doing politics" is not to avoid confrontation at all costs. Instead, he maintains a perspective that "a certain amount of provocation can set off a real debate and perhaps a real development in motion."

During the election campaign, Merz has vowed to make Germany's ailing economy strong again and curb irregular migration.

With President Donald Trump back in the White House and tensions rising over how to resolve the war in Ukraine, Merz, who has long supported a strong transatlantic relationship, said after his victory that his top priority is to unify Europe in the face of challenges coming from the United States and Russia.

"I have no illusions at all about what is happening from America," he told supporters. "We are under such massive pressure ... my absolute priority now is really to create unity in Europe."

Flirting with the far right?

Merz put toughening Germany's immigration laws at the forefront of the election campaign after a migrant

killed two people in a knife attack in the Bavarian city of Aschaffenburg last month.

He brought a nonbinding motion before the parliament, calling for many more migrants to be turned back at Germany's borders. The motion was narrowly approved thanks to votes from the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, party.

That prompted his opponents to accuse Merz of breaking a taboo in allegedly working with the AfD, and a public rebuke from Merkel. Critics pointed to the episode as an illustration of what they say is Merz's tendency to impulsiveness.

Since then, hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets to protest against both Merz' motion and also the rise of the far right.

Merz has insisted he did nothing wrong and never worked with AfD, and also repeatedly vowed to "never" work with the party if he becomes chancellor.

Roots in rural Germany

Merz represents his rural region in Germany's parliament — an area where people are "rather down-to-earth, perhaps a little reserved," Resing said. "That's what shaped him: rural life."

As a politician, Merz has always championed conservative values and stressed the importance of family. He met his wife Charlotte, who is now a judge, while he was studying law. The couple has three adult children.

Merz joined the CDU in 1972 and was elected to the European Parliament in 1989. He first joined the German parliament in 1994.

In the pilot's seat

A pilot openly passionate about his hobby, Merz sometimes flies his own small plane from his home in the Sauerland region in western Germany to Berlin early on Monday mornings.

He has stuck to flying, despite the long hours imposed by his job as opposition leader and occasional criticism that he is indulging in a rich man's hobby.

"When you talk to him about flying, his eyes light up," Resing said. "He says that when you're above the clouds, that's freedom."

Foreign leaders visit Ukraine to show their support on war's 3rd anniversary

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A dozen leaders from Europe and Canada visited Ukraine's capital Monday to mark the third anniversary of the country's war with Russia in a conspicuous show of support for Kyiv amid deepening uncertainty about the Trump administration's commitment to helping it fend off Russia's invasion.

Some of Ukraine's most important backers, including European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, were among the visitors greeted at the train station by Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha and the president's chief of staff, Andrii Yermak.

In a post on X, von der Leyen wrote that Europe was in Kyiv "because Ukraine is in Europe."

"In this fight for survival, it is not only the destiny of Ukraine that is at stake. It's Europe's destiny," she wrote.

Ukrainian and European officials have been rattled by U.S. President Donald Trump's cordial approach to Russian President Vladimir Putin and his tough words for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

In a cascade of unwelcome developments for Kyiv, Trump has in recent days called Zelenskyy a dictator, suggested Ukraine is to blame for the war and ended Putin's three-year diplomatic isolation by the United States. U.S. officials have also indicated to Ukraine that its hopes of joining NATO are unlikely to be realized and that it probably won't get back the land that Russia's army has occupied, amounting to nearly 20% of the country.

Meanwhile, Putin's troops are making steady progress on the battlefield while Ukraine is grappling with shortages of troops and weapons.

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Alarm bells sound in Europe as Washington changes course

The guests, also including European Council President Antonio Costa as well as the prime ministers of Northern European countries and Spain, were set to attend events dedicated to the anniversary and discuss with Zelenskyy further support for Ukraine.

The shift in Washington's policy has set off alarm bells in Europe, where governments fear being sidelined by the U.S. in efforts to secure a peace deal and are mulling how they might pick up the slack of any cut in U.S. aid for Ukraine. The changes have also placed strain on transatlantic relations.

Costa on Sunday announced that he would convene an emergency summit of the 27 EU leaders in Brussels on March 6, with Ukraine at the top of the agenda.

"We are living a defining moment for Ukraine and European security," he said in a post on social media.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron are to both visit Washington this week.

EU foreign ministers on Monday approved a new raft of sanctions against Russia. The measures target Russia's so-called "shadow fleet" of ships that it uses to skirt restrictions on transporting oil and gas, or to carry stolen Ukrainian grain. The EU said 74 vessels were added to its shadow fleet list.

Asset freezes and travel bans were imposed on 83 officials and "entities" — usually government agencies, banks or companies.

Diplomacy ramps up after record Russian drone attack

The EU's top diplomat, Kaja Kallas, insisted that the U.S. cannot seal any peace deal to end the war without Ukraine or Europe being involved. She highlighted what she claimed were pro-Russian positions being taken up by the Trump administration.

"You can discuss whatever you want with Putin. But if it comes to Europe or Ukraine, then Ukraine and Europe also have to agree to this deal," Kallas told reporters in Brussels, where she is chairing a meeting of EU foreign ministers.

Kallas travels to Washington on Tuesday for talks with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said the third anniversary was "a grim milestone."

"More than 12,600 civilians killed, with many more injured. Entire communities reduced to rubble. Hospitals and schools destroyed," he said in Geneva.

Trump, who is keen to shift the burden for supporting Ukraine onto Europe, has sought to follow through on his campaign promises to end the war quickly.

Ukrainian officials say they don't trust Putin and suspect his motives. On Sunday, Russia launched its biggest single drone attack of the war, pounding Ukraine with 267 drones.

Russia's foreign ministry said Saturday that preparations for a face-to-face meeting between Trump and Putin were underway, and U.S. officials have said that they had agreed with Moscow to reestablish diplomatic ties and restart economic cooperation.

And on Sunday, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told the state TASS news agency that "quite a lot" of contact was ongoing between the Russian and American sides.

Asked whether the U.S. administration is acting in the interests of Russia or Ukraine's Western backers, EU chief diplomat Kallas said: "If you look at the messages that come from the United States, then it's clear that the Russian narrative is there very strongly represented."

German election winner sends message of support to Kyiv

Kallas rejected Trump's earlier inflammatory assertion that Zelenskyy was a dictator for not having held elections after his regular term expired last year, saying, "Russia hasn't had elections in 25 years."

Ukrainian law prohibits elections being held while martial law is in place, and Zelenskyy said as recently as Sunday that after martial law is lifted, "there will be elections and people will make their choice."

Coming off a victory in Sunday's German elections, conservative leader Friedrich Merz — also a staunch backer of Ukraine — posted on X Monday: "More than ever, we must put Ukraine in a position of strength."

"For a fair peace, the country that is under attack must be part of peace negotiations," Merz wrote.

The U.K. was also expected to announce new sanctions against Russia on Monday, having earlier described them as the biggest package since the early days of the war. Foreign Secretary David Lammy on

Sunday said the measures would be aimed at eroding Russia's "military machine and reducing revenues fueling the fires of destruction in Ukraine."

'Conclave' cast celebrates with Timothée Chalamet and Ariana Grande after big SAG Awards win

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — As the cast of "Conclave" descended steps leading to backstage at the Shrine Auditorium, they got a fresh round of applause from staff and crew at the Screen Actors Guild Awards to go with the big ovation they'd gotten moments earlier from the ballroom crowd.

The esteemed group of Ralph Fiennes, Isabella Rossellini and John Lithgow had enough collective gravitas on their own, but Harrison Ford, who had just presented them the best ensemble award, the night's big prize, also walked among them.

He was among the generations of stars, including the night's other big winners and nominees, to congratulate the elite performers from the papal potboiler as they made their way through the behind-the-scenes winners' obligations at the SAG Awards, with an Associated Press reporter in tow.

A photographer asked the "Conclave" winners to stop and pose, and shouted "Get in there Mr. Ford!" Ford, not wanting to horn in, walked backwards up the steps back on to the stage.

SAG staffers tried to lead the group to their next stop, but they had to wait. "I have to go get my purse!" Rossellini said, and returned to the ballroom. Lithgow went back in too to get his wife.

A whirlwind of stars congratulate 'Conclave' cast

A gleeful Jamie Lee Curtis descended on the two before they left and gave congrats and kisses to each. Fiennes walked ahead alone for a moment, and happened on Ariana Grande, whose cast of "Wicked" had been up against "Conclave" for best ensemble.

"Yay, congratulations!" she told Fiennes. "I was really happy for you guys I was screaming!"

She then introduced him to her date, Broadway's "Spongebob SquarePants" actor Ethan Slater.

Next came a station, normally a bar, where the actual SAG statuettes are handed out. (The ones they accept on stage are just props.)

Jane Fonda, the night's winner of the guild's Lifetime Achievement Award, walked up.

"Are you guys just hanging out at the bar?" she said.

"I'm waiting for you, Jane Fonda!" Fiennes replied.

Fiennes pulled her aside and quietly praised the call-to-arms political speech she made during the show.

"You nailed it," he said, adding that she expressed "what no one is saying."

Rossellini reappeared, gave a big hug to Fonda, and introduced her to the fourth "Conclave" cast member in attendance, Sergio Castellitto, who played the vaping Cardinal Tedesco in the film.

"He was the conservative," Rossellini said.

"I was the villain!" Castellitto added.

Enter newly-minted winner Timothée Chalamet

Timothée Chalamet, winner of best male actor for "A Complete Unknown," then showed up to get his statue.

"Where's Timothée?" Fiennes shouted.

"Hey Ralph, how's it going, I was hoping I'd see you guys!" Chalamet said.

The wins for "Conclave" and Chalamet threw a wrench into expectations for the Oscars that are just a week away, with Chalamet, Fiennes and Rossellini all nominees. The presumed Oscar frontrunner, "Anora," was shut out.

Lithgow returned to the group, and when Chalamet saw him he shouted, "Hey John, not bad eh?"

A photographer asked Lithgow to pose with his award, and he held up fingers to indicate this was his third.

"I don't want to boast, but..," he said with a shrug to the AP reporter.

A rush of photos and time to get familiar with their SAG statuette

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The group moved along and signed show posters, then made their way to the area where winners pose for press photos.

Actors always say awards are heavy when they get them, but by all accounts the SAG statue truly is. Kieran Culkin made the heft the subject of half his acceptance speech for best supporting male actor.

While he waited for the photo session, the 62-year-old Fiennes did some presses with his award with each arm.

The 79-year-old Lithgow held his over his head with one arm as the photos were snapped.

His wife of more than 40 years, UCLA business professor Mary Yeager, found a bench nearby to sit down after the long night.

The group then stood for virtual questions from reporters at a news conference, and made their way into the official after-party, where they got their statuettes engraved.

Before leaving with Yeager, Lithgow posed with a group of firefighters who had taken on the recent Los Angeles wildfires and had been the evening's special guests, getting a standing ovation when they were introduced before the show.

Inside the SAG Awards ballroom

The firefighters spent much of the night getting similar photos.

During the first break in the telecast, they headed straight past Ford and Jeff Goldblum, who were standing and chatting, to the table where Grande sat with the "Wicked" cast, perhaps looking to impress their children with the photos.

They later made their way to Ford, who wanted to talk with them for a while before taking a picture.

With only actors as nominees, the SAG Awards crowd has a high famous-to-not famous ratio, and behind the scenes it's easy to see things like best female actor winner Demi Moore talking to best male actor nominee Adrien Brody as they walk toward the restrooms. Both are also up for Oscars.

The SAG Awards are also a union meeting, and this group, who went on a historic strike in 2023, were asked through fliers at place settings, a video that played during a break, and a pre-telecast plea from their leader to support their striking colleagues who work on video games.

Executive Director Duncan Crabtree-Ireland, also spoke of the need for legislation putting strict limits on the use of artificial intelligence to create actors' performances.

"As I look out at our guests I see some of the most deep-faked people in the world," he said.

Japan and Philippines agree to deepen defense ties due to their mutual alarm over Chinese aggression

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Japan and the Philippines agreed Monday to further deepen their defense collaboration and talk about protecting shared military information in the face of mutual alarm over China's increasing aggressive actions in the region.

Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani and his Philippine counterpart, Gilberto Teodoro, forged the agreements in a meeting in Manila where their concern over China's actions in the disputed South China Sea and East China Sea was high in the agenda.

Japan and the Philippines are treaty allies of the United States, and the three have been among the most vocal critics of China's assertive actions in the region, including in the contested waters.

At the opening of his meeting with Nakatani, Teodoro said the Philippines was looking forward to boosting defense relations with Japan "against unilateral attempts by China and other countries to change the international order and the narrative."

Nakatani said after the meeting that he agreed with Teodoro "to strengthen operational cooperation," including joint and multinational defense trainings, port calls and information-sharing.

"We also agreed to commence discussion between defense authorities on military information protection mechanism," Nakatani said.

The Philippines signed an agreement with the United States, its longtime treaty ally, last year to better

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secure the exchange of highly confidential military intelligence and technology in key weapons to allow the sale of such weaponry by the U.S. to the Philippines.

Then-Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Teodoro signed the legally binding General Security of Military Information Agreement in Manila at a time when the U.S. and the Philippines were boosting their defense and military engagements, including large-scale joint combat drills, largely in response to China's increasingly aggressive actions in Asia.

Nakatani said that he and Teodoro "firmly concurred that the security environment surrounding us is becoming increasingly severe and that it is necessary for the two countries as strategic partners to further enhance defense cooperation and collaboration in order to maintain peace and stability in Indo-Pacific."

Japan has had a longstanding territorial dispute with China over islands in the East China Sea. Chinese and Philippine coast guard and navy ships, meanwhile, have been involved in a series of increasingly hostile confrontations in the South China Sea in the last two years.

Also high in the agenda of Nakatani and Teodoro, a copy of which was seen by The Associated Press, was the "expansion of bilateral cooperation, especially in the context of the Reciprocal Access Agreement."

Last year, Japan and the Philippines signed the agreement allowing the deployment of Japanese and Philippine forces for joint military and combat drills in each other's territory. The Philippine Senate has ratified the agreement, and its expected ratification by Japan's legislature would allow the agreement to take effect.

The agreement with the Philippines, which includes live-fire drills, is the first to be forged by Japan in Asia. Japan signed similar accords with Australia in 2022 and with Britain in 2023.

Japan has taken steps to boost its security and defensive firepower, including a counterstrike capability that breaks from the country's postwar principle of focusing only on self-defense. It's doubling defense spending in a five-year period to 2027 to bolster its military power.

Many of Japan's Asian neighbors, including the Philippines, came under Japanese aggression until its defeat in World War II, and Tokyo's efforts to strengthen its military role and spending could be a sensitive issue.

Japan and the Philippines, however, have steadily deepened defense and security ties largely due to concerns over Chinese aggression in the region.

A French surgeon is on trial accused of raping or abusing 299 people, mostly child patients

By NICOLAS VAUX-MONTAGNY and JADE LE DELEY Associated Press

VANNES, France (AP) — A former surgeon is set to stand trial in France on Monday for the alleged rape or sexual abuse of 299 victims, most of them children who were his patients, in what investigators and his own notebooks describe as a pattern of violence spanning over three decades.

Joël Le Scouarnec, now 74, will face hundreds of victims during a four-month trial in Vannes, Brittany. He faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted, on top of 15 years he has been serving after being found guilty in 2020 of rape and sexual assault of children.

He does not deny the allegations, though says he doesn't remember everything. Some survivors have no memory of the assaults, having been unconscious at the time.

Le Scouarnec's trial comes as activists are pushing to lift taboos that have long surrounded sexual abuse in France. The most prominent case was that of Gisèle Pélicot, who was drugged and raped by her now ex-husband and dozens of other men who were convicted and sentenced in December to prison terms ranging from three to 20 years.

Child protection and women's rights groups and medical community associations have called for a rally on Monday in front of the courthouse where Le Scouarnec will be tried.

The case began in 2017, when a 6-year-old neighbor said Le Scouarnec had touched her over the fence separating their properties.

A subsequent search of his home uncovered more than 300,000 photos, 650 pedophilic, zoophilic and

scatological video files, as well as notebooks where he described himself as a pedophile and detailed his actions, according to investigation documents.

In 2020, Le Scouarnec was convicted of rape and sexual assault of four children, including two nieces, and was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

He had admitted to child abuse dating to 1985-1986, but some cases could not be prosecuted because the statute of limitations had expired.

The Vannes trial will examine alleged rapes and other abuses committed between 1989 and 2014 against 158 men and 141 women who were aged 11 on average at the time.

The doctor sexually abused both boys and girls when they were alone in their hospital rooms, according to investigation documents.

"I didn't really remember the operation. I remembered the post-operation, a surgeon who was quite mean," one of the victims, Amélie Lévêque, recalled of her time in the hospital when she was 9 years old in 1991. "I cried a lot."

Years later, she described feeling overwhelmed when she learned that her name appeared in Le Scouarnec's notebooks.

"That was the beginning of the answers to a lifetime of questions, and then it was the beginning of the descent into hell," she told public broadcaster France 3. "I felt like I had lost control of everything. I wasn't crazy, but now I had to face the truth of what had happened."

"I fell into a deep depression. ... My family tried to help, but I felt completely alone."

The Associated Press does not name people who say they were sexually assaulted unless they consent to being identified or decide to tell their stories publicly.

Le Scouarnec's lawyer, Thibaut Kurzawa, told Sud-Ouest newspaper his client will "answer the judges' questions" as he decided "to face up to reality."

Le Scouarnec had already been convicted in 2005 for possessing and importing child sexual abuse material and sentenced to four months of suspended prison time. Despite that conviction, he was appointed as a hospital practitioner the following year.

Some child protection groups joined the proceedings as civil parties, saying they hope to toughen the legal framework to prevent such abuse.

Federal workers confront mass confusion as Musk's deadline to list accomplishments looms

By STEVE PEOPLES, ERIC TUCKER and AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Confusion and chaos loom as hundreds of thousands of federal employees begin their workweek on Monday facing a deadline from President Donald Trump's cost-cutting chief, Elon Musk, to explain their recent accomplishments or risk losing their jobs.

Musk's unusual demand has faced resistance from several key U.S. agencies led by the president's loyalists — including the FBI, State Department, Homeland Security and the Pentagon — which instructed their employees over the weekend not to comply. Lawmakers in both parties said that Musk's mandate may be illegal, while unions are threatening to sue.

Trump over the weekend called for Musk to be more aggressive in his cost-cutting crusade through the so-called Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, and posted a meme on social media mocking federal employees who "cried about Trump and Elon."

Musk's team sent an email to hundreds of thousands of federal employees on Saturday giving them roughly 48 hours to report five specific things they had accomplished last week. In a separate message on X, Musk said any employee who failed to respond by the deadline — set in the email as 11:59 p.m. EST Monday — would lose their job.

Mass confusion followed on the eve of the deadline as some agencies resisted the order, others encouraged their workers to comply, and still others offered conflicting guidance.

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One message on Sunday morning from the Department of Health and Human Services, led by Robert F. Kennedy Jr., instructed its roughly 80,000 employees to comply. That was shortly after the acting general counsel, Sean Keveney, had instructed some not to. And by Sunday evening, agency leadership issued new instructions that employees should "pause activities" related to the request until noon on Monday.

"I'll be candid with you. Having put in over 70 hours of work last week advancing Administration's priorities, I was personally insulted to receive the below email," Keveney said in an email viewed by The Associated Press that acknowledged a broad sense of "uncertainty and stress" within the agency.

Keveney laid out security concerns and pointed out some of the work done by the agency's employees may be protected by attorney-client privilege: "I have received no assurances that there are appropriate protections in place to safeguard responses to this email."

Democrats and even some Republicans, including Sen. John Curtis, R-Utah, were critical of Musk's ultimatum.

"If I could say one thing to Elon Musk, it's like, please put a dose of compassion in this," Curtis, whose state has 33,000 federal employees, said on CBS' "Face the Nation." "These are real people. These are real lives. These are mortgages. ... It's a false narrative to say we have to cut and you have to be cruel to do it as well."

Newly confirmed FBI Director Kash Patel, an outspoken Trump ally, instructed employees to ignore Musk's request, at least for now.

"The FBI, through the Office of the Director, is in charge of all of our review processes, and will conduct reviews in accordance with FBI procedures," Patel wrote in an email confirmed by the AP. "When and if further information is required, we will coordinate the responses. For now, please pause any responses."

Ed Martin, interim U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, sent his staff a message Sunday that may have caused more confusion.

"Let me clarify: We will comply with this OPM request whether by replying or deciding not to reply," Martin wrote in the email obtained by the AP, referring to the Office of Personnel Management.

"Please make a good faith effort to reply and list your activities (or not, as you prefer), and I will, as I mentioned, have your back regarding any confusion," Martin continued. "We can do this."

Officials at the Departments of State, Defense and Homeland Security were more consistent.

Tibor Nagy, acting undersecretary of state for management, told employees in an email that department leadership would respond on behalf of workers. "No employee is obligated to report their activities outside of their Department chain of command," Nagy wrote in an email.

Pentagon leadership instructed employees to "pause" any response to Musk's team, according to an email from Jules Hurst, the deputy undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness.

The Homeland Security Department, meanwhile, told employees that "no reporting action from you is needed at this time" and that agency managers would respond, according to an email from R.D. Alles, deputy undersecretary for management.

Thousands of government employees have already been forced out of the federal workforce — either by being fired or through a "deferred resignation" offer — during the first month of Trump's second term. There is no official figure available for the total firings or layoffs so far, but the AP has tallied hundreds of thousands of workers who are being affected. Many work outside of Washington.

Musk on Sunday called his latest request "a very basic pulse check."

"The reason this matters is that a significant number of people who are supposed to be working for the government are doing so little work that they are not checking their email at all!" Musk wrote on X. "In some cases, we believe non-existent people or the identities of dead people are being used to collect paychecks. In other words, there is outright fraud."

He has provided no evidence of such fraud. Separately, Musk and Trump have falsely claimed in recent days that tens of millions of dead people over 100 years old are receiving Social Security payments.

Meanwhile, thousands of other employees are preparing to leave the federal workforce this coming week, including probationary civilian workers at the Pentagon and all but a fraction of U.S. Agency for International Development staffers through cuts or leave.

The UN will vote to demand Russia pull troops out of Ukraine. But the US wants a softer approach

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — On the third anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the U.N. General Assembly is expected to vote Monday on dueling resolutions — Ukraine's European-backed proposal demanding an immediate withdrawal of Russian forces from the country and a U.S. call for a swift end to the war that never mentions Moscow's aggression.

The United States pressured the Ukrainians to withdraw their nonbinding resolution in favor of its proposal, a U.S. official and a European diplomat said Sunday. But Ukraine refused, and it will be put to a vote in the 193-nation assembly, two European diplomats said. All spoke on condition of anonymity because the talks were private.

It's a reflection of the tensions that have emerged between the U.S. and Ukraine after President Donald Trump suddenly opened negotiations with Russia in a bid to quickly resolve the conflict. It also underscores the strain in the transatlantic alliance with Europe over the Trump administration's extraordinary turnaround on engagement with Moscow. European leaders were dismayed that they and Ukraine were left out of preliminary talks last week.

In escalating rhetoric, Trump has called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy a "dictator," falsely accused Kyiv of starting the war and warned that he "better move fast" to negotiate an end to the conflict or risk not having a nation to lead. Zelenskyy responded by saying Trump was living in a Russian-made "disinformation space."

Since then, the Trump administration not only declined to endorse Ukraine's U.N. resolution, but at the last minute proposed its own competing resolution and pressed its allies to support that version instead. It comes as Trump plans to host French President Emmanuel Macron on Monday in Washington.

The U.S. also wanted a vote on its proposal in the more powerful U.N. Security Council. China, which holds the council presidency this month, has scheduled it for Monday afternoon.

The General Assembly has become the most important U.N. body on Ukraine because the 15-member Security Council, which is charged with maintaining international peace and security, has been paralyzed by Russia's veto power.

There are no vetoes in the assembly, and the Ukraine resolution, which is co-sponsored by all 27 members of the European Union, is almost certain to be adopted. Its votes are closely watched as a barometer of world opinion, but the resolutions passed there are not legally binding, unlike those adopted by the Security Council.

Since Russia forces stormed across the border on Feb. 24, 2022, the General Assembly has approved half a dozen resolutions that have condemned Moscow's invasion and demanded the immediate pullout of Russian troops.

The votes on the rival resolutions — which have sparked intense lobbying and arm-twisting, one European diplomat said — will be closely watched to see if that support has waned and to assess the backing for Trump's effort to negotiate an end to the fighting.

The very brief U.S. draft resolution acknowledges "the tragic loss of life throughout the Russia-Ukraine conflict" and "implores a swift end to the conflict and further urges a lasting peace between Ukraine and Russia." It never mentions Moscow's invasion.

Russia's U.N. ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, told reporters last week that the U.S. resolution was "a good move."

The Ukraine's resolution, meanwhile, refers to "the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation" and recalls the need to implement all previous assembly resolutions "adopted in response to the aggression against Ukraine."

It singles out the assembly's demand that Russia "immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders."

It stresses that any involvement of North Korean troops fighting alongside Russia's forces "raises serious

concerns regarding further escalation of this conflict.”

The resolution reaffirms the assembly’s commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and also “that no territorial acquisition resulting from the threat or use of force shall be recognized as legal.”

It calls for “a de-escalation, an early cessation of hostilities and a peaceful resolution of the war against Ukraine” and it reiterates “the urgent need to end the war this year.”

Trump will meet French and UK leaders as uncertainty grows about US ties to Europe and Ukraine

By MATTHEW LEE and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump holds talks this week with French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer at a moment of deep uncertainty about the future of transatlantic relations, with Trump transforming American foreign policy and effectively tuning out European leadership as he looks to quickly end Russia’s war in Ukraine.

Trump also has made demands for territory — Greenland, Canada, Gaza and the Panama Canal — as well as precious rare earth minerals from Ukraine. Just over a month into his second term, the “America First” president has cast an enormous shadow over what veteran U.S. diplomats and former government officials had regarded as America’s calming presence of global stability and continuity.

Despite some notable hiccups, the military, economic and moral power of the United States has dominated the post-World War II era, most notably after the Cold War came to an end with the collapse of the Soviet Union. All of that, some fear, may be lost if Trump gets his way and the U.S. abandons the principles under which the United Nations and numerous other international bodies were founded.

“The only conclusion you can draw is that 80 years of policy in standing up against aggressors has just been blown up without any sort of discussion or reflection,” said Ian Kelly, a U.S. ambassador to Georgia during the Obama and first Trump administration and now a professor at Northwestern University.

“I’m discouraged for a lot of reasons, but one of the reasons is that I had taken some encouragement at the beginning from the repeated references to ‘peace through strength,’” Kelly added. “This is not peace through strength — this is peace through surrender.”

Visits start on anniversary of war in Ukraine

Trump is set to host Macron on Monday, the three-year anniversary of the war in Ukraine, while Starmer will be at the White House on Thursday.

Their visits come after Trump shook Europe with repeated criticism of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for failing to negotiate an end to the war and rebuffing a push to sign off on a deal giving the U.S. access to Ukraine’s rare earth minerals, which could be used in the American aerospace, medical and tech industries.

European leaders also were dismayed by Trump’s decision to dispatch top aides for preliminary talks with Russian officials in Saudi Arabia without Ukrainian or European officials at the table.

Another clash is set to play out at the U.N. on Monday after the U.S. proposed a competing resolution that lacks the same demands as one from Ukraine and the European Union for Moscow’s forces to immediately withdraw from the country.

On the minerals deal, Zelenskyy initially bristled, saying it was short on security guarantees for Ukraine. He said Sunday on X that “we are making great progress” but noted that “we want a good economic deal that will be part of a true security guarantee system for Ukraine.”

Trump administration officials say they expect to reach a deal this week that would tie the U.S. and Ukrainian economies closer together — the last thing that Russia wants.

It follows a public spat, with Trump calling Zelenskyy a “dictator” and falsely charging Kyiv with starting the war. Russia, in fact, invaded its smaller and lesser-equipped neighbor in February 2022.

Zelenskyy, who said Sunday in response to a question that he would trade his office for peace or to join NATO, then angered Trump by saying the U.S. president was living in a Russian-made “disinformation space.” Confronting Trump might not be the best approach, analysts say.

"The response to President Trump doing something to you is not to do something back right away. You tend to get this kind of reaction," said retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery, former foreign policy aide to the late Sen. John McCain and current senior fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

He added, "This is part of a broader issue where I know the administration's characterizing themselves as disruptors. I think a better term might be destabilizers. And, unfortunately, the destabilizing is sometimes us and our allies."

That complicated dynamic makes this week's task all the more difficult for Macron and Starmer, leaders of two of America's closest allies, as they try to navigate talks with Trump.

High-stakes talks between European and US leaders

Macron said he intends to tell Trump that it's in the joint interest of Americans and Europeans not to show weakness to Putin during U.S.-led negotiations to end the war in Ukraine. He also suggested that he'll make the case that how Trump handles Putin could have enormous ramifications for U.S. dealings with China, the United States' most significant economic and military competitor.

"You can't be weak in the face of President Putin. It's not you, it's not your trademark, it's not in your interest," Macron said on social media. "How can you then be credible in the face of China if you're weak in the face of Putin?"

Yet, Trump has shown a considerable measure of respect for the Russian leader. Trump said this month that he would like to see Russia rejoin what is now the Group of Seven major economies. Russia was suspended from the G8 after Moscow's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region.

Trump dismissed Zelenskyy's complaints about Ukraine and Europe not being included in the opening of U.S.-Russia talks, suggesting he's been negotiating "with no cards, and you get sick of it."

Putin, on the other hand, wants to make a deal, Trump argued Friday. "He doesn't have to make a deal. Because if he wanted, he would get the whole country," Trump added.

The deference to Putin has left some longtime diplomats worried.

"The administration should consider going in a different direction because this isn't going to work," said Robert Wood, a retired career diplomat who served in multiple Republican and Democratic administrations, most recently as the deputy U.S. ambassador to the United Nations until December. "Let's not kid ourselves: Russia started this war, and trying to rewrite the narrative isn't going to serve the best interests of the U.S. or our allies."

Jury selection to begin in murder trial of suspect in suburban Chicago July 4 parade

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

WAUKEGAN, Ill. (AP) — The man accused of opening fire on a suburban Chicago Independence Day parade, killing seven people, is about to stand trial, nearly three years after the attack.

Jury selection starts Monday after several delays. Part of the reason is the erratic behavior of the defendant, Robert Crimo III, which has raised questions about what to expect at trial.

The attack

Authorities allege a gunman perched on a roof shot at crowds assembled for a Fourth of July parade in downtown Highland Park, an upscale suburb 30 miles (50 kilometers) from Chicago.

Seven people were killed in the 2022 shooting, including both parents of a toddler. Dozens more were wounded. They ranged in age from their 80s down to a then- 8-year-old boy who was left partially paralyzed.

Witnesses described confusion as shots rang out, followed by terror as families abandoned the parade route, leaving behind lawn chairs and strollers to find safety inside homes and businesses.

City leaders canceled the parade the following year but reinstated it in 2024 with a memorial for the victims.

Mayor Nancy Rotering has said the city doesn't want to be defined by the mass shooting. This month, she announced the parade will return in July, but without fireworks, partly because of "community trauma."

"This year's parade theme reminds us that teams bring people together in support of a common goal,

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and that we are most resilient when we support each other," Rotering said.

Killed in the shooting were: Katherine Goldstein, 64; Jacquelyn Sundheim, 63; Stephen Straus, 88; Nicolas Toledo-Zaragoza, 78; Eduardo Uvaldo, 69; and married couple Kevin McCarthy, 37, and Irina McCarthy, 35.

The case

Crimo faces 21 counts of first-degree murder — three counts for each person killed — as well as 48 counts of attempted murder and 48 counts of aggravated battery.

Prosecutors have turned over about 10,000 pages of evidence, as well as hours of a video-taped interrogation during which police say Crimo confessed to the shooting. But the 24-year-old Crimo has since pleaded not guilty and rejected a plea deal.

Court proceedings have made parts of the interrogation public, and defense attorneys tried unsuccessfully to have the videos thrown out, alleging Crimo's rights were being violated.

Videos show officers repeatedly asking Crimo if he understood his Miranda rights, which include the right to remain silent and have an attorney present.

"I've heard them a million times," Crimo said at one point.

Prosecutors also have shown footage of a person dressed in women's clothing and identified by police as Crimo headed toward the parade route on the morning of July 4, 2022.

Something that could also hurt the defense is Crimo's unpredictable behavior in court.

He didn't show up to two previous court hearings, refusing to leave his Lake County jail cell. And in June 2024, when he was expected to accept a plea deal and give victims and relatives a chance to address him publicly, he showed up to court in a wheelchair and rejected the deal, surprising even his lawyers. He also fired his public defenders and said he would represent himself, then abruptly reversed himself.

"Anything could happen at this point," said Eric Johnson, a law professor at the University of Illinois.

Crimo's defense attorneys and Lake County prosecutors have repeatedly declined comment ahead of the trial.

The family

Crimo's father, Robert Crimo Jr., pleaded guilty in 2023 to seven misdemeanor counts of reckless conduct. The charges focused on how his son obtained a gun license.

In 2019, at age 19, Crimo III was only allowed to apply for a gun license with the sponsorship of a parent or guardian. His father agreed, even though a relative had reported to police that his son had a collection of knives and had threatened to "kill everyone."

Crimo Jr., a onetime mayoral candidate and former owner of a now-closed deli, has attended his son's court hearings, making eye contact with him during hearings. He declined to discuss the case in detail.

"As a parent, I love my son very much and Bobby loves this country more than anyone would ever know," he said during a phone interview. "I have no further comment."

The jury

Potential jurors are due at the courthouse in Waukegan on Monday for what attorneys expect to be a monthlong trial. But the high-profile case could complicate efforts to find a jury.

Survivors and their families have filed multiple lawsuits, including against the maker of the semiautomatic rifle used in the shooting and against authorities they accuse of negligence.

Those who have spoken out declined interviews ahead of the trial. Some are expected to testify, along with police and a former school resource officer who encountered Crimo during middle and high school.

Experts say attorneys will have to approach juror selection with extra care.

"There is information that's out there," said Alan Tuerkheimer, who consults lawyers on jury strategy but isn't involved in the trial. "This is the kind of thing that has affected people in the community."

Millionaire Vivek Ramaswamy set to join the Ohio governor's race

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Vivek Ramaswamy, the Cincinnati-born biotech entrepreneur who departed the Department of Government Efficiency initiative on President Donald Trump's first day, was expected to launch his bid for Ohio governor Monday.

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Ramaswamy, 39, is set to kick off his campaign in Cincinnati, joining the 2026 Republican primary just a month after presumed frontrunner and then-Lt. Gov. Jon Husted left the running to take a U.S. Senate appointment.

Ramaswamy sought the GOP nomination for president in 2024 before dropping out to back Trump, who later tapped him to co-chair the efficiency initiative with billionaire Elon Musk. A near-billionaire himself, Ramaswamy has promoted his ties to Trump as he lines up key endorsements and donors in the governor's race, but the president has made no formal endorsement yet.

Ramaswamy joins a competitive GOP primary field to succeed Republican Gov. Mike DeWine, 78, a veteran center-right politician who is term-limited.

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost announced a bid for the seat in January and Heather Hill, a Black entrepreneur from Appalachia, also is running. Dr. Amy Acton, the former state health director who helped lead Ohio through the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, is running as a Democrat.

They will compete in a former bellwether state that has tacked reliably red in recent years, having voted for Trump three times by more than 8 percentage points. Republicans also hold every statewide executive office, a majority on the Ohio Supreme Court and supermajorities in both legislative chambers.

Ramaswamy, who is Hindu, outlined the 10 core beliefs featured in his presidential campaign — led by "God is real" followed by "there are two genders" — in the 2024 book, "Truths: The Future of America First." He first rose to political prominence with his 2021 book, "Woke Inc: Inside Corporate America's Social Justice Scam," a scorching critique of corporations that he said use social justice causes as a smokescreen for self-interested policies.

He seeks to buck the traditional route to Ohio's governorship, which runs through extensive government service often stretching decades, and instead mount a Trump-style ascent into the job directly from the business world.

The formula has worked for Vice President JD Vance and U.S. Sen. Bernie Moreno, two political newcomers who won Senate seats with the help of Trump's endorsement in 2022 and 2024, respectively. But Ramaswamy will test it in a state government-level race for the first time in recent memory.

DeWine passed Ramaswamy over to appoint Husted to the Senate seat vacated by Vance, citing Husted's decades of elective experience. The gubernatorial bid by Husted, a former Ohio House speaker and secretary of state, had locked down many key endorsements and wealthy donors, who are now largely free agents.

Yost joined the race as rumors circulated that Ramaswamy was planning a run. Since then, however, Ohio Treasurer Robert Sprague and Republican Secretary of State Frank LaRose have endorsed Ramaswamy.

Pennsylvania hostage-taking and shootout highlight rising violence against US hospital workers

By MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

A man who took hostages in a Pennsylvania hospital during a shooting that killed a police officer and wounded five other people highlights the rising violence against U.S. healthcare workers and the challenge of protecting them.

Diogenes Archangel-Ortiz, 49, carried a pistol and zip ties into the intensive care unit at UPMC Memorial Hospital in southern Pennsylvania's York County and took staff members hostage Saturday before he was killed in a shootout with police, officials said. The attack also left a doctor, nurse, custodian and two other officers wounded.

Officers opened fire as Archangel-Ortiz held at gunpoint a female staff member whose hands had been zip-tied, police said.

The man apparently intentionally targeted the hospital after he was in contact with the intensive care unit earlier in the week for medical care involving someone else, according to the York County district attorney.

Such violence at hospitals is on the rise, often in emergency departments but also maternity wards and

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intensive care units, hospital security consultant Dick Sem said.

"Many people are more confrontational, quicker to become angry, quicker to become threatening," Sem said. "I interview thousands of nurses and hear all the time about how they're being abused every day."

Archangel-Ortiz's motives remained unclear but nurses report increasing harassment from the public, especially following the coronavirus pandemic, said Sem, former director of security and crisis management for Waste Management and vice president at Pinkerton/Securitas.

In hospital attacks, unlike random mass shootings elsewhere, the shooter is often targeting somebody, sometimes resentful about the care given a relative who died, Sem noted.

"It tends to be someone who's mad at somebody," Sem said. "It might be a domestic violence situation or employees, ex-employees. There's all kinds of variables."

At WellSpan Health, a nearby hospital where some of the victims were taken, Megan Foltz said she has been worried about violence since she began working as a nurse nearly 20 years ago.

"In the critical care environment, of course there's going to be heightened emotions. People are losing loved ones. There can be gang violence, domestic violence. Inebriated individuals," Foltz said.

Besides the fear of being hurt themselves, nurses fear leaving their patients unguarded.

"If you step away from a bedside to run, to hide, to keep safe, you're leaving your patient vulnerable," she said.

Healthcare and social assistance employees suffered almost three-quarters of nonfatal attacks on workers in the private sector in 2021 and 2022 for a rate more than five times the national average, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Other recent attacks on U.S. healthcare workers include:

— Last year, a man shot two corrections officers in the ambulance bay of an Idaho hospital while freeing a white supremacist gang member before he could be returned to prison. They were caught less than two days later.

— In 2023, a gunman killed a security guard and wounded a hospital worker in a Portland, Oregon, hospital's maternity unit before being killed by police in a confrontation elsewhere. Also in 2023, a man opened fire in a medical center waiting room in Atlanta, killing one woman and wounding four.

— In 2022, a gunman killed his surgeon and three other people at a Tulsa, Oklahoma, medical office because he blamed the doctor for his continuing pain after an operation. Later that year, a man killed two workers at a Dallas hospital while there to watch his child's birth.

The shooting is part of a wave of gun violence in recent years that has swept through U.S. hospitals and medical centers, which have struggled to adapt to the growing threats.

With rising violence, more hospitals are using metal detectors and screening visitors for threats at hospital entrances including emergency departments.

Many hospital workers say after an attack that they never expected to be targeted.

Sem said training can be critical in helping medical staff identify those who might become violent.

"More than half of these incidents I'm aware of showed some early warning signs from early indicators that this person is problematic. They're threatening, they're angry. And so that needs to be reported. That needs to be managed," he said.

"If nobody reports it, then you don't know until the gun appears."

The Trump administration is putting USAID staffers on leave worldwide and firing at least 1,600

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration moved its fast-paced dismantling of the U.S. Agency for International Development toward what appeared to be its final phases, telling all but a fraction of staffers worldwide that they were on leave as of Monday and notifying at least 1,600 of the U.S.-based staffers they were being fired.

The move was the latest and one of the biggest steps in what President Donald Trump and cost-cutting

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ally Elon Musk say is their goal of gutting the six-decade-old aid and development agency in a broader campaign to slash the size of the federal government.

The move comes after a federal judge on Friday allowed the administration to move forward with its plan to pull thousands of USAID staffers off the job in the United States and around the world. U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols rejected pleas in a lawsuit from employees to keep temporarily blocking the government's plan.

"As of 11:59 p.m. EST on Sunday, February 23, 2025, all USAID direct hire personnel, with the exception of designated personnel responsible for mission-critical functions, core leadership and/or specially designated programs, will be placed on administrative leave globally," according to the notices sent to USAID workers that were viewed by The Associated Press.

At the same time, the agency said in the notices to staffers that it was beginning a firing process called reduction in force that would eliminate 2,000 U.S.-based jobs. A version of the notice posted later on USAID's website put the number of positions to be eliminated lower, at 1,600.

The administration gave no explanation for the discrepancy. USAID and the State Department did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment.

Within hours of that notice, individual staffers began reporting receiving the notices of their upcoming dismissal under the reduction in force.

The Trump appointee running USAID, deputy administrator Pete Marocco, has indicated he plans to keep about 600 mostly U.S.-based staffers on the job in the meantime, in part to arrange travel for USAID staffers and families abroad.

The move escalates a monthlong push to dismantle the agency, which has included closing its headquarters in Washington and shutting down thousands of aid and development programs worldwide following a freeze on all foreign assistance. A judge later temporarily blocked the funding freeze. Trump and Musk contend that USAID's work is wasteful and furthers a liberal agenda.

Lawsuits by government workers' unions, USAID contractors and others say the administration lacks the constitutional authority to eliminate an independent agency or congressionally funded programs without lawmakers' approval.

The Trump administration efforts upend decades of U.S. policy that aid and development work overseas serves national security by stabilizing regions and economies and building alliances.

The notices of firings and leaves come on top of hundreds of USAID contractors receiving no-name form letters of termination in the past week, according to copies that AP viewed.

The blanket nature of the notification letters to USAID contractors, excluding the names or positions of those receiving them, could make it difficult for the dismissed workers to get unemployment benefits, workers noted.

A different judge in a second lawsuit tied to USAID said this past week that the administration had kept withholding foreign aid despite his order temporarily blocking the funding freeze and must restore the funding to programs worldwide.

The separate ruling from Nichols, a Trump appointee, on Friday also cleared the way for the administration to start the clock on a planned 30-day deadline for USAID staffers and their families to return home if they want their travel paid for by the government.

The judge said he was satisfied by Trump administration assurances that workers abroad would be allowed to stay in their jobs while on leave beyond the 30 days even if they chose to remain overseas.

Foreign staffers fear that continued problems with funding flows and the gutting of most of the headquarters staff will make a safe and orderly return difficult, especially those with children in school, houses to sell and ill family members.

USAID's notice Sunday said it was "committed to keeping its overseas personnel safe" and pledged not to cut off USAID staffers abroad from agency systems and other support.

'Conclave' triumphs at SAG Awards and Timothée Chalamet wins best actor, upending Oscar predictions

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

The papal thriller "Conclave" won best ensemble and Timothée Chalamet took best actor at the 31st Screen Actors Guild Awards on Sunday, a pair of twists that added a few final wrinkles to an unusually unpredictable awards season.

In winning the guild's top award, Edward Berger's Vatican-set drama triumphed just as the Catholic Church was praying for the health of Pope Francis, who remained in critical condition Sunday after an asthmatic respiratory crisis. "Conclave" dramatizes the fictional election of a new pope. Earlier in the evening onstage, Isabella Rossellini shared the cast's best wishes for Pope Francis.

All the momentum going into the SAG Awards was with Sean Baker's "Anora," which had won with the producers, directors and writers guilds. Now, with "Conclave" winning with the actors and at the BAFTAs, what will nab best picture in a week's time at the Academy Awards is, again, anyone's guess.

"Wow," said "Conclave" star Ralph Fiennes taking the stage. "I've not been elected to speak. I've been designated to speak on behalf of our conclave, our ensemble."

That wasn't the only surprise in the ceremony held at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles and streamed lived by Netflix. Chalamet's best actor win upset "The Brutalist" star Adrien Brody and put the 29-year-old on course to possibly win his first Academy Award.

Chalamet looked visibly surprised when his name was announced at the ceremony. But once he reached the stage, the "A Complete Unknown" star spoke with composure and confidence.

"The truth is, this was 5 1/2 years of my life," said Chalamet. "I poured everything I had into playing this incomparable artist, Mr. Bob Dylan, a true American hero. It was the honor of a lifetime playing him."

He then added: "The truth is, I'm really in pursuit of greatness. I know people don't usually talk like that, but I want to be one of the greats."

The other Oscar favorites — Demi Moore, Zoe Saldana and Kieran Culkin — all won. The SAG Awards are closely watched as an Oscar preview. Their picks don't always align exactly with those of the film academy, but they often nearly do.

The last three best ensemble winners — "Oppenheimer," "Everything Everywhere All at Once" and "CODA" — all went on to win best picture at the Oscars. All but one of the SAG acting winners of the last three years has also won the Oscar. (The sole exception was Lily Gladstone, who won SAG's award for female actor last year for "Killers of the Flower Moon," but the Oscar trophy went to Emma Stone for "Poor Things".)

Moore seemingly solidified her Oscar chances by following up her Golden Globe win for her performance in "The Substance." Moore, whose campaign was boosted by her speech about being pigeonholed a "popcorn actress," has traded awards with "Anora" breakthrough Mikey Madison.

"What we believe is so much more powerful than what we think," said Moore. "The saying, 'I'll believe it when I see it' — the reality is when I believe it, I will see it."

The SAG Awards unfolded against the backdrop of the aftermath of the devastating wildfires that began in early January. Those fires forced the guild to cancel its in-person nominations announcement and launch a disaster relief fund for SAG-AFTRA members affected. Host Kristen Bell introduced attending firefighters as "the most attractive tables" among a sea of stars.

Jane Fonda, 87, given the guild's Life Achievement Award, provided the evening with its most passionately political moment. Fonda, a famed activist, spoke indirectly about President Donald Trump's administration.

"We are in our documentary moment," said Fonda. "This is it. And it's not a rehearsal."

Fonda added that "woke just means you give a damn about other people."

"A whole lot of people are going to be hurt by what's happening, by what's coming our way," said Fonda. "We are going to need a big tent to resist what's coming at us."

Jean Smart, who had advocated for canceling award shows because of the wildfires, won best female actor in a comedy series for "Hacks." Smart didn't attend, but participated in a pre-taped introduction as

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her character, Deborah Vance.

Also not in attendance: Martin Short, though he upset Jeremy Allen White to win best male actor in a comedy series for "Only Murders in the Building." The Hulu series also won for best comedy ensemble.

"Wait, we never win. This is so weird," said Selena Gomez. "Marty and Steve (Martin) aren't here because, you know, they don't really care."

Colin Farrell won his first SAG award, for his performance in "The Penguin" and also became the first winner ever introduced, by Jamie Lee Curtis, as "the man who gave me COVID at the Golden Globes." Farrell bounded to the stage and promptly responded, "Guilty as charged," before blaming Brendan Gleeson for giving it to him.

The night's first televised award went to Culkin, who has won just about every award in the category for "A Real Pain." Gripping the SAG trophy, he could quickly tell the difference.

"It is funny that the heaviest of all awards is given by actors," said Culkin, who characteristically rified his way through a rambling acceptance speech before swearing sincerity: "Believe it or not, this actually means a lot to me."

Netflix's "Emilia Pérez," which has seen its awards hopes largely dashed by controversy over old tweets by lead actor Karla Sofia Gascón, took home the award for best female supporting actor, for Oscar favorite Saldaña.

For Netflix's second time around streaming the awards, it inserted ads sporadically, like a traditional broadcast. Last year, downtimes were occupied by backstage interviews. Audio issues occasionally marred the broadcast, including brief interruptions of Fonda's speech.

After romps at the Emmys and Golden Globes, "Shōgun" kept up its dominance. The FX series won best drama series ensemble, along with acting awards for HiroYuki Sanada, Anna Sawai and for best stunt ensemble. The corresponding award for film went to the stunt performer ode "The Fall Guy."

Zelenskyy says progress made on reaching an agreement with the US on rare minerals deal

By JUSTIN SPIKE and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A contentious Trump administration proposal to give the U.S. \$500 billion worth of profits from Ukraine's rare earth minerals as compensation for its wartime assistance to Kyiv has been taken off the table, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Sunday, indicating a more equitable deal is in the works.

Zelenskyy had earlier declined a U.S. draft agreement on exploitation of his country's valuable minerals such as lithium used in the aerospace, defense and nuclear industries because it did not contain security guarantees and came with the \$500 billion price tag.

"The question of \$500 billion is no longer there," Zelenskyy told a news conference at a forum of government officials in Kyiv marking the three-year anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The Ukrainian leader said considering aid as a debt to be repaid would be a "Pandora's box" that would set a precedent requiring Kyiv to reimburse all its backers.

"We do not recognize the debt," Zelenskyy said. "It will not be in the final format of the agreement."

No further details were given on the state of negotiations. Ukraine has insisted on security guarantees that it needs to deter any potential Russian aggression in the future.

Trump's special envoy to the Middle East, Steve Witkoff, said on CNN's "State of the Union" that he expects a deal this week allowing the U.S. to play a greater role in exploiting Ukraine's mineral resources.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the administration's minerals plan was to create a U.S.-Ukraine partnership, calling it a "win-win."

"We make money if the Ukrainian people make money," Bessent told Fox News Channel's Sunday Morning Futures program.

Zelenskyy's chief of staff, Andrii Yermak, left the Kyiv forum early along with Economic Minister Yuliia Svyrydenko for what Yermak said were talks with U.S. officials on a potential deal.

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Later Sunday, Yermak posted on social media that he'd spoken with U.S. officials, including Bessent and Trump's national security adviser Mike Walz, saying it had been a "constructive conversation."

"We are making progress," Yermak wrote. "The USA is our partner and we are grateful to the American people."

Zelenskyy says he'd give up presidency for NATO membership

In response to a pointed question from a reporter on whether he would give up his presidency for peace in Ukraine, Zelenskyy said he would if it achieved a durable end to the fighting under the security umbrella of the NATO military alliance.

"If to achieve peace, you really need me to give up my post, I'm ready," he said. "I can trade it for NATO."

His comment appeared to be aimed at recent suggestions by President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin that elections should be held despite Ukrainian legislation prohibiting them during martial law.

Ukraine fears Trump's policy shift toward Putin

Trump's engagement with Russian officials and his recent agreement to reopen diplomatic ties and economic cooperation with Moscow have marked a dramatic about-face in U.S. policy that has rattled leaders in Ukraine and across Europe.

Zelenskyy has expressed fear that Trump pushing a quick resolution would result in Ukraine losing territory and being left vulnerable to future Russian aggression. U.S. officials have asserted the Ukrainian leader would be involved if and when peace talks actually start.

Trump, however, prompted alarm and anger in Ukraine this week when he suggested Kyiv had started the war and Zelenskyy was acting as a "dictator" by not holding elections.

On Sunday, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told the state TASS news agency that Moscow and Washington would continue bilateral talks at the end of next week.

Ryabkov said the talks would take place between department heads from both countries' foreign ministries, adding that "quite a lot" of contact was ongoing between the Russian and American sides.

European leaders prepare for talks with Zelenskyy and Trump

European Union Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and other top EU officials were headed to Kyiv Monday for talks with Ukraine's government as Europe scrambles to devise a response to the Trump administration's U.S. policy changes, and to maintain support for Kyiv if aid from Washington ends.

The U.K. said it would announce new sanctions against Russia on Monday, describing them as the biggest package since the early days of the war. Foreign Secretary David Lammy said the measures would be aimed at eroding Russia's "military machine and reducing revenues fueling the fires of destruction in Ukraine."

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron were to both visit Washington this week as Europe attempts to persuade Trump not to abandon Ukraine in pursuit of a peace deal.

Russia launches record drone strikes on eve of anniversary

Earlier on Sunday, Zelenskyy said Russia had launched 267 drones into Ukraine overnight, more than in any other single attack of the war.

Ukraine's air force said 138 drones were shot down over 13 Ukrainian regions, with 119 more lost enroute to their targets.

Three ballistic missiles also were fired, the air force said. One person was killed in the city of Kryvyi Rih, according to the city military administration.

Reacting to the latest Russian attacks, Andrii Sybiha, Ukraine's minister of foreign affairs, said on social media: "No one should trust Putin's words. Look at his actions instead."

More sanctions imposed on Russia

New Zealand will sanction an additional 52 people and entities involved in Russia's military and energy sectors, North Korea's support to Russia's war effort, and the forced relocation and reeducation of Ukrainian children, New Zealand's Foreign Minister Winston Peters said Monday.

Since March 2022, New Zealand has placed sanctions on more than 1,800 individuals and entities.

New Zealand will contribute a further 3 million New Zealand dollars (\$1.7 million) to the World Bank-administered fund for Ukraine, Peters said in a statement.

US pressures Ukraine to nix its UN resolution demanding Russian forces withdraw

By EDITH M. LEDERER and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.S. has pressured Ukraine to withdraw its European-backed U.N. resolution demanding an immediate withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine in favor of an American proposal that does not mention Moscow's invasion, a U.S. official and a European diplomat said Sunday.

But Ukraine refused to pull its draft resolution, and the U.N. General Assembly will vote on it Monday, the third anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, two European diplomats said.

The 193-nation General Assembly then is expected to vote on the U.S. draft resolution, according to the diplomats and the U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because private negotiations are still ongoing.

The Trump administration is also seeking a vote on its proposal in the more powerful U.N. Security Council. China, which holds the Security Council presidency this month, scheduled a vote on the U.S. resolution for Monday afternoon.

The dueling resolutions — the first since the invasion — highlight the tension between the U.S., Ukraine and European countries in the five weeks since President Donald Trump took office and has opened talks with Russia after years of isolation in a bid to end the war. European leaders were dismayed that they and Ukraine were left out of preliminary negotiations between the U.S. and Russia last week.

The General Assembly has become the most important U.N. body on Ukraine because the Security Council, which is charged with maintaining international peace and security, has been paralyzed by Russia's veto power.

There are no vetoes in the General Assembly, and its votes are closely watched as a barometer of world opinion. However, its resolutions are not legally binding, unlike those adopted by the Security Council.

Since Russian forces crossed Ukraine's border on Feb. 24, 2022, the assembly has adopted half a dozen resolutions condemning the war and demanding the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops.

The assembly votes have shown strong global opposition to Russia's conflict, and the votes on the rival resolutions Monday will be closely watched to see if that support has waned — and to assess support for Trump's effort to bring a speedy end to the war.

One European diplomat said there has been intense lobbying and arm-twisting on the rival resolutions. The U.S. official said the U.S. is trying to get Ukraine and the Europeans to back down on their draft. It comes as Trump plans to host French President Emmanuel Macron on Monday in Washington.

The United States believes "this is the moment to commit to ending the war. This is our opportunity to build real momentum toward peace," Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in a statement late Friday.

He said that "while challenges may arise, the goal of lasting peace remains achievable" and that the resolution would "affirm that this conflict is awful, that the U.N. can help end it, and that peace is possible."

The Ukraine resolution, co-sponsored by the 27-nation European Union, refers to "the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation" and recalls the need to implement all previous assembly resolutions "adopted in response to the aggression against Ukraine."

It singles out the General Assembly's demand that Russia "immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders" and its demand to immediately halt all hostilities.

And it calls for "a de-escalation, an early cessation of hostilities and a peaceful resolution of the war against Ukraine."

The very brief U.S. draft resolution acknowledges "the tragic loss of life throughout the Russia-Ukraine conflict" and "implores a swift end to the conflict and further urges a lasting peace between Ukraine and Russia." It never mentions Moscow's invasion.

Russia's U.N. ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, told reporters last week that the U.S. resolution was "a good move."

Russia also suggested an amendment, seeking to add the phrase "including by addressing its root causes" so the final line of the U.S. resolution reads, "implores a swift end to the conflict, including by addressing its root causes, and further urges a lasting peace between Ukraine and Russia."

Pope Francis in critical condition with early kidney failure but remains alert as prayers pour in

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis remained in critical condition Sunday and blood tests showed early kidney failure but he remains alert, responsive and attended Mass, the Vatican said, as the 88-year-old pontiff battles pneumonia and a complex lung infection.

In a late update, the Vatican said Francis hadn't had any more respiratory crises since Saturday night but was still receiving high flows of supplemental oxygen.

Some blood tests showed "initial, mild, kidney failure," but doctors said it was under control.

"The complexity of the clinical picture, and the necessary wait for drug therapies to provide some feedback, dictate that the prognosis remains guarded," Francis' doctors concluded.

Prayers for Francis, meanwhile, poured in from around the world, from his native Argentina to the seat of Sunni Islam in Cairo to schoolchildren in Rome.

In New York, Cardinal Timothy Dolan admitted what church leaders in Rome weren't saying publicly: that the Catholic faithful were united "at the bedside of a dying father."

"As our Holy Father Pope Francis is in very, very fragile health, and probably close to death," Dolan said in his homily from the pulpit of St. Patrick's Cathedral, though he later told reporters he hoped and prayed that Francis would "bounce back."

Doctors have said Francis' condition is touch-and-go, given his age, fragility and pre-existing lung disease. His condition has revived speculation about what might happen if he becomes unconscious or otherwise incapacitated, and whether he might resign.

Prayers for pope at Vatican

Francis was supposed to celebrate Mass on Sunday morning in St. Peter's Basilica and ordain deacons as part of the Vatican's yearlong Holy Year commemoration.

The organizer of the Holy Year, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, celebrated the Mass in his place and offered a special prayer for Francis from the altar before delivering the homily the pope had prepared.

"Even though he is in a hospital bed, we feel Pope Francis close to us. We feel him present among us," Fisichella told the hundreds of white-robed deacons.

A prewritten message that had been prepared for Francis to read Sunday, but he did not deliver, said he was "confidently continuing my hospitalization at the Gemelli Hospital, carrying on with the necessary treatment; and rest is also part of the therapy!" The message asked for prayers for him — as he always asks — and noted the upcoming anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, "a painful and shameful occasion for the whole of humanity."

Meanwhile in Francis' native Argentina, Catholics prayed for the pope at the Buenos Aires cathedral and the city's iconic obelisk was lit up "Francis, the city prays for you."

In Cairo, the grand imam of Al-Azhar, the seat of Sunni learning who forged a close bond with Francis, wished him well.

"I pray to Allah to grant my dear brother, Pope Francis, a swift recovery and to bless him with good health and well-being so that he may continue his journey in serving humanity," Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb wrote in a Facebook post.

The American Jewish Committee also offered prayers. "We stand together with our Catholic brothers and sisters during this challenging time," the group wrote on X.

And school children from around Rome deluged the Gemelli hospital with get-well cards, while Italian

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bishops led rosary prayers and celebrated special Masses across Italy.

Sepsis is a potential threat

Doctors have warned that the main threat facing Francis is sepsis, a serious infection of the blood that can occur as a complication of pneumonia. To date there has been no reference to any onset of sepsis in the medical updates provided by the Vatican, including on Sunday.

On Saturday, Francis developed a low platelet count, which remained low but stable Sunday. Platelets are cell-like fragments that circulate in the blood that help form blood clots to stop bleeding or help wounds heal. Low platelet counts can be caused by a number of things, including side effects from medicines or infections.

Francis also developed anemia and, during blood transfusions Saturday, was given hematin, a treatment designed to increase the level of hemoglobin in his blood, which in turn helps the blood carry more oxygen. Doctors reported Sunday that the therapy had been beneficial.

Francis, who has chronic lung disease and is prone to bronchitis in winter, was admitted to Gemelli hospital on Feb. 14 after a weeklong bout of bronchitis worsened.

Doctors first diagnosed the complex viral, bacterial and fungal respiratory tract infection and then the onset of pneumonia in both lungs. They prescribed "absolute rest" and a combination of cortisone and antibiotics, along with supplemental oxygen when he needs it.

Francis' recent reforms suggest he knew he was getting older and more fragile

Francis has taken several recent decisions that suggest he was well aware that he was getting old and frail.

Last year, he revised the funeral rites that will be used after he dies, simplifying the rituals to emphasize his role as a mere bishop and allowing for burial outside the Vatican in keeping with his wishes. But the core elements of the rites remain, including the three key moments that must be observed between the death of a pope and his funeral: In his home, in St. Peter's Basilica and in the place of burial.

In December, Francis created 21 new cardinals. All but one were under age 80 and thus eligible to vote in a conclave to elect his successor. Their additions brought the overall number of voting-age cardinals to 140, well over the 120 limit set by St. John Paul II. But several of the current electors are turning 80 this year, bringing the number down.

Earlier this month, once he was already sick, Francis decided to extend the five-year term of the current dean of the College of Cardinals, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, 91, rather than make way for someone new. As depicted in the film "Conclave," the dean of the College of Cardinals plays an important role in the life of the Catholic hierarchy, and is a crucial figure during the transition between one papacy and the next.

Francis also decided to extend the term of the vice-dean, Argentine Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, 81.

Conservative opposition wins German election and the far right is 2nd with strongest postwar result

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — The opposition conservatives led by Friedrich Merz won a lackluster victory in Germany's election Sunday and Alternative for Germany doubled its support in the strongest showing for a far-right party since World War II, projections showed.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz conceded defeat for his center-left Social Democrats after what he called "a bitter election result." Projections for ARD and ZDF public television showed his party finishing in third place with its worst postwar result in a national parliamentary election.

Merz said he hopes to put a coalition government together by Easter. But that's likely to be challenging.

A discontented nation

The election took place seven months earlier than planned after Scholz's unpopular coalition collapsed in November, three years into a term that was increasingly marred by infighting. There was widespread discontent and not much enthusiasm for any of the candidates.

The campaign was dominated by worries about the yearslong stagnation of Europe's biggest economy

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and pressure to curb migration — something that caused friction after Merz pushed hard in recent weeks for a tougher approach. It took place against a background of growing uncertainty over the future of Ukraine and Europe's alliance with the United States.

Germany is the most populous country in the 27-nation European Union and a leading member of NATO. It has been Ukraine's second-biggest weapons supplier, after the U.S. It will be central to shaping the continent's response to the challenges of the coming years, including the Trump administration's confrontational foreign and trade policy.

The projections, based on exit polls and partial counting, put support for Merz's Union bloc around 28.5% and the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany, or AfD, about 20.5% — roughly double its result from 2021.

They put support for Scholz's Social Democrats at just over 16%, far lower than in the last election and below their previous post-war low of 20.5% from 2017. The environmentalist Greens, their remaining partners in the outgoing government, were on about 12%.

Out of three smaller parties, one — the hard-left Left Party — strengthened its position, winning up to 9% of the vote after a remarkable comeback. The pro-business Free Democrats, who were the third party in the collapsed government, looked likely to lose their seats in parliament with about 4.5%. The Sahara Wagenknecht Alliance, or BSW, was hovering around the 5% threshold needed to win seats.

A difficult task for the winner

Whether Merz will have a majority to form a coalition with Scholz's Social Democrats or need a second partner too, which would realistically have to be the Greens, will depend on whether the BSW gets into parliament. The conservative leader said that "the most important thing is to reestablish a viable government in Germany as quickly as possible."

"I am aware of the responsibility," Merz said. "I am also aware of the scale of the task that now lies ahead of us. I approach it with the utmost respect, and I know that it will not be easy."

"The world out there isn't waiting for us, and it isn't waiting for long-drawn-out coalition talks and negotiations," he told cheering supporters.

The Greens' candidate for chancellor, Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck, said that Merz would do well to moderate his tone after a hard-fought campaign.

"We have seen the center is weakened overall, and everyone should look at themselves and ask whether they didn't contribute to that," said Habeck. "Now he must see that he acts like a chancellor."

The Greens were the party that suffered least from participating in Scholz's unpopular government. The Social Democrats' general secretary, Matthias Miersch, suggested that their defeat was no surprise — "this election wasn't lost in the last eight weeks."

A delighted far-right party doesn't have a partner

AfD co-leader Tino Chrupalla told cheering supporters that "we have achieved something historic today."

"We are now the political center and we have left the fringes behind us," he said. The party's strongest previous showing was 12.6% in 2017, when it first entered the national parliament.

The party's candidate for chancellor, Alice Weidel, said it is "open for coalition negotiations" with Merz's party, and that "otherwise, no change of policy is possible in Germany." Merz has repeatedly ruled out working with AfD, as have other mainstream parties — and did so again in a televised post-election exchange with Weidel and other leaders.

Weidel suggested AfD wouldn't have to make many concessions to secure a theoretical coalition, arguing that the Union largely copied its program and deriding its "Pyrrhic victory."

"It won't be able to implement it with left-wing parties," she said. If Merz ends up forming an alliance with the Social Democrats and Greens, "it will be an unstable government that doesn't last four years, there will be an interim Chancellor Friedrich Merz and in the coming years we will overtake the Union."

Merz dismissed the idea that voters wanted a coalition with AfD. "We have fundamentally different views, for example on foreign policy, on security policy, in many other areas, regarding Europe, the euro, NATO," he said.

"You want the opposite of what we want, so there will be no cooperation," Merz added.

Scholz decried AfD's success. He said that "that must never be something that we will accept. I will not accept it and never will."

More than 59 million people in the nation of 84 million were eligible to elect the 630 members of the lower house of parliament, the Bundestag, who will take their seats under the glass dome of Berlin's landmark Reichstag building.

Motive in Pennsylvania hospital shooting unclear, but officials say man had recent contact with ICU

YORK, Pa. (AP) — The man who authorities say entered a Pennsylvania hospital with zip ties and a pistol over the weekend had recent contact with the hospital's intensive care unit, where he took staff members hostage and was killed in a shootout that left a police officer dead and others injured.

Investigators released no new information Sunday about a possible motive for the shooting at UPMC Memorial Hospital in York on Saturday, in which a doctor, nurse, custodian and two other officers were injured.

But York County District Attorney Tim Barker said during a news conference Saturday that the man — identified as 49-year-old Diogenes Archangel-Ortiz — appeared to have had recent contact with the ICU "for a medical purpose involving another person." He didn't release any details or identify Archangel-Ortiz's relationship to the person, citing privacy concerns.

While the investigation is in its early stages, Barker said after watching surveillance video and reviewing statements by police and workers that it appeared the shooter intentionally targeted the workers there.

The injured hospital workers were reported to be in stable condition Sunday, and UPMC officials said they were "progressing in their recovery." The hospital remained closed to visitors.

"We know that families and visitors are vital to helping patients heal, and we are working toward making visitation possible again," the hospital said in a statement.

Barker said the hospital's own security officers were first on the scene and that the gunman fired at them, prompting a call for backup.

Dozens of officers responded from multiple agencies. When they attempted to access the ICU, the gunman was holding a female staff member at gunpoint and ordered police back behind the doors. They complied to ensure the worker wouldn't be hurt.

Authorities said Archangel-Ortiz ended up entering the hallway with the staff member, her hands bound with zip ties.

"The officers, left with no recourse, did open fire," Barker said, and the gunman was killed.

The officer who died was identified as Andrew Duarte, 30, of the West York Borough Police Department.

Duarte was a law enforcement veteran who joined the department in 2022 after five years with the Denver Police Department, according to his LinkedIn profile. He described receiving a "hero award" in 2021 from Mothers Against Drunk Driving for his work in impaired driving enforcement for the state of Colorado.

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro ordered flags be flown half-staff to honor Duarte.

The two wounded officers, from Northern York County Regional and Springettsbury Township police departments, were reported in stable condition. Their identities weren't immediately released.

The shooting was the latest episode of a wave of gun violence in recent years that has swept through U.S. hospitals and medical centers, which have struggled to adapt to the growing threats. Such attacks have contributed to making health care one of the nation's most dangerous fields, with workers suffering more nonfatal injuries from workplace violence than workers in any other profession, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Ohio bathroom law targeting transgender students has brought internal strife to some campuses

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

For some famously progressive colleges in Ohio, a new state law designed to keep transgender women from using women's restrooms at schools is bringing a moment of soul-searching for students, alumni and administrators.

It's one of many such laws adopted around the country, with the stated intent of protecting female students. The Ohio law — which applies fully to private colleges, unlike the others — allows individual institutions to decide how they will obey and enforce the measure.

But navigating the law has become a challenge, especially at colleges like Antioch and Oberlin, campuses built on a bedrock of idealism and protest where many see the law as part of a wider attack on transgender students.

For some, the idea of complying at all runs counter to the long-held value of being gender-inclusive. At the same time, colleges across the country are sorting the impact of the Trump administration's crackdown on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, including a threat to cut federal funding for schools that reject its interpretation of civil rights laws.

Oberlin has published policies saying the school will comply with the law taking effect Tuesday and is offering counseling and a chance for students to ask to move out of their dorms. Antioch has not announced a detailed plan.

Ahri Morales-Yoon, a first-year student at Antioch College who is nonbinary, said the law's impact will go beyond bathroom access.

"It will cause a lot of fear and uncertainty," they said. "It's in the back of your head that this law is hanging over us."

Colleges see effort to undercut support for transgender students

Jane Fernandes has been president of Antioch College since 2021. In that time, she said, she hasn't fielded a single complaint about anyone's presence in a restroom.

The school, about an hour's drive west of Columbus, was founded in 1850. Horace Mann, the education reformer, abolitionist and former member of Congress became its first president. The school shuttered in 2008 amid financial struggles but relaunched three years later. Nearly 90% of the school's 120 students identify as LGBTQ+ and about 1 in 6 say they are transgender.

"We will do everything we can to make it possible for transgender students to be very supported and safe here," said Fernandes, who has spoken out repeatedly against the law.

Shelby Chestnut, the executive director of the Transgender Law Center, who is an Antioch graduate and chair of the school's board of trustees, said the law is an effort to deter colleges from supporting students.

"This is an outright attack on student safety," they said in an interview.

The law calls for colleges in Ohio to designate all multioccupancy restrooms, locker rooms, changing rooms and showers for the exclusive use of males or females, based on sex at birth.

Ten other states already enforce bathroom laws. But none of those apply broadly at private colleges and universities.

"The point was that we're treating our students equally across the board in Ohio," said Republican state Rep. Beth Lear, one of the measure's sponsors.

The bathroom laws are part of a wave of anti-transgender policies. Most GOP-controlled states, including Ohio, have banned gender-affirming medical care for transgender minors and passed laws to keep transgender women from competing in women's sports.

Since returning to office, President Donald Trump has signed a series of executive orders targeting transgender and nonbinary people on several fronts, an abrupt change from President Joe Biden's efforts to include them explicitly in civil rights protections.

External pressure leads to internal campus strife

Since its founding in 1833, Oberlin College and Conservatory, outside Cleveland, has broken down social

barriers, including being among the first colleges to admit women and Black students. The college was on the cover of Life magazine in 1970 when it offered co-ed dorms.

By the 1990s, dorm residents were voting on bathroom policies, and they often made facilities open to any gender.

The bathroom law has sparked angst on campus and among some alumni, who see the administration's intention to comply with the law as an abdication of values by the school of nearly 3,000 students. The college said in a campus-wide note that following the law "does not diminish our support for every member of our diverse community."

But it's not that simple to everyone.

It goes against "the whole idea of Oberlin," English professor DeSales Harrison said, "to refrain from making a decisive argument about what seems true and good in the world."

Some have called for Oberlin to take a more forceful stand.

Kathryn Troup Denney, who graduated in 1995, is a Massachusetts-based musical theatre director who wrote a production about transgender people. Like several alumni on message boards, she said her alma mater should not comply with the state law, even if it means risking government funding.

"When the law is deliberately causing discriminating against one particular population of people," Denney said, "that's when good people can rise up and say, 'No, this law is not fair, it is not equitable, and it is not safe.'"

Oberlin officials declined interview requests.

Signs are changing, but it's not clear restroom use will

When students returned to Oberlin for the spring semester, there were new signs designating multi-person bathrooms as being for either men or women.

Many dorm bathrooms previously had signs designating them as open to everyone, people of just one gender or just one occupant. Students could change the signs. In academic and other buildings, instead of designating a gender, some signs described whether a bathroom had stalls or urinals.

Some of the new signs have been removed, apparently as acts of protests, and the administration has been replacing them.

But at both Antioch and Oberlin, it's not clear that who uses which restroom will change.

Natalie DuFour, Oberlin's student body president, noted the law does not require anyone to check who is using the bathrooms.

"Students, in theory, have the freedom to use whatever they want," she said.

Antioch's Fernandes has signaled the same thing: "We're not going to monitor who's going in which bathroom."

American Airlines flight from New York to New Delhi lands safely in Rome after security concern

ROME (AP) — An American Airlines flight from New York to New Delhi landed safely in Rome on Sunday afternoon after it was diverted due to a security concern, which later proved to be "non-credible," the airline said.

American Airlines said Flight 292 "was inspected by law enforcement" after landing at Leonardo da Vinci International Airport and "cleared to re-depart."

It didn't clarify the cause of the security concern, but added an inspection was required by protocol before the flight could land in New Delhi.

"The flight will stay in Rome overnight to allow for required crew rest before continuing to Delhi as soon as possible tomorrow," the airline said.

An Associated Press reporter filmed two fighter jets flying over the airport shortly before the unscheduled landing. Fire trucks were visible on the landing strip on one side of the plane after it landed.

Neeraj Chopra, one of the passengers on board, said the captain announced that the plane had to turn

around about three hours before it was supposed to land in New Delhi because of a change in "security status."

Chopra, who was traveling from Detroit to visit family, described the mood on the plane as calm after the initial announcement but said he began to feel stressed when the captain later announced that fighter jets would be escorting their plane to Rome.

"I felt a little panic of, okay, what's going on here?" Chopra told the AP. "There's got to be like something bigger going on here."

Passenger Jonathan Bacon, 22, from Dayton, Ohio, started paying attention to the flight tracker on the seatback in front of him after the captain's announcement of a "diversion due to a security issue," observing the plane's sharp turn away from New Delhi and route back toward Rome.

Passengers had no internet connection for much of the flight, Bacon said, with only some spotty access that clued them into early reports of the situation about two hours before landing.

After landing, Bacon said all passengers were loaded onto buses and taken to the terminal, where each passenger and their personal items underwent additional security screenings that were time-consuming and felt "slightly heightened," especially for arrivals. More than two hours after landing, Bacon and his friend said they were still waiting for their checked baggage, which they said was also undergoing security screenings.

"It was definitely the longest flight to Europe I've ever taken," Bacon said.

A spokesperson for the airport said it was continuing to operate normally.

Israel sends tanks into West Bank for first time in decades, says fleeing Palestinians can't return

By MAJDI MOHAMMED and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

JENIN, West Bank (AP) — Israeli tanks moved into the occupied West Bank on Sunday for the first time in decades in what Palestinian authorities called a "dangerous escalation," after the defense minister said troops will remain in parts of the territory for a year and tens of thousands of Palestinians who have fled cannot return.

Associated Press journalists saw several tanks move along unpaved tracks into Jenin, long a bastion of armed struggle against Israel.

Israel is deepening its crackdown on the Palestinian territory and has said it is determined to stamp out militancy amid a rise in attacks. It launched the offensive in the northern West Bank on Jan. 21 — two days after the current ceasefire in Gaza took hold — and expanded it to nearby areas.

Palestinians view the deadly raids as part of an effort to cement Israeli control over the territory, where 3 million Palestinians live under military rule.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said he and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the military to "increase the intensity of the activity to thwart terrorism" in all refugee camps in the West Bank.

"We will not allow the return of residents, and we will not allow terrorism to return and grow," he said.

Earlier, Katz said he had instructed the military to prepare for "an extended stay" in some of the West Bank's urban refugee camps from which about 40,000 Palestinians have fled, leaving them "emptied of residents."

The camps are home to descendants of Palestinians who fled during wars with Israel decades ago. It was not clear how long Palestinians would be prevented from returning. Katz said Israeli troops would stay "for the coming year." Netanyahu said they would stay "as long as needed."

Tanks were last deployed in the West Bank in 2002, when Israel fought a deadly Palestinian uprising.

The Palestinian foreign ministry called the Israeli moves "a dangerous escalation of the situation in the West Bank," and urged the international community to intervene in what it termed Israel's illegal "aggression."

"Even if they stay, we will return to the camp at the end," said Mohamed al-Sadi, one of those displaced

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from Jenin. "This camp is ours. We have no other place to go."

Netanyahu under pressure to crack down

With fighting in Gaza and Lebanon on hold, Netanyahu has been under pressure from far-right governing partners to crack down on militancy in the West Bank. The U.N. says the current Israeli military operation is the longest since the Palestinian uprising of the early 2000s.

Under interim peace agreements from the early 1990s, Israel maintains control over large parts of the West Bank, while the Palestinian Authority administers other areas. Israel regularly sends troops into Palestinian zones but typically withdraws them after missions.

More than 800 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since the war in Gaza erupted on Oct. 7, 2023, with a Hamas attack on southern Israel. Israel says most were militants, but stone-throwing youths protesting Israeli raids as well as bystanders have also been killed. In the most recent operation, a pregnant Palestinian woman was killed.

Jewish settlers also have carried out rampages in Palestinian areas in the territory. And there has been a spike in Palestinian attacks emanating from the West Bank. On Thursday, blasts rocked three empty buses in Israel in what police view as a suspected militant attack.

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

U.S. envoy to pursue extended ceasefire

The truce between Israel and Hamas in Gaza remains tenuous.

A week is left in the ceasefire's first phase, and no negotiations have been reported on the second phase. The truce's collapse could lead to renewed fighting in Gaza, where Netanyahu says 63 hostages remain, about half of them believed dead, including a soldier captured in 2014.

"We are ready to return to intense fighting at any moment," Netanyahu said Sunday. The military increased its "operational readiness" around Gaza.

The U.S. special envoy for the Middle East, Steve Witkoff, told CNN he expects the second phase to go forward, adding: "We have to get an extension of phase one and so I'll be going into the region this week, probably Wednesday, to negotiate that." He told CBS he will visit Qatar, Egypt, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

But a senior Hamas leader, Mahmoud Mardawi, said Sunday the group will not engage in further discussions with Israel through mediators until Israel releases the 620 Palestinian prisoners meant to be freed on Saturday.

Israel said early Sunday it was delaying the release until it gets assurances that Hamas stops what Israel calls "humiliating" handovers of hostages in staged ceremonies criticized by the U.S. and Red Cross as cruel.

Egypt and Qatar were pressing Israel to release the prisoners, and Egypt refused to discuss any Israeli demands before then, said an Egyptian official involved in the talks who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to talk to the media.

Palestinian family members were distraught. "What have the prisoners done? We don't know what happened. They killed our joy," said one mother, Najah Zaqqot.

The White House is supporting Israel's decision to delay releasing the Palestinians prisoners, calling it "appropriate."

National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes said Sunday that, "given Hamas' barbaric treatment of the hostages, including the hideous parade of the Bibas children's coffins through the streets of Gaza, Israel's decision to delay the release of prisoners is an appropriate response."

"The President is prepared to support Israel in whatever course of action it chooses regarding Hamas," Hughes said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu faced new criticism over the war while speaking at a military graduation. As he held up a picture of Shiri Bibas and her young boys, Ariel and Kfir, whose remains were returned from Gaza last week, to demonstrate "what we are fighting against," audience members called out "Shame!" and "Why didn't you save them?" The prime minister didn't react.

Congo's president says he'll create a unity government as violence spreads

By JEAN-YVES KAMALE Associated Press

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) — Congo's president says he is going to launch a unity government as violence spreads across the country's east and pressure mounts over his handling of the crisis.

In some of his first statements since Rwandan-backed rebels captured major cities in eastern Congo, President Felix Tshisekedi told a meeting of the Sacred Union of the Nation ruling coalition on Saturday not to be distracted by internal quarrels.

"I lost the battle and not the war. I must reach out to everyone including the opposition. There will be a government of national unity," said Tshisekedi. He didn't give more details on what that would entail or when it would happen.

M23 rebels — the most prominent of more than 100 armed groups vying for control and influence in eastern Congo — have swept through the region seizing key cities, killing some 3,000 people. In a lightning three-week offensive, the M23 took control of eastern Congo's main city Goma and seized the second largest city, Bukavu.

The rebels are supported by about 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, according to U.N. experts, and at times have vowed to march as far as Congo's capital, Kinshasa, over 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) away.

Rwanda has accused Congo of enlisting ethnic Hutu fighters responsible for the 1994 genocide in Rwanda of minority Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

M23 says it's fighting to protect Tutsis and Congolese of Rwandan origin from discrimination and wants to transform Congo from a failed state to a modern one. Analysts have called those pretexts for Rwanda's involvement.

On Sunday, Congo's communications minister, Patrick Muyaya said in a post on X that Rwanda and M23 had killed more than a dozen people in Goma. M23 did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

'Dark MAGA' spreads as conservatives embrace Musk's influence on Trump

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

OXON HILL, Md. (AP) — At an annual gathering of conservative activists, the signature red "Make America Great Again" hats popularized by President Donald Trump were interspersed with a noticeable number of the black "Dark MAGA" hats made popular by Elon Musk.

It was just one sign of Musk's emerging influence and how the world's wealthiest man — who once backed Democrats Barack Obama and Joe Biden — has become a conservative power center in his own right due to his connections to Trump.

"He is an authentic and unique individual. I am glad he is on the team," said Whitney Mason, a 62-year-old real estate agent who was traveling from Seattle.

Musk was an unexpected guest of honor at the Conservative Political Action Conference, with his appearance announced hours before he took the stage wielding a chainsaw. The prop, and his comments, left little subtlety about his role or his influence, days after the Trump administration claimed in court that Musk was not in charge of his signature Department of Government Efficiency.

Speakers at CPAC frequently brought up DOGE, playfully named after a meme coin with the face of a Shiba Inu dog popularized by Musk in 2021. They variously referred to him as a "white knight," a "hero of free speech," and according to one of his harshest critics, Steve Bannon, "Superman."

"What Elon and the team are doing is what Congress has not had the ability to do," House Speaker Mike Johnson told the crowd of conservatives. "They have cracked the code. They're inside the belly of the beast of the bureaucracy, and the algorithms are crawling through."

The Trump administration, under Musk's advice, has fired thousands of federal workers without warn-

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ing. It gave employees an option to resign and gutted agencies without congressional approval. The Tesla and SpaceX CEO, who bought Twitter in 2022, has pledged to identify areas to cut costs and streamline services and save trillions of taxpayer dollars, with directives that spark confusion and have prompted demonstrations across agencies.

As Trump spoke at CPAC on Saturday, Musk announced federal workers would get an email to explain what they accomplished over the last week, saying "failure to respond will be taken as a resignation."

"Elon is doing a great job," Trump said in his speech on Saturday. "We love Elon, don't we? He's a character."

Critics have said that Musk could stand to benefit from his close relationship with Trump as there are a number of federal investigations and safety programs created through federal agency orders that are hitting Tesla's plans to create fleets of robo-taxis and self-driving cars. Musk's SpaceX also has major contracts with the Pentagon, NASA and intelligence agencies.

Colin McEvers, a 19-year old who voted for Trump, admires Vice President JD Vance and praised Musk's business acumen, said he was concerned about Musk's growing power in the federal government and the decline of regulations that were protecting workers from big corporations.

"I like the basic principle of making government more efficient and cutting back on costs," said McEvers, a political science student at Salisbury University. "Do I think that there could be a lot of self-interest involved with him, with the richest man in the world playing a very large role in government in reducing these regulations, which could very well end up profiting his businesses? I definitely think that's probably a very large part of it too."

The Trump administration has not yet declared any actions that could benefit Tesla or Musk's other companies.

Musk's positions on issues like H-1B visas for high-skilled immigrant workers have made him a target of popular MAGA figures such as Bannon, who once served as Trump's chief strategist and hosts the influential "War Room" podcast. Musk was born in South Africa and was once on an H-1B visa.

Bannon has previously cast the world's richest man as a "parasitic illegal immigrant" and an "oligarch," who will abandon Trump when he deems him no longer useful. Bannon didn't criticize Musk at CPAC and instead faced scrutiny for making a straight-arm gesture on stage that critics on the right and left compared to a Nazi-style salute. Bannon said he was giving the crowd a wave.

A few miles away, at a Washington hotel near the White House, more than a thousand anti-Trump activists and thought leaders gathered at the Principles First Summit and laughed repeatedly as another billionaire, Mark Cuban, charged that Trump was "overselling" and Musk's actions so far were not helping people who voted for the Republican president.

"Elon is going to make his job a thousand times harder," Cuban said using expletives to accuse Musk of not caring.

Trump on Saturday posted on Truth Social that he "WOULD LIKE TO SEE HIM GET MORE AGGRESSIVE." During his speech, Trump trivialized complaints that Musk does not have an official role in his government despite his strong influence on decisions during his first month in office.

"People said 'well, what official position does he have?' I say patriot," Trump said.

'Captain America' dives in second weekend, 'The Monkey' adds to Neon's successes

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — "Captain America: Brave New World" soared on opening weekend, but crash-landed in its second go-around with audiences.

"Brave New World," the latest sign that the Marvel machine isn't quite what it used to be, remained No. 1 at the box office in its second frame with \$28.2 million in ticket sales, according to studio estimates Sunday. But after a debut of \$100 million over four days and \$88 million over three days, that meant a steep drop of 68%.

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While blockbusters often see significant slides in their second weekends, only two previous MCU titles have fallen off so fast: 2023's "The Marvels," which fell 78%, and 2023's "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania," which dropped 70%.

The Anthony Mackie-led "Captain America" installment has been slammed by critics, and audiences also have graded it poorly, with a "B-" CinemaScore. "Brave New World," which fans had hoped would right the Marvel ship, has been largely met as another example of a once impenetrable brand struggling to recapture its pre-"Avengers: Endgame" aura of invincibility.

Still, "Brave New World" has quickly grossed \$289.4 million worldwide, with international sales nearly reaching \$150 million. And with few big-budget offerings arriving in theaters in the coming weeks, it will have scant competition through much of March.

The biggest new release of the weekend was Oz Perkins' "The Monkey," the director's follow-up to his 2024 horror hit, "Longlegs." Adapted from a Stephen King short story, "The Monkey" opened with \$14.2 million for Neon, the second-best debut for the indie distributor. The best? "Longlegs," which launched with \$22.4 million.

Neon had much to celebrate over the weekend. Its top awards contender, "Anora," by Sean Baker, continues to gather momentum into next Sunday's Academy Awards. The best-picture favorite added wins at the Independent Spirit Awards on Saturday.

Perkins, Neon and Blumhouse, which partnered in the release of "The Monkey," have found a productive low-budget collaboration, with more on the way. Even if "The Monkey" doesn't reach the heights of "Longlegs" (\$126.9 million globally), Perkins and Neon return with "Keeper" this October.

"The Monkey," starring Tatiana Maslany and Theo James, revolves around an old monkey toy found in an attic. Reviews have been good (77% fresh on Rotten Tomatoes), though audiences were less impressed, giving it a C+ CinemaScore. Horror films, though, typically grade low.

As it did with "Longlegs," Neon leaned into cryptic promotion for "The Monkey," along with some macabre marketing. A funeral premiere was held Los Angeles' Immanuel Presbyterian Church, and fan screenings took place at Hollywood Cemetery. The film, produced by James Wan, cost \$10 million to make.

Lionsgate's "The Unbreakable Boy" opened with a paltry \$2.5 million in 1,687 theaters. The Christian-themed Jon Gunn-directed film starring Zachary Levi and Meghann Fahy, is about parents who learn their son is autistic and has brittle bone disease.

"Paddington in Peru," the third installment of the marmalade-mad bear, fell to third place in its second weekend. It grossed \$6.5 million in 3,890 locations, bringing its two-week total to \$25.2 million. "Paddington in Peru" has been most popular overseas, where it's collected \$125 million thus far.

"Ne Zha 2," the animated Chinese juggernaut, took in \$3.1 million from 800 theaters in its second weekend. In China, the sequel has grossed \$1.7 billion this month, setting numerous box-office records. Those totals put "Ne Zha 2" past "Inside Out 2" (\$1.66 billion) as the highest grossing animated film ever.

Top 10 movies by domestic box office

With final domestic figures releasing Monday, this list factors in the estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore.

1. "Captain America: Brave New World," \$28.2 million.
2. "The Monkey," \$14.2 million.
3. "Paddington in Peru," \$6.5 million.
4. "Dog Man," \$5.9 million.
5. "Ne Zha 2," \$3.1 million.
6. "Heart Eyes," \$2.9 million.
7. "Mufasa: The Lion King," \$2.5 million.
8. "The Unbreakable Boy," \$2.5 million.
9. "Chhaava," \$1.5 million.
10. "One of Them Days," \$1.4 million.

The leaders of France and Britain head to Washington to urge Trump not to abandon Ukraine

By JILL LAWLESS and SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The leaders of France and Britain are making tag-team visits to Washington this week as Europe attempts to persuade President Donald Trump not to abandon Ukraine in pursuit of a peace deal in the three-year-old war with Russia.

There is an element of good cop, bad cop in efforts by U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron to salvage American support for Kyiv.

Starmer, reluctant to openly confront Trump, speaks of being a bridge between Europe and the U.S. administration. Macron has more strongly criticized Trump's recent statements that echo Russia's narrative and American moves to negotiate with Moscow while sidelining Ukraine.

The two leaders spoke by phone on Sunday and said the U.K. and Europe must "show united leadership in support of Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression," Starmer's office said. Both also stress that Ukraine's voice and sovereignty must be at the center of any peace talks.

The French president warned Trump against appearing "weak in the face of President Putin."

"It's not you, it's not your trademark, it's not in your interest," said Macron, who is due at the White House on Monday, the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Starmer is set to follow on Thursday.

Double-track diplomacy

The trips come after Macron called a crisis meeting of European leaders in Paris last week to discuss the continent's next steps — and after Trump on Friday claimed Macron and Starmer "haven't done anything" over the past three years to end the war.

The centrist French leader, known for his bold diplomatic moves, says he'll seek to persuade Trump that American and European interests are the same, telling him: "If you let Russia take over Ukraine, it would be unstoppable."

Starmer, a cautious center-left politician, has avoided directly contradicting Trump or criticizing his actions. The U.K. joined the U.S. in refusing to sign a joint declaration at an Artificial Intelligence summit hosted by Macron in Paris this month in what was seen as an attempt to curry favor with Washington.

But the prime minister has reaffirmed Britain's support for Ukraine, rejecting Trump's assertion that Zelenskyy is a "dictator" and the president's suggestion that Kyiv started the war, which erupted when Russia invaded its neighbor on Feb. 24, 2022.

Starmer spoke to Zelenskyy on Saturday, expressing "the U.K.'s ironclad support for Ukraine and commitment to securing a just and enduring peace." He said he would stress "safeguarding Ukraine's sovereignty" when he speaks to Trump in Washington.

Some historians say the idea that Britain can be a transatlantic bridge is built on shaky foundations.

"The 'special relationship' has always been more important from the British end," said Oxford University history professor Margaret MacMillan. "When it comes right down to it, great powers tend to do what suits them."

She said the bottom line for Macron and Starmer "is they want the U.S. to stay involved in Europe. Whether they can achieve that is another matter."

Overcoming U.S. reluctance

Macron and Starmer will say in Washington that Ukraine must be at the table for negotiations on its future. They hope to get U.S. support for an emerging plan to have Europe deploy troops in a "reassurance force" to help guarantee Ukraine's future security. Starmer has stressed that the plan will only work if there is a U.S. "backstop," likely in the form of American air power, to deter Russia from attacking again.

Trump may well be skeptical. He has long questioned the value of NATO and complained that the U.S. provides security to European countries that don't pull their weight.

Both Macron and Starmer appear ready to answer Trump's call to boost defense spending. France spends just over 2% of its gross domestic product on the military, and Macron said last week that Europeans

“must increase our war effort.”

Britain spends 2.3% of gross domestic product on defense, and Starmer has said that will rise to 2.5%. He may put a date for reaching that target during his Washington trip.

Jamie Shea, a retired senior NATO official, said Starmer should try to appeal to Trump’s keen sense of his place in history.

“The main argument Starmer can put will be to say, ‘Mr. President this is going to be your peace agreement. You did it and for better or worse you will be associated with it forever. And do you want to risk a failure?’” Shea said.

Talking trade and tariffs

Trade — and an effort to avoid U.S.-imposed tariffs — will also be on the agenda for both Macron and Starmer.

Trump has ordered reciprocal import taxes on America’s trading partners, slapped 10% tariffs on China; effectively raised U.S. taxes on foreign steel and aluminum; and threatened, then delayed for 30 days, 25% taxes on goods from Canada and Mexico.

U.K. officials hope Britain’s departure from the European Union — a move Trump has praised — and relatively balanced trade with the U.S. will help it avoid harsh tariffs.

Starmer also wants to raise U.K. opposition to Trump’s suggestion that Palestinians be deported from Gaza so the U.S. can take over the territory. And he will seek to allay U.S. concerns about a U.K. agreement to cede to Mauritius the Chagos Islands, an Indian Ocean archipelago that’s home to a strategic U.S. military base.

If all else fails, Britain can deploy ceremonial soft power of royalty. The Daily Telegraph reported that Starmer will present Trump with an invitation from King Charles III for a state visit replete with royal pomp and pageantry.

Musk gives all federal workers 48 hours to explain what they did last week or face consequences

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of federal workers have been given little more than 48 hours to explain what they accomplished over the last week, sparking confusion across key agencies as billionaire Elon Musk expands his drive to slash the size of federal government.

Musk, who serves as President Donald Trump’s cost-cutting chief, telegraphed the extraordinary request Saturday on his social media network.

“Consistent with President @realDonaldTrump’s instructions, all federal employees will shortly receive an email requesting to understand what they got done last week,” Musk posted on X, which he owns. “Failure to respond will be taken as a resignation.”

Shortly afterward, federal employees — including some judges, court staff and federal prison officials — received a three-line email with this instruction: “Please reply to this email with approx. 5 bullets of what you accomplished last week and cc your manager.”

The deadline to reply was listed as Monday at 11:59 p.m., although the email did not include Musk’s social media threat about those who fail to respond.

Some agencies soon told employees that they did not have to comply if they received Musk’s message.

“The State Department will respond on behalf of the Department. No employee is obligated to report their activities outside of their Department chain of command,” according to an email from Tibor Nagy, acting undersecretary for management, that was obtained by The Associated Press.

The latest unusual directive from Musk’s team injects a new sense of chaos across beleaguered multiple agencies, including the National Weather Service, the State Department and the federal court system, as senior officials worked to verify the message’s authenticity Saturday night and in some cases, instructed their employees not to respond.

Thousands of government employees have already been forced out of the federal workforce — either

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by being fired or offered a buyout — during the first month of Trump's administration as the White House and Musk's so-called Department of Government Efficiency fire both new and career workers, tell agency leaders to plan for "large-scale reductions in force" and freeze trillions of dollars in federal grant funds.

There is no official figure available for the total firings or layoffs so far, but The Associated Press has tallied hundreds of thousands of workers who are being affected. Many work outside of Washington. The cuts include thousands at the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense, Health and Human Services, the Internal Revenue Service and the National Parks Service, among others.

Labor union leaders quickly condemned the ultimatum and threatened legal action.

AFGE President Everett Kelley called the new order an example of Trump and Musk's "utter disdain for federal employees and the critical services they provide to the American people."

"It is cruel and disrespectful to hundreds of thousands of veterans who are wearing their second uniform in the civil service to be forced to justify their job duties to this out-of-touch, privileged, unelected billionaire who has never performed one single hour of honest public service in his life," Kelley said. "AFGE will challenge any unlawful terminations of our members and federal employees across the country."

Musk on Friday celebrated his new role at a gathering of conservatives by waving a giant chainsaw in the air. He called it "the chainsaw for bureaucracy" and said, "Waste is pretty much everywhere" in the federal government.

McLaurine Pinover, a spokesperson at the Office of Personnel Management, confirmed Musk's directive and said that individual agencies would "determine any next steps."

What happens if an employee is on leave or vacation? Again, she said individual agencies would determine how to proceed.

In a message to employees on Saturday night, federal court officials instructed recipients not to respond.

"We understand that some judges and judiciary staff have received an email ... directing the recipient to reply with 5 accomplishments from the prior week. Please be advised that this email did not originate from the Judiciary or the Administrative Office and we suggest that no action be taken," officials wrote.

Judges around the country got emails from Musk's team in late January, apparently by mistake, U.S. District Judge Randolph Daniel Moss said earlier this month. Moss said he'd also gotten a message and ignored it.

The National Weather Service leadership acknowledged some confusion in a message to its employees late Saturday as well.

"Within the last few hours, some of us — potentially all of us -- received an email message titled 'What did you do last week?' Until such time as we can verify that the message that was received at or around 4:46pm ET is authentic, please do not respond."

National Weather Service leadership continued: "Thank you all for your continued support and dedication ensuring public safety and the national security of our country."

Trump's Russian rapprochement, Mars musing and DOGE dividends. And is the gold gone? It's Week 5

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's fifth week in office included a dramatic shift in U.S. policy toward Russia, firing the country's senior military officer, sitting for a chummy interview alongside bureaucracy-buster Elon Musk and seeking greater authority over independent regulatory agencies.

Trump also said "inflation is back," but said his short time back in the White House meant he had "nothing to do" with prices remaining high. That deflection can only work for so long, unless the economic outlook changes. Consumer sentiment suggests that isn't happening.

A look at where things stand after the first month of Trump's second term:

Russian policy shift

Trump dispatched top foreign policy advisers to Saudi Arabia for direct talks with Russian officials that were aimed at ending Moscow's war against Ukraine. Those meetings did not include Ukrainian or Euro-

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pean officials, a matter that has increased tensions between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Trump.

For much of the time since Russia invaded in February 2022, the United States, under the Democratic Biden administration, held to the basic tenet of "nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine." The new Republican administration has dispensed with that notion as Trump has accelerated his push to find an endgame to the war.

Zelenskyy said Trump was living in a Russian-made "disinformation space." Trump called Zelenskyy a "dictator" and falsely suggested that Ukraine started the war, though on Friday he acknowledged that Moscow had attacked its neighbor.

Trump has said he hopes to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin soon — preparations are underway, a Kremlin official said Saturday — and has said the war has cost too many, in lives lost and U.S. money spent equipping Ukraine.

"I'm not trying to make Putin nicer or better," Trump said during a Fox News Radio interview. "I'm just telling you the fact that war should have never happened" if Trump had been reelected president in 2020.

Trump's comments have alarmed European leaders and could make for some awkward moments when French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer visit the White House in the week ahead.

Pentagon shakeup as DOGE remains undaunted

In an extraordinary move, Trump fired Air Force Gen. CQ Brown Jr, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The dismissal of the history-making fighter pilot and respected officer was part of a push to rid the military of leaders who support diversity and equity in the ranks.

In an online post announcing the move, the president called Brown, only the second Black general to serve in that post, "a fine gentleman and an outstanding leader." But his ouster sent shockwaves through the Pentagon and was part of a larger wave of dismissals at the Defense Department.

Meanwhile, federal firings continued to accumulate as Musk's Department of Government Efficiency team pursued more spending cuts. On Saturday, Musk gave hundreds of thousands of federal workers a deadline of Monday at 11:59 p.m. EST to explain what they accomplished over the past week. In an X post, he said failure to respond to an email going out to employees with that request "will be taken as a resignation."

DOGE had some wins in court and posted a savings tracker meant to show taxpayer money being recovered by canceled contracts and other cuts.

The amounts listed were sometimes misattributed or erroneous, however, and the totals often didn't add up.

Trump nonetheless floated the idea of returning as much as 20% of any savings produced by DOGE to taxpayers. Musk suggested \$5,000 rebate checks might be in the offing, even though generating that much money might require cuts to big-ticket government items such as Social Security.

Trump and Musk gushed with mutual admiration during a joint, nationally televised interview. Musk also used an appearance at conference of conservatives to wave around a chainsaw meant highlight his leading role in cost-cutting efforts. Yet the White House suggested in a court filing that Musk wasn't heading DOGE, a notion undercut by Trump himself, who said he had "put a man named Elon Musk in charge."

On Saturday, the president posted on his social media site, "ELON IS DOING A GREAT JOB, BUT I WOULD LIKE TO SEE HIM GET MORE AGGRESSIVE."

Americans aren't feeling great about the economy

Trump signed an executive order seeking to give the White House control of independent regulatory agencies created by Congress, including the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Federal Trade Commission.

He and his aides say the economy is ready to roar. But the public is increasingly pessimistic. Trump's constant tariff threats, mass federal layoffs and broader uncertainty about spending cuts and taxes have spooked many consumers.

The University of Michigan said its consumer index in February dropped roughly 10% on a monthly basis. Predictably, Republicans feel better about the economy than Democrats. But even Republicans' index

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reading of 86.7 points was lower than it was in June 2016 when Democrat Barack Obama was president, and Trump built momentum for his election win on economic discontent.

In recent days, Walmart's stock has fallen nearly 10% as its latest earnings report suggested slower growth ahead due to possible tariffs.

"There's clearly something that's still nagging consumers," economist Ryan Cummings said in an email. "Whether that's elevated price levels, uncertainty surrounding policy, or consumers projecting their feelings about the direction of the country (and world) onto the economy itself."

It's hard to tell what will pique the president's interest next

He's already suggested invading Panama and Greenland, making Canada the 51st state and reinventing Gaza as a "Riviera" resort.

But there's more.

Last week, the president ordered his administration to take a closer look at Fort Knox, the United States Bullion Depository, "to make sure the gold is there." That directive came after Musk posted about the site, which has stored precious metal bullion reserves for the U.S. since 1937, potentially having been emptied of gold.

Trump also mused about the federal government taking back control of the nation's capital, which would reverse more than 50 years of home rule in the District of Columbia.

And he renewed his ideas about the U.S. sending humans to Mars, suggesting that task could fall to Musk's rocket company, SpaceX.

Trump's agenda begins advancing in Congress

The president has long advocating for one "big, beautiful bill" allowing Congress to address his budget priorities, from funding for the U.S.-Mexico border to extending tax cuts approved during his first term.

But there are signs he may be wavering.

"As long as we get to the same point, you know, two bills," Trump told Fox News Radio. "I guess you could make the case you could do three. You could do 10."

That came after Senate Republicans made the first tangible progress on Trump's funding goals, advancing a budget blueprint that would provide \$342 billion for border security and defense. It's an approach that would leave the president's prized tax cuts to be dealt with later.

House Republicans, however, aren't onboard. Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., is trying to generate support for a more ambitious plan that would also extend the tax cuts.

But doing so would increase federal deficits by more than \$4.5 trillion over the next decade. Trump's desire to add new tax breaks by exempting tips, Social Security benefits and overtime from income taxes only boosts the price tag.

That's creating a difficult balancing act. Johnson has almost no votes to spare with a narrow 218-215 majority for Republicans in the House. Budget hawks back the more than \$2 trillion in spending cuts over 10 years that are in the blueprint.

But lawmakers from more divided congressional districts worry their constituents will be harmed in the tradeoff. First-term Republican Rep. Rob Bresnahan of Pennsylvania posted on X that if a bill is put in front of him that "guts the benefits my neighbors rely on, I will not vote for it."

If the House plan falters, then pressure will build to give Trump an early win and take up the Senate approach.

Today in History: February 24, President Andrew Johnson impeached by US House

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Monday, Feb. 24, the 55th day of 2025. There are 310 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Feb. 24, 1868, the U.S. House of Representatives impeached President Andrew Johnson by a vote of 126-47 following his attempted dismissal of Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton; Johnson was later

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acquitted by the Senate by a single vote.

Also on this date:

In 1803, in its landmark *Marbury v. Madison* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court established judicial review of the constitutionality of laws and statutes.

In 1942, the SS *Struma*, a charter ship attempting to carry nearly 800 Jewish refugees from Romania to British-mandated Palestine, was torpedoed by a Soviet submarine in the Black Sea; all but one of the refugees died.

In 1981, a jury in White Plains, New York, found Jean Harris guilty of second-degree murder in the fatal shooting of "Scarsdale Diet" author Dr. Herman Tarnower. (Sentenced to 15 years to life in prison, Harris was granted clemency by New York Gov. Mario Cuomo in December 1992.)

In 1988, in a ruling that expanded legal protections for parody and satire, the Supreme Court unanimously overturned a \$200,000 award that the Rev. Jerry Falwell had won against *Hustler* magazine and its publisher, Larry Flynt.

In 1991, the United States began ground operations in the Gulf War by entering Iraqi-held Kuwait.

In 2008, Cuba's parliament named Raul Castro president, ending nearly 50 years of rule by his brother Fidel.

In 2011, *Discovery*, the world's most traveled spaceship, thundered into orbit for the final time, heading toward the International Space Station on a journey marking the beginning of the end of the shuttle era.

In 2022, Russia began a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, launching airstrikes on cities and military bases and sending troops and tanks from multiple directions.

Today's birthdays: Actor Dominic Chianese is 94. Nike co-founder Phil Knight is 87. Actor Barry Bostwick is 80. Actor Edward James Olmos is 78. Musician George Thorogood is 75. Baseball Hall of Famer Eddie Murray is 69. Actor Billy Zane is 59. Boxing Hall of Famer Floyd Mayweather Jr. is 48. Tennis Hall of Famer Lleyton Hewitt is 44. Actor Daniel Kaluuya is 36.