

Groton Daily Independent

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Saturday, March 8

Sunday, March 9

SPRING FORWARD - Turn Clocks ahead 1 hour

- Open Gym: 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.
- United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 10:30 a.m.
- St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.
- Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship/Milestones for 7th and 8th graders, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.
- Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.
- First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.
- Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.

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



Monday, March 10

- Senior Menu: Beef tips on rice, Capri blend, oranges with vanilla pudding, whole wheat bread.
- School Breakfast: Breakfast sliders.
- School Lunch: Frensch bread pizza, corn.
- School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.
- Groton Senior Citizens Meet, 1 p.m., Groton Community Center
- Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.
- United Methodist: PEO Meeting, 7 p.m.

Tuesday, March 11

- Senior Menu: Tatertot hot dish, green beans, pineapple, whole wheat bread.
- School Breakfast: Egg Omelet.
- School Lunch: Sloppy joe, tater tots.
- Boys SoDak16 Basketball
- Emmanuel Lutheran: Church Council, 6 p.m.
- United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

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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.

'A Digital Fort Knox'

President Donald Trump hosted a cryptocurrency summit at the White House yesterday, where crypto czar David Sacks and top executives from major crypto firms discussed the future of digital asset regulation.

The summit came one day after Trump signed an executive order establishing a Strategic Bitcoin Reserve and a US Digital Asset Stockpile within the US Treasury. The reserve will be funded through federal asset forfeitures, with an estimated 200,000 bitcoins (worth approximately \$17B) already in government possession. The order mandates a full audit of government-owned digital assets and will hold the assets as a long-term store of value, similar to other national stockpiles.

The Trump administration has said it aims for the US to be the "crypto capital" of the world and has halted legal actions against several crypto firms.

Nearly 200 dead as Syrian security forces clash with Assad loyalists.

Fighting between Syrian security forces and loyalists of former President Bashar al-Assad in the coastal regions of Latakia and Tartus has led to dozens of people being killed since Thursday, marking the worst violence since Assad's ousting in December. The conflict has prompted large-scale military reinforcements and curfews as the new government struggles to restore control.

Cause of death for actor Gene Hackman and wife Betsy revealed.

Hackman, 95, likely died of heart disease, with Alzheimer's as a contributing factor, while his wife, Betsy Arakawa, 65, died of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome, according to New Mexico's chief medical examiner. Hantavirus causes a respiratory illness and is associated with rodent droppings. The couple was found dead in their Santa Fe home Feb. 26, but investigators believe Arakawa likely died Feb. 11 and Hackman died Feb. 18.

Trump administration cancels \$400M in funding to Columbia University.

The administration is pulling the contracts and grants to Columbia University for allegedly failing to protect Jewish students from antisemitism on campus. Last year, Columbia faced protests over the Israel-Hamas conflict and came under congressional scrutiny for its handling of antisemitism. The administration has also opened a similar probe into the University of California system.

Measles outbreak in Texas and New Mexico surpasses 200 cases.

The West Texas outbreak has grown to 198 cases, while the New Mexico outbreak has grown to 30. Among the West Texas cases, 23 people have been hospitalized, and one person—an unvaccinated 6-year-old—died last week. In New Mexico, one unvaccinated adult has died. The CDC says two vaccine doses are 97% effective at preventing measles; the first dose is given to children at 12 to 15 months old and the second at 4 to 6 years old.

Death row inmate executed by firing squad—first in the US in 15 years.

Brad Sigmon, a 67-year-old man convicted of a double murder in 2001, was executed by a firing squad in South Carolina Friday, marking the first use of this method in the US in nearly 15 years. Sigmon chose the firing squad over lethal injection and the electric chair, citing concerns about the potential for prolonged suffering with the other methods.

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US economy adds 151,000 jobs in February, fewer than expected.

The nonfarm payroll growth for last month is up from a downwardly revised 125,000 jobs added in January but below an estimate of 170,000. The unemployment rate rose slightly to 4.1% from 4%. Average hourly earnings rose 0.3% month over month (as expected) and 4% year over year (lower than a 4.2% forecast).

Dolly Parton releases ballad in tribute to her late husband, Carl Dean.

Parton's husband, whom she had been married to for 60 years, passed away earlier this week at the age of 82. In tribute, Parton released a new song Friday, titled "If You Hadn't Been There." The ballad reflects on the couple's relationship and the impact Dean had on Parton's life.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Nikita Z. in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

"I take care of two small children for work. Last week, when we were on a morning walk, I decided to stop for a coffee at the neighborhood bakery. Unfortunately, I realized that getting the double stroller inside would be almost impossible. It was crowded and there wasn't much space. After thinking about it for a minute, I decided to ask someone waiting outside if they would get me a coffee when they went in. When they agreed, I grabbed my wallet to give them some cash, but they immediately told me not to worry about it! This small act of generosity from a stranger was totally unexpected and truly made my day."

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Groton Area Dominates Britton-Hecla to Secure Spot in SoDak 16

The Groton Area Tigers punched their ticket to the SoDak 16 in commanding fashion, rolling past Britton-Hecla 60-29 in a dominant performance Friday night.

From the opening tip, Groton set the tone with near-perfect shooting. The Tigers lit up the scoreboard in the first quarter, hitting an incredible 10 of 11 field goals (91%) to storm out to a 22-7 lead. Meanwhile, Britton-Hecla struggled to keep possession, committing six turnovers, three of which Groton converted into seven points.

The Tigers didn't slow down in the second quarter, continuing their efficient shooting by knocking down 9 of 16 attempts (56%). Britton-Hecla managed just 4 of 13 (31%) in response. By halftime, Groton had built an overwhelming 46-15 lead, activating the state's 30-point mercy rule and ensuring a running clock in the second half.

Even with the game all but decided, Groton maintained its energy, outscoring Britton-Hecla 11-4 in the third quarter to extend the lead to 57-19. The Tigers cruised through the final period, wrapping up the night with a 60-29 victory.

Balanced Scoring Fuels Groton's Win

Becker Bosma led the way for Groton with 15 points, followed by Ryder Johnson with 11. Gage Sippel added 8, Keegen Tracy 7, Karson Zac 6, Turner Thompson 5, Easton Weber 3, Jayden Schwan 3, and Teylor Diegel 2.

As a team, Groton shot efficiently, hitting 17 of 27 (63%) on two-pointers and 7 of 18 (39%) from beyond the arc. At the free-throw line, the Tigers were 5 of 9 (56%).

Groton controlled the boards with 26 total rebounds, led by Johnson with 8 and Sippel with 7. The Tigers also showcased strong passing with 20 assists, including 6 from Tracy and 4 from Bosma. Defensively, they collected 12 steals—4 by Johnson and 3 by Sippel—and registered 2 blocks.

Britton-Hecla's Effort Falls Short

Britton-Hecla was led in scoring by Graham Fosness, who finished with 10 points. Jaxon Zuehlke added 6, Chaz Viotor 4, William Richter 3, Daniel Person 3, Benjamin Folkman 2, and Jace Rein 1.

The Braves struggled offensively, shooting just 28% (11 of 40) from the field. From the free-throw line, they were 4 of 8 (50%). Britton-Hecla also battled turnover woes, committing 14 in total.

With the win, Groton Area improves to 16-5 on the season and advances to the SoDak 16, where they will fight for a spot in the state tournament. Britton-Hecla concludes its season with a 10-12 record.

Ryder Johnson: 11 points, 8 rebounds, 2 assists, 4 steals, 1 block.

Keegen Tracy: 7 points, 6 assists, 2 fouls.

Gage Sippel: 8 points, 7 rebounds, 1 assist, 3 steals, 1 block.

Becker Bosma: 15 points, 5 rebounds, 4 assists, 1 steal.



Groton Area seniors Blake Pauli, Teylor Diegel and Turner Thompson hold up the SoDak16 ball as the Tigers defeated Britton-Hecla, 60-29. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



The boys basketball team was stretching out prior to the warmups. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Karson Zak: 6 points, 1 rebound, 2 assists, 2 fouls.

Easton Weber: 3 points, 1 assist, 1 steal.

Turner Thompson: 5 points, 2 rebounds, 3 assists, 2 fouls.

Jayden Schwan: 3 points, 1 steal, 2 fouls.

Logan Warrington: 1 rebound, 1 steal, 2 fouls.

Jace Johnson: 1 rebound, 1 steal, 2 fouls.

Ethan Kroll: 1 assist.

Ryder Schelle: 1 rebound, 1 foul.

Taylor Diegel: 2 points.

Blake Pauli also played.

2-Pointers: 17-27 64%, 3-Pointers: 7-18 39% (Tracy 1, Bosma 1, Zak 2, Weber 1, Thompson 1, Schwan 1), Free Throws: 5-9 56%, 26 rebounds, 9 turnovers, 20 assists, 12 steals, 13 fouls, 2 blocks.

Britton-Hecla: Graham Fosness 10, Jaxon Zuehlke 6, Chaz Vietor 4, William Richter 3, Daniel Person 3, Benjamin Folkman 2, Jace Rein 1. Field Goals: 11-40 28%, Free Throws: 4-8 50%, 10 fouls, 14 turnovers.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Bierman Farm service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Farmers Union Coop, Greg Johnson Construction, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Dairy Queen, Groton Ford, Hanlon Brothers, John Sieh Agency, Ken's Food Fair, Lori's Pharmacy, Olive Grove Golf Course, Rix Farms, S & S Lumber, Spanier Harvesting, The MeatHouse, Weismantel Agency. Paul Kosel and Jeslyn Kosel were on hand for the action.



The Groton Area Dance team performed at half time of the boys basketball game Friday night. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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The US Highway 12 electronic sign has been updated with the 2025 winners' ad spots! This year's winners were Front Porch 605 and Kolker Law Office. (Photos by Paul Kosel)

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GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

School Board Meeting

March 10, 2025 – 7:00 PM – GHS Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approval of minutes of February 10, 2025 school board meetings as drafted.
2. Approval of February 2025 District bills for payment.
3. Approval of February 2025 Financial Report, Agency Accounts, and Investments.
4. Approval of February 2025 School Transportation Report.
5. Approval of February 2025 School Lunch Report.
6. Approve open enrollment #25-22.

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Second reading and adoption of recommended policy amendments: DID-A Fixed Asset Capitalization Policy and Federal Grants Manual
3. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Discussion regarding Wellness/Power Lifting equipment improvement effort.
2. Approve request from St. John's Preschool for use of school bus for Bramble Park Zoo field trip.
3. Approve 2025 Driver's Education Fees and Instructor Agreements.
4. Acknowledge election of Tigh Fliehs, Travis J. Harder, and Samantha Weber to Groton Area School Board of Education for three year terms beginning in July 2025.
5. Executive Session pursuant to SDCL1-25-2(1) Personnel Issues, including Superintendent evaluation and SDCL1-25-2(2) student issue.
6. Issue administrative contracts with terms to be negotiated at a later date.

ADJOURN

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**BROWN COUNTY
BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA
REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY**

March 11, 2025, 8:45 A.M.

COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS, COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of the Agenda
3. Opportunity for Public Comment
4. Taylor Newton
 - a. Discuss 2024 pay 2025 Real Estate Tax Notice
5. Judy Dosch, Building Superintendent
 - a. Quotes for Burner Replacement for Boiler
 - b. Change Order for Tuckpointing
6. Aberdeen Leadership Class
 - a. Bike Park at the Fairgrounds
7. Dirk Rogers, Highway Superintendent
 - a. 2025 Replacement/Major Rehabilitation Bridge Improvement Grant – Approve & Authorize Signing
8. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes of March 4, 2025
 - b. Claims/Payroll
 - c. HR Report
 - d. Landfill Tonnage Report for February 2025
 - e. Travel Requests
 - f. Abatements
 - g. Approve & Authorize Signing of Facility Use Agreement
9. Other Business
10. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
11. Adjourn

Brown County Commission Meeting

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone.

<https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>

You can also dial in using your phone. United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3311](tel:+18722403311)

Access Code: 601-168-909 #

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Public comment provides an opportunity for the public to address the county commission.

Presentations may not exceed 3 minutes.

Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes (or at the discretion of the board) - Public comment will be accepted virtually when the virtual attendance option is available.

Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at <https://www.brown.sd.us/node/454>



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Trump's firings reach into a Rapid City museum and derail an expert's career

Curator with advanced degree was two months into new job after relocating

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 7, 2025 3:51 PM

There aren't many people in the U.S. who do what Angela Watts does.

There were fewer than 13,000 who worked in museum curation in 2023, according to the most recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Only 330 of them were federal, state or local government employees.

From mid-December until Feb. 14 — a day of mass firings across the federal workforce — Watts was one of them.

Watts' expertise is in a specific type of curation: Native American art. That background helped her earn the job of senior curator for the U.S. Department of Interior's Indian Arts and Crafts Board, a little-known division that promotes Native American art and artists, preserves that art and its cultural heritage for the public, and polices counterfeit Indigenous artwork presented as authentic.

The board operates the Sioux Indian Museum in Rapid City, as well as the Museum of the Plains Indian in Browning, Montana, and Southern Plains Indian Museum in Anadarko, Oklahoma.

Watts' job was in Rapid City, which is geographically centered among the three locations, has the biggest population, and has the Journey Museum, which houses the Sioux Indian Museum. Watts "moved to South Dakota in the middle of winter," she said, to start a job that felt perfect for someone with a specialty in tribal art curation.

"You go into museum work to serve communities, and so to be able to contribute to work that's helping communities in Browning and Anadarko and Rapid City, and helping support Native American artists, all of that was really exciting," Watts said. "I cared about the mission, but it was also a really good move for me career-wise. And so it kind of felt like a win-win."



Angela Watts started a Rapid City-based job as senior curator for the U.S. Department of Interior's Indian Arts and Crafts Board in December. She was one of the thousands of federal employees abruptly fired by the Trump administration in February. (Seth

Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)

Federal job cuts

The winning feeling didn't last long.

On Valentine's Day, Watts was among the thousands of probationary (newly hired) federal employees across the U.S. dismissed from duty, ostensibly for performance issues or their relative inexperience in

public service.

Those firings and thousands of others since the start of the second Trump administration came by way of the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, an entity created through an executive order and led by the world's richest person, Elon Musk.

It's unclear how many federal employees in South Dakota were impacted by the administration's moves to shrink the federal government's 2.3 million-strong workforce.

Around 10,000 federal employees lost their jobs nationwide in the Feb. 14 purge, and around 30,000 have lost them so far. The administration sent buyout offers to federal employees before then, and later said 75,000 people took them.

The Indian Arts and Crafts Board and its three museums are a blip on Interior's budgetary radar compared to the 20,000 employees working in some capacity on the 85 million acres of land managed by its National Park Service. The park service lost around 1,000 employees in the Feb. 14 downsizing.

Journey Museum Executive Director Conor McMahon formerly held the job Watts was hired for. At its largest, McMahon said, he had around two dozen coworkers nationwide with the Arts and Crafts Board. It's "a really unique" federal agency, he said, and one that fills an important role.

"They do work that is not duplicated by any other government agency, and is not done in the private sector," McMahon said. "The easiest way to think of it is that they are an economic development agency for Native American artists."

Probationary, but not inexperienced

Watts hadn't been with the government long enough to have an official performance review.

"I didn't actually have any bad feedback on my progress to that point," she said.

Watts may have been new to the position, but a case for inexperience would be difficult to make.

Her first high school job was in a museum in Salt Lake City, where she grew up. She has a graduate degree in museum anthropology and an undergraduate minor in Native American art history. Before taking the job in Rapid City, she spent 17 years at the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas.

Her specialty there? The preservation, cataloging and, when necessary, repatriation of Native American arts and artifacts.

"People hear the word 'probationary' and they think that it's some kid who just finished school as their first job or something like that," Watts said. "But this was a job I had been working toward for literally my entire career."

She applied in August, accepted in October and moved to Rapid City from Lawrence, Kansas, to start the job shortly before Christmas.

Museum getting by on less

Another board employee, Travis Braveheart, whose duties included leading tours for school children, was also let go by Interior on Feb. 14. While McMahon was chief curator, he hired Braveheart as an intern for the board.

Braveheart did well, especially in his outreach role, and had recently secured a full-time position as a museum technician. He was the only Lakota employee of the Sioux Indian Museum.

Watts, meanwhile, came to a long-open position with what McMahon called a strong and needed skill set.

"Losing them, losing her, is a real loss to both the Indian Arts and Crafts Board as well as the Sioux Indian Museum, and for the Journey Museum," McMahon said.

Just one of the board's three employees at the Rapid City location remains.

It's unclear what the losses mean for the Journey Museum long-term. Without Braveheart, McMahon said, it will be a lot more difficult to get Native American kids through the door for tours, during which they'd learn about their own history. In the near term, it will mean longer hours for the employees who remain.

He's saddened that the federal job cuts have sliced into part of Rapid City's cultural history. The Sioux Indian Museum's first exhibitions highlighting living Native American artists opened in the 1960s and '70s

and featured the work of artists including Oscar Howe, Arthur Amiotte and Don Montileaux.

“They would go on to become probably the three most famous Native American artists in South Dakota,” McMahon said. “And so I think that just shows the importance of these federal programs, these federal museums, and federal investments in our local arts, culture and economy.”

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

COMMENTARY

Politicians can demand more logging in the Black Hills, but they can't make trees grow faster

by Dave Mertz

Does the Black Hills need a viable timber industry to help manage its forests? Absolutely. Recently, U.S. Senators John Thune and Mike Rounds, U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson and South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden have been pressuring U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins to increase timber harvesting in the Black Hills National Forest.

Paradoxically, this may lead to the demise of the Black Hills timber industry.

The quantity of trees suitable for logging — known as the standing timber inventory — in the Black Hills National Forest has been in contention for at least 10 years. The forest has been heavily impacted by the mountain pine beetle, wildfires and overlogging, leading to a significant reduction of the standing inventory of trees. Larger trees were particularly hard hit. The mountain pine beetle and loggers both like larger trees.

Several studies have been conducted to determine how many trees are left in the forest. Timber industry representatives have never accepted the results. To finally address this issue, in 2023, the Black Hills National Forest undertook an intensive Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) project. This project was supported by both of the states with land in the Black Hills National Forest, Wyoming and South Dakota.

LiDAR uses lasers deployed from aircraft to provide an extremely accurate representation of the forest. Concurrent to the LiDAR flights, over 1,600 field plots were studied on the ground. This field data collection was accomplished in partnership with the Wyoming State Forestry Division, South Dakota State Forestry and Pennington County staff. The plots are used to “ground truth” the LiDAR data. In January, the ground-level field plot data was released after an external audit by the University of Wyoming.

The field plot data included some interesting statistics.

It showed that for pine trees greater than 5 inches in diameter, there were an average of 90 trees per



A portion of the Black Hills National Forest after an overstory removal northwest of Custer, along the Custer Limestone Road. In an overstory removal, the Forest Service contracts with loggers to remove mature trees, while leaving younger trees to grow. (Courtesy of Dave Mertz)

acre. This indicates that the forest is very open.

The average spacing of 90 trees per acre is about 22 feet between trees. For reference, when the Forest Service plants trees, it plants about 430 per acre at a spacing of 10 feet between trees.

Yes, there are still some dense stands out there, but on average, it is a very open forest.

The field plot data also revealed that the average diameter of pine trees greater than 5 inches is 9.8 inches. For reference, the lower cutoff for sawtimber (trees suitable to cut into lumber) is 9 inches. This shows that the forest is now, on average, a very young forest. It will take decades to turn this around.

Members of the timber industry want to return to the higher harvest levels of the past so they can run at full capacity. For those sawmills that rely on sawtimber-size trees, there are simply not enough left in the forest for them to do that sustainably. The Forest Service is required by the National Forest Management Act to manage its timber for long-term sustainability. Forest Service employees are offering lower levels of timber for sale, but not because they're lazy or mismanaging the forest. They're simply following the law.

In response to a commentary I wrote last year, Rep. Johnson did a Q&A with South Dakota Searchlight, which asked him to explain his statement that "roadblocks" were standing in the way of bigger timber harvests. Johnson mentioned his conversations with the Forest Service and the timber industry regarding 75 open positions in the Black Hills National Forest.

"We talked about what can be done to streamline that bureaucracy," Johnson said. "It takes more than six months to go from an open position to a field spot. That is clearly a bureaucracy problem."

The Trump administration and its new Department of Government Efficiency, known as DOGE, recently fired at least 2,000 Forest Service employees nationwide, reportedly including some in the Black Hills National Forest. None of our high-ranking South Dakota politicians have yet expressed any concern about this.

If the amount of timber harvested in the Black Hills returns to levels that are not sustainable, the timber industry could cut itself out of business. The forest already has few options for finding more timber. Widespread clear-cutting may not be that far down the road.

I suggest you take a drive in the forest and get off the paved roads. Look closely at the spacing between the larger trees. There are many dense thickets of small trees (which are a fire hazard), but they aren't considered part of the timber inventory. It will take up to 100 years for them to grow into sawtimber. Look at the diameter of the larger trees. There aren't many of them anymore. They are, for the most part, gone.

Republican politicians will likely be successful in demanding more timber harvesting from the Trump administration, but they cannot make trees grow faster. If you visit the forest and don't like what you see, consider contacting your elected officials.

Dave Mertz retired from the Black Hills National Forest in 2017 as the forest's natural resource officer. Over the course of his career, he was a forester, silviculturist, forest fire management officer and a fire staff officer.

Iowa leads push from 16 states for E15 approval

South Dakota attorney general adds signature to letter

BY: CAMI KOONS, IOWA CAPITAL DISPATCH - MARCH 7, 2025 5:36 PM

Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird and attorneys general from 15 other states, including South Dakota, have penned a letter to members of Congress, urging them to support legislation that would allow the year-round sale of an ethanol-blended fuel.

The letter, and commodity groups in Iowa, said the expansion of the ethanol market would help farmers and liquid fuel producers, and lower the cost at the pump for American consumers.

The current Clean Air Act allows the sale of 10% ethanol blended fuels, but ag and liquid fuel industry leaders are pushing for wider acceptance of a 15% blend known as E15, sometimes seen at the pump as Unleaded 88.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency allows for the sale of E15 for lightweight vehicles made after 2001, but restricts the sale during the summer months. EPA, however, has granted waivers in the past to allow

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for summer sale of E15, and some Midwestern states, including South Dakota, will have access to year-round E15 beginning April 28.

The letter calls on Congress to pass the Nationwide Consumer and Fuel Retailer Choice Act of 2025 to amend the Clean Air Act to allow 15% ethanol blends. The bill has been supported by ethanol and petroleum industries.

Addressed to U.S. House leaders Mike Johnson and Hakeem Jeffries and Senate leaders John Thune and Chuck Schumer, the letter also pointed to executive orders declaring a national energy emergency and establishing a national energy dominance council as a reminder of the executive branch's support for the issue.

"President Trump has already taken bold action to support year-round E15 and unleash American energy greatness—a stark contrast to the Biden EPA," Bird said in a press release about the letter. "Now, we're calling on Congress to follow President Trump's lead and grant permanent, nationwide access to E15 gasoline."

Iowa Corn Growers Association President Stu Swanson thanked Bird for her "long-time" advocacy and support of the issue.

"Passage of year-round E15 will provide consumers access to a cleaner burning, cheaper option at the pump, while putting dollars back in the pockets of American farmers through increased corn demand," Swanson said in a press release. "Iowa corn farmers are ready to provide homegrown, more affordable energy solutions to all Americans."

The National Corn Growers Association also submitted a letter on behalf of nearly 9,000 corn growers from across the country, urging congressional leaders to pass the legislation amending the Clean Air Act.

According to the association, year-round availability of E15 would result in increased corn demand of about 2.3 billion bushels per year and "provide an opportunity to curb the weakening farm economy."

"A legislative solution for consumers to access year-round E15 comes at no cost yet would provide critical support to our nation's energy sector, overdue relief to American families, and necessary economic security to rural communities," the letter on behalf of corn growers read.

The Iowa Renewable Fuels Association also pushed for the legislation at its annual conference in February, with attendees signing a letter addressed to Thune and Johnson.

IRFA Executive Director Monte Shaw said the AGs' letter shows the "widespread support" of the higher ethanol blend across the country.

"Consumers in all 50 states deserve to save 15 to 20 cents a gallon with E15," Shaw said in a statement. "Corn farmers deserve a growing market during these difficult times. And we can accomplish those things without requiring oil refiners to comply on a state-by-state basis. But that takes action from Congress."

Shaw said Congress "must" put year-round E15 in the upcoming continuing resolution, the budget lawmakers must pass by March 14 to avoid a partial government shutdown.

"Let's see this over the finish line," Shaw said.

Attorneys general from Alabama, Alaska, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, and West Virginia signed on the letter.

Cami Koons is an Iowa Capital Dispatch reporter covering agriculture and the environment. She previously worked at publications in Kansas and Missouri, covering rural affairs.



Industry leaders and elected officials push for a law that would allow the year-round sale of higher blends of ethanol across the country. (Photo

by Cami Koons/Iowa Capital Dispatch)

Poll finds support for stable or increased Medicaid funding, including among Trump voters

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 7, 2025 2:57 PM

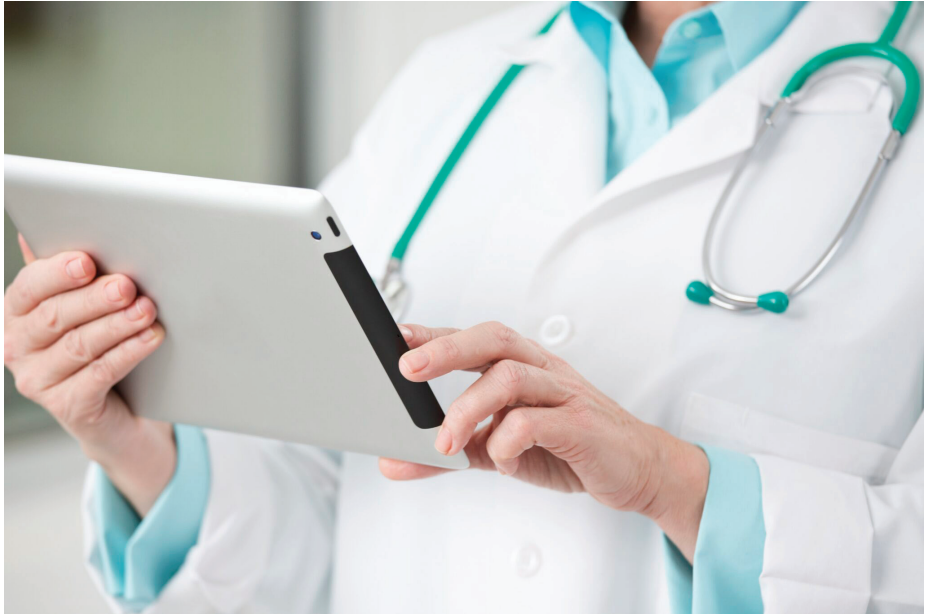
WASHINGTON — A majority of Americans don't want to see Congress reduce spending on Medicaid and believe the health care program for lower income individuals and families is important to their community, according to polling released Friday.

The survey from KFF, a nonpartisan health research organization, broke down responses by political party as well as which presidential candidate voters supported during November's election.

The results show there is a majority of support for the program among Republicans, including those who supported President Donald Trump. But it also showed that Americans might support changes to how Medicaid is run.

A total of 82% of those polled said that Congress should keep spending on Medicaid about the same or increase it. While the support was highest among Democrats and independents, 67% of Republicans polled said they believe government funding for the program should stay about the same or increase.

An overwhelming number of those polled, 96%, said Medicaid is important to their community. Ninety-five percent of Trump supporters responded that Medicaid is either very important or somewhat important.



A poll by the non-partisan health research organization KFF released March 7, 2025, found 82% of those surveyed said Congress should keep spending on Medicaid about the same or increase it. (Photo by Ariel Skelley/Getty Images)

Work requirement

KFF's polling also looked at how Americans feel about the changes that Republicans in Congress might make to the program to offset the deficit increase that's expected to come along with extending the 2017 tax cuts.

Work requirements for Medicaid appeared to be a popular policy choice among those polled, with 62% backing the requirement across political parties. Republicans held the highest share of respondents supporting work requirements at 82%, followed by independents at 60% and Democrats at 47%.

But KFF also asked three specific questions about work requirements, showing a fluctuation in support following each one.

A total of 32% of those polled supported work requirements after being asked: "What if you heard that most people on Medicaid are already working, or unable to work because they are either disabled or caring for a family member? Such a requirement would put many of them at risk of losing coverage due to the difficulty proving eligibility through required paperwork."

When asked — "if you heard that imposing such a requirement would have no significant impact on the share of Medicaid enrollees who are working, but would increase state administrative costs to oversee program eligibility" — a total of 40% supported work requirements.

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And 77% supported work requirements when asked: "What if you heard that imposing such a requirement could ensure that Medicaid is reserved for groups like the elderly, people with disabilities, and low-income children?"

Federal v. state funding

KFF asked those polled if they support reducing how much the federal government pays for the program compared to how much states are expected to pay themselves.

"As you may know, under the Affordable Care Act, most states have expanded Medicaid," the question begins. "Currently, the federal government pays at least 90 percent of the costs of this expansion with states paying the rest. There is a proposal that would significantly reduce the share that the federal government pays for this coverage. Would you support or oppose this reduction in the federal government's contribution?"

A total of 59% of respondents opposed the proposal, but there was a majority of support among Republicans, 64% of whom backed the idea.

KFF asked the question about the federal match rate in different ways, getting different results each time.

Support for changing the federal rate for states that expanded Medicaid under the ACA dropped to 24% when asked: "What if you heard that most states wouldn't make up the rest of the funding and many of the 20 million people who are covered by Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act expansion would lose their Medicaid coverage and become uninsured?"

Support rose to 49% when those polled were asked: "What if you heard that this change would reduce federal spending by \$600 billion over 10 years?"

Little consensus in Congress so far

Republicans in Congress are far from reaching agreement on what exactly they're going to do with tax policy or how they'll pay for some of the \$4.5 trillion increase in the deficit that would cause.

House Republicans approved a budget resolution in late February that proposes the Energy and Commerce Committee, which oversees Medicare and Medicaid, find \$880 billion in savings over the 10-year budget window to help pay for tax cuts.

GOP lawmakers and Trump have repeatedly said they won't change Medicare, though they are looking at Medicaid as one place to find savings.

But Republicans still have several steps to go before any changes to Medicaid could become law.

Republicans want to use the complicated budget reconciliation process to move their core policy goals through Congress without having to garner Democratic support to get past the Senate's 60-vote legislative filibuster.

In order to unlock the reconciliation process, the House and Senate must agree to adopt the same budget resolution with identical reconciliation instructions.

They have yet to do that.

The Senate is expected to take up the House's budget resolution at some point, but it's unclear how soon that might happen. When they do, several GOP senators plan on making changes to the reconciliation instructions in the House's budget resolution and then sending it back to the other side of the Capitol for final approval.

What exactly Senate Republicans change will determine if Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., will be able to rally enough support to adopt the amended budget resolution amid a razor-thin majority.

Final steps

After the House and Senate adopt a budget resolution, they can begin marking up the various sections of the bill in the numerous committees slated to get reconciliation instructions.

All of those bills will then be bundled together in one reconciliation package and sent to the floor for votes. While the House isn't required to hold amendment votes on the floor, the Senate must under the

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reconciliation process.

That could lead to a ping-pong match of sorts between the two chambers as they try to figure out a compromise on their campaign promises.

The last time Republicans used the reconciliation process in 2017, they had much wider margins in the House, holding 241 seats at the time.

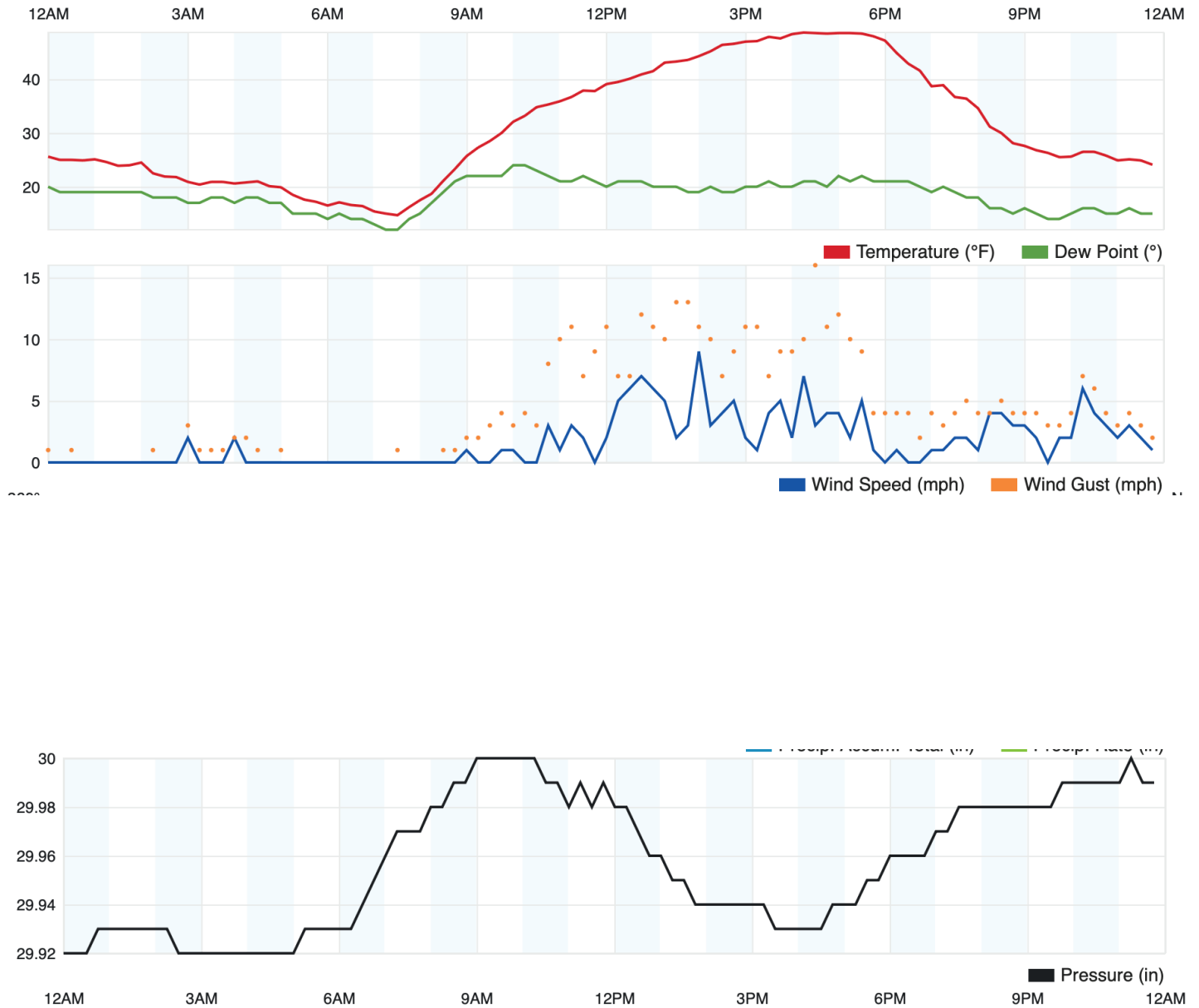
Getting the centrists and far-right members of the party to support one sweeping package that is expected to include tax cuts and hundreds of billions in spending cuts — potentially including Medicaid — will be more challenging this time around, with the GOP holding just 218 seats at the moment.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
				
High: 58 °F	Low: 31 °F	High: 65 °F	Low: 33 °F	High: 69 °F
Becoming Sunny	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny then Sunny and Breezy	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny then Sunny and Breezy



Elevated Fire Danger Sunday & Monday

March 8, 2025
4:59 AM

Key Messages

- Increasing west winds, with gusts of 25 to 35 mph Sunday afternoon and 30 to 45 mph Monday afternoon
- Relative humidity dropping to or below 25%
- The combination of gusty winds, low relative humidity, and ongoing dry fuels lead to **very high fire danger Sunday** and **very high to extreme fire danger Monday**

NEW

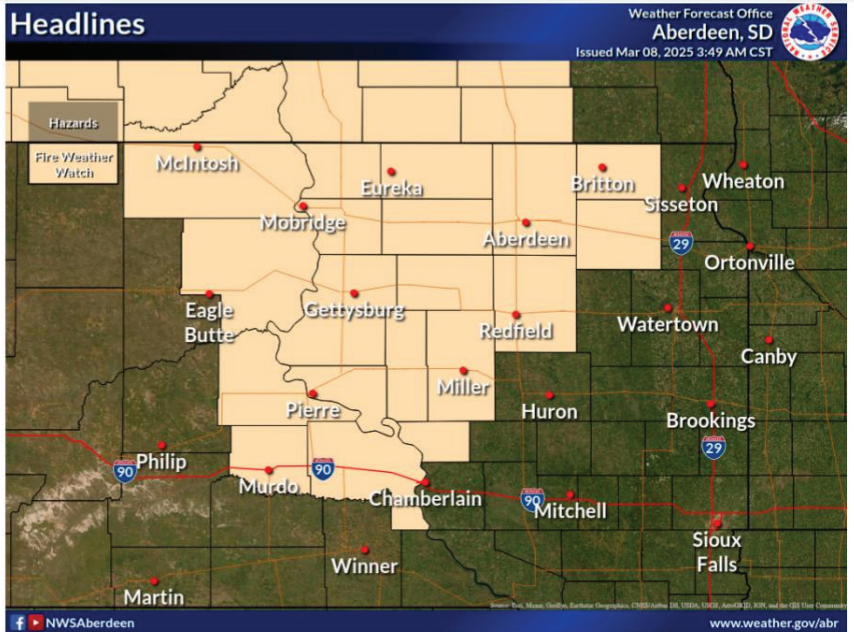
Important Updates

- **Fire Weather Watch** has been issued for north central, central, and portions of northeastern SD both Sunday and Monday

Next Scheduled Briefing

- Saturday afternoon

Headlines



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Increasing west winds both Sunday and Monday afternoon, relative humidity dropping to or below 25%, and ongoing dry fuels lead to very high fire danger Sunday and very high to extreme fire danger Monday. A Fire Weather Watch has been issued for these days.

Broton Daily Independent

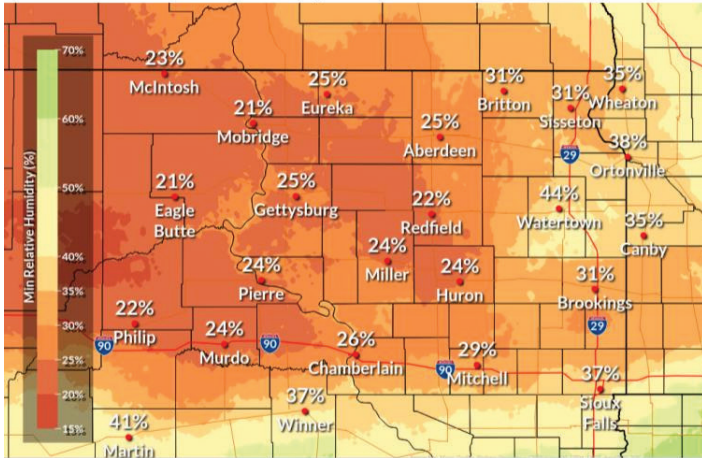
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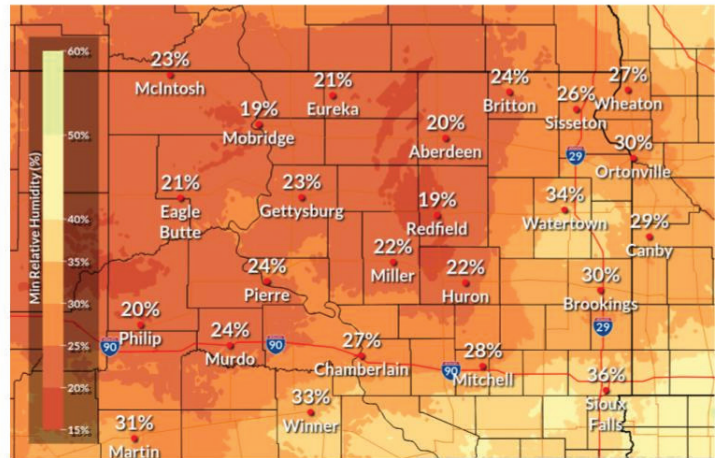
Lowest Forecast Relative Humidity

March 8, 2025
5:02 AM

Sunday Afternoon



Monday Afternoon



Main Takeaways

- Afternoon relative humidity will drop at or below 25% for north central, central, and portions of northeastern SD both Sunday and Monday



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Afternoon relative humidity will drop at or below 25% for north central, central, and portions of northeastern SD both Sunday and Monday

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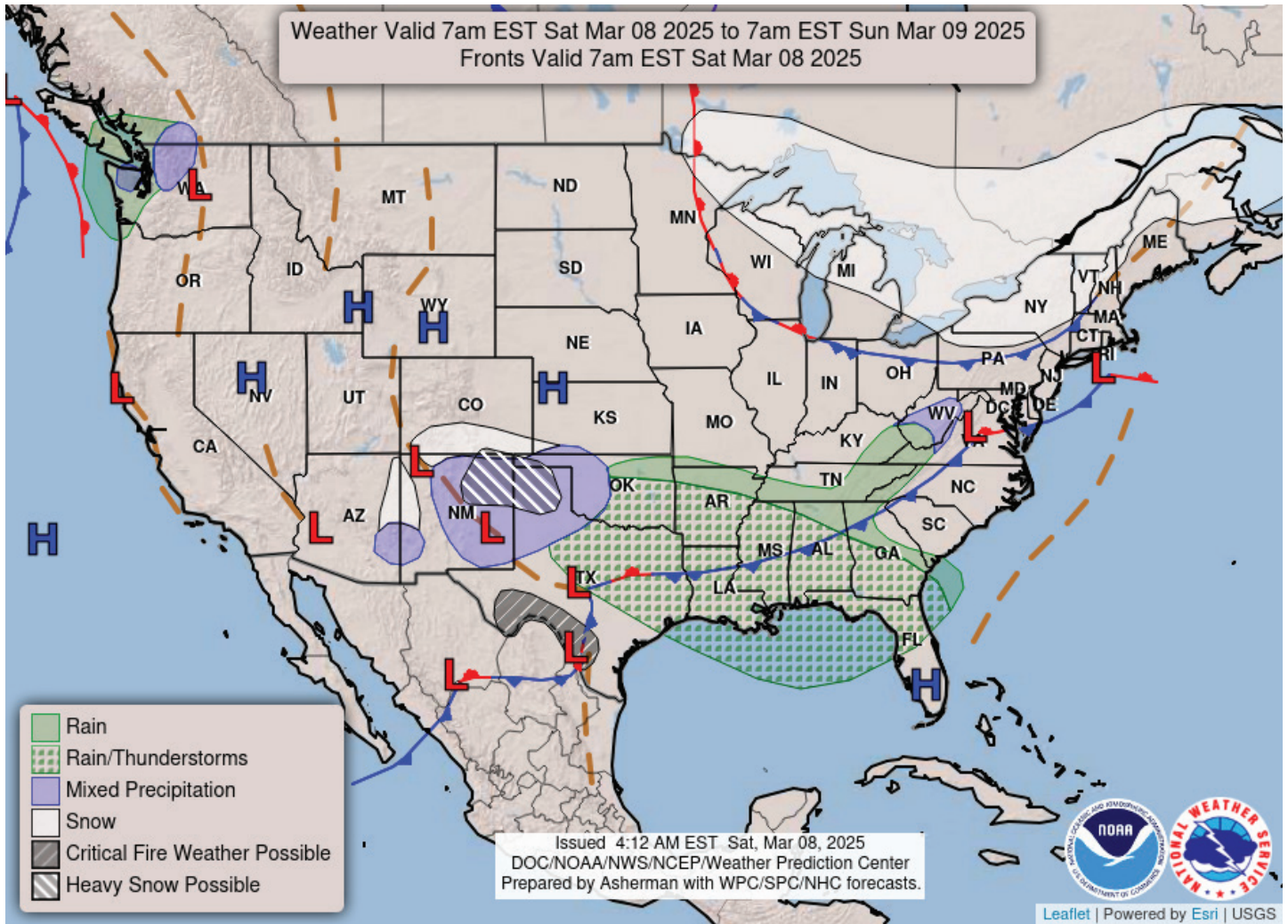
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 49 °F at 4:31 PM
Low Temp: 15 °F at 7:26 AM
Wind: 16 mph at 4:18 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 65 in 2021
Record Low: -32 in 1995
Average High: 37
Average Low: 16
Average Precip in March.: 0.19
Precip to date in March.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.36
Precip Year to Date: 0.45
Sunset Tonight: 6:30:42 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:53:28 am

Day length: 11 hours, 35 minutes



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Today in Weather History

March 8, 2000: High winds of 30 to 50 mph, combined with 3 to 7 inches of snow, caused widespread blizzard conditions across north-central South Dakota. As a result, many schools were closed early in the day. Travel was also significantly disrupted. Telephone service went down for several hours between Mobridge and Selby. Some heavy snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Eagle Butte, Selby, and Hoven and 7 inches southwest of Keldron.

March 8, 2013: An area of low pressure moving across the region brought warm moist air overtop low-level cold air, which resulted in the widespread freezing rain across much of northeast South Dakota during the evening and into the early morning hours of the 8th and 9th. For much of the area, the precipitation changed to all rain before ending as temperatures rose above freezing. Ice accumulations ranged from a tenth of an inch to a half of an inch. Some ice accumulation reports include; 0.25 inches at Garden City, Hayti, Waubay, Clear Lake, Sisseton, and Summit and 0.50 inches near Florence and Clark. Travel became hazardous, with no significant accidents reported. Also, no problems with power outages or tree damage were reported.

1669: The 1669 eruption of Mount Etna is the largest-recorded historical eruption of the volcano on the east coast of Sicily, Italy. After several weeks of increasing seismic activity that damaged the town of Nicolosi and other settlements, an eruption fissure opened on the southeastern flank of Etna during the night of 10-11 March. Several more cracks became active on March 11, erupting pyroclastics and tephra that fell over Sicily and accumulated to form the Monti Rossi scoria cone.

1717 - On Fishers Island in Long Island Sound, 1200 sheep were discovered to have been buried under a snow drift for four weeks. When finally uncovered, one hundred sheep were still alive. (The Weather Channel)

1909: The town of Brinkley, Arkansas, was struck by an estimated F4 tornado, which killed 49 people. The tornado, which was two-thirds of a mile wide, destroyed 860 buildings. Entire families were killed as houses were completely swept away by the storm.

1972: A wind gust of 207 mph was recorded on a Bendix-Friez Aerovane anemometer at Phase Shack #7, located six miles east of the Thule Air Force Base in Greenland. Winds were sustained at over 146 mph for three hours during the storm.

1984 - A freak thunder snowstorm produced high winds, vivid lightning, and up to seven inches of snow in the northern suburbs of Washington D.C. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 - Thirty-two cities in the eastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date, including Madison WI with a reading of 71 degrees. Afternoon highs of 68 degrees at Houghton Lake MI and 72 degrees at Flint MI smashed their previous records for the date by fourteen degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A cold front brought wintry weather to the north central U.S. Snowfall totals in northwestern Minnesota ranged up to eight inches at Roseau and Hallock. Winds in South Dakota gusted to 61 mph at Brookings. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989: While Arctic cold gripped the northeastern U.S., unseasonably warm weather prevailed across the southwestern states. Albany, New York, reported a record low of 2 degrees below zero. Tucson, Arizona, reported a record high of 90 degrees.

1990 - Late afternoon thunderstorms produced severe weather in east central Iowa and west central Illinois. Thunderstorms spawned a tornado south of Augusta IL which traveled 42 miles to Marbleton. Golf ball size hail was reported at Peoria IL and near Vermont IL. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2000: An F1 tornado traveled a short distance across Milwaukee, Wisconsin, during the evening hours. The tornado injured 16 people.

2004 - The California coast warms up. San Francisco broke a 112-year record by reaching 82 degrees. Los Angeles soared to 93 degrees.

2005 - A line of strong to severe thunderstorms affected the eastern portions of North and South Carolina, with wind damage and a few tornadoes reported. Winds gusted over 70 MPH with some of the stronger storms.

2017: Malta's famous Azure Window rock arch has collapsed into the sea after heavy storms.

2018: A horseshoe cloud was seen over Battle Mountain, Nevada.



ALWAYS SOMETHING!

A visitor from Wisconsin was traveling through the rural roads of Georgia and noticed a fruit stand with a sign reading, "FRESH PEACHES." Having heard of the large, sweet, juicy peaches of Georgia, he decided to stop and purchase a small basket to take on his journey.

Approaching the fruit stand he said to the farmer, "My goodness, these peaches are really small."

"Yep," replied the farmer with a nod.

"Well, I'll take some anyway," said the traveler.

A few moments later the traveler returned. He approached the farmer once again, this time looking angry. "These peaches are not only small," he said sternly, "but they are hard and tasteless!"

"Well," said the farmer quietly, "you ought to be thankful you didn't buy a bushel full!"

"No matter what happens," Paul wrote, "always be thankful, for this is God's will for you when you belong to Christ Jesus."

Far too often our thankfulness seems to depend on the circumstances in our lives. When "good" things happen, we rejoice – sometimes not even pausing to thank God. When "bad" things happen, we complain and blame God.

Paul precedes "thankfulness" with a challenge to "be joyful" and to "keep praying." And that's the key: If we are always joyful and in constant prayer, we will see God at work in our lives and "be thankful" for His gifts.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to realize the importance of expressing our gratitude for all of Your gifts. May we learn to look beyond the immediate to Your eternal plan. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:18

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: 03.07.25

8 20 48 58 60 7

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$256,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.05.25

10 15 23 35 41 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$25,560,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 21 Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.07.25

2 7 25 28 36 8

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 36 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.05.25

5 20 22 28 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$56,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 36 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.05.25

22 36 39 45 50 14

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 5 Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.05.25

24 28 40 63 65 20

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$320,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 5 Mins 48 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
- 05/12/2025 High School Girls Golf Meet at Olive Grove
- 05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm
- 06/07/2025 Day of Play
- 06/13/2025 SDSU 4 Person Scramble at Olive Grove
- 06/21/2025 Groton Triathlon
- 06/23/2025 Ladies 2 Person Scramble at Olive Grove
- 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
- 07/16/2025 Men's Pro Am Golf at Olive Grove
- 07/25/2025 Ferney Open Scramble Golf at Olive Grove
- 08/01/2025 Wine on Nine Fundraiser at Olive Grove
- 08/09/2025 2nd Annual Celebration in the Park/Rib Cook-Off 1-9:30pm
- 08/23/2025 Glacial Tournament at Olive Grove
- 09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 09/07/2025 Sunflower Classic Couples Scramble at Olive Grove
- 10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1:30pm
- 12/06/2025 Olive Grove Holiday Party and Silent Live Auction Fundraiser

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

SDHSAA Class A Region 1 SoDak Qualifier

Groton 60, Britton-Hecla 29

Milbank 58, Aberdeen Roncalli 47

SDHSAA Class A Region 2 First Round

Clark-Willow Lake 72, Great Plains Lutheran 42

Deuel 64, Elkton-Lake Benton 40

Sioux Valley 62, Florence-Henry 60

SDHSAA Class A Region 3 First Round

Madison 49, Flandreau 45

SDHSAA Class A Region 3 SoDak 16 Qualifier

Dell Rapids 35, Baltic 32

SDHSAA Class A Region 5 First Round

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 69, Scotland/Menno 59, OT

Wagner 52, Bon Homme 41

SDHSAA Class A Region 6 First Round

Mobridge-Pollock 52, Chamberlain 23

Platte-Geddes 48, Miller 39

Stanley County 74, Crow Creek Tribal School 43

SDHSAA Class A Region 7 First Round

Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 45, Little Wound 42

Pine Ridge 67, Lakota Tech 59

St. Francis Indian 84, Todd County 80, OT

SDHSAA Class A Region 8 SoDak Qualifier

Hill City 50, St Thomas More 49, OT

Rapid City Christian 76, Custer 53

SDHSAA Class B Region 1 Semifinal

Aberdeen Christian 54, Hitchcock-Tulare 45

Leola-Frederick High School 70, Wilmot 55

Waubay/Summit 51, Northwestern 43

Waverly-South Shore 50, Warner 35

SDHSAA Class B Region 2 Semifinal

Castlewood 71, Iroquois-Lake Preston 23

DeSmet 75, Estelline-Hendricks 70

Wessington Springs 64, James Valley Christian School 56

Wolsey-Wessington 66, Deubrook 39

SDHSAA Class B Region 3 Semifinal

Colman-Egan 46, Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 37

Dell Rapids St Mary 73, Sioux Falls Lutheran 43

SDHSAA Class B Region 4 Semifinal

Centerville 48, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 46

Freeman 61, Gayville-Volin High School 38

Parkston 65, Alcester-Hudson 35

Viborg-Hurley 76, Irene-Wakonda 37

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SDHSAA Class B Region 5 Semifinal

Corsica/Stickney 47, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 45, OT

Gregory 73, Marty 42

Lower Brule 55, Kimball-White Lake 36

Lyman 79, Burke 44

SDHSAA Class B Region 6 SoDak 16 Qualifier

Ipswich 53, Wakpala 41

Sully Buttes 68, Potter County 46

SDHSAA Class B Region 7 SoDak 16 Qualifier

Crazy Horse 74, Kadoka 59

New Underwood 68, Wall 53

SDHSAA Class B Region 8 SoDak 16 Qualifier

Lemmon High School 60, McLaughlin 43

Timber Lake 56, Dupree 53

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

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

SDHSAA Class AA SoDak 16 State Qualifier

Brandon Valley 69, Watertown 31

Mitchell 48, Brookings 30

Rapid City Stevens 78, Huron 35

Sioux Falls Jefferson 57, Aberdeen Central 54

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 56, Sturgis Brown High School 32

Sioux Falls Washington 59, Tea 41

Spearfish 53, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 45

T F Riggs High School 46, Harrisburg 39

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

Treysen Eaglestaff scores Summit League-record 51 to lead North Dakota over South Dakota State 85-69

By The Associated Press undefined

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Treysen Eaglestaff scored a Summit League-record 51 points to power North Dakota to an 85-69 victory over South Dakota State on Friday night in the quarterfinals of the tournament.

Geno Crandall set the previous record for the Fighting Hawks, scoring 41 in a victory over Troy during the 2017 regular season.

No. 6 seed North Dakota (12-20) advances to play second-seeded St. Thomas-Minnesota in Saturday's semifinals.

Eaglestaff shot 15 for 28 from the floor, including 8 for 18 from 3-point range, and 13 of 17 from the free-throw line for the Fighting Hawks. Eli King added 13 points and seven rebounds.

The third-seeded Jackrabbits (20-12) were led by Oscar Cluff with 27 points and 17 rebounds. Kalen Garry added 12 points and seven rebounds. Matthew Mors totaled 10 points and seven rebounds.

Eaglestaff scored 28 points in the second half.

South Dakota edges North Dakota State 85-84 in Summit League Tournament quarterfinal

By The Associated Press undefined

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Chase Forte scored 28 points to help South Dakota hold on for an 85-84 victory over North Dakota State on Friday night in the Summit League Tournament quarterfinals.

The fifth-seeded Coyotes (19-13) advance to play top-seeded Omaha in Saturday's semifinals.

Forte added six rebounds for the Coyotes. Isaac Bruns added 21 points and 10 rebounds. Mayuom Buom scored 14.

The fourth-seeded Bison (21-11) were led by Tajavis Miller with 26 points, eight rebounds and two blocks. Masen Miller added 19 points and Andy Stefonowicz pitched in with 16 points and six assists.

Bruns scored 10 points in the first half and South Dakota went into halftime trailing 40-34. Forte scored a team-high 20 points for South Dakota in the second half.

Hawks, butterflies and a song for her murdered son help Georgia mom reclaim joy after killings

By JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

ROSWELL, Ga. (AP) — A hawk swooped in and landed on a tree, then watched as Michele and Jeremy Davis mourned their murdered son at a vigil outside his high school.

It was one day after their teenager, Carter, was gunned down in a random attack that sent fear through the suburbs north of Atlanta in the summer of 2016.

The hawk stayed as the father spoke. When he finished, it began soaring silently over the crowd, flying just over the heads of Carter's classmates at the tearful vigil, Michele Davis recalled in an interview this week.

Hawks and butterflies would show up later for the Davis family in surprising and unexpected ways. They've been part of a series of events that helped her regain her joy, she said.

Michele Davis is an English teacher at the Lovett School in Atlanta, and one of the latest signs that her son is OK came through a former student, Slater Nalley. He wrote a song about Carter and later made it onto the TV show "American Idol." Nalley's performance of "Traces of You" will be aired on the season premiere Sunday night, ABC representatives said.

Searching for signs that Carter is OK

Michele Davis spent one of the last days with her son in her home state of South Dakota, beneath the towering granite peaks in the Black Hills. She and Carter noticed two granite spires touching each other across a ravine, a rock formation known as the Praying Hands.

Three days later, Carter and his friend Natalie Henderson, both 17, were gunned down. It was the night before he was supposed to start his senior year at River Ridge High School in Woodstock, Georgia.

Hours after the killings, Carter's parents gathered with their daughter, 8-year-old Greta, to find a path forward. They'd just heard devastating details of the murders from police detectives. When the police left, they went to their porch and decided to look for messages that signaled Carter was OK, Michele Davis said. To help Greta better comprehend the loss of her big brother, Jeremy Davis explained to his daughter that Carter may send messages that he's fine in unique ways, such as with feathers or dragonflies.

They talked it over a bit before Jeremy Davis told the family: "I see him as a hawk or an eagle, soaring high above."

The next evening at the vigil, the hawk appeared.

The butterfly visits

As Michele Davis spoke with her parents a couple of days after the killings, a yellow and black butterfly landed near them. It reminded them of Carter's love for butterflies.

Carter was also passionate about sports, and hoped to play lacrosse in college. Weeks after the killings, friends and family organized a pick-up lacrosse game in Georgia.

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Carter's best friend from South Dakota flew to Atlanta for the game and wore Carter's helmet and jersey. Midway through, players came to a halt. They began pointing at Carter's helmet, where a yellow butterfly had landed.

Gunman pleads guilty but mentally ill

Days after the killing, Roswell police arrested Jeffrey Hazelwood on two murder counts. Police said he stalked Carter and Henderson as they spent time in a parked car outside a Publix grocery store.

Hazelwood, who was 20 at the time, had climbed onto the roof of the grocery store during the predawn hours on Aug. 1, 2016, to watch them, prosecutors said. He later confronted the teens in the parking lot, shooting both of them in the head, the medical examiner determined. There was no evidence that he even knew them.

After the killings, Hazelwood wore a "Guy Fawkes" mask — which gained popularity after the 2006 film "V for Vendetta" — as he filled his car with gas at a nearby convenience store, surveillance video shows. There's no evidence he was wearing the mask during the killings, as there's no surveillance video that captured the teens being shot, police said. Detectives later found writings by Hazelwood that expressed his desire to become an assassin.

Hazelwood pleaded guilty but mentally ill to two counts of murder, and is serving a life sentence in a Georgia prison, according to the state Department of Corrections. Hazelwood has been diagnosed with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, his defense lawyers said in court.

A priest who prayed with her and the Henderson family, and the Roswell police detectives who interviewed Michele and Jeremy Davis also gave them comfort in their darkest days, Michele Davis said.

She's also grateful that detectives secured a confession from Hazelwood. He shook uncontrollably as he recounted the crime to a detective, as seen in the interrogation video. The police department's forensic science laboratory now has a plaque on the wall: "In Memory of Natalie Henderson & Carter Davis. When the innocent cannot cry out for justice, it is our duty to do so for them."

'The most magical thing'

Last year, Michele Davis shared a poem she had written with Nalley, her former student. Nalley then created a song about Carter and wanted to bring his guitar to school and play it for the class.

"It was the most magical thing I had ever heard," Michele Davis said. Students in other classrooms heard the music. So "we went on this classroom tour of him singing this song and me sitting there listening to it and crying," she said.

The song's opening lyric is "Your laugh was like a river running home." Later, the song evokes the hawks that bring comfort to her: "Somewhere past the sky I can feel you dancing in the air. Every single time I see a bird fly by, I'm reminded you're answering my prayers."

Living in the 'and'

Through a friend, Michele Davis was able to find a small group of women in the Atlanta area known as the Warrior Moms, all of whom have suffered tremendous loss.

"As Americans we shy away from talking about it," she said. "It's just underneath the surface — this sadness — that any one second, I can just sit still long enough and break down crying."

The Warrior Moms plan to share their experiences in a book, "Grieve Like a Mother, Survive Like a Warrior," set to be released later this year.

"We wanted to be able to tell our stories that help people find joy again," Michele Davis said. "It's very intentional with finding joy."

Another thing she's learned is what she calls "living in the 'and,'" as in "dark and light, sorrow and happiness, grief and joy," she said.

She also plans to keep looking for those unexpected moments, when the memory of her son comes flooding back.

"You look for the hawks and butterflies," she said.

Freedom Caucus in Wyoming claims victory with approval of most priorities

By MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) — Leaders of the first Freedom Caucus majority in a U.S. statehouse took a victory lap in Wyoming on Friday after wrapping up a legislative session in which most of their conservative priorities were passed, including a steep property tax cut and ban on diversity programs in government.

The Republican lawmakers aligned with a growing Freedom Caucus movement nationwide also passed stricter registration and residency requirements for voters. A fourth bill now before the governor would not allow driver's licenses issued to unauthorized immigrants by other states to be recognized in Wyoming.

The four bills — out of a wish list of five at the outset of Wyoming's legislative session in January — echo the priorities of President Donald Trump, something Wyoming House Freedom Caucus leaders weren't shy about pointing out in an end-of-session news conference.

"Just like President Trump is bringing common-sense change to Washington, the Wyoming Freedom Caucus is bringing common-sense change to Cheyenne," said Rep. Rachel Rodriguez-Williams, chairwoman of the caucus that took control of the Wyoming House in the November election.

Compared to Trump's blunderbuss approach to firing federal workers and doing away with agencies, the Wyoming Freedom Caucus has been doing its work quietly.

Even during negotiations over how much to cut property taxes — 50% or the 25% ultimately negotiated — there was little vitriol even by Wyoming standards.

"Stuff got done," summed up House Speaker Chip Neiman, a Freedom Caucus member.

Always conservative, Wyoming is almost completely dominated now by Republicans who control the governor's office, congressional delegation and 91% of the Legislature. One result is that the differences between Freedom Caucus members and traditional Republicans have become more meaningful than those between Republicans and the state's few Democrats.

The true spirit of the GOP in Wyoming is the Freedom Caucus, Williams said.

"We're very well connected with the temperature of Wyoming and the culture of Wyoming as a whole," Williams said. "The Freedom Caucus in Wyoming really is the conscience of the Republican Party."

Wyoming's more traditional Republicans include Gov. Mark Gordon, who last year drew Freedom Caucus ire by vetoing property a 25% property tax cut. With his concern about the minerals industry having to make up for the lost revenue addressed this year, Gordon signed off on it this time.

Skeptical that the Freedom Caucus really represents most Wyoming residents, Gordon has pointed out that many got elected last year in a Republican primary with low turnout.

Yet he has so far signed three of the five bills in the Freedom Caucus "five and dime" plan to pass five priorities out of the House in the first 10 days of the legislative session. All five cleared the House on schedule. But the Senate declined to take up a ban on environmental, social and governance, or ESG, investing by the state.

Three of the five bills are now law. A fourth bill that has passed, a stricter identification and residency requirements for voters, still awaits Gordon signature or veto.

Bills vetoed by Gordon, including one to require women to have an ultrasound before a pill abortion and one to lift the state's cap on its number of charter schools, were overridden with Freedom Caucus help.

Any hard feelings toward Gordon were water under the bridge on Friday, however.

"We have an awesome relationship with our governor. We have the kind of relationship I think we need to have between the executive and the legislative branch," Neiman said.

Freedom Caucus victories in other states

Freedom Caucus chapters in other states also have had some success this year.

South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden signed legislation Thursday barring the taking of private property to build a carbon dioxide pipeline, an issue championed by the state Freedom Caucus.

Missouri's Freedom Caucus, which clashed with Republican state Senate leaders last year, has worked closely with new GOP leaders this year to advance its priorities, including measures that would permanently

ban transgender treatments for minors and transgender athletes in women's sports.

"I'm excited about the nationwide movement to create Freedom Caucus movements in other states," Williams said. "What we have proven in the state of Wyoming as a caucus really should be a model for other states, especially in this administration."

Pope Francis rests in hospital as Vatican and Holy Year marches on without him

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis continued his recovery from double pneumonia on Saturday as the Vatican machinery and Holy Year celebrations marched on without him, this weekend dedicated to the Catholic Church's volunteers.

Francis was continuing his respiratory and physical therapy after a quiet, restful night, the Vatican said.

The 88-year-old pope, who has chronic lung disease and had part of one lung removed as a young man, entered his fourth week at Rome's Gemelli hospital with his condition stabilized following a few bouts of acute respiratory crises.

In his absence, the Vatican's day-to-day operations continued, with Cardinal Pietro Parolin celebrating Mass for a pro-life group in St. Peter's Basilica. At the start, Parolin delivered a message from the pope from the hospital on the need to protect life, from birth to natural death.

In the message, dated March 5 and addressed to the Movement for Life, which seeks to provide women with alternatives to abortion, Francis encouraged the faithful to promote pro-life activities not just for the unborn, but "for the elderly, no longer independent or the incurably ill."

Later Saturday, another cardinal closely associated with Francis' papacy, Canadian Cardinal Michael Czerny, presides over the nightly recitation of prayers for Francis. Czerny then returns on Sunday to celebrate the Holy Year Mass for volunteers that Francis was supposed to have celebrated.

On Friday, Francis spent 20 minutes in the Gemelli hospital chapel, praying and doing some work in between rest and respiratory and physical therapy, the Vatican said. A medical update was expected later Saturday.

Francis has been using high flows of supplemental oxygen to help him breathe during the day and a noninvasive mechanical ventilation mask at night.

Doctors not involved in his care said after three weeks of acute care in the hospital for double pneumonia, they would have hoped to have seen improvement. While he has stabilized, they warned that he was increasingly at risk of secondary infections the longer he remains hospitalized. Additionally, Francis had episodes of acute respiratory failure earlier this week and underwent bronchoscopies to suction mucus from his lungs.

"He's had respiratory failure and they were not able to liberate him from the hospital in the first three weeks. And therefore I think you'd say this does look concerning, perhaps more concerning than it did right at the beginning," said Dr. Andrew Chadwick, a respiratory and intensive care specialist at Oxford University Hospitals in England.

Dr. Jeffrey Millstein, a clinical assistant professor of internal medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, said it wasn't shocking that Francis hadn't improved in three weeks, and that it was encouraging he was able to breathe part of the day with just a nasal tube of high-flow oxygen.

But he said that the pope's condition certainly was "a precarious, touch and go kind of situation" and that recovery, while still possible, would be a long process.

Going forward, "I just would be looking for no new setbacks," he said. "I think as long as he is dealing with the current issues and he's just making incremental progress, that would be great."

Francis was hospitalized Feb. 14 for what was then just a bad case of bronchitis. The infection progressed into a complex respiratory tract infection and double pneumonia that has sidelined Francis for the longest period of his 12-year papacy and raised questions about the future.

North Korea unveils nuclear-powered submarine for the first time

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea unveiled for the first time a nuclear-powered submarine under construction, a weapons system that can pose a major security threat to South Korea and the U.S.

State media on Saturday released photos showing what it called “a nuclear-powered strategic guided missile submarine,” as it reported leader Kim Jong Un’s visits to major shipyards where warships are built.

The Korean Central News Agency, or KCNA, didn’t provide details on the submarine, but said Kim was briefed on its construction.

The naval vessel appears to be a 6,000-ton-class or 7,000-ton-class one which can carry about 10 missiles, said Moon Keun-sik, a South Korean submarine expert who teaches at Seoul’s Hanyang University. He said the use of the term “the strategic guided missiles” meant it would carry nuclear-capable weapons.

“It would be absolutely threatening to us and the U.S.,” Moon said.

A nuclear-powered submarine was among a long wishlist of sophisticated weaponry that Kim vowed to introduce during a major political conference in 2021 to cope with what he called escalating U.S.-led military threats. Other weapons were solid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missiles, hypersonic weapons, spy satellites and multi-warhead missiles. North Korea has since performed a run of testing activities to acquire them.

North Korea obtaining a greater ability to fire missiles from underwater is a worrying development because it’s difficult for its rivals to detect such launches in advance.

Questions about how North Korea, a heavily sanctioned and impoverished country, could get resources and technology to build nuclear-powered submarines have surfaced.

Moon, the submarine expert, said North Korea may have received Russian technological assistance to build a nuclear reactor to be used in the submarine in return for supplying conventional weapons and troops to support Russia’s war efforts against Ukraine.

He also said North Korea could launch the submarine in one or two years to test its capability before its actual deployment.

North Korea has an estimated 70-90 diesel-powered submarines in one of the world’s largest fleets. However, they are mostly aging ones capable of launching only torpedoes and mines, not missiles.

In 2023, North Korea said it had launched what it called its first “tactical nuclear attack submarine,” but foreign experts doubted the North’s announcement and speculated it was likely a diesel-powered submarine disclosed in 2019. Moon said there has been no confirmation that it has been deployed.

North Korea has conducted a slew of underwater-launched ballistic missile tests since 2016, but all launches were made from the same 2,000-ton-class submarine which has a single launch tube. Many experts call it a test platform, rather than an operational submarine in active service.

In recent days, North Korea has been dialing up its fiery rhetoric against the U.S. and South Korea ahead of their upcoming annual military drills set to start Monday.

During his visits to the shipyards, Kim said North Korea aims to modernize water-surface and underwater warships simultaneously. He stressed the need to make “the incomparably overwhelming warships fulfill their mission” to contain “the inveterate gunboat diplomacy of the hostile forces,” KCNA reported Saturday.

Russian strike on Ukrainian town kills 11 as US cuts intelligence sharing with Kyiv

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A Russian strike on a town in Ukraine’s embattled Donetsk region killed at least 11 people, officials said Saturday, as a wave of heavy aerial attacks continued into the second night following a U.S. decision to stop sharing satellite images with Ukraine.

Thirty people were also reported injured in multiple strikes late Friday that damaged eight apartment blocks in the town of Dobropillya, which is close to the front where Russian troops have been making steady advances. Ukraine’s State Emergency Service said a Russian drone damaged a Ukrainian fire truck

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while rescuers fought to extinguish the burning buildings.

Donetsk Gov. Vadym Filashkin declared Saturday a day of mourning in the region and warned that more victims could still be found in the rubble. "The destroyed houses and burned-out cars are a terrible scar on the body of our city, left by Russian missiles and drones," he said in a statement on Telegram.

"But the most terrifying thing is the the number of victims. At the moment, we know that 11 people were killed and 30 were wounded, but the search operation is ongoing and these numbers may still increase."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said at least five children were among the injured. "Last night, the Russian army fired two ballistic missiles at the center of Dobropillya," he said. "After emergency services arrived at the scene, they launched another strike, deliberately targeting rescuers. It is a vile and inhumane intimidation tactic to which the Russians often resort."

The attack took place just 24 hours after Russia hit Ukrainian energy facilities with dozens of missiles and drones, hobbling its ability to deliver heat and light to its citizens and to power weapons factories vital to its defenses.

The barrage came after the U.S. suspended military aid and intelligence to Ukraine to pressure it into accepting a peace deal being pushed by the Trump administration.

When asked Friday by a reporter during an Oval Office exchange if Russian President Vladimir Putin was taking advantage of the U.S. pause on intelligence-sharing to attack Ukraine, Trump responded: "I think he's doing what anybody else would."

Zelenskyy did not reference the intelligence-sharing deal, but did seem to appeal to other statements Trump made Friday related to financial sanctions against Moscow. Writing on social media, the U.S. president proposed imposing large-scale banking sanctions and tariffs on Russia until a cease-fire and final peace settlement was reached.

Zelenskyy welcomed the prospect of additional sanctions on Moscow, saying, "Everything that helps Putin finance the war must be broken."

Ukraine's air force reported Saturday that Russian troops launched three Iskander missiles and 145 drones over the country overnight. The bombardment contained a mix of attack and decoy drones intended to confuse air defenses. One missile and 79 drones were shot down, while 54 more drones were lost without causing damage, the Ukrainian air force said.

Among the targeted areas was Ukraine's northeastern region of Kharkiv, where three people died after a Russian drone hit a civilian workshop, emergency services said.

Meanwhile, Russian troops shot down 31 Ukrainian drones overnight, including 26 over the country's Krasnodar region, Russia's Defense Ministry said Saturday.

Falling debris from one drone sparked a blaze at the KINEF oil refinery in Russia's northern Leningrad region, local Gov. Aleksandr Drozdenko said in a statement. No casualties were reported.

South Korea's impeached President Yoon released from prison

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's impeached conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol was released from prison on Saturday, a day after a Seoul court canceled his arrest to allow him to stand trial for rebellion without being detained.

TV footage showed Yoon waving his hand, clenching his fists and bowing deeply to his supporters who were shouting his name and waving South Korean and U.S. national flags. He climbed into a black van to travel to his presidential residence in Seoul.

In a statement distributed by his lawyers, Yoon said that he "appreciates the courage and decision by the Seoul Central District Court to correct illegality," in an apparent reference to questions over his arrest. He said he also thanks his supporters and asked those who are on hunger strike against his impeachment to end it.

Yoon was arrested and indicted by prosecutors in January over his Dec. 3 martial law decree that plunged the country into huge political turmoil. The liberal opposition-controlled National Assembly separately voted

to impeach him, leading to his suspension from office.

The Constitutional Court has been deliberating whether to formally dismiss or reinstate Yoon. If the court upholds his impeachment, a national election will be held to find his successor within two months.

The Seoul Central District Court said Friday it accepted Yoon's request to be released from prison, citing the need to address questions over the legality of the investigations on the president. Yoon's lawyers have accused the investigative agency that detained him before his formal arrest of lacking legal authority to probe rebellion charges.

The Seoul court also said the legal period of his formal arrest expired before he was indicted.

Yoon's release came after prosecutors decided not to appeal the decision by the Seoul court. South Korean law allows prosecutors to continue to hold a suspect while pursuing an appeal, even after his or her arrest is canceled by a court.

The main liberal opposition Democratic Party, which led Yoon's Dec. 14 impeachment, lashed out at the prosecutors' decision, calling them "henchmen" of Yoon, a former prosecutor general. Party spokesperson Cho Seung-rae urged the Constitutional Court to dismiss Yoon as soon as possible to avoid further public unrest and anxiety.

At the heart of public criticism of Yoon over his martial law decree was his dispatch of hundreds of troops and police officers to the National Assembly after placing the country under military rule. Some senior military and police officials sent to the assembly have testified that Yoon ordered them to pull out lawmakers to thwart a parliamentary vote on the decree. Yoon has countered that he aimed to maintain order.

Enough lawmakers eventually managed to enter an assembly hall and voted unanimously to overturn Yoon's decree.

Investigators have alleged Yoon's martial-law decree amounted to rebellion. If he's convicted of that offense, he would face the death penalty or life imprisonment. Yoon has presidential immunity from most criminal prosecutions but that doesn't cover grave charges like rebellion and treason.

Yoon has said he didn't intend to maintain martial law for long as he only attempted to inform the public of the danger of the Democratic Party, which obstructed his agenda and impeached many senior officials and prosecutors. In his martial law announcement, Yoon called the assembly "a den of criminals" and "anti-state forces."

South Korea's conservative-liberal divide is severe, and rallies either supporting or denouncing Yoon's impeachment have divided Seoul streets. Experts say whatever decision the Constitutional Court makes, the division is certain to worsen.

1 dead and several injured as tropical low tracks west across Australian east coast

By JOHN PYE and ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

BRISBANE, Australia (AP) — Flooding rains will continue for days to lash a region of the Australian east coast even though it avoided the destructive winds of its first tropical cyclone in 51 years, officials said on Saturday. One person was confirmed dead and several were injured.

Tropical Cyclone Alfred had been expected to become the first cyclone to cross the Australian coast near the Queensland state capital, Brisbane, Australia's third-most populous city, since 1974.

But it weakened Saturday to a tropical low, which is defined as carrying sustained winds of less than 63 kph (39 mph), then came to a near-standstill off the Brisbane coast for several hours.

The cyclone's remnant is forecast to track west across the Australian mainland in the coming days bringing heavy rain, Bureau of Meteorology manager Matt Collopy said.

"The real threat now is from that locally heavy-to-intense rainfall, which may lead to flash and riverine flooding," Collopy told reporters.

Cyclones are common in Queensland's tropical north but are rare in the state's temperate and densely populated southeast corner that borders New South Wales state.

A 61-year-old man who disappeared in a flooded river near the New South Wales town of Dorrigo was confirmed the first casualty of the crisis when his body was recovered on Saturday, police said.

Several defense personnel were injured when two military trucks involved in the emergency response collided at the town of Tregeagle in New South Wales on Saturday, police said.

Nine Network television and other media reported that 36 people were injured, eight seriously, with two people trapped in the trucks.

A woman sustained minor injuries when an apartment building lost its roof in the Queensland border city of Gold Coast on Friday, police said. The woman was one of 21 people who were evacuated from the building.

A couple sustained minor injuries when a tree crashed through the ceiling of their Gold Coast bedroom during strong winds and rain on Thursday night, officials said.

Queensland Premier David Crisafulli said 330,000 homes and businesses had lost power due to the storm since Thursday. No other natural disaster had created a bigger blackout in the state's history. New South Wales reported as many as 45,000 premises without electricity on Saturday. But tens of thousands had been reconnected by late in the day, officials said.

Rivers were flooding in Queensland and New South Wales after days of heavy rain, the meteorology bureau said. The missing man was the only failure among 36 flood rescues carried out by emergency teams in northern New South Wales in recent days, most involving vehicles attempting to cross floodwaters, police said.

A resort entirely staffed and run by women in Sri Lanka seeks to break gender barriers

By BHARATHA MALLAWARACHI Associated Press

DAMBULLA, Sri Lanka (AP) — After leaving school, Jeewanthi Adikari was determined to pursue her studies in accounting. But her life took a different path when she began a three-month training program in hospitality.

She has since worked in different hotels throughout a career spanning over two decades. Now 42, she is in charge of Sri Lanka's first resort fully operated and managed by women. It's an attempt to address gender disparities in a male-dominated tourism sector crucial for the country's economic recovery after a major crisis.

"This is a place where women can realise their potential. They will not be inside the shell. Instead, they will come out and try to perform better," said Adikari, who oversees the daily operations of Amba Yaalu, a resort located in Dambulla city that serves as a gateway to most of Sri Lanka's tourist attractions.

Most Sri Lankan women don't get a chance to work in the tourism industry, earn money and own a career. In a country where 52% of the 22 million people are women, they account for only about 10% of the 200,000-strong workforce in the hospitality sector.

Amba Yaalu wants to be the driver of change

Some 160 kilometers (100 miles) northeast of Colombo, the resort is nestled in a mango plantation and all work is managed by 75 women staff who garden, work in the kitchens, clean the facility, address the guests and provide security in the form of seven ex-military members. The resort's facilities also include training programs for women to develop their skills in different areas of hospitality.

The resort opened in January and has been seen as a move unlocking women's potential and driving the tourism economy in the debt-stricken nation.

The idea was conceived by seasoned hotelier Chandra Wickramasinghe, who said he was "inspired by the power of women," especially that of his mother who raised him and his seven siblings as a single parent.

"I knew what these ladies can do. I got the idea and put my team to work on it. We got a strong team to run it and it worked very well," said Wickramasinghe, adding that the resort would enable women to thrive as leaders.

Social stigma, language barrier, work-life balance, lack of training facilities and low salaries have long kept

the majority of Sri Lankan women away from the hospitality industry, especially those in the rural areas, said Suranga Silva, professor of tourism economics in the University of Colombo.

Much of this stems from a patriarchal structure and traditional gender roles deeply embedded in Sri Lanka's society, even though many women have made their mark in the country's politics and have held key positions in the government. The island nation's current prime minister, Harini Amarasuriya, is a woman.

"Tourism industry can't be isolated from women," said Silva, adding that women's employment in Sri Lanka's tourism is very low compared to the global and regional levels.

Lack of women professionals

Sri Lanka's tourism and hospitality sector contributed 2.3% to the country's economy in 2023 — down from 5% in 2018 — and the industry has traditionally been the country's third largest foreign exchange earner. But the shortage of skilled women and some of them leaving jobs after getting married have been challenges faced by the industry since the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings and the coronavirus pandemic.

Kaushalya Batagoda, the executive chef at the resort, said the industry faces a shortage of female professionals to serve in the kitchen and as a result, most staff recruited to the resort's kitchen were rookies still in training.

"But, the new generation has a passion for working in the kitchen," she said, adding that she gets a lot of applications from women.

The resort has been lauded by women's rights activists who have long been concerned about limited career choices for women in Sri Lanka.

Activist Sepali Kottegoda said such business enterprises can "open up more safe employment opportunities for women."

Silva, the professor, said that "a dramatic change" is taking place as more young women are eager to join the industry, but suggested that the government and the sector must jointly provide training programs for women to improve their skills and employability.

At Amba Yaalu resort, some of these concerns are already being tackled.

"This is purely to empower women," Adikari said. "We invite women to come and join us, see whether they can perform better in the career, sharpen their capacities and skills and contribute to the industry."

From staff cuts to aid reductions, UN humanitarian agencies scramble in wake of US funding freeze

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Trump administration freezes on U.S. foreign aid have led many United Nations organizations to cut staff, budgets and services in places as diverse as Afghanistan, Sudan, Ukraine and far beyond.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has lamented the "severe cuts" and cited some fallout last week: Over 9 million people in Afghanistan will miss out on health and protection services; cash allocations that helped 1 million people in Ukraine last year have been suspended; funding for programs for people fleeing Sudan have run out, among other things.

Many independent NGOs — some that work with the United Nations — have cited many project closures because of the U.S. administration's decision to eliminate more than 90% of foreign aid contracts, cut some \$60 billion in funding, and terminate some 10,000 contracts worldwide involving the U.S. Agency for International Development, USAID.

For their part, U.N. agencies have been scrambling to revise their operations, make strategic cuts, seek funding elsewhere, and appeal to the administration to restore U.S. support. Some hope federal court rulings will salvage some U.S. foreign aid outlays.

Here's what some U.N. organizations say about the impact of the U.S. funding freezes and their response to them — so far.

Less UN help for people on the move: Refugees and Migrants

UNHCR : The U.N. refugee agency, which got over 40% of its nearly \$5 billion budget last year from

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the United States, told The Associated Press on Wednesday the pause in U.S. funding allocations have affected operations and its "first cost saving efforts" will involve cutting \$300 million in planned activities.

Some partners — U.N. organizations often rely on and fund outside groups — have pulled back or halted some activities that, for example, have led to suspended services for nearly 180,000 forcibly displaced women in girls in Central African Republic, Uganda and South Sudan. In Ethiopia, 200,000 forcibly displaced women and girls will be affected by the closure of services, it said.

"If new funding is not forthcoming soon, more cuts in direct life-saving assistance will be inevitable," spokesman Matthew Saltmarsh said.

IOM: The International Organization for Migration, which is run by Amy Pope of the United States and got more than 40% of its \$3.4 billion budget in 2023 from the U.S., said it was "acting accordingly" in response to the U.S. order to pause foreign assistance funding that was affecting staff, operations and beneficiaries.

Devex, a news organization focusing on global development, reported last month that IOM sent dismissal notices to some 3,000 employees who had been working on a U.S. resettlement program following the funding freezes. The agency declined to comment to the AP.

UN health agencies sound the alarm

WHO: The Trump administration has been especially tough with the World Health Organization. One of his earliest executive orders announced a U.S. pullout from the U.N. health agency, which can't take full effect until next January, as well as a recall of U.S. staff working with WHO and funding pauses.

WHO says a global measles and rubella lab network is "at risk of collapse" because its cost of about \$8 million a year is entirely funded by the U.S. The funding cuts have affected the global response to mpox, and WHO has tapped its own emergency funds to fill gaps left in the response to Ebola in Uganda.

On Wednesday, WHO said U.S. cuts in bilateral funding to fight tuberculosis will have a "devastating response on TB programs" — which the United States has generally contributed \$200-\$250 million to every year over the last decade.

UNAIDS : The AIDS-fighting agency said Wednesday that U.S. funding has "served as the backbone" for HIV prevention in many countries hit hard by the virus. U.S. funding amounts to 55% of the total AIDS budget in Uganda, and the funding freeze has led to the closure of drop-in centers and service points that provide antiretroviral therapy.

It said a rapid assessment estimated that 750,000 people in Haiti are affected by the U.S. freeze, and 70% of the 181 total sites funded through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR, had closed: "Patients have flooded the remaining sites, which are unable to meet the increased demand."

A "large portion" of PEPFAR-funded staff working on HIV response in South Africa will be affected because dozens of USAID implementing partners received termination letters last week, UNAIDS said.

At a regular briefing Thursday, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric highlighted the impact of funding cuts on Afghanistan alone, saying more than 200 health facilities have closed -- depriving 1.8 million people from essential health services in the country.

Unlocking aid from UN coffers

OCHA: The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said Thursday it was releasing \$110 million from its emergency response fund to help address underfunded crises in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Tom Fletcher, the U.N. humanitarian chief who heads the office, told the Security Council on Thursday the U.S. funding cuts to foreign aid amounted to "body blow to our work to save lives."

He said he had asked partners to provide lists of areas where they have to cut back.

"It is of course for individual countries to decide how to spend their money. But it is the pace at which so much vital work has been shut down that adds to the perfect storm that we face," Fletcher said.

Storm dumps heavy snow on northern Arizona, gridlocking Interstate 40

PARKS, Ariz. (AP) — A winter storm dumped heavy snow across northern Arizona on Friday, playing a major factor in a more than 15-mile (24-kilometer) backup on a major interstate.

Semitrucks and other vehicles were stalled on Interstate 40 westbound between Flagstaff and Williams late Friday as the sun set. The standstill dragged on for hours.

The snow, along with a two-vehicle crash contributed to the backup, Arizona Department of Public Safety spokesperson Bart Graves said.

"We could not clear it quick enough to get traffic moving again because of the adverse snow conditions, he said.

An injury was reported in the crash but no deaths were reported around the region as a result of the storm, Graves said.

One driver got out of a vehicle and threw snowballs, while others nearby hooked a tow strap to a four-wheel drive vehicle to pull another vehicle out of deep snow.

The storm was the biggest of the winter season so far and followed a dry stretch that left Flagstaff and numerous other cities across the West well below normal for precipitation to date. They'll likely stay there despite the snow and rain.

The snowfall ranged from a few inches in lower elevations to more than a foot (30 centimeters) in places like Flagstaff and Munds Park. Williams, west of Flagstaff, got more than 2 feet (60 centimeters) of snow, according to the National Weather Service.

The Arizona Snowbowl ski resort joked on X that Miracle March was in full effect.

"This weekend is bound to be epic," it wrote in a post.

Parts of other roadways were closed at times during the storm, including Interstate 17 between Flagstaff and Phoenix. Traffic was clogged on U.S. 89 north of Flagstaff, with multiple slide-offs and motorists parked over the icy road.

The storm was expected to move east out of the state on Saturday, the weather service said.

Gene Hackman died at home a week after wife Betsy Arakawa died from hantavirus, authorities say

By MORGAN LEE, SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN and LISA BAUMANN Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — Forensic experts came to a heartrending conclusion Friday about the manner of death for actor Gene Hackman: he died of heart disease with complications from Alzheimer's disease on an empty stomach a week after a rare, rodent-borne disease took the life of his wife at their home in Santa Fe.

The partially mummified remains of Hackman, 95, and Betsy Arakawa, 65, were discovered Feb. 26 when maintenance and security workers showed up at the home and alerted police.

Authorities unraveled the mysterious circumstances and revealed that Arakawa likely died Feb. 11 at home from hantavirus pulmonary syndrome, a rare but potentially fatal disease spread by infected rodent droppings.

Hackman, in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's, apparently was unaware that his wife was dead.

"He was in a very poor state of health. He had significant heart disease, and I think ultimately that's what resulted in his death," chief medical investigator Dr. Heather Jarrell said. "It's quite possible he was not aware she was deceased."

Both deaths were ruled to be from natural causes.

Santa Fe County Sheriff Adan Mendoza said Arakawa's last known outing was a round of errands and shopping Feb. 11. She visited a pharmacy, pet store and grocery before returning to the couple's gated neighborhood that evening.

Arakawa stopped answering emails that day. The couple's cellphone communications have not yet been

analyzed.

Hackman's pacemaker last showed signs of activity a week later, indicating an abnormal heart rhythm Feb. 18, the day he likely died, Jarrell said.

Hackman was found in the home's entryway, and Arakawa was found in a bathroom. Their bodies were decomposing with some mummification, a consequence of body type and climate in Santa Fe's especially dry air at an elevation of nearly 7,200 feet (2,200 meters).

The revelations about the manner of the couple's deaths jolted Santa Fe, the state capital city known as a refuge for celebrities, artists and authors.

"All of us that knew him should have been checking on him," said Stuart Ashman, co-owner of Artes de Cuba gallery, who cherished his encounters with Hackman at a local Pilates exercise studio. "I had no idea. ... It's just really sad. And that she died a week before him. My God."

Experts believe Hackman was severely impaired due to Alzheimer's disease and unable to deal with his wife's death in the last week of his life — or seek help after she died.

"Their (the authorities') explanation, I thought, was quite clear and plausible, said Dr. Victor Weedn, a forensic pathologist in Virginia. "I believe they really discovered what truly happened in this case."

Most older Americans with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias live at home, and many receive care from family or friends.

Hantavirus typically is reported in spring and summer, often due to exposures that occur when people are near mouse droppings in homes, sheds or poorly ventilated areas. This is the first confirmed case of hantavirus in New Mexico this year.

While hantavirus is found throughout the world, most cases in the U.S. have been found in western states. The virus can cause a severe and sometimes deadly lung infection.

Jarrell said it was not known how quickly Arakawa died.

One of the couple's three dogs, a kelpie mix named Zinna, also was found dead in a crate in a bathroom closet near Arakawa, while two other dogs survived.

Dogs do not get sick from hantavirus, said Erin Phipps, a veterinarian with the New Mexico Health Department. A necropsy will be done on the dog.

The sheriff considers this an open investigation until they receive results of the dog's necropsy and finish checking into data from personal cellphones retrieved from the home.

Hackman, a Hollywood icon, won two Oscars during a storied career in films including "The French Connection," "Hoosiers" and "Superman" from the 1960s until his retirement in the early 2000s.

Arakawa, born in Hawaii, studied as a concert pianist, attended the University of Southern California and met Hackman in the mid-1980s while working at a California gym.

Hackman dedicated much of his time in retirement to painting and writing novels far from Hollywood's social circuit. He served for several years on the board of trustees at the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, and he and Arakawa were investors in local businesses.

Takeaways from the Gene Hackman and Betsy Arakawa deaths investigation

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — A towering figure in cinema for decades, retired actor Gene Hackman spent his final years in seclusion with his wife, living with heart disease and Alzheimer's, authorities said Friday.

An investigation into the deaths of Hackman and his wife, 65-year-old Betsy Arakawa, paint a tragic picture of the 95-year-old Oscar-winner's last days before he succumbed to heart disease, one week after Arakawa died from a rare disease called hantavirus.

Here are some takeaways:

Hackman may not have realized his wife died a week earlier

"Mr. Hackman showed evidence of advanced Alzheimer's disease," New Mexico chief medical investigator Dr. Heather Jarrell said. "He was in a very poor state of health. He had significant heart disease, and

I think ultimately that's what resulted in his death."

All signs point to their deaths coming a week apart, Jarrell said, adding, "It's quite possible he was not aware she was deceased."

Dr. Michael Baden, a former New York City medical examiner, said he believes Hackman was severely impaired because of Alzheimer's disease and unable to deal with his wife's death in the last week of his life. Couple lived a secluded life and were not found for days

When Hackman and Arakawa were found, the bodies were decomposing with some mummification, a consequence of body type and climate in Santa Fe's especially dry air at an elevation of nearly 7,200 feet (2,200 meters).

Santa Fe Sheriff Adan Mendoza described the couple as a "very private family," which presented difficulties in determining a timeline in their deaths. Hackman had no food in his stomach when he died, meaning he hadn't eaten recently, but he wasn't dehydrated, Jarrell said.

Investigators have not found any indication Hackman tried to contact anyone after Arakawa died, Mendoza said.

"All of us that knew him should have been checking on him," said Stuart Ashman, co-owner of Artes de Cuba gallery. He cherished his encounters with Hackman at a local Pilates exercise studio, where they used to swap stories.

"I had no idea. ... It's just really sad," Ashman said. "And that she died a week before him. My God."

Hantavirus believed to be the cause of Arakawa's death

Arakawa likely died Feb. 11 from hantavirus pulmonary syndrome, a rare disease spread by infected rodent droppings. She had gone out that day to run errands and stopped at a grocery store, pharmacy and pet store before returning to their home in a gated neighborhood.

How Arakawa contacted hantavirus is unknown, but signs of rodents were found by investigators in some of the buildings on the couple's property, authorities said. Jarrell said it's possible Arakawa was showing symptoms of the virus, similar to flu symptoms, before she died.

The virus can cause a severe and sometimes deadly lung infection. While hantavirus is found throughout the world, most cases in the U.S. have been found in western states.

Hackman had retired from a celebrated acting career

Hackman's long career included roles as villains, heroes and antiheroes in dozens of dramas, comedies and action films. Aside from appearances at awards shows, he was rarely seen on the Hollywood social circuit. Hackman and Arakawa eschewed fame and made Santa Fe their home decades ago, like many other artists.

He met Arakawa, a classical pianist, at a California gym in the mid-1980s. They moved to Santa Fe by the end of the decade. Their Pueblo revival home sits on a hill with views of the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

In his first decades in New Mexico, Hackman was often seen around the state capital and served on the board of trustees for the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum from 1997 to 2004. Hackman kept a tight circle of friends and didn't go out much, but he was sometimes spotted downtown.

Maasai girls take up self-defense as protection from sexual abuse and early marriage

By NICHOLAS KOMU and ZELIPHA KIROBI Associated Press

KILGORIS, Kenya (AP) — "I am worth defending!" a group of girls chant as they each take up a fighting stance.

They are about to practice combat techniques. And no, they are not part of a martial arts club. They are Maasai girls living at a boarding school in Transmara in western Kenya, which doubles up as a rescue center for teens who have escaped early marriage and female genital mutilation.

"We learn how to protect ourselves, how to protect our bodies," said Grace Musheni, 14, who has been living and studying at the Enkakenya Centre for Excellence since 2023.

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The center was set up in 2009 by Kakenya Ntaiya, a Maasai woman who was subjected to genital cutting herself. It doesn't just offer a safe haven for girls at risk of early marriage: it also provides a free high school education as an incentive for parents to allow their daughters to stay in school instead of undergoing the cutting ritual that is still common for Maasai girls between the ages of 8 and 17.

Once a girl is circumcised, she is considered an adult and ripe for marriage, meaning an abrupt end to childhood and education for many.

"Most child marriages are caused by poverty in families," Musheni explains. "Because of this poverty, you can get that a parent can allow their daughter to be married by an old man — because the family can be paid."

While Ntaiya was unable to escape genital mutilation herself, she convinced her father to allow her to continue her education, and she now holds a Ph.D. in education from the University of Pittsburgh and multiple awards for her work.

"I am a beneficiary of proper education and I really wanted to show my community how important it is to empower women and girls," she says.

Although Kenyan law prohibits genital mutilation and marriage below age 18, both are still practiced, especially in rural areas where education levels remain low. The 2022 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey by the government found that 56.3% of women with no education had undergone genital mutilation, compared to 5.9% of women who had studied past secondary school.

Girls' education apparently has an impact on gender-based violence too, with 34% of Kenyan women surveyed saying they were victims of physical violence, a figure that drops to 23% for women with education.

But that is still alarmingly high. So on top of providing education, the Enkakenya Centre partners with I'm Worth Defending to teach combative self-defense skills. It's not so much so that they can physically fight potential abusers — although they could — but it teaches them to be assertive in all areas of their lives.

"We train them with basic principles of assertiveness and boundary setting, which includes verbal and physical techniques," says Amelia Awuor from I'm Worth Defending. "These skills instill confidence to speak up against violations or fight off physical threats."

The training gave 14-year-old Rahab Lepishoi power to speak up for other girls. During a recent visit to her older sister, she learned that the girls in the village were about to be circumcised, including an old childhood friend. "I told her about the dangers of FGM and to come with me to my home to avoid (it)," Lepishoi says.

She is following in the footsteps of her educators, who visit remote communities in Transmara every year to raise awareness about genital mutilation, early marriage and the importance of education. "Now when I go to a place, I apply that skill of assertiveness and confidence. I educate my friends, so that when they meet with a boy, they will be confident and say what they mean," says Lepishoi.

The self-defense classes also offer some protection against sexual abuse, which can end up trapping many in violent marriages. "When a girl reports to her parents that she has been abused, it is common for the parents to force the girl to marry the man that abused her," said Musheni.

Purity Risanoi, 15, has been at the school for five years. Her mother is a widow and raised her five children alone, but cultural pressures from her community remain. "My family is still very traditional," she says. "When a girl grows up, she is expected to get married and she cannot choose who to marry."

Her solution? Keep studying. One day, she wants to be a lawyer.

Musheni meanwhile dreams of a career as a software engineer. She wants to come back here and use technology to uplift her community. "Girls can achieve great things," she says. "I want to inspire others to chase their dreams."

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Republicans try to go it alone on government funding as shutdown deadline nears

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans are looking to do what, for them, is almost unheard of — approving government funding on their terms with little help from Democrats.

Speaker Mike Johnson is teeing up a bill that would generally fund federal agencies at current levels for the remainder of the budget year ending Sept. 30. That would mean defense and non-defense programs would be funded at 2024 levels. Congress must act by midnight March 14.

It's a risky approach. Normally, when it comes to keeping the government fully open for business, Republicans have had to work with Democrats to craft a bipartisan measure that both sides can support. That's because Republicans almost always lack the votes to pass spending bills on their own.

This time, Republicans have hopes of going it alone. They plan to muscle the funding bill, known as a continuing resolution, through the House, and then dare Senate Democrats to oppose it and risk being blamed for a government shutdown.

Crucially, the strategy has the backing of President Donald Trump, who has shown an ability so far in his term to hold Republicans in line.

"Let's get this Bill done!" Trump said on social media.

Rep. Ralph Norman, R-S.C., says he has never voted for a continuing resolution, what lawmakers often call a CR, but he is on board with Johnson's effort. He says he has confidence in Trump and the Department of Government Efficiency, led by Elon Musk, to make a difference on the nation's debt.

"I don't like CRs," Norman said. "But what's the alternative? Negotiate with Democrats? No."

"I freeze spending for six months to go identify more cuts? Somebody tell me how that's not a win in Washington," added Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, another lawmaker who has often frequently voted against spending bills but supports the six-month continuing resolution.

Republicans are also hoping that resolving this year's spending will allow them to devote their full attention to extending the individual tax cuts passed during Trump's first term and raising the nation's debt ceiling to avoid a catastrophic federal default.

But Democratic leaders are warning that the decision to move ahead without consulting them increases the prospects for a shutdown. One of their biggest concerns is the flexibility the legislation would give the Trump administration on spending.

"We cannot stand by and accept a yearlong power grab CR that would help Elon take a chainsaw to programs that families rely on and agencies that keep our communities safe," said Sen. Patty Murray, the lead Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Democratic leadership in both chambers has stressed that Republicans have the majority and are responsible for funding the government. But they also have been wary of saying how Democrats would vote on a continuing resolution.

"We have to wait to see what their plan is," Schumer said. "We've always believed the only solution is a bipartisan solution, no matter what."

House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries said earlier this week that the Democratic caucus would meet and discuss the legislation at the "appropriate moment." But he struck a more forceful tone Friday.

Jeffries said Democrats are ready to negotiate a "meaningful, bipartisan spending agreement that puts working people first." But he said the "partisan continuing resolution" threatens to cut funding for key programs, such as veterans benefits and nutritional assistance for low-income families.

"That is not acceptable," Jeffries said.

While continuing resolutions generally keep spending flat, many lawmakers say that failing to keep pace with inflation actually leads to a cut in services.

Trump has been meeting with House Republicans in an effort to win their votes on the legislation. Rep. Tim Burchett of Tennessee, along with more than a dozen other lawmakers, met with Trump on Wednesday.

"I'm open to it," Burchett said. "But I want to see what's in it."

Republicans have a 218-214 majority in the House, so if all lawmakers vote, they can afford only one defection if Democrats unite in opposition. The math gets even harder in the Senate, where at least seven Democrats would have to vote for the legislation to overcome a filibuster — and that's assuming all 53 Republicans vote for it.

Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., has said that passage of the measure covering the remainder of the fiscal year doesn't preclude further negotiations to pass the regular appropriations bills for the budget year.

A Democratic aide speaking on condition of anonymity confirmed that such talks have reopened as the two sides try to reach agreement on topline spending levels. The talks could amount to a Plan B should the continuing resolution falter.

US economic worries mount as Trump implements tariffs, cuts workforce and freezes spending

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With his flurry of tariffs, government layoffs and spending freezes, there are growing worries President Donald Trump may be doing more to harm the U.S. economy than to fix it.

The labor market remains healthy with a 4.1% unemployment rate and 151,000 jobs added in February, and Trump likes to point to investment commitments by Apple and Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company to show that he's delivering results.

But Friday's employment report also found that the number of people stuck working part-time because of economic circumstances jumped by 460,000 last month. In the leisure and hospitality sectors that reflect consumers having extra money to spend, 16,000 jobs were lost. And the federal government reduced its payrolls by 10,000 in a potential harbinger of the alarm being sounded by the stock market, consumer confidence and other measures of where the economy is headed.

Since January, the economic policy uncertainty index has spiked 41% to a level, 334.5, that in the past signaled a recession. Nicholas Bloom, a Stanford University economist and co-developer of the uncertainty index, said it's unclear how this will play out, but he's worried.

"I have an increasing fear we will enter into what may become known as the 'Trump recession,'" he said. "Ongoing policy turbulence and a tariff war could tip the U.S. economy into its first recession in five years." That last recession occurred under Trump because of the coronavirus pandemic.

For his part, Trump seems comfortable with the uncertainty that he's generating, saying that any financial pain from import taxes is a mere "disruption" that will eventually lead to more factories relocating to the United States and stronger growth.

If Trump's gambit succeeds, the Republican would cement his reputation as an unconventional leader who proved doubters wrong. But if Trump's tariffs backfire, much of the price would be paid by everyday Americans who could suffer from job losses, lower wages, higher inflation and, possibly, an injured sense of national pride.

In an interview to air Sunday on Fox News' "Sunday Morning Futures," Trump was pressed to provide some clarity on his tariffs agenda that has caused uncertainty to fester. The president largely hedged his answer and blamed the 6% drop in the stock market over the past two weeks on "big globalists."

"You know, the tariffs could go up as time goes by, and they may go up and, you know, I don't know if it's predictability," the president said.

The White House maintains that Friday's jobs report showed the administration's strategy is working because manufacturers added 10,000 jobs. Of the manufacturing gains, 8,900 jobs came from the auto sector, recovering some of the industry's job losses in January. The White House also suggested that the loss of leisure and hospitality jobs was the result of flu season and people having depleted savings and credit card debt because of President Joe Biden's term.

"I thought it was a really, really impressive jobs report," Kevin Hassett, director of the White House National Economic Council, said of Friday's numbers.

Hassett said the additional factory jobs were the result of companies "on-shoring" work because of the

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coming tariffs.

"This is the first of many reports that are going to look like this," Hasset said with regard to the hiring in the industrial sector.

The stock market selloff raises doubts about whether tariffs will create the promised jobs.

"Markets anticipate," said John Silvia, CEO of Dynamic Economic Strategy. "The turn down the dark alley of tariffs signals higher inflation, slower economic growth and a weaker U.S. dollar. It is an economic horror movie in slow motion."

Trump has instigated a trade war in the last week with Canada, Mexico and China, only to then hit a monthlong pause on some of his import taxes because of the threat to U.S. auto factory jobs and because of Mexico's latest efforts to curb fentanyl smuggling.

More tariffs are coming on April 2 for Europe, Trump says, possibly putting the United States into open conflict with a continent it helped rebuild after World War II. South Korea, India and Brazil could also face new tariffs, Trump said in his address to a joint session of Congress on Tuesday.

Silvia said Trump's tariffs need to be more targeted with regard to products and nations and set at lower rates, adding that doing so would provide an assurance that there is solid research backing the measures.

There were multiple signs of uncertainty and concerns about the tariffs in the Federal Reserve's beige book, a collection of anecdotes from hundreds of businesses that the Fed releases eight times a year.

Published Wednesday, the beige book included 47 references to uncertainty, up from just 17 in the previous edition in January.

"Many businesses noted heightened economic uncertainty and expressed concern about tariffs," the Fed's New York branch reported. "Looking ahead, businesses were notably less optimistic."

"This is the perfect storm for businesses," said Brian Bethune, an economist at Boston College. "How can you possibly plan anything in this environment?"

Still, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said Friday on CNBC that he sees positive momentum in combating inflation. He said crude oil prices have fallen since Trump's inauguration, as have the interest rates on 10-year U.S. Treasury notes and mortgages.

Still, interest rates on government debt are higher than they were last year in September, and the recent decline could reflect a slowdown in economic demand.

Bessent suggested a core problem is that the U.S. economy has become overly reliant on government deficits and that the Trump administration would be fostering stronger growth in the private sector.

"We've become addicted to this government spending, and there's going to be a detox period," he said.

This particular form of economic rehab is coming from Trump's Department of Government Efficiency, which is led by T-shirted tech mogul Elon Musk, the owner of Tesla, X and SpaceX, among other companies.

The alleged savings by DOGE are still too paltry to bend the troubling trajectory of the national debt that is largely being driven by tax revenues that are insufficient to cover the rising costs of Social Security and Medicare.

But the initiative has started to downsize the federal workforce in ways that could surface in future jobs reports. Roughly 75,000 employees took the deferred resignation plan. There are also thousands of probationary federal workers who were fired and tens of thousands of layoffs to come based on the administration's plans.

Asked Friday in the Oval Office if the government layoffs could hurt the overall labor market, Trump said the economy would be great.

"I think the labor market is going to be fantastic, but it's going to have high-paying manufacturing jobs," he said. "We had too many people in government. You can't just do that."

Meet Amy Gleason, the DOGE administrator who may — or may not — be wielding extraordinary power

By RYAN J. FOLEY and BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

When her daughter was diagnosed with a rare autoimmune disease in 2010, Amy Gleason attacked the challenge.

She carried binders of medical records to doctors' appointments across six health systems seeking the best care for juvenile dermatomyositis. She volunteered at a nonprofit searching for a cure. She also started a health care company to create record-sharing software that would make life easier for chronically ill patients and families.

Within five years, President Barack Obama's White House recognized Gleason as a "Champion of Change" in the industry. When the coronavirus struck in 2020, she was a health care technologist in the first Trump White House who worked grueling hours building data systems to guide the federal response. (And her daughter was a thriving college student.)

Now, her journey has improbably led to President Donald Trump naming her the acting administrator of the U.S. DOGE Service, a position that seems to convey extraordinary power. Except almost no one has heard of her and everyone knows the man the president says is actually leading the unparalleled effort to gut the federal workforce and shutter agencies: Elon Musk.

Gleason's role at DOGE is unclear

While Musk has claimed his Department of Government Efficiency is fully transparent, until last week the White House press secretary would not even say Gleason's name — which does not appear on the DOGE website.

In his address to Congress Tuesday, Trump made clear that Musk is in charge, saluting him as the head of DOGE, with Musk smiling down on the president from the visitors' gallery. Yet government lawyers have argued in court that Gleason and not Musk is the agency's leader.

The confusion has added to the mystery around the role of Gleason, who did not respond to a phone call or text message for comment.

"I don't think anyone really knows for sure what her role is and whether she actually has any oversight of any of the people doing the work, or is she just there as a punching bag and a distraction to keep their actual activities shielded from the public," said Brett Hartl, government affairs director for the Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental group that sued the DOGE Service and Gleason seeking access to records that would shed light on their operations.

DOGE claims credit for saving more than \$100 billion through mass firings, cancellations of contracts and grants, office closures and other cuts that have paralyzed entire agencies. Many of those claimed savings have turned out to be overstated or unproven.

Gleason is known as a behind-the-scenes operator

On one level, Gleason fits the mold of a Musk employee, one willing to work arduous hours to meet his goals. Former colleagues say she is an effective behind-the-scenes operator and say her rise is the story of a former nurse who got into health care technology to help patients and doctors and climbed through merit.

"From my perspective, I can't imagine somebody I'd rather have there," said Jamie Grant, a former Republican lawmaker in Florida who worked with Gleason to start a health care company. "Somebody saying yes to that job right now better believe in the mission and better have a spine and be talented and she's that in spades."

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters that Gleason had served as the acting administrator at DOGE for weeks. But that was not the widely held understanding of her position internally, according to three people with knowledge of the office's operation who spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear of retribution.

While the exact nature of Gleason's portfolio was not well defined, what was clear is that she was working closely with DOGE leaders. She attempted to push civil service staffers in the office to hire at least

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two people who failed screening reviews for prospective hires; both were later hired by DOGE, according to two of the people who spoke to The Associated Press.

The uncertainty over her role — and when she was appointed to it — could have far-reaching implications in a series of ongoing lawsuits filed to blunt the impact of Musk's radical paring of the government workforce.

Under questioning from U.S. District Court Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly recently, government attorneys struggled to explain who was in charge of DOGE or Musk's precise role. That led Kollar-Kotelly to wonder if the office was running afoul of the Constitution's appointments clause because Musk had not been nominated to lead the office, or received confirmation from the Senate.

The Trump administration announced the following day that Gleason was DOGE's acting administrator, a question they had previously refused to answer.

Gleason has ties to Trump world

Unlike many DOGE workers, Gleason has no prior ties to Musk. She recently worked as chief products officer at Nashville-based health care firms founded by Brad Smith, who worked in the prior Trump administration on health care and is also a DOGE adviser.

Smith and Gleason began working on Trump's transition after the November election, and her role in Trump's orbit has grown. In December, she rejoined the United States Digital Service, where she had previously worked from 2018 through 2021 on high-level government health care technology initiatives.

On his first day back in office, Trump signed an executive order rebranding USDS as the US DOGE Service and giving it a mandate to help Musk's cost-cutting initiative. Soon, dozens of Musk acolytes associated with DOGE began arriving at agencies across the government demanding access to sensitive data systems and pushing for drastic changes.

While 21 others in the office resigned in protest rather than carry out Musk's initiatives, Gleason accepted a position that thrust her into an unfamiliar spotlight.

Health care entrepreneur Travis Bond, Gleason's colleague over two decades at companies in Florida, said Gleason will hate the public attention but excel in her new role.

"I'm not sure they could have picked a better person. She just thinks, eats and breathes this stuff," he said.

Gleason helped build CareSync, which later collapsed

Bond, Gleason and Grant in 2011 launched CareSync Inc., which developed an app to allow patients suffering from chronic disease to keep their medical records in one place. After benefiting from a \$7.25 million grant from one Florida county, CareSync found it hard to attract buyers for subscriptions that cost up to \$199 annually.

CareSync pivoted in 2015, taking advantage of a new federal rule that allowed Medicare providers to bill for chronic care management services delivered remotely. The company raised millions of dollars from investors and began rapidly adding staff and serving more than 20,000 patients nationwide. By summer 2018, CareSync ran out of cash and closed without notice, firing 300 workers and leaving creditors owed millions.

Gleason recalled later that she was "trying to figure out what in the world to do in life" after that experience and applied for the USDS with encouragement from Aneesh Chopra, U.S. chief technology officer under Obama. Chopra declined comment.

She focused on improving technology systems at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. During the pandemic, she worked under White House response coordinator Dr. Deborah Birx to develop laboratory and hospital data reporting systems. Birx praised Gleason last week in an interview with CNN as a "really competent, hardworking, focused woman who understands the value of data."

Near the end of her three-year stint in 2021, Gleason reflected on her work in a podcast interview, saying the digital service sought to "empower the civil servants and to bring new approaches in technology to the government and to help modernize their efforts."

"Our mission is really to do the greatest good, for the greatest number of people, in the greatest need," she said.

Expert tells judge to drop charges against NYC Mayor Eric Adams without letting them be refiled

By LARRY NEUMEISTER and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A judge has no choice but to grant the Justice Department's unusual and divisive request to dismiss New York City Mayor Eric Adams' corruption case, a court-appointed lawyer said Friday. But he recommended that prosecutors be barred from ever reviving the charges so they don't hang over Adams "like the proverbial Sword of Damocles."

Paul Clement, who represented the federal government before the Supreme Court as President George W. Bush's solicitor general, delivered the recommendation to Manhattan federal Judge Dale E. Ho in papers filed two weeks after Ho appointed him to provide neutral advice on the case.

In a written submission, Clement told Ho that there was "ample reason" to dismiss the prosecution without granting the Justice Department's request to be able to refile them after this year's mayoral election, which would leave "a prospect that hangs like the proverbial Sword of Damocles over the accused."

"When it comes to the sensitive task of prosecuting public officials," Clement wrote, "the prospect of re-indictment could create the appearance, if not the reality, that the actions of a public official are being driven by concerns about staying in the good graces of the federal executive, rather than the best interests of his constituents."

Adams spokesperson Fabien Levy said on the social platform X: "To quote @NYCMayor, 'Yeah, duh.'"

Ho appointed Clement after Acting Deputy U.S. Attorney General Emil Bove defended the request at a hearing. Bove argued that the charges came too close to Adams' reelection campaign and would distract the mayor from assisting the Trump administration's immigration crackdown.

Bove had suggested the charges could be reinstated after the election if the new permanent U.S. attorney decided it was appropriate.

In a filing late Friday signed by Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche and Bove, the government continued to maintain that the judge should allow reinstatement of the charges in the future.

They also cited text messages in which prosecutors who worked on the case discussed strategy and how to react to recent public statements about political corruption by former U.S. Attorney Damian Williams, who stepped down late last year.

Blanche and Bove obtained the text messages as part of an investigation of the Adams prosecution team that Bove disclosed two weeks ago. They suggested that they would reference those materials if Ho conducts a hearing, saying "any additional inquiry will not reflect well" on Manhattan prosecutors.

The filing came the same day two prosecutors who worked on the Adams' case — Celia Cohen and Andrew Rohrbach — were placed on leave while the internal probe continued, according to a person with knowledge of the action. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the individual was not authorized to speak publicly.

Cohen and Rohrbach did not respond Friday to messages seeking comment. Two other prosecutors on the case had already been placed on leave and one has resigned.

The government also was expected to file papers soon in response to a recent request by lawyers for Adams asking that the charges be dismissed "with prejudice," meaning they could not be refiled. That request is pending.

Adams was indicted in September and accused of accepting over \$100,000 in illegal campaign contributions and travel perks from a Turkish official and others seeking to buy influence while he was Brooklyn borough president. He has pleaded not guilty and insisted he is innocent.

Ho has said that oral arguments, if necessary, could occur next week on the government request to dismiss the indictment.

Bove initially directed then-interim U.S. Attorney Danielle Sassoon to request dismissal, but she refused, telling Attorney General Pam Bondi in a Feb. 12 letter as she offered to resign that she could not "agree to seek a dismissal driven by improper considerations."

She said the indictment was brought nine months before New York's June Democratic mayoral primary,

consistent with longstanding Justice Department policy regarding election-year sensitivities, and the threat of possibly refileing the charges amounted to "using the criminal process to control the behavior of a political figure."

Besides Sassoon, whose resignation was accepted by Bove the day after her letter, six prosecutors, including five high-ranking ones at the Justice Department, resigned before Bove made the dismissal request himself, along with two other Washington prosecutors.

In his recommendation to Ho, Clement observed that the Justice Department's move to end the case "precipitated a series of resignations and unusual public disclosures concerning internal deliberations about the case and the decision to seek dismissal."

"Suffice it to say that those materials raised material questions concerning both the initial decision to pursue the indictment and the subsequent decision to seek dismissal," he wrote.

A South Carolina man executed by firing squad is the first US prisoner killed this way in 15 years

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — A South Carolina man who killed his ex-girlfriend's parents with a baseball bat was executed by firing squad Friday, the first U.S. prisoner in 15 years to die by that method, which he saw as preferable to the electric chair or lethal injection.

Three volunteer prison employees used rifles to carry out the execution of Brad Sigmon, 67, who was pronounced dead at 6:08 p.m.

Sigmon killed David and Gladys Larke in their Greenville County home in 2001 in a botched plot to kidnap their daughter. He told police he planned to take her for a romantic weekend, then kill her and himself.

Sigmon's lawyers said he chose the firing squad because the electric chair would "cook him alive," and he feared that a lethal injection of pentobarbital into his veins would send a rush of fluid and blood into his lungs and drown him.

The details of South Carolina's lethal injection method are kept secret in South Carolina, and Sigmon unsuccessfully asked the state Supreme Court on Thursday to pause his execution because of that.

On Friday, Sigmon wore a black jumpsuit with a hood over his head and a white target with a red bullseye over his chest.

The armed prison employees stood 15 feet (4.6 meters) from where he sat in the state's death chamber — the same distance as the backboard is from the free-throw line on a basketball court. Visible in the same small room was the state's unused electric chair. The gurney used to carry out lethal injections had been rolled away.

The volunteers all fired at the same time through openings in a wall. They were not visible to about a dozen witnesses in a room separated from the chamber by bullet-resistant glass. Sigmon made several heavy breaths during the two minutes that elapsed from when the hood was placed to the shots being fired.

The shots, which sounded like they were fired at the same time, made a loud, jarring bang that caused witnesses to flinch. His arms briefly tensed when he was shot, and the target was blasted off his chest. He appeared to give another breath or two with a red stain on his chest, and small amounts of tissue could be seen from the wound during those breaths.

A doctor came out about a minute later and examined Sigmon for 90 seconds before declaring him dead.

Witnesses included three family members of the Larkes. Also present were Sigmon's attorney and spiritual advisor, a representative from the prosecuting solicitor's office, a sheriff's investigator and three members of the news media.

Sigmon's lawyer read a closing statement that he said was "one of love and a calling to my fellow Christians to help us end the death penalty."

Prison spokeswoman Chrysti Shain said Sigmon's last meal was four pieces of fried chicken, green beans, mashed potatoes with gravy, biscuits, cheesecake and sweet tea.

The firing squad is an execution method with a long and violent history in the U.S. and around the world.

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Death in a hail of bullets has been used to punish mutinies and desertion in armies, as frontier justice in America's Old West and as a tool of terror and political repression in the former Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

Since 1977 only three other prisoners in the U.S. have been executed by firing squad. All were in Utah, most recently Ronnie Lee Gardner in 2010. Another Utah man, Ralph Menzies, could be next; he is awaiting the result of a hearing in which his lawyers argued that his dementia makes him unfit for execution.

In South Carolina on Friday, a group of protesters holding signs with messages such as "All life is precious" and "Execute justice not people" gathered outside the prison before Sigmon's execution.

Supporters and lawyers for Sigmon asked Republican Gov. Henry McMaster to commute his sentence to life in prison. They said he was a model prisoner trusted by guards and worked every day to atone for the killings and also that he committed the killings after succumbing to severe mental illness.

But McMaster denied the clemency plea. No governor has ever commuted a death sentence in the state, where 46 other prisoners have been executed since the death penalty resumed in the U.S. in 1976. Seven have died in the electric chair and 39 others by lethal injection.

Gerald "Bo" King, chief of the capital habeas unit in the federal public defender's office, said Sigmon "used his final statement to call on his fellow people of faith to end the death penalty and spare the lives of the 28 men still locked up on South Carolina's death row."

"It is unfathomable that, in 2025, South Carolina would execute one of its citizens in this bloody spectacle," King said in a statement. "But South Carolina has ended the life of a man who has devoted himself to his faith, and to ministry and service to all around him. Brad admitted his guilt at trial and shared his deep grief for his crimes with his jury and, in the years since, with everyone who knew him."

In the early 2000s, South Carolina was among the busiest death penalty states, carrying out an average of three executions a year. But officials suspended executions for 13 years, in part because they were unable to obtain lethal injection drugs.

The state Supreme Court cleared the way to resume them in July. Freddie Owens was the first to be put to death, on Sept. 20, after McMaster denied him clemency. Richard Moore was executed on Nov. 1 and Marion Bowman Jr. on Jan. 31.

Going forward the court will allow an execution every five weeks.

South Carolina now has 28 inmates on its death row including two who have exhausted their appeals and are awaiting execution, most likely this spring. Just one man has been added to death row in the past decade.

Before executions were paused, more than 60 people faced death sentences. Many of those have either had their sentences reduced to life or died in prison.

A car pulled from a river may tell what happened to an Oregon family of 5 that went missing in 1958

By MARTHA BELLISLE Associated Press

After two days of dredging, a crane on Friday pulled from the Columbia River a Ford station wagon that officials believe belonged to an Oregon family who disappeared while on a trip 66 years ago to find Christmas greenery.

No human remains were found in the vehicle, which was pulled out of the water on Friday afternoon in a process that took about 10 minutes. The vehicle's body, which was visible in videos shot by divers, came off during the lifting and only the frame and wheels came out of the water.

The car will be wrapped and sent to a warehouse, where a forensic team will try to learn more about its owners, said Pete Hughes, a Hood River County Sheriff's deputy. But officials felt certain they found the car they were looking for, he said.

"Everything matches," he said. "It appears to be the color, make and model of the Martin vehicle."

Disappearance made national news

The search for the Martin family was a national news story at the time and led some to speculate about

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the possibility of foul play, with a \$1,000 reward offered for information.

"Where do you search if you've already searched every place logic and fragmentary clues would suggest?" an Associated Press article wondered in 1959, months after the disappearance.

The bodies of two of the family's children were found in the river later that year, though the remaining members never turned up.

Salvage efforts were called off just before dark on Thursday and resumed early Friday as crews tried to clear mud that buried much of the car.

The station wagon thought to belong to Ken and Barbara Martin was found last fall by Archer Mayo, a diver who had been looking for it for seven years, said Mayo's representative, Ian Costello. Mayo pinpointed the likely location and dove several times before finding the car upside-down about 50 feet (15 meters) deep, covered in mud, salmon guts, silt and mussel shells, Costello said.

"This is a very big development in a case that's been on the back of Portland's mind for 66 years," Costello told The Associated Press.

Mayo found other cars nearby, Costello said. Hughes, the Hood River County sheriff's deputy, said one car had been previously identified and the second was an unknown Volkswagen.

Investigators will now work on finding identification numbers from the engine and chassis of the car to make sure it is the Martins' vehicle. The rest of the car body will remain in the river for now, Hughes said.

An ill-fated Christmas trip

The Martins took their daughters — Barbara, 14; Virginia, 13; and Sue, 11 — on a ride to the mountains on Dec. 7, 1958, to collect Christmas greenery, according to AP stories from the time. The children left the Sunday newspaper comics scattered about their home. Dishes remained in the sink and a load of laundry in the washing machine.

They never returned. Officials narrowed their search for the family after learning that Ken Martin had used a credit card to buy gas at a station near Cascade Locks, a small Columbia River community about 40 miles (64 kilometers) east of Portland.

"Police have speculated that Martin's red and white station wagon might have plunged into an isolated canyon or river," the AP reported. "The credit card purchase was the only thing to pinpoint the family's movements."

A waitress reported seeing a family that could have been the Martins at the Paradise Snack Bar, east of Cascade Locks, just before sunset. The family had been out looking for a Christmas tree. They ordered hamburgers, fries, milk and dessert. The bill came to \$4.15.

Five months after their disappearance, the body of the youngest daughter was found "bobbing in a Columbia River slough," according to the AP. "The body of Susan apparently floated free of the wreckage in the spring current and was washed to a back water slough near Camas, Washington," the AP wrote.

Virginia Martin's body was found the next day about 25 miles (40 kilometers) upstream from where her sister's was located. The other family members were never found, but the search continued.

The Martins had a 28-year-old son, Don, who was a Marine veteran and graduate student at Columbia University in New York at the time and told the AP he believed his family was dead.

Vehicle found by longtime sleuth

"It's been a high public interest case," Hughes told the AP on Thursday.

After Mayo provided part of the license plate number and other vehicle identifiers, the sheriff's office and the Columbia Gorge major crimes team, along with the Oregon State Crime Lab, arranged to have the car pulled out, he said.

Mayo runs a business that finds things that were lost in the river, like watches and rings, but also helps with the recovery of drowning victims, Costello said. He had been looking for a research vessel that sank in 2017 when he learned about the Martin family, Costello said.

Mayo began digging up material on the family and used modeling to pinpoint the possible location, he said.

A single day of Trump and Musk's cost-cutting campaign remakes huge sections of government

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A series of decisions revealed Friday provided a glimpse of the turmoil engulfing federal agencies since President Donald Trump and Elon Musk launched their campaign of disruption, upending how government functions in ways big and small.

Some changes appeared designed to increase political control over agencies that have historically operated with some degree of autonomy, such as requiring Environmental Protection Agency officials to seek approval from the Department of Government Efficiency for any contracts exceeding \$50,000.

Other directives increased burdens on federal workers, who have already endured insults, layoffs and threats from the president and other top officials. For example, government credit cards issued to civilian employees at the Pentagon were altered to have a \$1 limit, choking off their ability to travel for work.

The Transportation Security Administration became another target. The administration canceled a collective bargaining agreement with 47,000 workers who screen travelers and luggage at airports around the country, eliminating union protections in a possible prelude to layoffs or privatization.

The cascading developments are only a fraction of the upheaval that's taken place since Trump took office, but they still reshaped how hundreds of thousands of public servants do their jobs, with potentially enduring consequences. The ongoing shakeup is much more intense than the typical whiplash that Washington endures when one administration gives way to another, raising fundamental questions about how government will function under a president who has viewed civil servants as an obstacle to his agenda.

The White House has wrestled with political blowback over Musk's role and legal challenges that have tried to block or slow down his work. Republicans who are facing growing pressure in contentious town halls have started to speak up.

"I will fully admit, I think Elon Musk has tweeted first and thought second sometimes," said Rep. Bill Huizenga, R-Mich., during a virtual meeting with constituents on Friday. "He has plunged ahead without necessarily knowing and understanding what he legally has to do or what he is going to be doing."

Mistakes are being made

The overhaul of the federal government is happening at lightning speed, reflecting years of preparation by Trump's allies and the president's decision to grant Musk sweeping influence over his administration. Musk, a billionaire entrepreneur with no previous experience in public service, has shown no interest in slowing down despite admitting that he'll make mistakes in his crusade to slash spending and downsize the workforce.

The government is facing even more dramatic changes in the coming weeks and months. Trump has directed agencies to prepare plans for widespread layoffs, known as reductions in force, that will likely require more limited operations at agencies that provide critical services.

The Department of Veterans Affairs could shed 80,000 employees, while the Internal Revenue Service and the Social Security Administration are considering plans that would cut their workforces in half.

Trump has vowed not to reduce Social Security benefits, but Democrats argue that layoffs would make it harder to deliver payments to 72.5 million people, including retirees and children.

There are also concerns that politics could interfere with Social Security. Trump has feuded over transgender issues with Maine Democratic Gov. Janet Mills, and his administration recently said children born in the state would no longer have a Social Security number assigned at birth. Instead, parents would have to apply for one at a local office.

Leland Dudek, the acting commissioner of Social Security, rescinded the order on Friday.

"In retrospect, I realize that ending these contracts created an undue burden on the people of Maine, which was not the intent," he said in a statement. Dudek added that "as a leader, I will admit my mistakes and make them right."

A startup mindset takes hold

More than a month after Trump took office, there's still confusion about Musk's authority. In public state-

ments and legal filings, administration officials have insisted that Musk does not actually run DOGE and has no direct authority over budgets.

But Trump has contradicted both statements. He said Tuesday that DOGE is "headed by Elon Musk" in a prime-time speech to a joint session of Congress, and he said Thursday that "Elon will do the cutting" if agency leaders don't reduce their spending.

Their approach has energized people like David Sacks, a venture capitalist serving as a Trump adviser on cryptocurrency and artificial intelligence, who praised the administration as moving "faster than any startup that I've been part of."

Trump denied reports of friction between Musk and Cabinet officials, particularly Secretary of State Marco Rubio, during a meeting Thursday.

"Elon gets along great with Marco," the president said. The State Department had no immediate comment.

Norm Eisen, executive chair of State Democracy Defenders Fund, an organization that has been suing the Trump administration, said the president "made clear that Musk and DOGE have been calling the shots."

Musk serves as a presidential adviser, not a Senate-confirmed official, which Eisen argued makes his role unconstitutional. He said Trump's comments are "an admission that the vast chaos that Musk and DOGE have wrought without proper approval and documentation is illegal — and so must be completely unwound."

Trump is using executive orders to reshape government

Many of the changes sweeping through Washington were ignited by Trump's executive orders. One order issued last week said agencies must develop new systems for distributing and justifying payments so they can be monitored by DOGE representatives.

The EPA distributed guidance intended to ensure compliance.

"Any assistance agreement, contract or interagency agreement transaction (valued at) \$50,000 or greater must receive approval from an EPA DOGE team member," said the documents obtained by The Associated Press.

Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island, the top Democrat on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, said the involvement of Musk's "unvetted, inexperienced team raises serious concerns about improper external influence on specialized agency decision-making."

Republicans have shied away from holding town hall meetings with constituents after critics started using them to vent their frustration.

Some protesters gathered outside Huizenga's district office in Holland, Michigan, calling on him to answer questions in person.

"I would like to ask him why he thinks that someone like Musk can go in and simply blow up agencies without seemingly even knowing what they're doing," said Linda Visscher, a Holland resident.

She said increasing the efficiency of government was a good idea, but she doesn't agree with "just taking the blowtorch to it."

What to know about Hollywood icon Gene Hackman's and his wife's deaths

The Associated Press undefined

Actor Gene Hackman died of heart disease likely a week after his wife died of hantavirus but may not have realized she was dead in their New Mexico home because he showed severe signs of Alzheimer's disease, authorities said Friday.

Hackman, 95, and his wife, Betsy Arakawa, 65, were found dead Feb. 26. Authorities previously said they did not suspect foul play, and immediate tests for carbon monoxide poisoning were negative.

What we know about the deaths

Both were ruled to be from natural causes, chief medical examiner Dr. Heather Jarrell said. Hackman's death was tied to heart disease with Alzheimer's disease contributing. Authorities linked Arakawa's death to hantavirus pulmonary syndrome, a rare but potentially fatal disease spread by the droppings of infected rodents.

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The last known communication and activity by Arakawa was on Feb. 11, when she visited a grocery store, pharmacy, pet food store and entered a gated community in Santa Fe where the couple lived, Santa Fe County Sheriff Adan Mendoza said. Hackman's pacemaker last showed signs of activity a week later, with an abnormal heart rhythm Feb. 18 — the day he likely died, Jarrell said.

While there's no reliable way to know for sure when each died, all signs point to their deaths coming a week apart, Jarrell said.

Hackman's body was found in the home's entryway, and Arakawa's body was found in a bathroom. Thyroid medication pills prescribed to Arakawa were found nearby and weren't listed as contributing to her death, Jarrell said.

Investigators earlier retrieved personal items from the home, including a monthly planner and two cellphones. One of the couple's three dogs was found dead in a crate near Arakawa. Authorities initially misidentified the breed.

The sheriff's office considers the investigation still open until it finishes checking into cellphone data and receives results from a planned necropsy of the dog.

What is hantavirus?

The virus typically is reported in spring and summer, often when people are exposed to mouse droppings in homes, sheds or poorly ventilated areas. It can cause a severe, sometimes deadly lung infection called hantavirus pulmonary syndrome, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

This is the first confirmed case of hantavirus in New Mexico this year. Hantavirus does not spread between people.

Initial symptoms can include fatigue, fever and muscle aches. As the disease progresses, people can experience coughing, shortness of breath or tightness in the chest as the lungs fill with fluid, according to the CDC. About a third of people who develop respiratory symptoms can die, the agency said.

How Hackman made his name

Hackman appeared in a broad range of movie roles dating back to 1961, when he debuted in "Mad Dog Coll." His roles included playing the arch nemesis Lex Luthor in the "Superman" movies and a coach finding redemption in the sentimental favorite "Hoosiers."

He was a five-time Oscar nominee who won best actor in a leading role for "The French Connection" in 1972 and best actor in a supporting role for "Unforgiven" two decades later. He retired in the early 2000s.

Who was Arakawa?

Arakawa was born in Hawaii in December 1959 and grew up in Honolulu. She studied piano and, as an 11-year-old sixth grader, performed in youth concerts in front of thousands of students at the Honolulu International Center Concert Hall, the Honolulu Star-Bulletin reported in 1971.

She attended the University of Southern California and was a cheerleader for the Aztecs, a professional soccer team in the North American Soccer League. She also worked as a production assistant on the television game show "Card Sharks," the Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported in 1981.

She met Hackman while working part-time at a California gym in the mid-1980s. They soon moved in together and relocated to Santa Fe by the end of the decade.

Arakawa was vice president of Pandora's, a home decor and furnishing store in Santa Fe, according to New Mexico business records.

Where were Hackman and his wife living?

Their Pueblo revival home, a style typical in the area, sits on a hill in a gated community with views of the Rocky Mountains far from Hollywood. The area is known as a preferred location among artists and a retreat for celebrities.

The home was featured in a 1990 article by Architectural Digest. The four-bedroom, 8,700-square-foot (808-square-meter) structure on 6 acres (2.4 hectares) had an estimated market value of a little over \$4 million, according to Santa Fe County property tax records.

Hackman could be spotted around the historic state capital, but he disappeared largely from the public eye in his later years. His hobbies included painting, deep-sea diving and, later in life, writing novels.

Justice Dept. says ending Louisiana petrochemical case helps 'dismantle radical DEI programs'

By MATTHEW DALY and MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department on Friday celebrated its decision to drop a federal lawsuit against a Louisiana petrochemical plant accused of worsening cancer risks for residents in a majority-Black community, saying the dismissal showed that officials are "delivering on President (Donald) Trump's promise to dismantle radical DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) programs and restore integrity to federal enforcement efforts."

The dismissal Wednesday of the two-year-old case underscored the Trump administration's commitment to "eliminate ideological overreach and restore impartial enforcement of federal laws," Justice said in a statement.

At the same time, the Environmental Protection Agency withdrew its formal referral of the case to the Justice Department. The agency said the action aligns with EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin's pledge to end the use of "environmental justice" as an enforcement tool that Zeldin was too often used to advance liberal ideological priorities.

Dismissal of the case unraveled one of former President Joe Biden's highest-profile targets for an environmental justice effort aimed at improving conditions in places disproportionately harmed by decades of industrial pollution. Biden's EPA sued the Denka Performance Elastomer plant in early 2023, alleging it posed an unacceptable cancer risk and demanding cuts in toxic emissions of cancer-causing chloroprene.

The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in the Eastern District of Louisiana and was formally withdrawn Wednesday.

The action is one of a series the Trump administration has taken as it moves quickly to reverse the environmental justice focus of Biden's administration, placing roughly 170 environmental justice-focused staffers on administrative leave. Dropping the Denka case relieves pressure on a company that has spent years fighting federal lawsuits and investigations over its impact on public health.

Denka, based in Japan, bought the former DuPont plant in LaPlace, Louisiana, a decade ago. It's located near an elementary school in a community about 30 miles outside New Orleans.

The site produces neoprene, a synthetic rubber that is found in products such as wetsuits and laptop sleeves. The Justice Department sued the company in early 2023, accusing it of emitting unacceptable levels of chloroprene, a chemical that may be especially harmful to children. A judge had scheduled a bench trial for April.

Dismissal of the case reflects the Justice Department's "renewed commitment to enforce environmental laws as Congress intended — consistently, fairly and without regard to race," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Adam Gustafson, who oversees the department's Environment and Natural Resources Division.

Zeldin, a former Republican congressman who took over the EPA in late January, said the dismissal was "a step toward ensuring that environmental enforcement is consistent with the law. While EPA's core mission includes securing clean air for all Americans, we can fulfill that mission within well-established legal frameworks, without stretching the bounds of the law or improperly implementing so-called 'environmental justice.'"

Denka said the dismissal was "long-overdue" and ends litigation that it said lacked scientific and legal merit. The lawsuit was a "draining attack on our business," the company said.

"The focus should be on the real-world data that shows no adverse health effects, even at substantially higher emission levels," the company said in a statement.

The government's lawsuit said air monitoring showed that long-term concentrations near the Denka plant are as high as 15 times the amount recommended for long-term exposure to chloroprene.

The EPA under Biden issued a related rule aimed at reducing industrial pollution that gave Denka a fast deadline to lower its emissions. The company said it was being singled out and other manufacturers were given far more time to comply. The company also said the plant has significantly reduced its emissions in recent years, since the sale was completed in 2015. The company won an extension of its deadline.

The Denka plant is located in an industrial stretch of Louisiana from New Orleans to Baton Rouge that is officially called the Mississippi River Chemical Corridor. It's known informally as Cancer Alley for the high incidence of cancer among residents who live near the industrial corridor, which has about 200 fossil fuel and petrochemical operations. The area accounts for about 25% of the petrochemical production in the United States.

Clashes in Syria between government forces and Assad loyalists kill more than 200

By BASSEM MROUE and ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Fighters siding with Syria's new government stormed several villages near the country's coast, killing dozens of men in response to recent attacks on government security forces by loyalists of ousted President Bashar Assad, a war monitor said.

The village assaults erupted Thursday and continued Friday. Ongoing clashes between the two sides have marked the worst violence since Assad's government was toppled in early December by insurgent groups led by the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. The new government has pledged to unite Syria after 14 years of civil war.

More than 200 people have been killed since the fighting broke out, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. In addition to around 140 killed in apparent revenge attacks in the villages, the dead include at least 50 members of Syria's government forces and 45 fighters loyal to Assad. The civil war that has been raging in Syria since March 2011 has left more than half a million people dead and millions displaced.

The most recent clashes began when government forces tried to detain a wanted person near the coastal city of Jableh on Thursday and were ambushed by Assad loyalists, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

On Thursday and Friday, gunmen loyal to the new government stormed the villages of Sheer, Mukhtariyeh and Haffah near the coast, killing 69 men but harming no women, according to the observatory.

"They killed every man they encountered," said observatory chief Rami Abdurrahman.

Beirut-based Al-Mayadeen TV also reported the attacks on the three villages, saying that more than 30 men were killed in the village of Mukhtariyeh alone.

Another 60 people were killed in the town of Baniyas, including women and children, the observatory said.

Syrian authorities did not publish a death toll, but Syria's state news agency SANA quoted an unidentified security official as saying that numerous people went to the coast seeking revenge for recent attacks on government security forces. The official said the actions "led to some individual violations and we are working on stop them."

Interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa in a video statement called on armed groups affiliated with the former government to hand over their weapons and for those loyal to the new government to avoid attacking civilians or abusing prisoners.

"When we compromise our ethics, we reduce ourselves to the same level as our enemy," he said. "The remnants of the fallen regime are looking for a provocation that will lead to violations behind which they can seek refuge."

Coastal towns still under the control of Assad loyalists

Overnight, Damascus sent reinforcements to the coastal cities of Latakia and Tartus and nearby villages that are home to Assad's minority Alawite sect and make up his longtime base of support. A curfew remained in effect in Latakia and other coastal areas.

Under Assad, Alawites held top posts in the army and security agencies. The new government has blamed his loyalists for attacks against the country's new security forces over the past several weeks. There also have been some attacks against Alawites in recent weeks, though the new government says it won't allow collective punishment or sectarian vengeance.

As of Friday, the observatory said, Jableh and the coastal town of Baniyas were still under the control

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of Assad loyalists, along with other Alawite villages nearby and Assad's hometown of Qardaha, in the mountains overlooking Latakia.

One Qardaha resident told The Associated Press in a text message that government forces were firing with heavy machine guns in the town's residential areas. Another said people had not been able to leave their homes since Thursday afternoon because of the intensity of the shooting. Both spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution.

The fighting could stoke more sectarian tensions

Gregory Waters, an associate fellow with the Middle East Institute who has researched Syria's coastal areas, said he doesn't expect the flareup to escalate into sustained fighting between the two sides. However, he said he was concerned it could stoke cycles of violence between different civilian communities living along the coast.

Also, any violations by the security forces sent from Damascus would leave young Alawite men more fearful of the new government — and more prone to take up arms, Waters said.

In Damascus, a crowd gathered in the rain at Umayyad Square to show support for the new government.

"We've had enough of long periods of wars and tragedies," said retiree Mazen Abdelmajeed. He blamed the violence on remnants of the former regime and said Syria's unity must be preserved.

"No one wants a civil war to happen," he said. "We're not against any of the components of the Syrian people. ... We're all one Syrian people."

Qutaiba Idlbi, a research fellow at the Atlantic Council think tank, said that apart from the danger of sectarian escalation, the violence had laid bare a "big security challenge for the government in terms of potentially its inability to address multiple security threats on multiple fronts across the country." Armed groups opposed to the new authorities may take note, he said.

Syrian people ask Russia for help

Scores of people gathered Friday outside the main Russian air base in Syria near Jableh to ask Moscow for protection. Russia joined Syria's conflict in 2015, siding with Assad, although it has since established links with the new government. Assad has been living in Moscow since leaving Syria in December.

Russia's foreign ministry said in a written statement that Moscow is "closely coordinating efforts with foreign partners in the interests of a speedy de-escalation of the situation."

"We reaffirm our principled position in support of the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic," the statement said. "We expect that all states that have influence on the situation in Syria will contribute to its normalization."

A warning from Turkey

Turkey, which backed the insurgents when Assad was still in power, warned on Friday that the current fighting poses a serious threat to the new government.

"Intensive efforts are underway to establish security and stability in Syria," Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesperson Oncu Keceli said in a post on X. "At this critical juncture, the targeting of security forces could undermine the efforts to lead Syria into the future in unity and solidarity."

90,000 Palestinians attend the first Friday prayers of Ramadan in Jerusalem

By IMAD ISSEID and JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — In the first Friday prayers of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, about 90,000 Palestinians prayed at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City under tight security by Israeli forces.

Thousands made their way from the West Bank into Jerusalem after Israel allowed men over 55 and women over 50 to enter from the occupied territory for the prayers. Tensions have risen in the West Bank in the past weeks amid Israeli raids on militants. There was no immediate sign of frictions in Jerusalem on Friday.

However, Palestinian authorities said Israeli soldiers had stormed eight mosques around the city of

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Nablus, in the north of the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

In a statement posted to X, the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Israeli operations set fire to "large sections" of the Al-Nasr mosque in the old city of Nablus, posting a photo of the interior of the mosque, where walls appeared blackened. The mosque used to be a Byzantine church.

Asked for comment, the military said it was "not aware" of any fire set by soldiers at the site.

A chance to enter a holy place

For many Palestinians, Friday marked their first opportunity to enter Jerusalem since last Ramadan about a year ago, when Israel also let in worshippers under similar restrictions.

Since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023, the Israeli government blocked Palestinians in the West Bank from crossing to Jerusalem or visiting Israel. Cuts to USAID by the Trump administration have also set back aid groups operating in Gaza.

Last Ramadan, the war was raging, but this time, a fragile ceasefire is in place since mid-January — though its future is uncertain. Since Sunday, Israel has barred all food, fuel, medicine and other supplies from entering Gaza for some 2 million people, demanding Hamas accept a revised deal.

Prayers at the Dome of the Rock and in the rubble of Gaza

In Gaza, thousands gathered for the Friday communal prayers in the shattered concrete husk of Gaza City's Imam Shafi'i Mosque, heavily damaged by Israeli forces during fighting. During Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn until sunset as a sign of humility, submission to God and sympathy for the poor and hungry.

On Thursday evening, Palestinians strung festive Ramadan lights around the rubble of destroyed buildings surrounding their tent camp in Gaza City and set up long communal tables for hundreds of people where aid groups served up iftar, the meal that breaks the daily fast.

At Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, Nafez Abu Saker said he left his home in the village of Aqraba in the northern West Bank at 7 a.m., taking three hours to make the 45-kilometer (20-mile) trip through Israeli checkpoints to reach Jerusalem. "If the people from the West Bank will be permitted to come, people from all the cities, villages and camps will come to Al-Aqsa to pray," he said.

"The reward of prayer here is like 500 prayers — despite the difficulty of the road to get here. It brings a great reward from God," said Ezat Abu Laqia, also from Aqraba.

The faithful formed rows to listen to the Friday sermon and kneel in prayer at the foot of the golden Dome of the Rock on the sprawling mosque compound. The Islamic Trust, which oversees the Al-Aqsa compound, said 90,000 attended the prayers. The Israeli police said it deployed thousands of additional officers around the area.

The compound, revered by Jews as the Temple Mount, and the surrounding area of Jerusalem's Old City have been the site of clashes between Palestinians and Israeli police in the past. The Old City is part of east Jerusalem, captured by Israel along with the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast War. Israel has since annexed the sector, though Palestinians seek it and the territories for an independent state.

Tight security and delays at checkpoints

Thousands of Palestinians coming from the West Bank lined up at the Qalandia checkpoint on the edge of Jerusalem to attend the prayers. But some were turned away, either because they didn't have the proper permits or because the checkpoint closed.

Israeli police said authorities had approved the entry of 10,000 Palestinians from the West Bank, but did not say how many made it into Jerusalem.

"All the young people, elderly people and women were waiting here. They refused to let anyone cross at the checkpoint," said Mohammed Owaisat, who arrived to find the crossing closed.

The fragile ceasefire

The first phase of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire brought the release of 25 Israeli hostages held by militants in Gaza and the bodies of eight others in exchange for the freeing of nearly 2,000 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

But an intended second phase of the deal — meant to bring the release of remaining hostages and a lasting truce and full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza — has been thrown into doubt. Israel has balked at en-

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tering negotiations over the terms of the second phase. Instead, it has called for Hamas to release half its remaining hostages in return for an extension of the ceasefire and a promise to negotiate a lasting truce.

It says its bar on aid to Gaza will continue and could be escalated until Hamas accepts the proposal — a move rights groups and Arab countries have decried as a “starvation tactic.” Hamas has demanded implementation of the original ceasefire deal.

A Hamas delegation arrived in Cairo on Friday to discuss the implementation of the deal and to push for the second phase, Egypt’s State Information Service said.

Israel’s military offensive has killed over 48,000 Palestinians in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry, which does not say how many of the dead were militants.

The campaign was triggered by Hamas’ Oct. 23, 2023 attack on southern Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took a total of 251 people hostage. Most have been released in ceasefire agreements or other arrangements. Hamas is believed to still have 24 living hostages and the bodies of 34 others.

Hamas on Friday released video footage of Israeli hostage Matan Angrest in captivity and claimed that remaining hostages feel the Israeli government has abandoned them and also called on Trump to bring them home.

In the video, Angrest, an Israeli soldier taken captive from the Nahal Oz military base, says there’s no sunlight and that winter conditions are tough in Gaza.

Likely speaking under duress, he appealed to Donald Trump, saying the U.S. president is the only one who can return all the hostages because of his influence over Benjamin Netanyahu’s government.

Angrest’s family said it was “shaken by the video” and added that his appearance in the footage makes them fear that he has been tortured.

Russia attacks Ukraine’s energy supplies as US cuts its access to satellite images

By ILLIA NOVIKOV and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia attacked Ukrainian energy facilities with dozens of missiles and drones during the night, officials said Friday, hobbling the country’s ability to deliver heat and light to its citizens and to power weapons factories vital to its defenses.

The overnight barrage — which also pounded residences and wounded at least 10 people — came days after the U.S. suspended military aid and intelligence to Ukraine to pressure it into accepting a peace deal being pushed by the Trump administration. Without U.S. intelligence, Ukraine’s ability to strike inside Russia and defend itself from bombardment is significantly diminished.

The U.S. government said Friday it halted Ukrainian access to unclassified satellite images that had been used to help it fight back against Russia.

The U.S. National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency told The Associated Press the decision reflected “the Administration’s directive on support to Ukraine,” without elaborating. The satellite imagery provider Maxar Technologies confirmed the U.S. government decision to “temporarily suspend” Ukrainian access.

Air-defense systems supplied by the West are crucial for Ukraine, but further U.S. help is uncertain under President Donald Trump, who held a tempestuous — and televised — White House meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last week in which he questioned Ukraine’s determination to end the war. Zelenskyy has since said the blowup with the Trump administration was “regrettable.”

European Union leaders, mindful they may need to shoulder more of the burden for arming Ukraine and strengthen their own defenses, agreed on a plan Thursday to significantly build up their military spending.

Ukraine is having a tough time on the battlefield. An onslaught by Russia’s bigger army is straining short-handed Ukrainian forces at places along the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line.

Officials from the U.S. and Ukraine will meet in Saudi Arabia next week to discuss ending the war, which began more than three years ago when Russia launched a full-scale invasion. On Friday, President Trump

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said on social media he was "strongly considering" additional sanctions on Russia to force it into peace talks with Ukraine.

Later, when asked by a reporter during an Oval Office exchange if Russian President Vladimir Putin was taking advantage of the U.S. pause on intelligence-sharing to attack Ukraine, Trump responded: "I think he's doing what anybody else would."

Ukraine's energy minister, Herman Halushchenko, described the overnight attack on Facebook as "massive."

"Russia is trying to hurt ordinary Ukrainians by striking energy and gas production facilities, without abandoning its goal of leaving us without light and heat, and causing the greatest harm to ordinary citizens," Halushchenko wrote.

Russia has repeatedly targeted Ukraine's power grid during the war. The attacks have depleted electricity generation capacity and disrupted critical heating and water supplies. Ukrainian officials have accused Russia of "weaponizing winter" in an effort to erode civilian morale.

Zelenskyy on Friday won the support of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for Ukraine's proposals to take some first steps toward stopping the war, including a halt on firing missiles, drones and bombs at energy and other civilian infrastructure. Zelenskyy has also proposed ceasing combat operations in the Black Sea to allow safe shipping.

Erdogan said that he also wants the shooting to stop without delay.

"We support the idea of an immediate ceasefire and the cessation of attacks in the air and at sea as a confidence-building measure between the parties," he said in a video call with European leaders.

Zelenskyy first suggested those initial steps in a post on X on Tuesday, when he said that he was ready to work under President Trump's "strong leadership" to get a lasting peace.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday that the energy supply is a legitimate target in the war, because it's "linked with Ukraine's military industrial complex and weapons production."

Russian air defenses downed 39 Ukrainian drones overnight, according to the Russian Defense Ministry.

Ukraine's largest private gas producer, DTEK, said that the overnight bombardment in the Odesa region was Russia's sixth attack in the past two and a half weeks on its facilities. Its plants in two other regions were also struck.

Russia fired 67 missiles from air, land and sea, and launched 194 strike and decoy drones, Ukraine's air force said. Their primary target was Ukraine's natural gas extraction facilities, it said.

For the first time, Ukraine deployed French Mirage-2000 warplanes delivered a month ago to help repel the attack, according to the air force. Ukraine also has Western-supplied F-16 fighter jets to shoot down Russian missiles.

Ukrainian defenses downed 34 missiles and 100 drones, the air force said, while up to 10 missiles didn't reach their targets and 86 drones were lost from radars, presumably jammed by electronic warfare.

The Maxar Technologies system that Ukraine previously had access to allows the U.S. government to order commercial images that can be shared freely, as opposed to the highly classified images taken by its top-secret satellites. A Ukrainian website associated with its military, Militarnyi, first reported the satellite image service had been blocked.

During the war, Ukraine has used those images to plan attacks, see the results of their strikes and monitor the movement of Russian forces. Even before the war began in February 2022, commercial satellite imagery allowed the Biden administration to share otherwise classified information about what it knew.

"Maxar has contracts with the U.S. government and dozens of allied and partner nations around the world to provide satellite imagery and other geospatial data," said Gia DeHart, a spokesperson for Maxar Intelligence's U.S. government business. "Each customer makes their own decisions on how they use and share that data."

D'Wayne Wiggins, founding member of the R&B group Tony! Toni! Tone!, has died at 64

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — D'Wayne Wiggins, a founding member of the Grammy-nominated group Tony! Toni! Tone! behind the classic 1990s jams "Anniversary," "It Never Rains (In Southern California)" and "(Lay Your Head on My) Pillow," has died. He was 64.

Wiggins died Friday morning after battling bladder cancer for over the past year, according to a statement released by his family on social media.

"D'Wayne's life was incomparable, and his music and service impacted millions around the world, including in his hometown of Oakland, California," his family said in a statement. "He was a guitarist, producer, composer, philanthropist, mentor and founding member of Tony! Toni! Tone! He was deeply passionate about providing artist development and mentorship to emerging young musicians, helping to shape the early careers of many."

His family added: "Through this fight, he remained committed and present for his family, his music, his fans and his community."

Wiggins was a vocalist and bass guitarist of the beloved R&B group, which included his brother Raphael Saadiq and their cousin Christian Riley. The group became mainstays of the New Jack Swing movement, blending R&B, jazz and traces of gospel melodies.

The Oakland, California, natives burst onto the music scene with their 1988 debut album, "Who?" with songs like "Baby Doll" and "Little Walter." But it was their 1990 New Jack Swing-infused "Feels Good" record that gave the group mainstream success, peaking at No. 9 on Billboard's Hot 100 chart.

They released two more studio projects together, with party hits like "Let's Get Down," featuring DJ Quik, and timeless slow jams including "Whatever You Want," "It Never Rains (In Southern California)," "(Lay Your Head on My) Pillow" and "Anniversary," a standard in the Black music romance canon. Their "It Never Rains" version was a cover of the 1972 hit by British singer-songwriter Albert Hammond.

The blood relatives also couldn't predict how their success would affect their relationship. The Tonyies went their separate ways after their fourth album, 1996's platinum-selling "House of Music." Fame, finances, miscommunication and creative differences were unsustainable for the group.

Wiggins and Riley toured under the group's name between 1998 and 2018, with Amar Khalil taking over lead singing duties. Wiggins also produced and helped grow young artists who would become some of today's brightest young stars, including Zendaya, H.E.R., Kehlani and even Destiny's Child.

Ultimately, through Saadiq's efforts, the group made amends and reunited for a tour in 2023. It was the first road trip featuring the three original members in nearly 30 years.

The family members vowed not to let outside influences like managers, record executives and the entertainment business as a whole drive them apart again, realizing that time — at least in the professional sense — is no longer a luxury.

In a 2023 interview with The AP, The Tonyies had planned on a new project.

"We got a lot of material, and now we just want to make sure that we put out the right energy through our music," Wiggins said.

Canada to name a new leader while dealing with Trump trade war

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Canada looks set to pick a measured former central banker to deal with the threats President Donald Trump's tariffs pose against a pillar of Western free trade.

Mark Carney, 59, could become the next prime minister when the governing Liberal Party of Canada announces a replacement for Justin Trudeau in a leadership vote Sunday.

The opposition Conservatives hoped to make the election about Trudeau, whose popularity declined as food and housing prices rose and immigration surged. Trudeau announced his resignation in January but

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remains prime minister until a successor is chosen. Election laws mandate a vote before October but one is expected sooner.

Trump's trade war and his talk of making Canada the 51st state have infuriated Canadians, who are booing the American anthem at NHL and NBA games. Some are cancelling trips south and many are avoiding buying American goods when they can.

The surge in Canadian nationalism has bolstered the Liberal Party's chances in Parliamentary elections that are expected within days or weeks, and Liberal showings have been improving steadily in opinion polls.

After decades of bilateral stability, the vote on Canada's next leader now is expected to focus on who is best equipped to deal with the United States.

Who is Mark Carney?

Carney navigated crises when he was the head of Canada's central bank and when he became the first non-citizen to run the Bank of England since it was founded in 1694.

His appointment won bipartisan praise in Britain after Canada recovered from the 2008 financial crisis faster than many other countries.

Carney is credited with keeping money flowing through the Canadian economy by acting quickly in cutting interest rates to their lowest level ever of 1%, working with bankers to sustain lending through the crisis and, critically, letting the public know rates would remain low so they would keep borrowing.

And it wasn't just that he had good policies — he sold them to the public in a way everyone could understand. He was the first central banker to commit to keep them at a historic low for a definite time, a step the U.S. Federal Reserve would follow.

Carney has picked up one endorsement after another from Cabinet ministers and members of Parliament since declaring his candidacy in January.

The other top Liberal leadership candidate is former Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland. Trudeau told Freeland in December he no longer wanted her as finance minister, but that she could remain deputy prime minister and the point person for U.S.-Canada relations. Freeland resigned shortly after, releasing a scathing letter about the government that proved to be the last straw for Trudeau.

Three points turned the leadership race into a runaway for Carney. Freeland had a long association with the unpopular Trudeau. Carney worked hard to gather support from Liberal members of Parliament members. And Trump's tariff fixation was also pivotal, said Nelson Wiseman, professor emeritus at the University of Toronto.

"Liberal backbenchers feared losing their seats and knew that Carney was more electable as their leader than Freeland," Wiseman said.

What's next for Canada?

The Liberal Party members will pick a new leader in a secret vote by about 140,000 members that will be announced on Sunday. The new leader is expected to trigger an election shortly afterward. Either the new Liberal party leader will call one, or the opposition parties in Parliament could force one with a no-confidence vote this month.

Daniel Béland, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal, said Carney's calm demeanor and outstanding resume make him a reassuring figure to many Canadians at a time when Trump is going after their country's economy and sovereignty.

Béland said that style and profile stands in strong contrast to the Conservative Party's Pierre Poilievre, whom he called a true career politician who has embraced a populist rhetoric not unlike Trump's.

Poilievre, 45, for years the party's go-to attack dog, is a firebrand populist who says he will to put "Canada first." He attacks the mainstream media and vows to defund Canada's public broadcaster and cut taxes.

"That works with his base but that is not welcomed by other Canadians, especially considering what the U.S. president is now saying about, and doing to, their country," Béland said.

Poilievre urged Trump on Friday stop the attacks on Canada and "the monthly melodrama that is hurting our economies on both side of the border."

Stock market today: Wall Street ends its wild week with what else but more swings

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Wall Street rose on Friday, but only after careening through another wild day. It was a fitting ending to a brutal week of scary swings dominated by worries about the U.S. economy and uncertainty about what President Donald Trump will do with tariffs.

The S&P 500 climbed 0.6% after storming back from an earlier loss that had reached 1.3%. It was coming off a punishing stretch where it swung more than 1%, up or down, for six straight days.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 222 points, or 0.5%, and the Nasdaq composite rose 0.7%. The wild week, which was the worst for the S&P 500 since September, left the index a little more than 6% below its all-time high set last month.

The head of the Federal Reserve helped ease the market's worries on Friday afternoon after saying he thinks the economy looks stable at the moment, and he doesn't feel pressure to cut interest rates in order to prop it up.

Traders in recent weeks had been building bets the Fed would have to cut its main rate more than three times this year following a stream of weaker-than-expected reports on the economy. But Jerome Powell pushed back on speculation he and other Fed officials could feel pressure to act soon.

"The costs of being cautious are very, very low" right now, Powell said about holding steady on interest rates. "The economy is fine. It doesn't need us to do anything really. We can wait, and we should wait."

A highly anticipated jobs report released Friday morning may have given him leeway to do just that. The U.S. Labor Department said employers added 151,000 more jobs last month than they cut. That was slightly below economists' expectations, but it was an acceleration from January's hiring.

Recent, discouraging surveys had shown souring confidence for U.S. businesses and households because of uncertainty around Trump's tariffs, and economists were waiting to see if Friday's report would show if that was translating into real pain for the economy and job market.

"To sum it up: today's print wasn't as bad as feared," according to Lindsay Rosner, head of multi sector fixed income investing at Goldman Sachs Asset Management.

Some economists, though, also warned the jobs data included concerning details underneath the surface that could imply trouble ahead. The number of people working part time who would rather be full time rose 10% in February from January, for example.

"The market might breathe a sigh of relief that the labor market was still looking healthy, but a deeper dive shows that spring could be a more challenging season," said Brian Jacobsen, chief economist at Annex Wealth Management.

The whiplash actions from the White House on tariffs — first placing them on trading partners and then exempting some and then doing it again — have raised uncertainty for businesses.

That sparked fears businesses might freeze in response to what they have described as "chaos" and pull back on hiring. U.S. households, meanwhile, are bracing for higher inflation because of tariffs, which is weakening their confidence and could hold back their spending. That would sap more energy from the economy.

Trump said Friday he wants tariffs to bring jobs back to the United States, and he gave no indication more certainty is imminent for financial markets. "There will always be changes and adjustments," he said in comments from the Oval Office.

"There could be some disturbance," Trump said about the effect on the economy before saying, "I solved a little bit of that" by giving a one-month reprieve on tariffs for Mexican and Canadian imports for automakers.

In the bond market, Treasury yields initially fell after the jobs report but rose after Powell's comments pushed traders to ratchet back expectations for four or more cuts to rates this year.

The 10-year Treasury yield fell as low as 4.22% before climbing to 4.30%, up from 4.28% late Thursday. It's been generally sinking since January, when it was nearing 4.80%, as investors have ratcheted back

expectations for the U.S. economy's growth.

On Wall Street, Walgreens Boots Alliance climbed 7.5% after the pharmacy and drug store chain agreed to be acquired by private equity firm Sycamore Partners. The buyout would take the struggling chain private for the first time since 1927 and give it more flexibility to make changes to improve its business without worrying about Wall Street's reaction.

Broadcom rose 8.6% after delivering stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected. The chip company also gave a forecast for upcoming revenue that topped analysts' expectation, thanks in part to strong demand for its artificial-intelligence offerings.

They helped offset Hewlett Packard Enterprises, which slumped 12% after reporting profit for the latest quarter that fell just short of analysts' expectations.

Costco sank 6.1% after the retailer reported a weaker profit for the latest quarter than expected.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 31.68 points to 5,770.20. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 222.64 to 42,801.72, and the Nasdaq composite gained 126.97 to 18,196.22.

In stock markets abroad, German stocks lost 1.8% to give back some gains from earlier in the week sparked by a seismic shift in its policy on debt. The traditionally debt-averse German government appears willing to allow for much more borrowing.

Indexes also fell across much of the rest of Europe and Asia.

West Texas reports nearly 200 measles cases. New Mexico is up to 30

By DEVI SHASTRI AP Health Writer

A historic measles outbreak in West Texas is just short of 200 cases, Texas state health officials said Friday, while the number of cases in neighboring New Mexico tripled to 30.

Most of the cases across both states are in people younger than 18 and people who are unvaccinated or have an unknown vaccination status.

Texas health officials identified 39 new infections of the highly contagious disease, bringing the total count in the West Texas outbreak to 198 people since it began in late January. Twenty-three people have been hospitalized so far.

Last week, a school-age child died of measles in Texas, the nation's first measles death in a decade. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced this week that they were sending a team to Texas to help local public health officials respond to the outbreak.

New Mexico health officials had been reporting for weeks a steady number of cases in Lea County — which borders the epicenter of Texas' outbreak. But on Friday, state health officials provided The Associated Press a week-by-week count that shows cases have steadily increased from 14 cases in the week of Feb. 9 to 30 this week.

A spokesman for the health department said more cases are expected and that many of the cases reported Friday weren't identified until after people's illnesses had run their course. The department has said it hasn't been able to prove a clear connection to the Texas outbreak, though on Feb. 14, it said a link is "suspected."

On Thursday, New Mexico health officials confirmed an unvaccinated adult who died without seeking medical care tested positive for measles. The state medical investigator has not announced the official cause of death, but the state health department said Friday it is "measles-related."

The CDC said Friday it has also confirmed measles cases in Alaska, California, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, New Jersey, New York City, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Washington. But the Texas and New Mexico outbreaks make up for most of the nation's case count.

The rise in measles cases has been a major test for U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., an anti-vaccine activist who has questioned the safety of childhood vaccines. Recently, he has stopped short of recommending people get the vaccine, and has promoted unproven treatments for the virus, like cod liver oil.

Kennedy dismissed the Texas outbreak as "not unusual," though most local doctors in the West Texas region told The Associated Press that they have never seen a case of measles in their careers until this outbreak.

The measles, mumps and rubella vaccine is safe and highly effective at preventing infection and severe cases. The first shot is recommended for children ages 12 to 15 months, and the second for ages 4 to 6 years.

Childhood vaccination rates across the country have declined as an increasing number of parents seek exemptions from public school requirements for personal or religious reasons. In Gaines County, Texas, which has the majority of cases, the kindergarten measles vaccination rate is 82% - far below the 95% needed to prevent outbreaks.

Many of Gaines County's cases are in the county's "close-knit, undervaccinated" Mennonite community, a diverse group that has historically had lower vaccination rates and whose members can be distrusting of government mandates and intervention.

Measles is a respiratory virus that can survive in the air for up to two hours. Up to 9 out of 10 people who are susceptible will get the virus if exposed, according to the CDC. Owing to the success of the vaccine, the U.S. considered measles eliminated in 2000.

Trump administration cancels \$400M in grants and contracts with Columbia University

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The Trump administration said Friday that it's pulling \$400 million from Columbia University, canceling grants and contracts because of what the government describes as the Ivy League school's failure to squelch antisemitism on campus.

The notice came five days after federal agencies announced they were considering orders to stop work on \$51 million in contracts with the New York City university and reviewing its eligibility for over \$5 billion in federal grants going forward. And it came after Columbia set up a new disciplinary committee and ramped up its own investigations into students critical of Israel, alarming free speech advocates.

But Columbia's efforts evidently didn't go far enough for the federal government.

"Universities must comply with all federal antidiscrimination laws if they are going to receive federal funding. For too long, Columbia has abandoned that obligation to Jewish students studying on its campus," Education Secretary Linda McMahon said in a statement Friday.

She later posted on X that she'd had "a productive meeting" with the university's interim president, Katrina Armstrong, and anticipated "working together to protect all students."

Columbia vowed to work with the government to try to get the money back.

"We take Columbia's legal obligations seriously and understand how serious this announcement is and are committed to combatting antisemitism and ensuring the safety and well-being of our students, faculty and staff," the university said in a statement.

It is not clear which research, projects or activities will be affected at Columbia, which operates a medical center among many other functions. The university said it was reviewing the announcement. An inquiry was sent to the federal Education Department, which issued Friday's announcement along with the Health and Justice departments and the General Services Administration.

While the details aren't yet certain, the announcement comes as research project leaders at Columbia are figuring out their budgets for the next academic year, and they're "very worried about what this means," said oceanographer Robert Newton, a retired senior research scientist who continues to teach at the university.

Newton, who is Jewish, sees the government's complaints as based on "a complete falsehood" about Columbia being awash in antisemitism and indifferent to some Jewish students' reports of facing hostility.

But the \$400 million cutoff was welcome news to Columbia/Barnard Hillel, a Jewish student group. Executive Director Brian Cohen said he hoped it would be "a wake-up call to Columbia's administration and

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trustees to take antisemitism and the harassment of Jewish students and faculty seriously.”

The New York Civil Liberties Union’s executive director, Donna Lieberman, called the move an unconstitutional government effort “to coerce colleges and universities into censoring student speech and advocacy that isn’t MAGA-approved, like criticizing Israel or supporting Palestinian rights.” A message seeking comment was sent to a coalition group of pro-Palestinian protesters.

Columbia has become the first target in President Donald Trump’s campaign to cut federal money to colleges accused of tolerating antisemitism amid the Israel-Hamas war that began in October 2023.

The university was at the forefront of U.S. campus protests over the war last spring. Pro-Palestinian demonstrators set up an encampment in April and inspired a wave of similar protests. Protesters at Columbia went on to seize a campus building, resulting in dozens of arrests when police cleared the building.

Meanwhile, congressional Republicans grilled Columbia then-President Minouche Shafik about the university’s response to antisemitism. Shafik said she was “personally committed to doing everything I can to confront it directly.” She resigned four months later.

A few weeks after that, a university task force said that Jews and Israelis at the school were ostracized from student groups, humiliated in classrooms and subjected to verbal abuse amid the spring demonstrations.

In recent days, a much smaller contingent of demonstrators have staged brief occupations of buildings at Columbia-affiliated Barnard College to protest the expulsion of two students accused of disrupting an Israeli history class. Several students were arrested following an hourslong takeover of a building Wednesday.

Many people involved in the protests have said there’s nothing antisemitic about criticizing Israel over its actions in Gaza or expressing solidarity with Palestinians.

Some students, and an attorney advising them, see the university’s new disciplinary crackdown as an effort to mollify the government by suppressing pro-Palestinian speech.

Columbia is among a handful of colleges that have come under new federal antisemitism investigations. Others include the University of California, Berkeley; the University of Minnesota; Northwestern University; and Portland State University.

Which US companies are pulling back on diversity initiatives?

By The Associated Press undefined

A growing number of prominent companies have scaled back or set aside the diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives that much of corporate America endorsed following the protests that accompanied the Minneapolis police killing of George Floyd, a Black man, in 2020.

The changes have come in response to a campaign by conservative activists to target workplace programs in the courts and social media, and more recently, President Donald Trump’s executive orders aimed at upending DEI policies in both the federal government and private sector.

DEI policies typically are intended to root out systemic barriers to the advancement of historically marginalized groups in certain fields or roles. Critics argue that some education, government and business programs are discriminatory because they single out participants based on factors such as race, gender and sexual orientation. They have targeted corporate sponsorships, employee-led affinity groups, programs aimed at steering contracts to minority or women-owned businesses, and goals that some companies established for increasing minority representation in leadership ranks.

While hiring or promotion decisions based on race or gender is illegal under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act in most circumstances, companies say they are not doing that. Instead, they say they aspire to diversify their workforce over time through policies like widening candidate pools for job openings.

These are some of the companies that have retreated from DEI:

Uber

After conducting an internal investigation that found rampant sexual harassment issues within its corporate office under its founder and former CEO Travis Kalanick, Uber has been focused on overhauling its corporate culture since its current CEO Dara Khosrowshahi took over in 2017.

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Those changes had included a ramped-up commitment to diversity and inclusion as part of a commitment that the ride-hailing service highlighted in a section of its annual report for 2023.

But Uber dropped its diversity and inclusion section from its 2024 annual report filed last month. And the word "diversity" doesn't appear anywhere in its 135 pages.

Uber didn't immediately respond to a request for comment Friday.

Salesforce

Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff once was on a crusade to inspire other corporate leaders to become social activists in a drive to fix a "train wreck" of inequality, but he has since toned down that message while pledging to work with President Donald Trump "to drive American success and prosperity for all."

Although Benioff personally has remained an outspoken supporter of LGBTQ+ rights, Salesforce is no longer touting its diversity program. After carving out a section of its annual report filed last year to declare, "Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Equality is a core value at Salesforce," the San Francisco excluded any discussion of diversity programs in its latest annual report filed March 5.

"While we don't have representation goals, we remain committed to our value of equality," Salesforce said in a statement.

Pepsi

PepsiCo confirmed that it's ending some of its diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, even as rival Coca-Cola voiced support for its own inclusion efforts.

In a memo sent to employees, PepsiCo CEO Ramon Laguarta said the company will no longer set goals for minority representation in its managerial roles or supplier base. The company will also align its sponsorships to events and groups that promote business growth, he said.

Laguarta wrote that inclusion remains important to PepsiCo, whose brands include Gatorade, Lay's potato chips, Doritos, Mountain Dew as well as Pepsi. The Purchase, New York-based company's chief diversity officer will transition to a broader role focused on employee engagement, leadership development and ensuring an inclusive culture, he said.

Goldman Sachs

Investment firm Goldman Sachs confirmed that it was dropping a requirement that forced IPO clients to include women and members of minority groups on their board of directors.

"As a result of legal developments related to board diversity requirements, we ended our formal board diversity policy," said a Goldman Sachs spokesman in an email to The Associated Press. "We continue to believe that successful boards benefit from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, and we will encourage them to take this approach."

Goldman Sachs said that it will still have a placement service that connects its clients with diverse candidates to serve on their boards.

Google

Google rescinded a goal it had set in 2020 to increase representation of underrepresented groups among the company's leadership team by 30% within five years. In a memo to employees, the company also said it was considering other changes in response to Trump's executive order aimed at prohibiting federal contractors from conducting DEI practices that constitute "illegal discrimination."

Google's parent company Alphabet also signaled things were changing in its annual 10-K report filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission. The report dropped a boilerplate sentence it has used since 2020 declaring that the company is "committed to making diversity, equity, and inclusion part of everything we do and to growing a workforce that is representative of the users we serve."

Target

The retailer said that changes to its "Belonging at the Bullseye" strategy would include ending a program it established to help Black employees build meaningful careers, improve the experience of Black shoppers and to promote Black-owned businesses following Floyd's death in Minneapolis, where Target has its headquarters.

Target, which operates nearly 2,000 stores nationwide and employs more than 400,000 people, said it also would conclude the diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI, goals it previously set in three-year cycles.

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The goals included hiring and promoting more women and members of racial minority groups, and recruiting more diverse suppliers, including businesses owned by people of color, women, LGBTQ+ people, veterans and people with disabilities.

Target also will no longer participate in surveys designed to gauge the effectiveness of its actions, including an annual index compiled by the Human Rights Campaign, a national LGBTQ+ rights organization. Target also said it would further evaluate corporate partnerships to ensure they're connected directly to business objectives, but declined to share details.

Meta Platforms

The parent company of Facebook and Instagram said it was getting rid of its diversity, equity and inclusion program, which featured policies for hiring, training and picking vendors.

Like other companies that announced similar changes before Meta, the social media giant said it had been reviewing the program since the Supreme Court's July 2023 ruling upending affirmative action in higher education.

Citing an internal memo sent to employees, news website Axios reported the Menlo Park, California-based tech giant said it would no longer have a team focused on diversity and inclusion and will instead "focus on how to apply fair and consistent practices that mitigate bias for all, no matter your background." The change means the company will also end its "diverse slate approach" to hiring, which involved considering a diverse pool of candidates for every open position.

Amazon

Amazon said it was halting some of its DEI programs, although it did not specify which ones. In a Dec. 16 memo to employees, Candi Castleberry, a senior human resources executive, said the company has been "winding down outdated programs and materials, and we're aiming to complete that by the end of 2024."

"We also know there will always be individuals or teams who continue to do well-intentioned things that don't align with our company-wide approach, and we might not always see those right away. But we'll keep at it," she wrote.

Rather than "have individual groups build programs," Castleberry said, Amazon is "focusing on programs with proven outcomes – and we also aim to foster a more truly inclusive culture."

McDonald's

McDonald's said on Jan. 6 that it would retire specific goals for achieving diversity at senior leadership levels. It also planned to end a program that encouraged its suppliers to develop diversity training and to increase the number of minority group members represented within their own leadership ranks.

McDonald's later said it was changing — but not eliminating — a scholarship program for Latino students after it was sued by a group that opposes affirmative action. The program will now be open to any student who can demonstrate an impact on the Latino community, the fast-food giant said. Applicants no longer need to have at least one Latino parent.

In an open letter to employees and franchisees, McDonald's senior leadership team said it remained committed to inclusion and believes that having a diverse workforce is a competitive advantage. The company said it would continue to publicly report its demographic information and spending on diverse-owned suppliers.

Walmart

The world's largest retailer confirmed in November that it would not be renewing a five-year commitment to a racial equity center set up in 2020 after the police killing of George Floyd, and that it would stop participating in the HRC's Corporate Equality Index.

Walmart also said it will better monitor its third-party marketplace to make sure items sold there do not include products aimed at LGBTQ+ minors, including chest binders intended for transgender youth.

Additionally, the company will no longer consider race and gender as a litmus test to improve diversity when it offers supplier contracts and it won't be gathering demographic data when determining financing eligibility for those grants.

Ford

CEO Jim Farley sent a memo to the automaker's employees in August outlining changes to the company's

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DEI policies, including a decision to stop taking part in HRC's Corporate Equality Index.

Ford, he wrote, had been looking at its policies for a year. The company doesn't use hiring quotas or tie compensation to specific diversity goals but remains committed to "fostering a safe and inclusive workplace," Farley said.

"We will continue to put our effort and resources into taking care of our customers, our team, and our communities versus publicly commenting on the many polarizing issues of the day," the memo said.

Lowe's

In August, Lowe's executive leadership said the company began "reviewing" its programs following the Supreme Court's affirmative action ruling and decided to combine its employee resource groups into one umbrella organization. Previously, the company had "individual groups representing diverse sections of our associate population."

The retailer also will no longer participate in the HRC index, and will stop sponsoring and participating in events, such as festivals and parades, that are outside of its business areas.

Harley-Davidson

In a post on X in August, Harley-Davidson said the company would review all sponsorships and organizations it was affiliated with, and that all would have to be centrally approved. It said the company would focus exclusively on growing the sport of motorcycling and retaining its loyal riding community, in addition to supporting first responders, active military members and veterans.

The motorcycle maker said it would no longer participate in the ranking of workplace equality compiled by the HRC, and that its trainings would be related to the needs of the business and absent of socially motivated content.

Harley-Davidson also said it does not have hiring quotas and would no longer have supplier diversity spending goals.

Brown-Forman

The parent company of Jack Daniels also pulled out from participating in the HRC's Corporate Equality Index, among other changes. Its leaders sent an email to employees in August saying the company launched its diversity and inclusion strategy in 2019, but since then "the world has evolved, our business has changed, and the legal and external landscape has shifted dramatically."

The company said it would remove its quantitative workforce and supplier diversity ambitions, ensure incentives and employee goals were tied to business performance, and review training programs for consistency with a revised strategy.

"Brown-Forman continues to foster an inclusive work environment where everyone is welcomed, respected, and able to bring their best self to work," spokeswoman Elizabeth Conway said in an email.

John Deere

The farm equipment maker said in July that it would no longer sponsor "social or cultural awareness" events, and that it would audit all training materials "to ensure the absence of socially-motivated messages" in compliance with federal and local laws.

Moline, Illinois-based John Deere added "the existence of diversity quotas and pronoun identification have never been and are not company policy." But it noted that it would still continue to "track and advance" the diversity of the company.

Tractor Supply

The retailer in June said it was ending an array of corporate diversity and climate efforts, a move that came after weeks of online conservative backlash against the rural retailer.

Tractor Supply said it would be eliminating all of its DEI roles while retiring current DEI goals. The company added that it would "stop sponsoring non-business activities" such as Pride festivals or voting campaigns — and no longer submit data for the HRC index.

The Brentwood, Tennessee-based company, which sells products ranging from farming equipment to pet supplies, also said that it would withdraw from its carbon emission goals to instead "focus on our land and water conservation efforts."

The National Black Farmers Association called on Tractor Supply's president and CEO to step down shortly after the company's announcement.

WWII bomb disposal operation in Paris causes hours of travel chaos and Eurostar line closure

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The disposal of what Paris police called an “excessively dangerous” unexploded World War II bomb caused hours of transportation chaos Friday on rail and road networks in the French capital, including the suspension of high-speed train links with London and Brussels.

Having moved the bomb into a hole, disposal experts managed to unscrew and then destroy its fuse, “like you see in the movies,” said Christophe Pezron, who heads the Paris police laboratory that includes bomb disposal services. He said that the half-ton British-made bomb could have caused major damage had it exploded after workers inadvertently dug it up with an earthmover.

But the police operation that made the bomb safe before it was then taken away triggered major disruption for hundreds of thousands of rail travelers and motorists.

The bomb was dug up near train tracks north of Paris, forcing a shutdown of the rail network serving Gare du Nord, France’s busiest station. A portion of the A1 highway — a major road artery into northern Paris — and sections of the capital’s always-busy beltway were also closed while police disposal officers worked.

“We’re delighted and relieved that all this has come to an end,” Transport Minister Philippe Tabarot was able to finally declare Friday afternoon — 12 hours after the bomb-disposal police were first called — as roads reopened and rail services were progressively being restored.

The minister said that almost 500 trains had been canceled, impacting around 600,000 people at Gare du Nord that serves not only Paris’ northern suburbs and northern France, but also international destinations in the U.K., Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany.

“All of the northern part of our country was paralyzed,” Tabarot said.

Eurostar, the operator of high-speed trains through the Channel Tunnel that joins England with the European continent, said that normal traffic would resume Saturday between Paris and Brussels and Paris and London, after Friday’s full day of cancellations. Hundreds of commuter, regional and high-speed train services between Paris and its suburbs and towns and cities in northern France were also canceled.

Travel plans thrown into disarray

Gabrielle Cotton, a tourist from the U.S. state of Missouri, was traveling by train from Amsterdam, Netherlands, to Paris, but got no further than Brussels.

“I heard the girl next to me — her parents called her and said that there was a World War II bomb found in the train station,” she said. “They told us we had to get off in Brussels.”

Retired Parisian Michel Garrot also found himself stranded with his wife in the Belgian capital.

“There’s no solution. We’re going to call the hotel and stay one more day. And change our train ticket,” he said.

At Eurostar’s hub in London, St. Pancras International station, passengers scrambled for alternatives. Fridays are invariably busy with thousands of weekend travelers. Paris-bound passengers were advised to try taking trains to Lille in northern France, or fly.

Bride-to-be Charlotte Liddell had a bachelorette party — her own — to get to in Paris and wanted to join friends already in the French capital.

“It’s the hen do without the hen!” she said. “We’re very upset, but it’s so out of our control.”

Eurostar said that it “sincerely apologizes for the disruption and understands the inconvenience this may cause.”

The bomb was dug up overnight

Workers laboring overnight on a bridge-replacement project spotted the rust-eaten, dirt-covered bomb before dawn Friday, after it was found by an earth-moving machine at a depth of about two meters (six feet), between train tracks to the north of Gare du Nord, national rail operator SNCF said.

Bomb disposal services arrived within the hour and set up a 200-meter security perimeter, later extended to 500 meters. Pezron, the police lab director, said that the bomb could have exploded had it been struck

accidentally with workers' tools or shaken too vigorously.

Morning rush-hour travelers arriving at Gare du Nord to catch trains were greeted by bright-red signs warning of disruptions, lines of passengers seeking information and ticket exchanges, and barriers blocking access to the Eurostar terminal.

The Gare du Nord habitually hosts 700,000 travelers per day, making it the busiest rail hub in both France and Europe, the SNCF says.

Deadly legacies of World War I and II

Bombs left over from the battles fought in France and its skies in both world wars are regularly unearthed, even more than a century later, although it's rare that they cause such widespread disruption in people-packed Paris.

"It's the fourth one we've found in this area since 2019," Pezron said.

In World War II, Allied forces' bombing raids flattened towns and cities in the Normandy region north-west of Paris, but didn't wreak destruction on the same scale on the French capital. Still, factories, train lines and other targets in and around Paris were bombed repeatedly, killing more than 3,600 people and wounding thousands more, according to city archives.

The Interior Ministry says that since World War II's end in 1945, disposal teams have defused 700,000 air-dropped bombs and made safe nearly 50 million mines, shells and other explosive devices.

Panama to allow 112 migrants deported from the US to move about freely in the country

By ALMA SOLÍS and MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

PANAMA CITY (AP) — Panama announced Friday that it will allow 112 migrants deported from the United States who have been held in a remote camp in the Darien region since last month to move about the country freely until they decide on their next course of action.

The government cited humanitarian reasons for the decision but rights lawyers promptly expressed concerns that this could be a tactic to absolve the authorities of international scrutiny for their treatment of migrants while also putting them in more danger.

Panama's Security Minister Frank Ábrego said the migrants — from a number of mostly Asian nations — would be granted temporary humanitarian passes as documents. They would find their own places to stay while they decide where they are going next, Ábrego said, without elaborating.

The passes would last for an initial 30 days but could be renewed, he added.

"They have exactly 30 days to figure out how to leave Panama, because they refused ... to accept help from the (International Organization for Migration) and (the U.N. Refugee Agency) and said that they wanted to do it themselves," Ábrego said, speaking to reporters outside a security conference Friday.

"Panama has decided to respect this," he also said.

Panama has come under pressure from human rights groups for holding the migrants without their passports or cell phones in harsh conditions. Lawyers had petitioned the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on their behalf.

Most of the migrants had been moved to the camp in San Vicente on Feb. 19, from a hotel in Panama City where they had initially been held under police guard. Migrants who agreed to voluntarily return to their countries remained at the hotel and those who didn't were sent to the camp in the Darien.

Alvaro Botero, one of the lawyers who filed the petition, said his legal team was concerned the humanitarian permits are a way for Panamanian authorities to wash their hands of the deportees, many who fear for their safety in their own countries.

"Many of these people have legitimate claims to seek and receive asylum," Botero's said. "The option of deporting them is not the protection that these people deserve."

While deportees were stripped of their phones by Panamanian authorities, a handful of people, including one who has spoken with The Associated Press, have been able to communicate secretly with hidden

phones.

Botero's team was informed by one of the migrants in the camp that they were given papers to sign for the 30-day permit. Signing the document apparently implied the migrants would accept the 30-day permit on the condition that they leave Panama after that period of time.

Botero's team asked the client not to sign the document because the lawyers were unable to look into the text.

He also warned the permits may be an attempt by authorities to influence the outcome of the human rights petition next week.

"They want to report, 'You know what, we already granted humanitarian permits to the people that were detained and they are no longer detained,'" he said.

The camp had originally been established for the hundreds of thousands of migrants crossing the treacherous Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama in recent years as they made their way toward the U.S. border.

President Donald Trump's shutting down of access to asylum and other legal routes at the U.S. southern border in January forced many migrants already in transit to reconsider their options. Panama and Costa Rica have reported seeing a reverse flow of migration as migrants began moving south.

The U.S. had sent 299 migrants to Panama as the Trump administration tried to accelerate deportations as part of a deal in which countries like Panama and Costa Rica act as "bridges," temporarily detaining deportees while they await return to their countries of origin or third countries.

Some of the migrants held in the hotel had held up handmade signs in their windows, asking for help.

At the camp, a migrant who had a hidden cell phone told an AP reporter they were sweltering, fighting ants and receiving no information about what would happen with them next.

Panamanian authorities have not responded to requests for comment about the conditions and have denied journalists access to the camps.

The migrant, who requested anonymity fearing for her safety, said last week that a small riot broke out because guards blocked a migrant from accessing their phone, information that was verified by lawyers speaking to another individual inside the camp. Authorities sent armed guards to suppress the riot, she said, and another migrant in the camp went on a days-long hunger strike.

"We are treated like prisoners here," she said.

States sue President Trump's administration over mass firings of probationary federal workers

By BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) — Maryland and 19 other states are suing multiple federal agencies, contending President Donald Trump's administration has illegally fired thousands of federal probationary workers.

Maryland Attorney General Anthony Brown is leading the coalition of attorneys general in the federal lawsuit that was filed late Thursday in Maryland, where the state estimates about 10% of households receive wages from the federal government.

"The draconian actions of the Trump-Vance Administration could lead to tens of thousands of jobs lost, hundreds of thousands of lives disrupted, and the cratering of tens of millions of dollars in income here in Maryland," Gov. Wes Moore, a Democrat, said Friday in support of the complaint.

Brown followed up on Friday by moving for a temporary restraining order in federal court in Maryland seeking to stop any more firings of federal probationary employees and to reinstate those who have already been dismissed.

The mass firings will cause irreparable burdens and expenses on the states, the lawsuit said, because states will have to support recently unemployed workers and review and adjudicate claims of unemployment assistance. More than 800 fired federal workers in Maryland already have applied for unemployment benefits, Brown's office said.

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The lawsuit also contended that the layoffs will hurt state finances due to lost tax revenue.

"President Trump's unlawful mass firings of federal workers are a blatant attack on the civil service, throwing thousands of hardworking families into financial turmoil," Brown, a Democrat, said in a news release. "Instead of following the law and notifying states, his administration blindsided Maryland, forcing us to deal with the devastating economic fallout and social consequences."

Trump, a Republican, has said he's targeting fraud, waste and abuse in a bloated federal government. The president and his adviser Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency have fired both new and career workers, telling agency leaders to plan for "large-scale reductions in force." The purge has spawned a number of lawsuits as unions and attorneys general have challenged Doge's authority. Attempts to contact the White House and Justice Department for comment were unsuccessful.

Probationary workers have been targeted for layoffs across the federal government because they're usually new to the job and lack full civil service protection.

While federal agencies claimed the employees were fired for unsatisfactory performance or conduct, the lawsuit said the firings were part of the administration's attempt to restructure and downsize the entire government.

That means the administration was required to follow federal laws and regulations that govern large-scale federal reductions in force, the lawsuit said. For example, regulations require that government agencies consider an employee's tenure, performance and veteran status when making termination decisions, the attorneys said. Regulations also typically require 60 days' advance notice of termination in a reduction in force.

"This has inflicted and will continue to inflict serious and irreparable harms on the Plaintiff States, as they must now deal with a sudden surge in unemployment, without the advance notice required under the federal (reduction in force) statute and regulations," the lawsuit said.

The attorneys general are asking for the court to reinstate the fired employees and stop further terminations of federal employees.

The other states that have joined the lawsuit are Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin. The District of Columbia also is a plaintiff.

Daylight saving time is coming and the golf industry can't wait

By MARGERY A. BECK Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Looking forward to more evening sunlight thanks to daylight saving time this weekend?

Many in the golf industry like the time change, too, and they are pushing to make that annual switch permanent.

The move is intended to encourage more evening golf and to stave off efforts to establish permanent standard time, which would leave less time for an evening on the links. And it is those late afternoon players who tend to buy food and drinks in the clubhouse.

"We would lose 100 tee times a day if daylight saving time goes away," said Connor Farrell, general manager of Stone Creek Golf Course in Omaha, Nebraska. "Switching to permanent standard time would cost us \$500,000 a year."

Golf played a big role in daylight savings time

Golf has deep roots in the history of daylight saving time, which begins for most states at 2 a.m. Sunday when clocks "spring forward" by one hour. Some credit goes to William Willett, a British builder and avid golfer who in 1905 published a pamphlet advocating for moving clocks ahead in April and returning them back to their regular settings in September. The U.S. adopted a version of that during World War I and again in World War II.

Congress passed the Uniform Time Act in 1966 that set up the biannual time change, and lobbying efforts by the golf industry are largely credited for Congress expanding daylight saving time by a month in

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the mid-1980s.

Lawmakers try to make standard time permanent

But for as long as it has been around, the constant clock adjusting has drawn the ire of Americans weary of losing an hour of sleep in the spring only to be faced with the early onset of darkness in the fall. That exhaustion has led to hundreds of bills introduced in nearly every state over the years to halt the practice.

The National Conference of State Legislatures reports that in the last six years, 20 states have passed measures calling for a switch to year-round daylight saving time, many at the cajoling of golf industry lobbyists. But while states could switch to permanent standard time — as Arizona and Hawaii have done — Congress would need to change the law to allow permanent daylight saving time.

That hindrance — along with arguments that permanent standard time would improve sleep quality and foster safer morning commutes — has seen more states consider opting out of daylight saving time. Lawmakers in more than a dozen states have introduced bills this year to make standard time permanent.

Nebraska is among several states considering competing bills to make either standard time or daylight saving time permanent. That drew Joe Kohout, a lobbyist for the Nebraska Golf Alliance, to testify in favor of year-round daylight saving time.

Late afternoon golf leagues account for up to 40% of the annual revenue of some Nebraska courses, Kohout said, while a majority of golf instructors reported that nearly 50% of their lessons are taught after 4 p.m.

Under permanent standard time, "Nebraska's golf courses will lose revenue, be forced to raise prices, and in some cases could be driven out of business," he said.

The Utah Golf Association is also fighting a bill to make standard time permanent.

"The argument that changing clocks twice a year is an inconvenience does not outweigh the year-round benefits of having more usable daylight hours in the evenings," it posted on social media.

In Indiana, golf course owner Linda Rogers succeeded in lobbying the Legislature to institute daylight saving time in 2006. Now a state senator, Rogers is fighting an effort to return to permanent standard time.

"Daylight savings time allows someone that, you know, worked until 5 o'clock to come out and still play at least nine holes," she said. "And it's not just golf. There are so many outdoor activities that people want to be outside for and enjoy later in the summertime."

Golf course owners like the status quo

The National Golf Course Owners Association, which has about 4,000 members, recently polled stakeholders on the matter. The vast majority favored either permanent daylight saving time or the status quo of changing the clocks, said CEO Jay Karen. Only about 6% backed a change to permanent standard time.

"If standard time was to be made permanent, thousands of courses would be harmed by that," Karen said.

Even so, Karen's group is not advocating for a change to permanent daylight saving because it could hurt hundreds of courses that cater to early morning golfers, he said. Those include courses in retirement communities, vacation resorts where late tee times interfere with dinner plans and Sun Belt courses where extreme late-day heat sees golfers favoring early tee times.

"We feel like status quo is no harm, no foul," Karen said.

Republican Iowa state Rep. John Wills introduced a bill this year to make the change to permanent daylight savings. But he has been under pressure to amend the bill to permanent standard time.

Wills was considering it until he heard arguments on how that change could affect golf.

"I think I might push back in the future and say, you know, the golf industry needs this," he said.

Trump weighs new sanctions on Russia, days after pausing military aid and intel sharing with Ukraine

By AAMER MADHANI and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Friday he is "strongly considering" levying new sanctions and tariffs on Russia for its war against Ukraine, floating the possibility of new pressure on Moscow

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just days after he ordered a pause on U.S. military assistance and intelligence sharing with Kyiv.

Trump, in a post on his Truth Social platform, said he was considering the action "based on the fact that Russia is absolutely 'pounding' Ukraine on the battlefield right now."

He added that the prospective sanctions could remain in place until the two sides come to a ceasefire and peace settlement.

The sanctions threat came as Trump faces criticism for increasing pressure on Ukraine to reach a deal while playing down or even denying Russia's responsibility for starting the war with its invasion three years ago.

"To Russia and Ukraine, get to the table right now, before it is too late," Trump added in his post.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said at the Economic Club of New York on Thursday that the U.S. has kept its sanctions in place on Russia and "will not hesitate to go all in should it provide leverage in peace negotiations."

Joe Biden's administration over the course of Russia's invasion of Ukraine imposed thousands of sanctions on Russian firms, people and ships as well as a price cap on Russian oil, among other actions.

Bessent called Biden's sanctions on Russian energy "egregiously weak" and "stemming from worries about upward pressure on U.S. energy prices."

"Per President Trump's guidance, sanctions will be used explicitly and aggressively for immediate maximum impact," Bessent said. "They will be carefully monitored to ensure that they are achieving specific objectives."

Kevin Hassett, director of the National Economic Council, told reporters Friday there is still a "heck of a lot" of room to put further pressure on the Russian economy through sanctions.

"President Trump is adamant that we need to get everybody to the table, and we could do that with carrots, and we could do that with sticks," Hassett said.

Russia launched overnight attacks on Ukrainian energy facilities with dozens of missiles and drones, officials said Friday, hobbling the country's ability to deliver heat and light to its citizens and to power weapons factories vital to its defenses.

The barrage — which also pounded residences and wounded at least 10 people — came days after the U.S. suspended military aid and intelligence to Ukraine to pressure it into accepting a peace deal being pushed by the Trump administration.

Without U.S. intelligence, Ukraine's ability to strike inside Russia and defend itself from bombardment is significantly diminished.

But Trump, in an exchange with reporters, shrugged off the notion that Russian President Vladimir Putin is taking advantage of the intelligence pause to inflict more pain on Ukraine.

"I think he's doing what anybody else would," Trump said of Putin.

And Trump again questioned whether Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is committed to getting a peace agreement to end the conflict. "It may be easier dealing with Russia, which is surprising, because they have all the cards, and they're bombing the hell out of them right now," Trump said.

Trump is sending Secretary of State Marco Rubio, national security adviser Mike Waltz and special envoy Steve Witkoff to Saudi Arabia next week to meet with Ukrainian officials.

Trump, days into his second, nonconsecutive White House term, said targeting Russia's oil revenue was the best way to get Moscow to end its nearly three-year war against Ukraine. He leaned in on the idea that OPEC+, the alliance of oil producing nations, holds the key to ending the war by reducing oil prices.

But that push has been received coolly by OPEC+ nations, which include the oil-rich kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Trump has had a complicated history with Putin. The Republican president has even raised the investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election in making the case for why he believes he can trust Putin to not restart his war on Ukraine if a truce is reached.

"Putin went through a hell of a lot with me," Trump told Zelenskyy during last week's contentious Oval Office meeting that led to Trump pausing aid and intelligence with Ukraine. "He went through a phony witch hunt where they used him and Russia. Russia, Russia, Russia, ever hear of that deal?"

Pope Francis hits 3-week mark of hospitalization after giving world a sign of his frailty

By NICOLE WINFIELD and MARIA CHENG Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis hit the three-week mark Friday in his hospitalization for double pneumonia, in stable condition, receiving therapy but not necessarily improving, after giving the world a tangible indication of just how frail and sick he is.

The 88-year-old Francis spent 20 minutes in the Gemelli hospital chapel, praying and doing some work in between rest and respiratory and physical therapy, the Vatican said. He was using high flows of supplemental oxygen to help him breathe during the day and a noninvasive mechanical ventilation mask at night.

Doctors not involved in his care said after three weeks of acute care in the hospital for double pneumonia, they would have hoped to have seen improvement and warned that he was increasingly at risk of secondary infections the longer he remains hospitalized. Additionally, Francis has had episodes of acute respiratory failure earlier this week and underwent bronchoscopies to suction mucus from his lungs.

"He's had respiratory failure and they were not able to liberate him from the hospital in the first three weeks. And therefore I think you'd say this does look concerning, perhaps more concerning than it did right at the beginning," said Dr. Andrew Chadwick, a respiratory and intensive care specialist at Oxford University Hospitals in England.

Dr. Jeffrey Millstein, a clinical assistant professor of internal medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, said it wasn't shocking that Francis hadn't improved in three weeks, and that it was encouraging he was able to breathe part of the day with just a nasal tube of high-flow oxygen. But he said that his condition certainly was "a precarious, touch and go kind of situation" and that recovery, while still possible, would be a long process.

Going forward, "I just would be looking for no new setbacks," he said. "I think as long as he is dealing with the current issues and he's just making incremental progress, that would be great."

Francis offered a first public sign of just how weak he is on Thursday by recording an audio message that was broadcast to the faithful in St. Peter's Square who had gathered for the nightly recitation of the rosary prayer.

In it, Francis thanked the people for their prayers. But his voice was barely discernible through his labored breaths and he spoke in his native Spanish, not Italian.

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your prayers for my health from the square, I accompany you from here," he said to the hushed square. "May God bless you and the Virgin protect you. Thank you."

The message served many purposes. It was the first public sign of life from the pope since he entered Rome's Gemelli hospital on Feb. 14, and put to rest right-wing conspiracy theories and rumors calling into question his true medical status.

The Vatican said that Francis himself wanted to record it, to thank all those people who had been praying for him. In his Sunday message last weekend, Francis said he had felt the affection of so many people, and felt "as if I am 'carried' and supported by all God's people."

But the audio also underscored just how weak Francis is. For anyone used to hearing his voice, the message was an emotional punch to the gut that hammered home just how hard it is for him to even breathe.

The pope has chronic lung disease and had part of one lung removed as a young man.

The Vatican has given twice-daily updates on Francis' condition, but has distributed no photos or video of him since the morning of Feb. 14, when he held a handful of audiences at the Vatican before being admitted to Gemelli hospital for what was then just a bad case of bronchitis.

The infection progressed into a complex respiratory tract infection and double pneumonia that has sidelined Francis for the longest period of his 12-year papacy and raised questions about the future of his papacy.

US employers add a solid 151,000 jobs last month though unemployment up to 4.1%

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. employers added solid 151,000 jobs last month, but the outlook is cloudy as President Donald Trump threatens a trade war, purges the federal workforce and promises to deport millions of immigrants.

The Labor Department reported Friday that hiring was up from a revised 125,000 in January. Economists had expected 160,000 new jobs last month.

The unemployment rate rose slightly to 4.1% as the number jobless Americans rose by 203,000.

Employment rose in healthcare, finance and transportation and warehousing. The federal government shed 10,000 jobs, the most since June 2022, though economists don't expect Trump's federal layoffs to have much of an impact until the March jobs report. Restaurants and bars cut nearly 28,000 jobs last month on top of a loss of almost 30,000 in January.

"The labor market continues to hold up, but we're still a far cry from where we were a year or two years ago," said Sarah House, senior economist at Wells Fargo.

House expects hiring to slow and unemployment to creep higher as Trump continues to cut spending on programs and slash the federal workforce, while imposing tariffs on America's trading partners.

The spending cuts "are likely to spill over into the private sector, hitting contractors and nonprofits, and we still have a trade war that is picking up," House said. "There are multiple battles for the labor market to fight off, multiple shocks it's having to work through in the months ahead."

The economy's unexpectedly strong recovery from the pandemic recession of 2020 set loose an inflationary surge that peaked in June 2022 when prices came in 9.1% higher than they'd been a year earlier.

In response, the Federal Reserve raised its benchmark interest rate 11 times in 2022 and 2023, taking it to the highest level in more than two decades. The economy remained sturdy despite the higher borrowing costs, defying expectations of a recession, thanks to strong consumer spending, big productivity gains at businesses and an influx of immigrants who eased labor shortages.

The American job market has remained remarkably resilient, but it has cooled from the red-hot hiring of 2021-2023. Employers added a decent average of 168,000 jobs a month last year. But that was down from 216,000 in 2023, 380,000 in 2022 and a record 603,000 in 2021 as the economy rebounded from COVID-19 lockdowns.

Inflation came down — dropping to 2.4% in September -- allowing the Fed to reverse course and cut rates three times in 2024. The rate-cutting was expected to continue this year, but progress on inflation has stalled since summer, and the Fed has held off.

Average hourly earnings rose 0.3% last month, down from a 0.4% increase in January.

Fed officials will likely see the figures as supporting their current wait-and-see approach toward interest-rate cuts. With inflation still modestly above the Fed's 2% target, several have made clear in recent remarks that they would like to see more progress before cutting their benchmark rate any further.

Steady hiring and an expanding economy make it easier for the Fed to stay on the sidelines. Should companies start laying off workers and the unemployment rate rise, pressure could rise on the Fed to cut rates.

On Thursday, Fed governor Chris Waller suggested a cut was unlikely at the central bank's March meeting, adding that Fed officials would like to see more data before making any further moves.

Rick Gillespie, chief commercial officer at Columbus, Ohio-based Revive Environmental Technology LLC, said he is bullish about the prospects for the environmental contamination mitigation and water treatment company despite the uncertain economy.

Revive, which currently has 34 full-time employees, plans to add a total of another 10 to 20 workers in Columbus, Ohio and Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the next few months, Gillespie said. Revive has found a way to destroy a toxic chemical called PFAS that is found in everyday items like nonstick cookware, waterproof weather jackets and cell phones and can end up in landfills, drinking water, and industrial waste water.

Others are seeing a shakeout in the economy.

Sheela Mohan-Peterson, who owns a franchise of the Patrice & Associates recruiting firm, said she's starting to get more resumes from top-level executives who worked at biotech and high tech companies. "We're talking C Suite level" – chief financial officers, chief technology officers, even a couple of CEOs, she said.

She used to get maybe one of those resumes a month. Since the end of last year, she's seeing one or two a week. "It has definitely accelerated in the last month," she said. Mohan-Peterson believes its fallout from the chaotic federal spending cuts.

"Especially startups, they do depend on federal grants to get going, and they're starting to see those disappear or threaten to disappear," she said. "They're starting to get rid of their high-paid executives so that they can save some money because they can't count on those grants."

A former biotech lawyer, Mohan-Peterson acquired her recruiting franchise in 2023, and she's seen the job market cool since then. "2023 was great. There were a lot of jobs around," she said. "2024, I started to see a slowdown. It was very, very slight. But toward the end of the year it started getting harder and harder to find placements for very skilled workers."

The Pope has now been in the hospital for 3 weeks battling double pneumonia. How serious is that?

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — Friday marks three weeks since Pope Francis was hospitalized for bronchitis, which then led to double pneumonia. He was also treated for a complex lung infection and has suffered several respiratory crises requiring further treatment, including machines to help him breathe.

Doctors not involved in the pope's care say the road ahead could be tricky, even if the 88-year-old pope fully recovers. Here's a look at the pope's hospitalization and what doctors will be watching out for in the days and weeks ahead.

Why was Pope Francis hospitalized in the first place?

The pope was hospitalized Feb. 14 after suffering from weeks of bronchitis that made it increasingly hard for him to speak. Several days later, Vatican authorities said he had a complex infection in his respiratory system requiring more targeted treatment.

The pope then developed pneumonia in both lungs and began receiving steroid and antibiotics, among other treatments.

How bad is this?

"He's an 88-year-old who's been in the hospital and receiving acute care for three weeks," said Dr. Andrew Chadwick, a respiratory and intensive care specialist at Oxford University Hospitals in Britain. "That's not a sign that things are going well."

Chadwick said that any admission of someone in Francis' age group, for this long, is very concerning. "The road ahead still looks bumpy," he said.

Francis' doctors have said he is in stable condition, but that his prognosis is guarded, meaning he is not out of danger.

What are doctors particularly worried about?

The number of respiratory crises, complications and the pope's reliance on machines to help him breathe suggest that "the pneumonia is more severe and is requiring more intensive supporting measures," said Dr. Meredith McCormack, director of pulmonary and critical care medicine at Johns Hopkins University.

"It sounds like there might not be signs of clear improvement and some continued signs of severe infection, like continuing to need oxygen," McCormack said.

Vatican authorities said the pope's last respiratory crisis was on Monday and things have stabilized since then.

Others doctors noted that the longer Francis is in the hospital, the more susceptible he is to other complications, like infections from catheters, bed sores, or another bout of pneumonia.

Are there any encouraging signs that the pope might be getting better?

Dr. Jeffrey Millstein, a clinical assistant professor of internal medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, said it was good that Francis hasn't needed a mechanical ventilator. That would be the probable next step if he wasn't able to breathe well enough with the non-invasive support he's gotten so far.

On Friday, the Vatican released a short audio clip of the pope thanking people for their good wishes. Even though the pope's voice sounded markedly weaker than normal, McCormack said that was a welcome sign. "That does show he's still able to communicate in a meaningful way," she said. "If you were on life support ... you wouldn't be able to do that."

How long might recovery take?

Quite a while. McCormack said that for every week a person spends in the hospital, it can take about a month of recovery time.

Dr. Eric Schmidt, division chief of pulmonary and critical care medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital, said that severe pneumonia can have lasting consequences.

"It is not simply a disease of the lungs. It really impacts multiple parts of the body," he said, explaining that people who have severe pneumonia can later suffer from problems including memory loss, an inability to focus, muscle weakness and depression.

Chadwick of Oxford University Hospitals said experts would be hoping to see the pope move from being acutely sick into receiving rehabilitation therapy.

As of this week, Francis has been receiving physical therapy to help his mobility, on top of the respiratory physiotherapy he had been receiving to help him breathe better.

"Even if he were today to get miraculously better, he's likely to need a prolonged period of rehab," Chadwick said. "The pope will likely have to relax for a while and scale back some of his normal duties."

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Aid efforts in Gaza slow as millions of promised USAID dollars do not arrive, agency officials say

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The Trump administration's cuts to USAID have frozen hundreds of millions of dollars in contractual payments to aid groups, leaving them paying out of pocket to preserve a fragile ceasefire, according to officials from the U.S. humanitarian agency.

The cutbacks threaten to halt the small gains aid workers have made combatting Gaza's humanitarian crisis during the Israel-Hamas ceasefire. They also could endanger the tenuous truce, which the Trump administration helped cement.

USAID was supposed to fund much of the aid to Gaza as the ceasefire progressed, and the Trump administration approved over \$383 million on Jan. 31 to that end, according to three USAID officials.

But since then, there have been no confirmed payments to any partners in the Middle East, they said. The officials, who have survived multiple rounds of furloughs, spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution.

Two senior officials at aid organizations confirmed they have not received any of the promised funds, after spending millions of dollars on supplies and services. The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the political sensitivity of the issue and of their work in Gaza, said they could not afford to continue aid operations indefinitely.

Some organizations have already reported laying off workers and scaling down operations, according to

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internal USAID information shared with The Associated Press.

That could imperil the ceasefire, under which Hamas is supposed to release hostages held in Gaza in exchange for Israel releasing Palestinian prisoners and ramping up the entry of humanitarian assistance.

"The U.S. established very specific, concrete commitments for aid delivery under the ceasefire, and there is no way ... to fulfill those as long as the funding freeze is in place," said Jeremy Konyndyk, president of Refugees International and a former USAID official.

USAID has been one of the biggest targets of a broad campaign by President Donald Trump and Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, to slash the size of the federal government.

USAID payments frozen, some NGOs scale down Gaza response

Before Trump took office, USAID had roughly \$446 million to disburse to partner organizations in Gaza in 2025, the USAID officials said.

But after Trump froze global foreign assistance, USAID's Gaza team had to submit a waiver to ensure the funds for Gaza aid could continue to flow. They received approval Jan. 31 to secure over \$383 million in funding, less than two weeks after the U.S.-brokered ceasefire was reached.

Some \$40 million was subsequently cut under a measure that no money be provided for aid in the form of direct cash assistance.

USAID then signed contracts with eight partner organizations, including prominent NGOs and U.N. agencies, awarding them money to flood supplies and services into Gaza. Then, the officials said, they began hearing that organizations were not receiving the promised payments — even as they had already spent millions, expecting USAID reimbursement.

Some of those organizations are now spending less and scaling back programs.

The International Medical Corps, a global nonprofit that partners with the World Health Organization and provides medical and development assistance, was awarded \$12 million to continue operations at two hospitals in Gaza. These include the largest field hospital in Gaza, whose construction was funded by USAID at the request of the Israeli government, according to internal USAID information.

The freeze has forced the organization to lay off some 700 staff members and offer only basic services at the hospitals, with a skeletal crew, said one USAID official.

A former IMC staffer, who quit citing lack of stability, said the program providing life-saving treatment for malnutrition was significantly scaled down for lack of funds. The former staffer, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the organization's details, said the current nutrition services were at a minimum level.

Another former IMC staffer, who also left recently and spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss information not meant to be shared with media, said the USAID cuts have reduced the amount of medical supplies brought into Gaza and led the majority of IMC's partners to reduce their programming.

They said that some organizations have already purchased stocks of medical supplies, food to treat acute malnutrition, lab and medical equipment ready to enter Gaza, but because of the shortfall they have not been able to afford movement of those goods.

Meanwhile, termination letters severing the contracts between USAID and Gaza partners were also sent out to organizations that were major providers of shelter, child protection and logistical support in the Gaza aid operation, a USAID official said.

Some of the termination letters seen by the AP were signed by new USAID deputy chief Peter Marocco — a returning political appointee from Trump's first term. They instruct organizations to "immediately cease" all activities and "avoid additional spending chargeable to the award," citing a directive from Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

USAID Gaza response in crisis as truce is tenuous

In addition to the spending freeze, officials say USAID has been wracked by internal chaos and the introduction of new regulations since the new administration took office.

During the first 42-day phase of the ceasefire, Israel had to allow at least 600 trucks of aid into Gaza a day, as well as 60,000 temporary homes and 200,000 tents.

Two USAID officials said the agency was originally supposed to buy 400 temporary homes that would

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make it into Gaza by the end of Phase 1, and over 5,200 more during the next phase. That figure has since been slashed to just over 1,000.

USAID was never able to purchase the mobile homes because of newly imposed policies requiring extra approvals for procurements.

On Feb. 2, some 40% of the Gaza team was locked out of their email accounts and software necessary to track awards, move payments and communicate with the organizations. An email sent immediately following the lockout came from Gavin Kliger, a DOGE staffer.

Access to the servers has now been restored, the officials said, but the team is smaller after waves of layoffs. From an original team of about 30 people, only six or seven remain.

Very few mobile homes entered Gaza during Phase 1 of the ceasefire, which ended last week, prompting Hamas to accuse Israel of violating the truce.

Since the end of Phase 1, Israel has cut off all aid shipments into Gaza in a bid to pressure Hamas to accept an extension of the ceasefire. That has sent aid groups scrambling to distribute reserves of food and shelter to the most needy. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says he is considering cutting off electricity to raise the pressure on Hamas.

With USAID in flux, the U.S. risks losing its influence, said Dave Harden, the former USAID assistant administrator of Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Aid and a longtime director of the agency's work in the Palestinian territories.

"U.S. aid assistance to Palestinians ... never, ever equated to U.S. assistance to Israel, never quite balanced, but always gave us a seat at the table, always helped us to have real discussions with both the Palestinians and the Israelis about what the future might hold," Harden said.

Now, he said, "We're just simply not at the table in a meaningful way, and so I think the ceasefire is fragile."

Today in History: March 8 First U.S. combat troops arrive in Vietnam

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, March 8, the 67th day of 2025. There are 298 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 8, 1965, the United States landed its first combat troops in South Vietnam as 3,500 Marines arrived to defend the U.S. air base at Da Nang.

Also on this date:

In 1917, protests against food rationing broke out in Petrograd (now St. Petersburg), triggering eight days of rioting that resulted in the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and the end of the Russian monarchy.

In 1948, the Supreme Court, in *McCullum v. Board of Education*, struck down religious education classes during school hours in Champaign, Illinois, public schools, saying the program violated separation of church and state.

In 1971, in the first of three fights between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier, Frazier defeated Ali by unanimous decision in what was billed as "The Fight of the Century" at Madison Square Garden in New York.

In 1983, in a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals convention in Orlando, Florida, President Ronald Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as an "evil empire."

In 1988, 17 soldiers were killed when two Army helicopters from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, collided in mid-flight during a night training mission.

In 2008, President George W. Bush vetoed a bill that would have banned the CIA from using simulated drowning and other coercive interrogation methods to gain information from suspected terrorists.

In 2014, Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370, a Boeing 777 with 239 people on board, vanished during a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, setting off a massive and ultimately unsuccessful search.

Today's birthdays: Author John McPhee is 94. Songwriter Carole Bayer Sager is 81. Actor-musician Micky

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Dolenz (The Monkees) is 80. Baseball Hall of Famer Jim Rice is 72. Singer Gary Numan is 67. TV journalist Lester Holt is 66. Actor Aidan Quinn is 66. Actor Camryn Manheim is 64. Actor Freddie Prinze Jr. is 49. Actor James Van Der Beek is 48. Songwriter-producer Benny Blanco is 37. Tennis player Petra Kvitová is 35. Actor Montana Jordan is 22. Actor Kit Connor is 21.