

Groton Daily Independent

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Monday, March 10

Senior Menu: Beef tips on rice, Capri blend, oranges with vanilla pudding, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast sliders.

School Lunch: French 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: Groton Area vs. Winner at Huron, 7:15 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Church Council, 6 p.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Monday Blessings

Good Morning

May your day be filled with peace, joy, and countless blessings. Take time to rest, reflect, and cherish the moments that make life beautiful.

I have a blessed day!



Wednesday, March 12

Senior Menu: Chicken alfredo, California blend, Cherry fluff, breadstick.

School Breakfast: Cereal.

School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, potato wedges.

Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Lenten Supper, 6 p.m. (host - Emmanuel Men), worship, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Lenten Service, 7 p.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 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.

Trudeau Successor Named

Canadian lawmaker Mark Carney was selected by the country's Liberal Party to replace Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Trudeau resigned roughly two months ago after losing support from his coalition government, likely avoiding a no-confidence vote.

Trained as an economist and, most recently, as the country's international lead on climate finance, Carney is widely credited with helping navigate the Great Recession as head of the Bank of Canada in 2008. Before entering public service, Carney spent 13 years at Goldman Sachs. He will quickly face an electoral test—general elections are scheduled for October, though some say he may call for snap elections shortly in an effort to shore up support.

Carney takes over as Canada grapples with uncertainty around tariffs on its exports to the US. President Donald Trump leveled a broad 25% levy on imports from the country but then granted an exemption applying to about 40% of Canadian goods until April 2.

Syrian Violence Intensifies

The death toll from violent clashes and attacks in Syria rose to more than 1,000 over the weekend, the worst bloodshed since former President Bashar al-Assad was ousted in December. Fighting began Thursday along the country's western coast between state security forces and Assad loyalists, with the majority of victims appearing to be civilians targeted in revenge killings.

Assad, the last of a dynasty that exerted often ruthless rule over Syria, was part of the Alawite minority, an offshoot of Shia Islam. The group makes up roughly 10% of the country's population but received long-running preferential treatment from the Assad regime. The new leadership has pledged to end retaliatory violence—though an independent watchdog estimates at least 700 Alawite civilians have been killed in the current fighting.

Assad himself remains alive, having fled in the final days before his government's collapse. He was granted political asylum by Russia and remains in Moscow.

Hackman Death Probe

Authorities have revealed new details about the deaths of actor Gene Hackman, 95, and his wife, Betsy Arakawa, 64, whose bodies were discovered Feb. 26 in their home in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Arakawa died of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome, a rare respiratory illness with flu-like symptoms contracted through exposure to rodent waste. Investigators found evidence of rodent activity on the property but have not determined how she was exposed. Her last known activities were Feb. 11, when she visited stores in Santa Fe before returning home.

Hackman died about a week later due to heart disease, with Alzheimer's disease as a contributing factor. His pacemaker recorded its final activity Feb. 17, and investigators found no indication that he tried to contact anyone after Arakawa died. He had no food in his stomach but was not dehydrated. Authorities found no signs of foul play.

A deceased dog, which was found in a crate and may have been recovering from a recent medical procedure, was also discovered in the home. Its autopsy results are pending.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Denver Nuggets' Nikola Jokić becomes first in NBA history to top 30 points, 20 rebounds, and 20 assists in a single game.

Myles Garrett becomes highest-paid non-QB in NFL history after signing four-year, \$40M-per-year extension with the Cleveland Browns.

Buffalo Bills sign QB Josh Allen to six-year, \$330M deal with the largest-ever guarantee of \$250M.

Art Schallock, three-time World Series champion, dies at age 100; Schallock held title of oldest living ex-MLB player until his death.

D'Wayne Wiggins, Grammy-nominated founding member of R&B group Tony! Toni! Toné!, dies of cancer at age 64.

"Ne Zha 2" tops \$2B at Chinese box office, becoming first film to ever top \$2B in a single market; the animated film is now sixth all-time at the global box office.

Science & Technology

NASA delays SPHEREx and PUNCH mission launches to continue checking Falcon 9 lift vehicle; next potential launch date still to be determined.

Security researchers uncover backdoor in the Chinese-made ESP32 microchip; in more than 1 billion devices worldwide, chip contains previously undocumented commands that can be used for attacks.

Doctors combine AI learning algorithm and brain-computer interface to help paralyzed man control a robotic arm via thoughts.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close up Friday (S&P 500 +0.6%, Dow +0.5%, Nasdaq +0.7%); gains cap volatile five-day stretch, S&P posts worst week since September.

AI startup Firsthand raises \$26M Series A funding, valuation not disclosed; company helps brand marketers and publishers use AI agents to interact directly with consumers.

Chinese consumer price index falls into negative territory, down 0.7% year over year last month.

Politics & World Affairs

House Republicans unveil six-month short-term spending bill ahead of March 14 deadline to avoid a partial government shutdown; vote expected tomorrow, bill would head to Senate for approval.

Health Department offers roughly 80,000 federal workers \$25K buyout.

Russian forces retake much of the Russian border province Kursk; Ukraine captured large swaths of the region during a surprise August offensive.

US, Russian, and European leaders to meet this week to continue talks toward ending the war.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol released from detention ahead of impeachment trial; Yoon was arrested following a failed December attempt to impose martial law.

Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

The NFL offseason isn't really an offseason. As soon as the last whistle blows in the Super Bowl, teams turn the page and start looking towards the next season. The annual combine happens in late February, free agency begins in March, the Draft is in April, then mini camps and training camps – and before you know it, August is here and we're watching preseason games. Just like NFL teams, we're looking at the team's roster, evaluating last year, and keeping an eye on how they can improve it. This week we are focusing on the offensive line.

Offensive Tackle

The Vikings have two of the best offensive tackles in the league. Left tackle, one of the most important positions in football, is held down by Christian Darrisaw, who was playing at an All-Pro level until his injury forced him to miss half the season. Darrisaw signed a four-year extension last offseason, so he isn't going anywhere anytime soon.

The other bookend of the offensive line, right tackle Brian O'Neill, is also one of the best players at his position. He is signed through the 2026 season, but he has huge cap hits the next two seasons (\$26M and \$23M). I don't anticipate O'Neill leaving any time soon, but I wouldn't be surprised if the Vikings reworked his contract to bring those cap hits down.

Interior Offensive Line

While the Vikings have excellent tackles, the interior of the offensive line is a huge liability. Blake Brandel was signed to be the team's starting left guard. He was... ok last season. Because his cap hits are so low (roughly \$4M this season and next), it's unlikely the team will replace him this offseason.

Garrett Bradbury is entering the final year of a three-year extension he signed in 2023. The best and worst thing about Bradbury is that he's an athletic center. He's able to get to the second level to block linebackers in the run game, but he's easily dominated by bigger defensive tackles.

Ed Ingram started the 2024 season as the starter at right guard but was replaced midseason by Dalton Risner. Although he was a slight upgrade over Ingram, Risner is a free agent this offseason and is unlikely to be back unless he agrees to be a backup.

Walter Rouse (OT) and Michael Jurgens (OG) were both drafted last year, and while it's possible they make huge progress this offseason, they will likely be the team's backups once again in 2025.

So what can the Vikings do to improve the offensive line? That's where it gets tricky. There are a few options in the draft, but the team doesn't have many picks this year. Plus, offensive linemen usually take a few years to adjust to the NFL, and the Vikings need help now, not in two or three years.

My best guess is the team improves the o-line through free agency. There are some solid players available, and the Vikings have plenty of cap space available to them. The problem is that none of the available free agents are difference-makers. Brandon Sherff is the best guard on the market, but he's 33 years old. Ryan Kelly would be an upgrade at center, but he'll be 32 years old and has an extensive injury history. James Daniels and Patrick Mekari are two names to keep an eye on, as they are both young players just entering their prime and shouldn't cost TOO much money.

Looking ahead, free agency begins this week. With a limited amount of draft picks and plenty of cap space, I anticipate the Vikings being very active over the next week or two. Skoll!

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Groton Chamber of Commerce

March 5, 2025

12pm City Hall

- Members present: Katelyn Nehlich, Douglas Heinrich, Ashley Bentz, and April Abeln
- Minutes from the previous meeting were approved by Heinrich and seconded by Abeln. All members present voted aye.
- The treasurer's report was given. Dacotah Bank checking account balance is \$23,950.45 in addition to the \$10,000 CD. The bucks account balance is about \$1,800. More members have paid dues than last year. The report was approved by Abeln and seconded by Heinrich. All members present voted aye.
- A thank you note was received from Taryn Thompson for Snow Queen.
- Discussion was held on sponsoring popcorn during the GHS football season.
- Discussion was held on electronic sign contracts for 2026 as well as updating it with our 2025 winners.
- Scholarship winners are Axel Warrington, Emma Kutter, and Gretchen Dinger. Meet and greet is May 14th at 1:30pm at the GHS library.
- Bentz visited the City Council members at their last meeting and gifted them with tumblers. It was suggested that a different gift be given next year.
- Motion by Abeln and seconded by Heinrich to publish a 1/2 paid ad in the Yellowstone Trail Guide. All members present voted aye.
- Motion by Nehlich and seconded by Heinrich to advertise 4 years at the ballfield for \$750. All members present voted aye. Discussion was also held on advertising at the swimming pool, but the board passed.
- Motion by Abeln and seconded by Heinrich to donate \$200 to the Groton BB/SB Foundation's Dueling Duo fundraiser. All members present voted aye.
- Motion by Heinrich and seconded by Abeln to donate \$100 in Chamber Bucks to the Fireman's Social. All members present voted aye.
- Other possible donations to the Yelduz Shrine for circus tickets and to Princess Prom will be discussed at the next meeting.
- Possible next business welcomes include the new owners of the Red Horse and Saleen Waldner, who may be opening a business in the prior Farmers Union Insurance building.
- Next Meeting: April 2nd, 12pm at City Hall
- Many spring events are scheduled. The Chamber has donated a shirt to the vendor fair and a free bike to the Lions Easter Egg Hunt. Eggs for that event are being packed March 13th at 6pm at Topper's building on Main Street, all are invited to attend.
- It was suggested our meeting agendas be posted on Facebook to encourage attendance and to post our 2025 meeting dates.

Upcoming events

03/22/2025 Spring Vendor Fair 10am-2pm GHS Gym

03/22/2025 Common Cents Extended Hours 10am-2pm

04/05/2025 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser 6-11:30pm Legion Post #39

04/06/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser 10am-1pm Community Center

04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)

04/12/2025 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)

04/25/2024 Front Porch 605 Spring Shop Hop 12-5pm

04/26/2025 Front Porch 605 Spring Shop Hop 9am-3pm

05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)

We the People

The South Dakota Humanities Council is making available a weekly column -- "We the People" -- that focuses on the U.S. Constitution. It is written by David Adler, who is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality, and civic education.



By David Adler

President Trump and the Historic and Constitutional Origins of the Legislative Power of the Purse

It took many centuries of advances, threats, retreats and a Civil War, before the English Constitution secured for Parliament the appropriations power-- the power of the purse-- what civics instructors teach as the fundamental right to spend taxpayer dollars. Throughout the Middle Ages, the eminent English historian, Maitland explained, the appropriations power really did belong to the monarchy; the king's revenue was the king's revenue and Parliament seldom tried to tell him what to do with it. The consequence was that there was no accountability for the expenditure of public funds, often spent for arbitrary, indeed, disastrous and divisive purposes, typically in service to the king's personal, political and pecuniary interests, without any need to consult the representatives of the people.

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 halted the practice, stripped the king of unconstrained authority and formally etched in English law legislative supremacy on the expenditure of money. A member of Parliament grasped the historic importance of the transformation: "'tis money that makes a Parliament considerable & nothing else."

President Donald Trump's claim, in a stunning Executive Order issued on February 17, of constitutional power to withhold legislative funding for any projects and initiatives that he doesn't like, that is, those which conflict with his preferences, policies and priorities, represents a breathtaking assertion of the royal prerogative that was denied to English kings in the late 17th Century, an ancient, discredited monarchical power that the American colonists rejected, and one that the Framers of Constitution thought repugnant to the principles of republicanism. Indeed, Article 1, Section 7 states: "No Money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in consequence of Appropriations made by Law; and a regular Statement and Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of all public Money shall be published from time to time."

Trump's impoundment of congressionally authorized funds to Ukraine, an appropriation by law pursuant to congressional policy to aid a beleaguered democratic ally in its defense against Russia's invasion, like the billions of dollars that he has frozen and refuses to release, violate the Impoundment Act of 1974 and the Constitution, and represent a usurpation of power that would ground the presidency, not in the constitutional principles championed by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and George Washington, but rather the absolutist assertions of English monarchs in the Middle Ages.

On March 1, 1793, then Rep. James Madison, justly known as the Father and Chief Architect of the Constitution, echoed the sentiments of his congressional colleagues when he concluded that, "appropriations of money," by the representatives of the people, "were of a high and sacred character; that they were the great bulwark which our Constitution had carefully and jealously established against executive usurpations." Madison was reiterating what he had written in Federalist 58, namely, that Congress held the purse. "The power over the purse," he observed, represented "the most complete and effectual weapon with which any constitution can arm the immediate representatives of the people, for obtaining a redress of every grievance, and for carrying into effect every just and salutary measure."

Justice Joseph Story, the most scholarly of Justices, observed in his magisterial, three-volume, "Commentaries on the Constitution" (1833), that since "all taxes are raised from the people," and "applied to the discharge" of the nation's expenses, debts and engagements, that "it is highly proper that Congress should possess the power to decide, how and when any money should be applied for these purposes." If it were otherwise, Story wrote, in words that recalled the dreaded monarchical prerogative, "the executive

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would possess an unbounded power over the public purse of the nation; and might apply all its monied resources at his pleasure." Congress, not the president, he declared, has been made by the Constitution, "the guardian of this treasure." To make the congressional "responsibility complete and perfect," the Constitution requires of the executive "a regular account of the receipts and expenditures," so that the people "may know what money is expended, for what purposes and by what authority."

Among their chief purposes, the American colonists fought a revolution, and the Framers drafted the Constitution, to protect what Madison called the "sacred" principle of congressional power over the purse. If Trump can establish the idea of policy impoundment at the pleasure of the president, he will succeed in upending the theory of the Constitution.

David Adler is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality and civic education. This column is made possible with the support of the South Dakota Humanities Council, South Dakota NewsMedia Association and this newspaper.



Groton
Area
Tigers
Groton, SD

GDILIVE



SoDak16 at the Huron Arena
#8 Groton Area (16-5) vs. #9 Winner (16-5)
Tuesday, March 11, 2025, 7:15 p.m.

www.youtube.com/@GDILIVE

A production of the
Groton Daily Independent

For more info: GDILIVE.COM

Game Sponsors:

Bary Keith at Harr Motors
Bierman Farm Service
Blocker Construction
Dacotah Bank
Farmers Union Coop, Ferney and Conde

Greg Johnson Construction, Bristol
Groton Ag Partners
Groton Chamber
Groton Dairy Queen
Groton Ford
Hanlon Brothers, Groton and Verdon

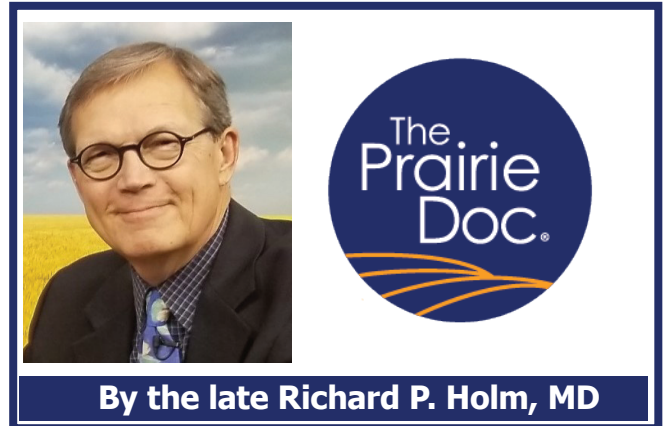
John Sieh Agency
Ken's Food Fair
Lori's Pharmacy
Olive Grove Golf Course
Rix Farms/R&M Farms

S & S Lumber
Spanier Harvesting
The MeatHouse, Andover
Weismantel Agency, Columbia

"Those Dirty Rotten Scoundrels"

The phone rang, and I answered it because the call was from a nearby community. No big surprise that the caller was obviously not from anywhere near, and the caller was asking for a donation for some organization in which I had no interest. I said, in a kindly tone, "No thank you," and hung up. They will never end the call. YOU MUST HANG UP.

Financial abuse by telephone or internet has been called "the crime of the 21st century." People of all ages are at risk, but scammers commonly target the elderly. Those of us past 65 are more often home to answer the phone, are apt to stay on the line longer and are less likely to report a crime. Making all of this worse, telemarketing crime is challenging to prosecute and, therefore, inviting to criminals.



There are plenty of bad guys out there. The National Council on Aging has written a compendium of common fraudulent traps that can result from telephone calls or internet messages. Here are some:

- Callers may pose as Medicare representative to obtain your personal numbers for the purpose of billing Medicare for bogus services. Remember, U.S. Government agencies will NEVER initiate a call.
- Because of outrageous prices for drugs, people are lured to purchase less expensive prescriptions from internet and out-of-country pharmacies. Beware that doses of drugs may be different than desired, and sometimes unsafe substances are added.
- Callers may be selling false or dangerous anti-aging products and claim reduced wrinkles or bags under eyes. Don't trust them. Talk to your doctor.
- Con-artists may promise to split a large sum of money with you, provided you first agree to send a "good faith" donation to help cover shipping costs. Don't believe it.
- "Hi Grandma, do you know who this is?" Never give out the name of a family member on an unsolicited call. They usually ask you for money for a fake emergency or rescue. Always check by calling family first.
- Especially after a major disaster, callers ask for "rescue money" to help those harmed which, of course, goes to the scammers, not those in need.
- Fake investment plans are everywhere. Strangers calling or emailing you with a great investment opportunity, should not be trusted, especially if it sounds too good to be true.

Take home message: Don't respond to calls or emails from strangers selling or pushing you into something. Don't donate to causes that you didn't initiate. Beware of scammers. In a kindly tone, say, "No thank you," and JUST HANG UP.

Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and Threads. Prairie Doc Programming includes On Call with the Prairie Doc®, a medical Q&A show (most Thursdays at 7pm on SDPB and streaming on Facebook), 2 podcasts, and a Radio program (on SDPB), providing health information based on science, built on trust.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Grant that 'would have fed thousands' on SD Native American reservation lost to Trump cuts

Federal cancellation shuts down Rosebud fruit tree project

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 9, 2025 3:02 PM

The Trump administration's efforts to claw back federal grant money, led by the world's richest person, will affect access to fresh fruit for some of the nation's poorest people.

Late last month, a nonprofit organization that serves and is headquartered on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation got notice that it would lose access to a \$547,000 federal grant funneled to it through the Nebraska-based Arbor Day Foundation.

Sicangu Co. was set to use the funding to plant 70 fruit trees and 600 berry bushes in backyards across the western South Dakota reservation and at the Keya Wakpala garden on the grounds of a Lakota immersion elementary school.

Some of the community garden's produce is used to feed kids in that program. Some is used for boxes delivered to tribal members.

A new employee would've facilitated the program, according to Sicangu spokesman Aaron Epps, and the organization had just finished writing the job description when news of the grant cancellation landed via email.

Over time, Epps said, the bushes and trees paid for through the grant funding "would have fed thousands of people."

News of the grant loss came amid a weekslong effort by the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) to find savings by canceling government contracts and firing federal employees. The DOGE team is headed by Tesla founder Elon Musk, empowered to slash spending by President Donald Trump.

The Sicangu grant is diminutive by comparison to higher-profile Trump administration actions, but Epps said the impact locally is significant. The reservation's Todd County is a persistent poverty area, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, which defines the term as a place having a poverty rate of 20% or higher for three decades.

Some parts of the organization's food sovereignty program will remain, Epps said. The organization had previous funding to plant gardens in 60 backyards a year. That work will continue, but the low-maintenance, perennial promise of food from fruit trees in those garden installations for the next three years is gone for now, as is the immediate placement of an orchard for the larger community garden.

The Sicangu loss was tied to the cancellation of a larger, \$8 million grant to the Arbor Day Foundation from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service to promote healthy eating in tribal areas.



A child helps plant vegetables in a community garden on the Rosebud Reservation. (Courtesy Sicangu Co.)

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The Nebraska foundation awarded subgrants to groups with plans to address food insecurity in those areas, which are often "food deserts" where the nearest fresh fruits and vegetables are far away. The USDA estimates that 2.3 million people in the U.S. live more than a mile from the nearest grocery store and don't have a car. Food deserts are associated with worse health and educational outcomes for residents.

Other projects funded through the \$8 million USDA grant included funding for similar projects in Wisconsin for the Bad River and Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, in South Carolina for the Catawba Nation and in Alaska for the Native Village of Tyonek.

Sicangu Co. posted a redacted version of the termination notice email to its LinkedIn page. The last line says the Forest Service had determined the grant award "no longer effectuates agency priorities regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and activities."

"My hunch for the reason it was cancelled was that this award was aimed at tribal communities," Epps said. "Obviously, I don't have proof for that."

Elise Peterson of the Arbor Day Foundation said in a statement that the organization couldn't speculate on the reason for the grant's cancellation.

"Right now, we're focused on helping our sub-awardees find other opportunities to fund their impactful work expected to be supported by the federal grant," Peterson wrote. "We are already in dialogue with our network of supporters, both individuals and corporate partners, to hopefully help some of these projects still come to fruition."

A USDA spokesperson didn't mention diversity, equity and inclusion in a response to South Dakota Searchlight on the reasons for canceling the grants. Instead, its statement said the Trump administration "rightfully has asked for a comprehensive review of all contracts, work, and personnel across all federal agencies."

"Anything that violates the President's Executive Orders will be subject for review," the statement read. "The Department of Agriculture will be happy to provide a response to interested parties once Secretary Brooke Rollins has the opportunity to analyze these reviews."

Epps hopes the grant cancellation isn't a sign of more cuts to come for the families of Rosebud. The Lakota immersion program is funded in part by federal grants. So far, he said, no funding cancellation notes have appeared that could affect that program.

Even so, he said, "our feeling is that every single federal dollar we've had awarded to us is in jeopardy."

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.

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EARTHTALK

Dear EarthTalk: How is the environmental advocacy community in the U.S. gearing up for a second term of Trump in the White House?

-- Peggy L., Washington, DC

As Trump begins his second term, green groups are bracing for policies favoring fossil fuels and loose regulations. With appointments like North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum as Interior Secretary and oil industry CEO Chris Wright as Energy Secretary, many expect expanded drilling and reduced federal land protections. Burgum supports more domestic oil production, which could slow a shift to renewables.



Earthjustice president Abigail Dillen is just one of the environmental leaders hell-bent on fighting the second Trump administration's new environmental and climate "policies." Credit: Earthjustice.

Environmental groups are preparing legal challenges to harmful policies. Earthjustice, the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) have strong histories of successful lawsuits. Brett Hartl, CBD's government affairs director, warns of "aggressiveness and disregard for the rule of law." These groups plan to defend climate policies, air and water quality, and environmental justice programs. Another concern is Project 2025, a conservative policy framework likely to guide Trump's administration. It aims to roll back clean energy initiatives and climate policies. Andrew Wetzler, head of NRDC's nature program, noted that several Project 2025 contributors have already been appointed, reinforcing fears of cuts to emissions regulations and clean energy funding.

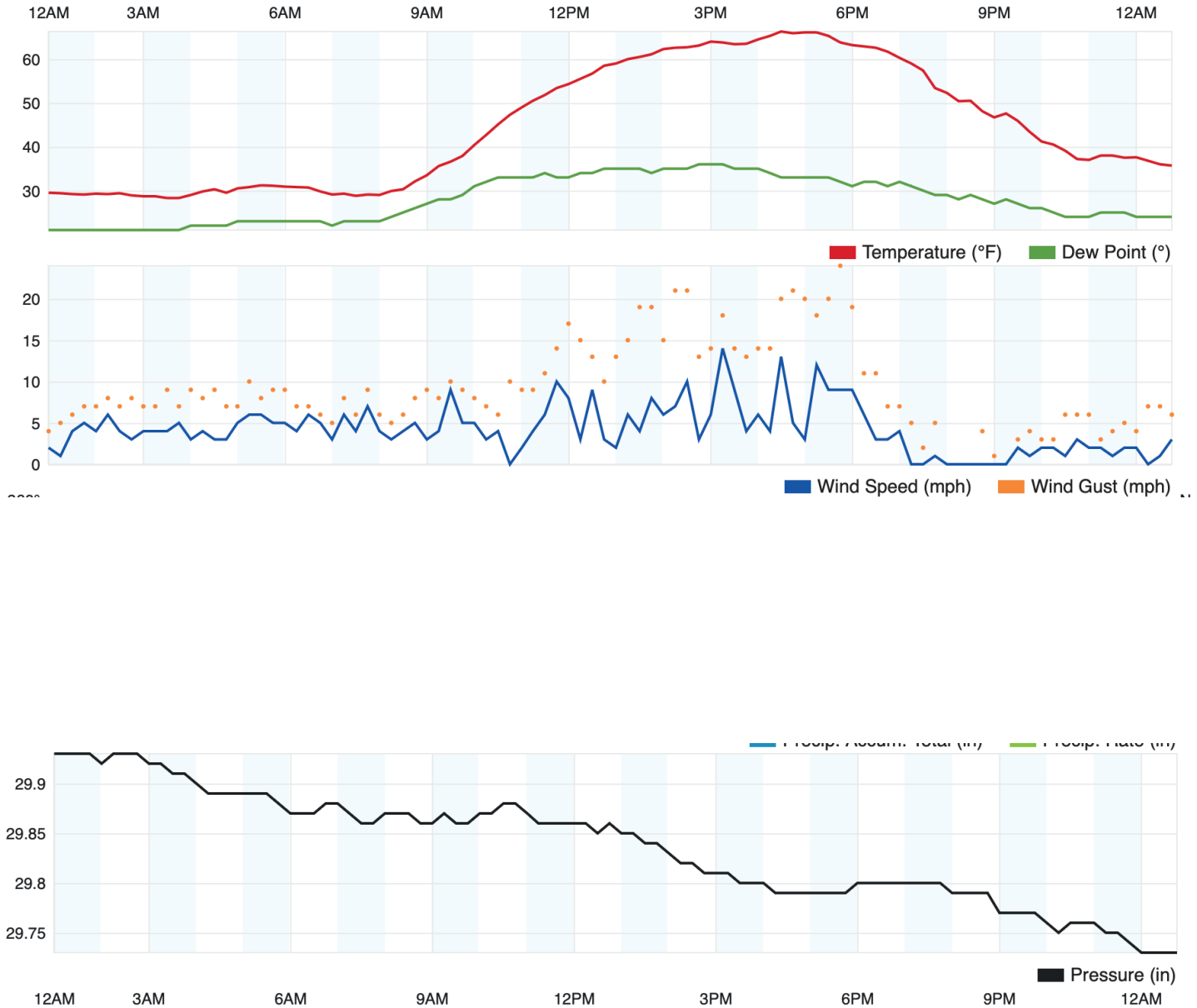
Federal lands and national monuments, such as Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante, may again face reduced protections. Trump tried similar rollbacks in his first term, and groups like the Grand Canyon Trust are ready to fight new efforts. Executive Director Ethan Aumack asserted that "dismantling national monuments is unlawful" and vowed to take legal action if needed. Greens are also appalled by Trump's dramatic rollback of environmental justice initiatives, including disbanding the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council via executive order. "By rolling back efforts to address historic underinvestment and overburden in communities of color and low-income communities, President Trump is putting good health and prosperity out of reach for millions of people," says Earthjustice president Abigail Dillen. "Earthjustice will keep fighting alongside communities who continue to demand justice."

Despite these challenges, bipartisan support for clean water and conservation could help counter some rollbacks. Clean energy investments, particularly in red-leaning districts, may also continue due to economic benefits like job creation. Wetzler noted that protecting clean water and natural spaces often transcends political divides. Green groups will rely on public engagement to protect progress made on environmental issues. Individuals can play important roles by staying informed, supporting legal and advocacy efforts and urging lawmakers to protect key environmental policies. By working together, the public can ensure that environmental protections are maintained and strengthened despite the challenges.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today		Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday
 					
					
High: 73 °F		Low: 17 °F	High: 44 °F	Low: 27 °F	High: 60 °F
Mostly Sunny then Mostly Sunny and Breezy		Partly Cloudy and Blustery	Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny



Red Flag Conditions Expected Today

March 10, 2025
4:51 AM

Key Messages

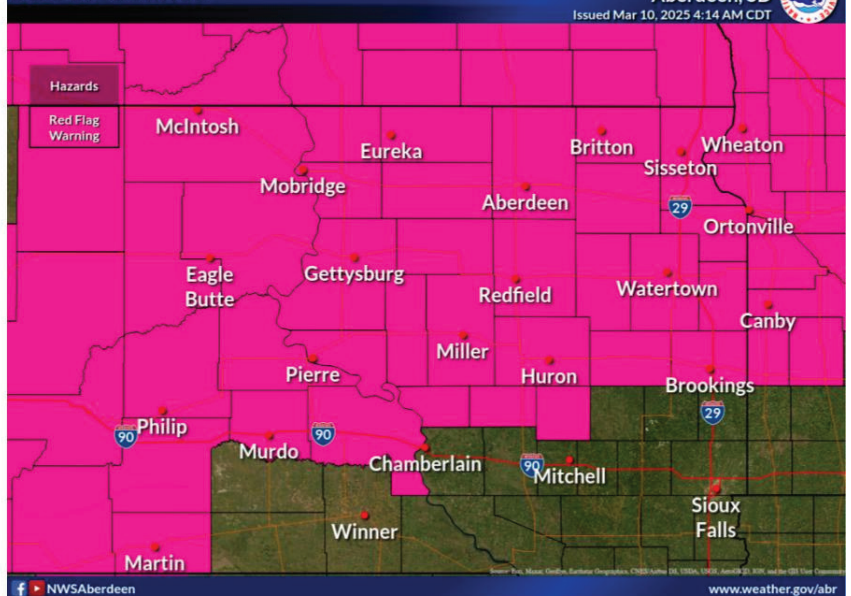
- Increasing west to northwest winds, with gusts of 35 to 55 mph this afternoon through this evening.
 - ◆ Highest gusts of 45 to 55 mph will be across northern SD
- Relative humidity dropping to, or below 20% for much of the area.
- The combination of gusty winds, low relative humidity, and ongoing dry fuels lead to **very high to extreme fire danger**.

NEW

Important Updates

- **Red Flag Warning** remains in effect for the entire forecast area

Fire Headlines



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Increasing west to northwest winds, with gusts of 35 to 55 mph this afternoon and evening, combined with relative humidity values at or below 20%, and ongoing dry fuels will lead to very high to extreme fire danger. Any fires that ignite will spread rapidly and become difficult to control or suppress.

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Strong Winds This Afternoon and Evening

March 10, 2025
4:54 AM

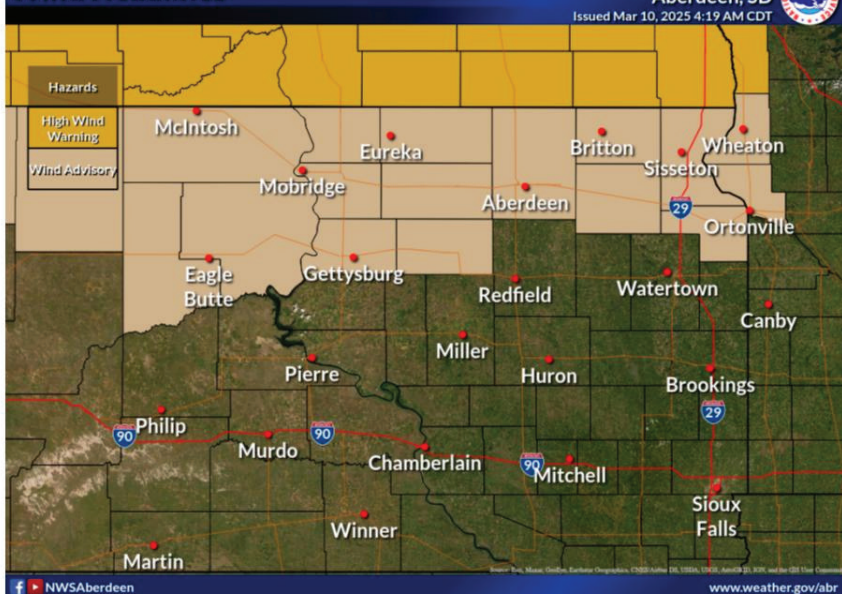
Key Messages

- Increasing west to northwest winds, with gusts of 45 to 55 mph possible over northern SD.
- Strongest winds expected during the late afternoon and early evening hours.
- Wind will diminish early Tuesday morning

NEW Important Updates

- **High Wind Watch** has been replaced with a **Wind Advisory** for north central and portions of northeastern SD and west central MN

Wind Headlines



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

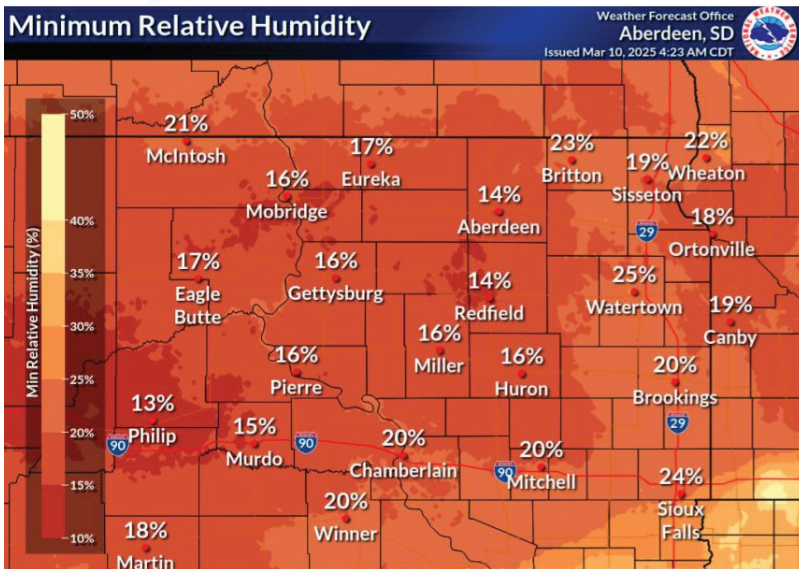
Increasing west to northwest winds, with gusts of 45 to 55 mph possible over northern SD into west centrals MN this afternoon and evening.



Relative Humidity & Wind Gusts

March 10, 2025
4:56 AM

- Wind gusts of 35 to 55 mph this afternoon and evening (highest gusts over north central SD).
- Afternoon relative humidity values drop at or below 20% for much of the region.



Maximum Wind Gust Forecast (mph)

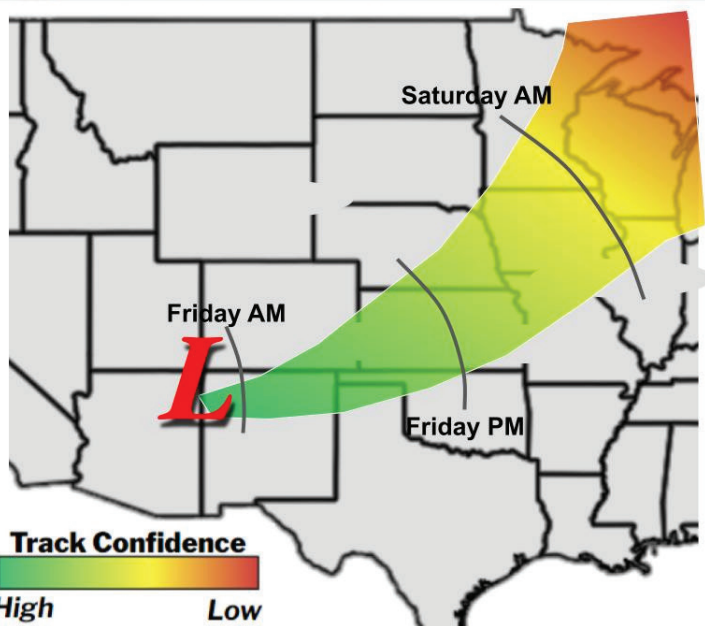
	3/10 Mon						3/11 Tue			
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am
Aberdeen	16	29	31	46	46	44	35	25	16	14
Britton	21	31	33	49	46	41	35	26	16	12
Brookings	14	17	24	29	30	38	39	31	21	16
Chamberlain	13	15	22	29	28	30	30	23	14	14
Clark	16	18	25	36	38	38	38	29	20	14
Eagle Butte	24	29	37	47	48	45	40	29	16	24
Ellendale	26	38	38	55	53	49	31	23	14	13
Eureka	18	37	40	54	55	49	29	18	10	15
Gettysburg	17	24	30	41	44	40	32	23	13	18
Huron	13	14	24	32	32	36	37	30	20	14
Kennebec	16	20	25	29	29	29	30	23	14	16
McIntosh	26	37	51	59	53	48	26	16	15	23
Milbank	20	24	28	36	38	39	39	33	21	14
Miller	20	22	28	36	37	37	36	29	17	14
Mobridge	16	29	32	45	46	45	28	20	10	17
Murdo	24	26	30	32	31	31	30	24	14	20
Pierre	13	16	23	32	33	33	29	21	9	15
Redfield	14	17	28	39	41	40	38	30	18	15
Sisseton	23	30	33	41	45	45	39	30	20	13
Watertown	15	20	26	33	35	36	38	30	21	14
Webster	20	26	31	40	43	40	37	29	20	15
Wheaton	20	26	30	39	44	44	38	32	22	14



Winter Weather Potential Friday Night/Saturday

March 10, 2025
4:59 AM

Low Track And Timing Play Key Part In Temperatures, Winds & Location of Rain/Snow Accumulations



Key Messages

- **What's The Concern?**
 - Growing forecast confidence in an **IMPACTFUL** late winter storm system late this week/weekend with several weather hazards possible
- **What's Uncertain?**
 - **System low track and timing**
 - **When temperature/precipitation (rain to snow) transition occurs**
 - **The location and amounts of the heaviest precipitation**
- **What Should You Do?**
 - This system is still several days away. Continue to monitor the latest forecast from [reliable/reputable sources](#)...
 - Dust off the snow blower. If you have travel plans, consider making alternate arrangements.



Growing forecast confidence in an IMPACTFUL late winter storm system late this week/weekend with several weather hazards possible. What is uncertain is the system low track and timing, precipitation changeover, and the location of the heaviest precip. Continue to monitor for the latest forecast.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 58 °F at 3:37 PM

Low Temp: 18 °F at 5:25 AM

Wind: 25 mph at 2:19 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 41 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 65 in 1913

Record Low: -24 in 1948

Average High: 38

Average Low: 17

Average Precip in March.: 0.24

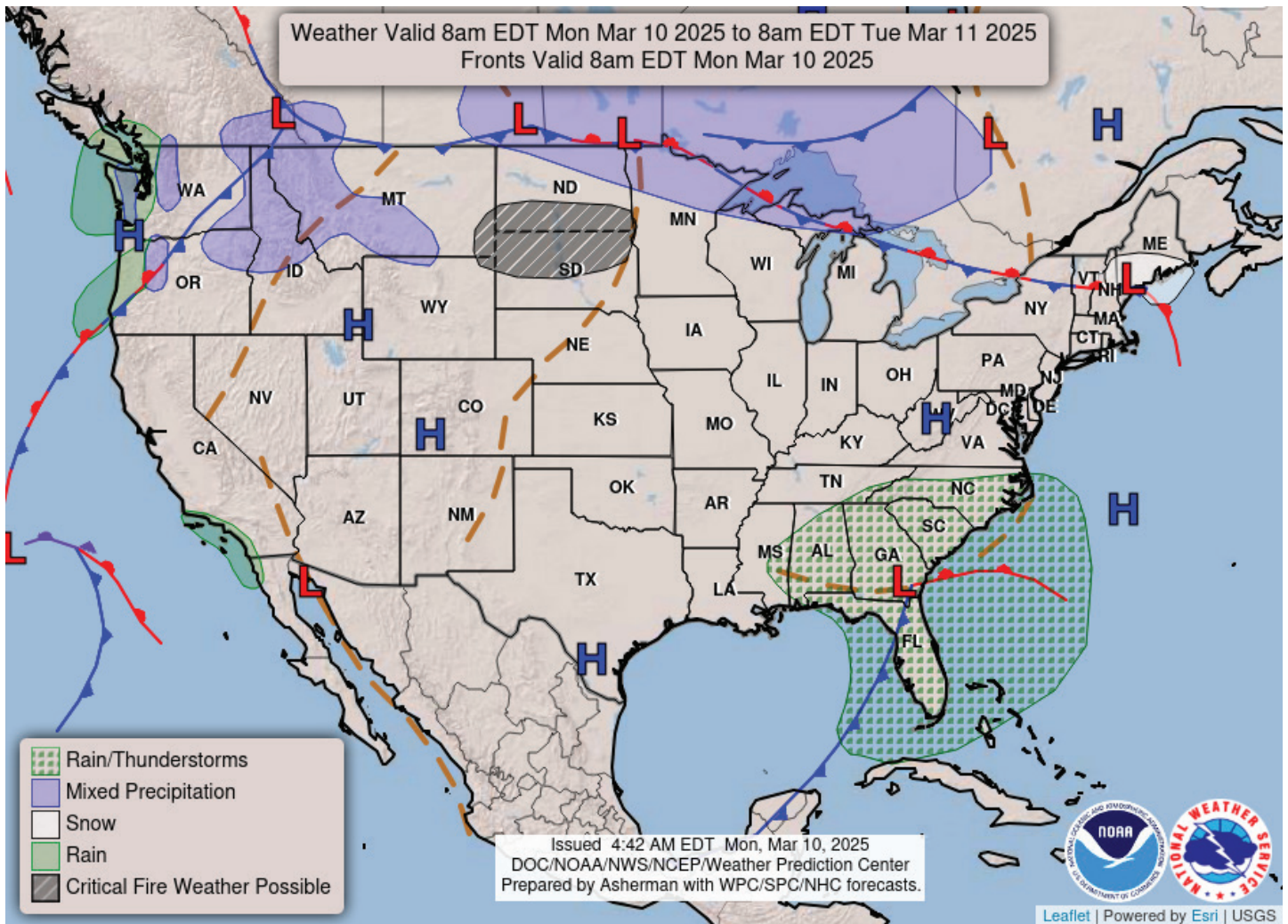
Precip to date in March.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.41

Precip Year to Date: 0.45

Sunset Tonight: 7:33:24 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:49:45 am



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Today in Weather History

March 10, 2005: High winds of 35 to 45 mph with gusts of near 70 mph occurred across central and northeast South Dakota from early morning to early evening. The high winds overturned a semi-truck near Mound City; knocked a large branch down onto a pickup truck in Selby; blew a glass door of a store in Clark off; tore a sign down in Aberdeen, and ripped the roof off a mobile home in South Shore.

March 10, 2009: A low-pressure system tracked across the panhandle of Oklahoma into the Great Lakes region produced moderate to heavy snow across northeast South Dakota from the morning to the evening of the 10th. Strong north-to-northwest winds gusting to 45 mph resulted in blizzard conditions. Travel became difficult, if not impossible, across northeast South Dakota. Interstate 29 between Watertown and the North Dakota border was closed for several hours. Several minor accidents occurred, along with some injuries. Snowfall amounts included; 3 inches near Milbank; 4 inches near Columbia, Summit, and Sisseton; 5 inches at Waubay and Wilmot; 6 inches 10 miles northeast of Sisseton, Britton, and Roy Lake; 7 inches in Webster and Westport.

Bitter cold air filtered in behind the low-pressure system bringing record cold to the area. On the 11th, Aberdeen and Sisseton broke their record low highs for the date, with afternoon highs only reaching zero. The record at Aberdeen had been in place since 1896. Sisseton also set a record low of 14 degrees below zero on March 12.

1884: John Park Finley issued the first experimental tornado prediction. Finley studied the atmospheric parameters that were present during previous tornadoes. Many of these same criteria are still used by operational forecasters today. But the use of tornado forecasts would be banned just a few years later and remain forbidden until 1952.

1912 - The barometric pressure reached 29.26 inches at Los Angeles, CA, and 29.46 inches at San Diego CA, setting all-time records for those two locations. (David Ludlum)

1922 - Dodge City, KS, reported a record 24 hour total of 17.5 inches of snow. (The Weather Channel)

1986: Severe thunderstorms and tornadoes hit Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. A total of 19 tornadoes occurred. Three of the tornadoes in Indiana reached F3 intensity. A densely populated subdivision of Southeast Lexington, Kentucky, was heavily damaged by a tornado. Twenty people were injured, and 900 homes were destroyed or demolished. A very strong thunderstorm downburst hit the Cincinnati area. At the Greater Cincinnati Airport, windows were blown out of the control tower, injuring the six controllers on duty. At Newport, Kentucky, 120 houses were destroyed by winds estimated from 100 to 140 mph.

1987 - Strong northwesterly winds ushered arctic air into the eastern U.S. Gales lashed the middle and northern Atlantic coast. Winds gusted to 50 mph at Manteo NC and Cape Hatteras NC. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A winter storm produced snow and high winds in the Central Rocky Mountain Region. Snowfall totals in Utah ranged up to 42 inches at Alta, with 36 inches reported at the Brian Head Ski Resort in 24 hours. Winds gusted to 72 mph at La Junta CO and Artesia NM. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thirty-four cities in the central and southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. The high of 85 degrees at Hanksville UT was a record for March, and Pueblo CO equalled their March record of 86 degrees. Hill City KS warmed from a morning low of 30 degrees to an afternoon high of 89 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing along a warm front produced severe weather from southeast Iowa to central Indiana and north central Kentucky. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 65 mph at Fort Knox KY, and hail two inches in diameter west of Lebanon IN. Evening thunderstorms over central Oklahoma deluged Guthrie with 4.5 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2010 - As many as four people are injured, one is killed and homes were damaged in Center Hill and Pearson, AR, by an EF2 tornado.



CREATING PERSONAL HAPPINESS

It was a cold afternoon as a well-dressed gentleman walked to a waiting limousine. A homeless man approached him and said, "Sir, would you please help me – please, Sir?"

"Here's a dollar," said the man gruffly, "not because you deserve it, but because it gives me a certain amount of happiness to contribute to your well-being."

"Oh, thank you, Sir," he said, "but why not make it fifty dollars and really make yourself happy?"

Our giving reflects our attitude about God's faithfulness. That's why Paul wrote, "Don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. God loves the person who gives cheerfully! And God will provide everything you need!"

Often we hesitate to give more generously to God because we worry about having enough money to meet our needs should we encounter difficult times. We want to be certain that we have enough for today and a little for tomorrow – should it come. But God, Paul promises, will provide for everything that we need.

Could it be that we fail to be more generous because we do not know what tomorrow will bring? Will sickness strike? Will we lose our jobs? Inherit a fortune? Receive an unexpected gift? Is it not a lack of trust in the goodness of God that causes us to hold on to what we have rather than holding on to the promise of the fact that He will provide for whatever we need?

Prayer: Lord, perhaps we are afraid to give because we fear the unknown. Your Word, Father, assures us of Your love and faithfulness when we fully trust in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Preach You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." 2 Corinthians 9:7

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: 1 Days 16 Hrs 19 Mins
56 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.08.25

1 30 31 36 43 9

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$25,700,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 34 Mins 56
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.09.25

6 14 18 40 46 6

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 49 Mins 56
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.08.25

6 9 11 14 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$60,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 49
Mins 56 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.08.25

21 24 37 62 68 11

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 18 Mins 56
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.08.25

2 4 16 23 63 13

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$335,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 18 Mins 56
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

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Omaha tops St. Thomas-Minnesota 85-75 to win 1st Summit League Tournament championship

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — JJ White scored 29, Marquel Sutton totaled 22 points and a career-high 18 rebounds and Omaha beat St. Thomas-Minnesota 85-75 on Sunday night in the championship game of the Summit League Tournament.

The top-seeded Mavericks (22-12) had already earned the automatic berth to the NCAA Tournament entering the game because the Tommies (24-10) — the No. 2 seed — are in their final year of postseason ineligibility after making a rare leap from Division III to Division I.

The Mavericks will play in the NCAA Tournament for the first time after transitioning to D-I play in 2011. Omaha's 22 victories this season are its most since the move up.

White and reserve Lance Waddles both scored 11 in the first half and combined to make 5 of 6 shots from 3-point range to guide Omaha to a 39-33 advantage. Sutton, the Summit League player of the year, had his eighth double-double this season by halftime with 10 points and 10 rebounds.

Sutton opened the second half with a dunk and White followed with a 3-pointer to push Omaha's lead to double digits. A Waddles 3-pointer gave the Mavericks their largest lead at 51-36 with 14 minutes remaining.

St. Thomas got within six points four times, the final one at 79-73 on two Minnessale free throws with 1:58 left. Sutton followed with two foul shots and White added a layup to wrap up the title.

White made 10 of 14 shots with three 3-pointers, adding five assists for the Mavericks. Waddles hit four 3-pointers and scored 15.

Minnessale had 20 points to lead the Tommies. Miles Barnstable scored 14.

Paige Meyer leads trio with 20 points, No. 25 South Dakota State women win Summit over Oral Roberts

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Paige Meyer scored 26 point, Haleigh Timmer added 21 and Madison Mathiowetz had 20 and No. 25 South Dakota State continued its dominance in the Summit League with an 84-68 win over Oral Roberts on Sunday, the Jackrabbits' third-straight title and 13th NCAA appearance.

The Jackrabbits have won 19 games in a row, 59-straight against league opponents and are 41-5 all-time in the Summit League tourney they have won 12 times since becoming eligible in 2009.

Top-seeded South Dakota State (29-3) won despite leading scorer Brooklyn Meyer (17.5 points a game) being held to 10 points, six in the fourth quarter. However, Meyer hauled down 15 rebounds and Mesa Byom had 13, both career highs. Paige Meyer had nine assists.

Taleyah Jones and Emily Robinson had 17 points apiece for the second-seeded Golden Eagles (24-8), who lost the regular-season matchups by five and 18 points. Jalei Oglesby and Ruthie Udoumoh both added 11. Oral Roberts was trying to reach the NCAA Tournament for the first in a dozen years.

The Jackrabbits hit 5 of 8 3-point attempts in the first quarter, two by Timmer who had 10 points, and took a 19-10 lead.

Makyrá Tramble hit a 3-pointer early in the second quarter to start an 11-0 run to give the Golden Eagles their only lead at 23-21. Mathiowetz answered with a 3 and the Jackrabbits pulled away to lead 46-36 at the half.

Mathiowetz and Paige Meyer opened the third quarter with 3-pointers to push the lead to 16 but the Golden Eagles cut that to five. SDSU went about six minutes without a field goal but made 7 of 9 free throws to take a 65-55 lead into the fourth quarter.

March Madness: Omaha headed to 1st NCAA Tournament, even with a loss in Summit League final

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Omaha is headed to its first NCAA Tournament — even if the Mavericks lose the Summit League championship game.

Omaha will play St. Thomas in the tournament final Sunday night, but St. Thomas is ineligible for the NCAA Tournament while completing its transition to Division I. That means Omaha will receive the league's automatic bid no matter the result, because the Mavericks won the regular-season conference title.

Tony Osburn scored 30 points in Omaha's 100-75 victory over South Dakota in the semifinals Saturday night. St. Thomas beat North Dakota 85-69.

Playing its 14th season since moving up to Division I status, Omaha is in the Summit League championship game for the third time but has never won it.

St. Thomas was kicked out of its Division III league for being too dominant. The Minnesota school then jumped all the way up to Division I. This is the final year the Tommies won't be eligible for the NCAA Tournament.

Canada's next prime minister has managed the financial crisis, then Brexit and now Trump's trade war

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Canada's next prime minister has helped run two Group of Seven economies in crisis before and now will try to steer Canada through a looming trade war brought by U.S. President Donald Trump, a threat of annexation and an expected federal election.

Former central banker Mark Carney will become prime minister after the governing Liberal Party elected him its leader Sunday in a landside vote with 85.9% support.

Carney, 59, replaces Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who announced his resignation in January but remains prime minister until his successor is sworn in in the coming days. Carney is widely expected to trigger an election the coming days or weeks amid Trump's sweeping tariff threats.

Canada 'didn't ask for this fight'

"We didn't ask for this fight. But Canadians are always ready when someone else drops the gloves," Carney said. "The Americans, they should make no mistake, in trade, as in hockey, Canada will win."

Carney said Canada will keep its initial retaliatory tariffs in place until "the Americans show us respect."

Carney navigated crises when he was the head of the Bank of Canada and when in 2013 he became the first noncitizen to run the Bank of England since it was founded in 1694. His appointment won bipartisan praise in the U.K. after Canada recovered from the 2008 financial crisis faster than many other countries. He helped manage the worst impacts of Brexit in the U.K.

The opposition Conservatives hoped to make the election about Trudeau, whose popularity declined as food and housing prices rose and immigration surged.

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

Canadian nationalism surges

The surge in Canadian nationalism has bolstered the Liberal Party's chances in a parliamentary election expected within days or weeks, and Liberal showings have been improving in opinion polls.

"The Americans want our resources, our water, our land, our country. Think about it. If they succeed they would destroy our way of life," Carney said. "In America health care is big business. In Canada it is a right."

Carney said America is "a melting pot. Canada is mosaic," he said. "America is not Canada. And Canada will never, ever will be a part of America in any way, shape or form."

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.

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"These are dark days, dark days brought on by a country we can no longer trust," Carney said. "We need to pull together in the tough days ahead."

Trump has postponed 25% tariffs on many goods from Canada and Mexico for a month, amid widespread fears of a broader trade war. But he has threatened other tariffs on steel, aluminum, dairy and other products.

Carney picked up one endorsement after another from Cabinet ministers and members of Parliament since declaring his candidacy in January. He is a highly educated economist with Wall Street experience who has long been interested in entering politics and becoming prime minister, but he lacks political experience.

Trudeau previously offered to make him finance minister. Carney has said former Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper also offered to make him finance minister.

Former Goldman Sachs executive

Carney is a former Goldman Sachs executive. He worked for 13 years in London, Tokyo, New York and Toronto, before being appointed deputy governor of the Bank of Canada in 2003.

In 2020, he began serving as the United Nations' special envoy for climate action and finance.

The other top Liberal leadership candidate was former Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, who received just 8% of the vote. Trudeau told Freeland in December that 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.

Either Carney will call an election in the coming days or weeks, or the opposition parties in Parliament could force one with a no-confidence vote later this month.

Trudeau urged Liberals supporters to get involved.

"This is a nation-defining moment. Democracy is not a given. Freedom is not a given. Even Canada is not a given," Trudeau said.

What to know ahead of the talks between the US and Ukraine in Saudi Arabia

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Saudi Arabia is to host talks on Tuesday between the United States and Ukraine in a new diplomatic push after an argument erupted during President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Feb. 28 visit to the White House.

The oil-rich kingdom may seem like an unusual venue for talks aimed at smoothing over relations after the blowup. But Saudi Arabia under its assertive Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has been positioning itself as an ideal location for possible peace negotiations between Kyiv and Moscow — and even the first face-to-face talks between Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump.

Here's what to know about why this meeting is taking place and Saudi Arabia's role:

Why are these talks happening?

U.S. and Ukrainian officials will meet after the Oval Office meeting between Zelenskyy, Trump and U.S. Vice President JD Vance descended into an extraordinary 10-minute argument before journalists.

Trump at one point admonished Zelenskyy by angrily saying: "You're gambling with World War III, and what you're doing is very disrespectful to the country." Zelenskyy ended up leaving the White House without signing a deal that included granting the U.S. access to Ukraine's rare earth minerals. Kyiv hoped that deal would ensure the continued flow of U.S. military support that Ukraine urgently needs as it battles Russia in the war that began after Moscow's full-scale invasion in February 2022.

Where will these talks take place?

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Ministry in a statement on Friday identified the location for the talks as Jeddah, a port city on the Red Sea. It's not clear why the kingdom picked Jeddah as opposed to Riyadh, the Saudi capital where the initial Russia-U.S. talks took place on Feb. 18. However, Jeddah has hosted other diplomatic engagements in the past and is home to royal palaces.

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The Foreign Ministry said the kingdom would continue to pursue “a lasting peace to end the Ukrainian crisis.”

“The kingdom has continued these efforts over the past three years by hosting many meetings on this matter,” the ministry said.

Who will attend the talks?

Zelenskyy plans to visit Saudi Arabia on Monday ahead of the talks. He earlier delayed a trip to the kingdom after traveling to the neighboring United Arab Emirates, which also has been considered as a possible venue for peace talks between Kyiv and Moscow.

“We continue working on the relevant steps with our partners who want peace, who want it just as much as we do,” Zelenskyy said Friday. “There will be a lot of work here in Europe, with America in Saudi Arabia — we are preparing a meeting to accelerate peace and strengthen the foundations of security.”

Zelenskyy wrote online that a team including his chief of staff Andriy Yermak, Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha and Defense Minister Rustem Umerov traveling with him to Saudi Arabia will take part in the talks. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio will lead the American team for the Ukrainian talks and meet with Prince Mohammed.

Sybiha also spoke on Friday with Rubio ahead of the talks. Sybiha described it as a “constructive call.” A two-sentence readout from the State Department said Rubio “underscored President Trump is determined to end the war as soon as possible and emphasized that all sides must take steps to secure a sustainable peace.”

Trump himself sounded upbeat on Air Force One on Sunday when speaking to journalists.

“I think you’re gonna have eventually — and maybe not in the distant future — you’re gonna have some pretty good results coming out of Saudi Arabia this week,” Trump said.

Why are these talks in Saudi Arabia?

Since assuming power in Saudi Arabia, Prince Mohammed took an aggressive posture both at home and abroad. His public image reached its nadir with the 2018 slaying of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul, believed by the United States and others to be at the prince’s orders.

In the last two years, however, Prince Mohammed instead has reached a détente with Iran, hosted Zelenskyy for an Arab League summit and been involved in negotiations over the wars in Sudan and the Gaza Strip. Riyadh also maintained ties to Russia through the OPEC+ oil cartel while Western nations levied sanctions against it. That’s reasserted the role the kingdom long has perceived itself as having — being the leader of the Sunni Muslim world and a dominant force in the Middle East.

Hosting Russia-U.S. talks, possibly drawing Trump to the kingdom for his first foreign trip in this term through investments and other possible meetings only raise Saudi Arabia’s profile further as a neutral territory for high-stakes negotiations. Saudi Arabia’s autocratic government, compliant media and distance from the war also allows for talks to take place in a tightly controlled country with relative privacy.

What does this mean for the war and the wider world?

Trump remains focused on reaching some kind of peace deal to stop the war. His approach toward Ukraine so far has relied far more on stick than carrot — limiting their access to intelligence and weaponry. While conciliatory toward Putin, Trump recently also threatened new sanctions against Russia over its ceaseless attacks on Ukrainian cities.

If Ukraine and the U.S. reach some sort of understanding acceptable to Trump, that could accelerate his administration’s push to talks. However, the rest of Europe remains skeptical as they have been sidelined from the talks. The European Union last week agreed to boost the continent’s defenses and to free up hundreds of billions of euros for security.

North Korea fires several ballistic missiles after the US and South Korea began military drills

By KIM TONG-HYUNG and HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea fired several ballistic missiles into the sea Monday, South Korea's military said, hours after South Korean and U.S. troops kicked off their large annual combined drills, which the North views as an invasion rehearsal.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the missile firings, North Korea's fifth missile launch event this year, were detected from the North's southwestern Hwanghae province. It called the weapons close-range but didn't say how far they flew. The military said South Korea bolstered its surveillance posture and is closely coordinating with the United States.

Earlier Monday, the South Korean and U.S. militaries began their annual Freedom Shield command post exercise, their first major combined training of President Donald Trump's second term. The allies have already been engaging in diverse field training exercises in connection with the Freedom Shield training.

North Korea's Foreign Ministry warned Monday the latest training risks triggering "physical conflict" on the Korean Peninsula. It called the drills an "aggressive and confrontational war rehearsal" and reiterated leader Kim Jong Un's stated goals for a "radical growth" of his nuclear force to counter what he claims as growing threats posed by the U.S. and its Asian allies.

This year's training came after the South Korean and U.S. militaries paused live-fire training while Seoul investigates how its fighter jets mistakenly bombed a civilian area during a warm-up drill last week.

About 30 people were injured, two of them seriously, when two South Korean KF-16 fighter jets mistakenly fired eight MK-82 bombs on a civilian area in Pocheon, a town near the North Korean border, on Thursday. The bombing occurred while South Korean and U.S. forces were engaging in a live-fire drill ahead of the Freedom Shield exercise.

The initial assessment from the South Korean air force was that one of the KF-16 pilots entered the wrong coordinates and failed to visually verify the target before proceeding with the bombing. The second pilot had the correct coordinates but focused only on maintaining flight formation and dropped the bombs on the first pilot's instructions without recognizing the target was wrong, according to the content of the latest briefing provided to The Associated Press.

Gen. Lee Youngsu, chief of staff of the South Korean air force, bowed and apologized Monday over the injuries and property damage caused by the bombing, which he said "should have never happened and must never happen again."

Both the South Korean and U.S. militaries have halted all live-fire exercises in South Korea following the mistake. South Korean military officials say live-fire training will resume after they complete the investigation of the bombing and form preventative steps.

The South Korean air force earlier suspended the training flights of all its planes too but lifted the steps on Monday, except aircraft affiliated with the unit the two KF-16s belong to.

What makes Greenland a strategic prize at a time of rising tensions? And why now?

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

NUUK, Greenland (AP) — When U.S. President Donald Trump first suggested buying Greenland in 2019, people thought it was just a joke. No one is laughing now.

Trump's interest in Greenland, restated vigorously soon after he returned to the White House in January, comes as part of an aggressively "America First" foreign policy platform that includes demands for Ukraine to hand over mineral rights in exchange for continued military aid, threats to take control of the Panama Canal, and suggestions that Canada should become the 51st U.S. state.

Why Greenland?

Increasing international tensions, global warming and the changing world economy have put Greenland

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at the heart of the debate over global trade and security, and Trump wants to make sure that the U.S. controls this mineral-rich country that guards the Arctic and North Atlantic approaches to North America.

Who does Greenland belong to?

Greenland is a self-governing territory of Denmark, a long-time U.S. ally that has rejected Trump's overtures. Denmark has also recognized Greenland's right to independence at a time of its choosing.

Amid concerns about foreign interference and demands that Greenlanders must control their own destiny, the island's prime minister called an early parliamentary election for Tuesday.

The world's largest island, 80% of which lies above the Arctic Circle, is home to about 56,000 mostly Inuit people who until now have been largely ignored by the rest of the world.

Why are other countries interested in Greenland?

Climate change is thinning the Arctic ice, promising to create a northwest passage for international trade and reigniting the competition with Russia, China and other countries over access to the region's mineral resources.

"Let us be clear: we are soon entering the Arctic Century, and its most defining feature will be Greenland's meteoric rise, sustained prominence and ubiquitous influence," said Dwayne Menezes, managing director of the Polar Research and Policy Initiative.

"Greenland — located on the crossroads between North America, Europe and Asia, and with enormous resource potential — will only become more strategically important, with all powers great and small seeking to pay court to it. One is quite keen to go a step further and buy it."

The following are some of the factors that are driving U.S. interest in Greenland.

Arctic competition

Following the Cold War, the Arctic was largely an area of international cooperation. But climate change, the hunt for scarce resources and increasing international tensions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine are once again driving competition in the region.

Strategic importance

Greenland sits off the northeastern coast of Canada, with more than two-thirds of its territory lying within the Arctic Circle. That has made it crucial to the defense of North America since World War II, when the U.S. occupied Greenland to ensure that it didn't fall into the hands of Nazi Germany and to protect crucial North Atlantic shipping lanes.

The U.S. has retained bases in Greenland since the war, and the Pituffik Space Base, formerly Thule Air Force Base, supports missile warning, missile defense and space surveillance operations for the U.S. and NATO. Greenland also guards part of what is known as the GIUK (Greenland, Iceland, United Kingdom) Gap, where NATO monitors Russian naval movements in the North Atlantic.

Natural resources

Greenland has large deposits of so-called rare earth minerals that are needed to make everything from computers and smartphones to the batteries, solar and wind technologies that will power the transition away from fossil fuels. The U.S. Geological Survey has also identified potential offshore deposits of oil and natural gas.

Greenlanders are keen to develop the resources, but they have enacted strict rules to protect the environment. There are also questions about the feasibility of extracting Greenland's mineral wealth because of the region's harsh climate.

Climate change

Greenland's retreating ice cap is exposing the country's mineral wealth and melting sea ice is opening up the once-mythical Northwest Passage through the Arctic.

Greenland sits strategically along two potential routes through the Arctic, which would reduce shipping times between the North Atlantic and Pacific and bypass the bottlenecks of the Suez and Panama canals. While the routes aren't likely to be commercially viable for many years, they are attracting attention.

Chinese interest

In 2018, China declared itself a "near-Arctic state" in an effort to gain more influence in the region. China has also announced plans to build a "Polar Silk Road" as part of its global Belt and Road Initiative, which

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has created economic links with countries around the world.

Then-U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo rejected China's move, saying: "Do we want the Arctic Ocean to transform into a new South China Sea, fraught with militarization and competing territorial claims?" A Chinese-backed rare earth mining project in Greenland stalled after the local government banned uranium mining in 2021.

Independence

The legislation that extended self-government to Greenland in 2009 also recognized the country's right to independence under international law. Opinion polls show a majority of Greenlanders favor independence, though they differ on exactly when that should occur. The potential for independence raises questions about outside interference in Greenland that could threaten U.S. interests in the country.

A one-day strike at 13 German airports, including the main hubs, brings most flights to a halt

BERLIN (AP) — A one-day strike by workers at 13 German airports, including the Frankfurt and Munich hubs and all the country's other main destinations, caused the cancelation of most flights on Monday.

The 24-hour walkout, which started at midnight, involves public-sector employees at the airports as well as ground and security staff.

At Frankfurt Airport, 1,054 of the day's 1,116 scheduled takeoffs and landings had been canceled, German news agency dpa reported, citing airport traffic management.

All of Berlin Airport's regular departures and arrivals were canceled, while Hamburg Airport said no departures would be possible. Cologne/Bonn Airport said there was no regular passenger service and Munich Airport advised travelers to expect a "greatly reduced flight schedule."

The ver.di service workers union's strike targeted the Hamburg, Bremen, Hannover, Berlin, Duesseldorf, Dortmund, Cologne/Bonn, Leipzig/Halle, Stuttgart and Munich airports. At the smaller Weeze and Karlsruhe/Baden-Baden airports, only security workers were called out.

The union announced the strike on Friday. But at Hamburg Airport, it added a short-notice walkout on Sunday to the strike on Monday, arguing that it must ensure the measure was effective.

The so-called "warning strike," a common tactic in German wage negotiations, relates to two separate pay disputes: negotiations on a new pay and conditions contract for airport security workers, and a wider dispute over pay for employees of federal and municipal governments.

The latter already has led to walkouts at Cologne/Bonn, Duesseldorf, Hamburg and Munich airports. Pay talks in that dispute are due to resume on Friday, while the next round of talks for airport security workers is expected to start on March 26.

Pope following Vatican's spiritual retreat from afar as he recovers from pneumonia in hospital

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis is participating in the Vatican's weeklong spiritual retreat from a Rome hospital as he continued his recovery on Monday from double pneumonia and looks ahead to the 12th anniversary of his election amid questions about what the future of his papacy might look like.

Francis followed the opening of the retreat by videoconference on Sunday: He could see and hear the Rev. Roberto Pasolini, preacher of the papal household, but the priests, bishops and cardinals in the Vatican auditorium couldn't see or hear him.

Pasolini delivered a meditation on "The hope of eternal life," a theme that was chosen well before Francis was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital on Feb. 14 with a complex lung infection.

The retreat, which is an annual gathering that kicks off the Catholic Church's solemn Lenten season leading to Easter, continues through the week. The Vatican has said Francis would participate "in spiritual communion" with the rest of the hierarchy, from afar.

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In its early update Monday, the Vatican said Francis was resting after a quiet night.

At the time of his hospitalization last month, the 88-year-old pope, who has chronic lung disease and had part of one lung removed as a young man, had 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.

He has now remained in stable condition for over a week, with no fever, respiratory crises and good oxygen levels in his blood for several days, doctors reported.

The doctors said that such stability was in itself a positive thing and showed he was responding well to therapy. But they kept his prognosis as "guarded," meaning that he's not out of danger. Doctors were expected to provide a medical update later Monday.

On Thursday, the Vatican will mark the 12th anniversary of Francis' election, the first with the pope out of sight but still very much in charge. Francis was elected the 266th pope, the first Jesuit pope and first from Latin America, on March 13, 2013 following the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI.

On Sunday, Francis met with Cardinal Pietro Parolin and the chief of staff, Archbishop Edgar Pena Parra, for the third time at the hospital. Such meetings are the routine way the pope governs, and shows Francis is still keeping up with essential business.

While Francis has previously praised Benedict for his courage and humility in resigning, he has indicated more recently that he believes the job of pope is for life and said as recently as last year that he had no plans of stepping down.

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

South Africa's giant playwright Athol Fugard, whose searing works challenged apartheid, dies aged 92

By MARK KENNEDY and GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — Athol Fugard, South Africa's foremost dramatist who explored the pervasiveness of apartheid in such searing works as "The Blood Knot" and "Master Harold'... and the Boys," has died. He was 92.

The South African government confirmed Fugard's death and said the country "has lost one of its greatest literary and theatrical icons, whose work shaped the cultural and social landscape of our nation."

Six of Fugard's plays landed on Broadway, including two productions of "Master Harold'... and the Boys," in 1982 and 2003.

Because Fugard's best-known plays center on the suffering caused by the apartheid policies of South Africa's white-minority government, some among Fugard's audience abroad were surprised to find he was white himself.

"Master Harold'... and the Boys" is a Tony Award-nominated work set in a South African tea shop in 1950. It centers on the relationship between the son of the white owner and two Black servants who have served as surrogate parents. One rainy afternoon, the bonds between the characters are stressed to breaking point when the young man begins to abuse his elders.

"In plain words, just get on with your job," the boy tells one servant. "My mother is right. She's always warning me about allowing you to get too familiar. Well, this time you've gone too far. It's going to stop right now. You're only a servant in here, and don't forget it."

When it opened in Johannesburg in 1983 — at the height of apartheid — in the audience was anti-apartheid activist Desmond Tutu. "I thought it was something for which you don't applaud. The first response is weeping," Tutu, who died in 2021, said after the final curtain. "It's saying something we know, that we've said so often about what this country does to human relations."

"The Road to Mecca," with its three white characters, touches on apartheid of a different sort. It concerns an adventurous artist named Miss Helen, at odds with and cut off from the rigid and unyielding Afrikaners around her. It's her eccentric artwork that severs her from society and makes her the subject

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of a fight for control.

A production opened in San Francisco in 2023, prompting the San Francisco Chronicle's theater critic to note that "its central concern — how to deal with people who are aging and alone — feels ripe for our own moment of declining birth rates and increasing life expectancy amid a fraying social safety net."

Fugard once told an interviewer that the best theater in Africa would come from South Africa because the country's "daily tally of injustice and brutality has forced a maturity of thinking and feeling and an awareness of basic values I do not find equaled anywhere in Africa."

Fugard was born in Middleburg in the semiarid Karoo on June 11, 1932. His father was an English-Irish man whose joy was playing jazz piano. His mother was Afrikaans, descended from South Africa's early Dutch-German settlers, and earned the family's income by running a store.

Fugard said his first trip into Johannesburg's Black enclave of Sophiatown — since destroyed and replaced with a white residential area — was "a definitive event of my life. I first went in there as the result of an accident. I suddenly encountered township life."

This ignited Fugard's longstanding urge to write. He left the University of Cape Town just before he would have graduated in philosophy because "I had a feeling that if I stayed I might be stuck into academia."

Fugard became a target for the apartheid government and his passport was taken away for four years after he directed a Black theater workshop, "The Serpent Players." Five workshop members were imprisoned on Robben Island, where South Africa kept political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela. Fugard and his family endured years of government surveillance; their mail was opened, their phones tapped, and their home subjected to midnight police searches.

He hitchhiked through Africa in 1953 with South African poet Perseus Adams, and ended up working as a sailor, the only white seaman on his ship. Fugard's theater experience was confined to acting in a school play until 1956, when he married actor Sheila Meiring and began concentrating on stage writing. He and Meiring later divorced. He married second wife Paula Fourie in 2016.

He took a job in 1958 as a clerk with a Johannesburg Native Commissioner's Court, where Black people who broke racial laws were sentenced, "one every two minutes."

"We were absolutely broke. I needed a job and I needed information on the pass system," Fugard said. His job included witnessing the caning of lawbreakers. "It was the darkest period of my life."

He got some satisfaction in putting a small wrench in the works, by "shuffling up the charge sheets," delaying proceedings enough for friends of the Black detainees to get them lawyers.

Fugard wrote, directed and acted in his early productions. On the eve of the opening of "A Lesson From Aloes," at Johannesburg's Market Theater, Fugard dismissed one of the three performers and took the role himself.

Later in life, Fugard taught acting, directing and playwriting at the University of California, San Diego. In 2006, the film "Tsotsi," based on his 1961 novel, won international awards, including the Oscar for foreign language film. He won a Tony Award for lifetime achievement in 2011.

More recent plays include "The Train Driver" (2010) and "The Bird Watchers" (2011), which both premiered at the Fugard Theatre in Cape Town. As an actor, he appeared in the films "The Killing Fields" and "Gandhi." In 2014, Fugard returned to the stage as an actor for the first time in 15 years in his own play, "Shadow of the Hummingbird," at the Long Wharf in New Haven, Connecticut.

Iran says it is open to talks about concerns about militarization of its nuclear program

By The Associated Press undefined

Iran said Sunday it would consider negotiations with the United States if the talks were confined to concerns about the militarization of its nuclear program.

In a statement posted on X, the country's U.N. mission said: "If the objective of negotiations is to address concerns vis-à-vis any potential militarization of Iran's nuclear program, such discussions may be

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subject to consideration.”

A day earlier, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei had rejected talks with the U.S., because he said they would be aimed at imposing restrictions on Iran’s missile program and its influence in the region.

Khamenei’s remarks came a day after President Donald Trump acknowledged sending a letter to him seeking a new deal with Tehran to restrain its rapidly advancing nuclear program and replace the nuclear deal he withdrew America from during his first term in office.

Khamenei said U.S. demands would be both military and related to the regional influence of Iran. He said such talks would not solve problems between Iran and the West.

Trump’s overture comes as both Israel and the United States have warned they will never let Iran acquire a nuclear weapon, leading to fears of a military confrontation as Tehran enriches uranium at near weapons-grade levels — something only done by atomic-armed nations.

Tehran has long maintained its program is for peaceful purposes, even as its officials increasingly threaten to pursue the bomb. Tensions are high with the U.S. over its sanctions and with Israel as a shaky ceasefire holds in its war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The Iranian statement Sunday, while allowing for talks on concerns about militarization, stressed that Tehran would not negotiate away what it stresses is its peaceful nuclear program.

“However, should the aim be the dismantlement of Iran’s peaceful nuclear program to claim that what Obama failed to achieve has now been accomplished, such negotiations will never take place,” Iran’s mission said.

Tokyo was filled with charred corpses after US firebombing 80 years ago. Survivors want compensation

By MARI YAMAGUCHI and MAYUKO ONO Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — More than 100,000 people were killed in a single night 80 years ago Monday in the U.S. firebombing of Tokyo, the Japanese capital. The attack, made with conventional bombs, destroyed downtown Tokyo and filled the streets with heaps of charred bodies.

The damage was comparable to the atomic bombings a few months later in August 1945, but unlike those attacks, the Japanese government has not provided aid to victims and the events of that day have largely been ignored or forgotten.

Elderly survivors are making a last-ditch effort to tell their stories and push for financial assistance and recognition. Some are speaking out for the first time, trying to tell a younger generation about their lessons.

Shizuyo Takeuchi, 94, says her mission is to keep telling the history she witnessed at 14, speaking out on behalf of those who died.

Red skies, charred bodies

On the night of March 10, 1945, hundreds of B-29s raided Tokyo, dumping cluster bombs with napalm specially designed with sticky oil to destroy traditional Japanese-style wood and paper homes in the crowded “shitamachi” downtown neighborhoods.

Takeuchi and her parents had lost their own home in an earlier firebombing in February and were taking shelter at a relative’s riverside home. Her father insisted on crossing the river in the opposite direction from where the crowds were headed, a decision that saved the family. Takeuchi remembers walking through the night beneath a red sky. Orange sunsets and sirens still make her uncomfortable.

By the next morning, everything had burned. Two blackened figures caught her eyes. Taking a closer look, she realized one was a woman and what looked like a lump of coal at her side was her baby. “I was terribly shocked. ... I felt sorry for them,” she said. “But after seeing so many others I was emotionless in the end.”

Many of those who didn’t burn to death quickly jumped into the Sumida River and were crushed or drowned.

More than 105,000 people were estimated to have died that night. A million others became homeless. The death toll exceeds those killed in the Aug. 9, 1945, atomic bombing of Nagasaki.

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But the Tokyo firebombing has been largely eclipsed by the two atomic bombings. And firebombings on dozens of other Japanese cities have received even less attention.

The bombing came after the collapse of Japanese air and naval defenses following the U.S. capture of a string of former Japanese strongholds in the Pacific that allowed B-29 Superfortress bombers to easily hit Japan's main islands. There was growing frustration in the United States at the length of the war and past Japanese military atrocities, such as the Bataan Death March.

Recording survivors' voices

Ai Saotome has a house full of notes, photos and other material her father left behind when he died at age 90 in 2022. Her father, Katsumoto Saotome, was an award-winning writer and a Tokyo firebombing survivor. He gathered accounts of his peers to raise awareness of the civilian deaths and the importance of peace.

Saotome says the sense of urgency that her father and other survivors felt is not shared among younger generations.

Though her father published books on the Tokyo firebombing and its victims, going through his raw material gave her new perspectives and an awareness of Japan's aggression during the war.

She is digitalizing the material at the Center of the Tokyo Raids and War Damage, a museum her father opened in 2002 after collecting records and artifacts about the attack.

"Our generation doesn't know much about (the survivors') experience, but at least we can hear their stories and record their voices," she said. "That's the responsibility of our generation."

"In about 10 years, when we have a world where nobody remembers anything (about this), I hope these documents and records can help," Saotome says.

Demands for financial help

Postwar governments have provided 60 trillion yen (\$405 billion) in welfare support for military veterans and bereaved families, and medical support for survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Civilian victims of the U.S. firebombings received nothing.

A group of survivors who want government recognition of their suffering and financial help met earlier this month, renewing their demands.

No government agency handles civilian survivors or keeps their records. Japanese courts rejected their compensation demands of 11 million yen (\$74,300) each, saying citizens were supposed to endure suffering in emergencies like war. A group of lawmakers in 2020 compiled a draft proposal of a half million-yen (\$3,380) one-time payment, but the plan has stalled due to opposition from some ruling party members.

"This year will be our last chance," Yumi Yoshida, who lost her parents and sister in the bombing, said at a meeting, referring to the 80th anniversary of Japan's WWII defeat.

Burnt skin and screams

On March 10, 1945, Reiko Muto, a former nurse, was on her bed still wearing her uniform and shoes. Muto leapt up when she heard air raid sirens and rushed to the pediatric department where she was a student nurse. With elevators stopped because of the raid, she went up and down a dimly lit stairwell carrying infants to a basement gym for shelter.

Soon, truckloads of people started to arrive. They were taken to the basement and lined up "like tuna fish at a market." Many had serious burns and were crying and begging for water. The screaming and the smell of burned skin stayed with her for a long time.

Comforting them was the best she could do because of a shortage of medical supplies.

When the war ended five months later, on Aug. 15, she immediately thought: No more firebombing meant that she could leave the lights on. She finished her studies and worked as a nurse to help children and teenagers.

"What we went through should never be repeated," she says.

The cute whiskers are back on. Rare Mediterranean monk seals are cared for in a Greek rehab center

By ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Panagis hauls himself out of the pool at a rehabilitation center in Greece and scurries over for a delectable lunch: whole mackerel. It's been about three months since the orphaned seal pup was found struggling in the coastal waters of Cyprus. Soon, he'll be well enough to go home.

Panagis is one of dozens of Mediterranean monk seals, or *Monachus monachus*, that have been nursed back to health by Greece's MOM, a charity dedicated to the care and protection of the rare marine mammal whose population had dwindled so dramatically that at one point it faced extinction.

Thanks to conservation efforts, the seals with the big, round eyes and prominent whiskers are now making a remarkable comeback. Nearly half of their estimated global population of 800 live in Greek waters, where the extensive coastline offers an abundance of sea caves that provide shelter for females to rear their young.

From near extinction to recovery

Sleek and remarkably fast in the water, the monk seal is a skillful hunter and can consume up to 3 kilograms (6 pounds) of fish, octopus and squid a day. But it's not averse to a ready meal, and can rip through fishing nets to steal fish — which led fishermen to view them as pests.

For decades, they were hunted, contributing to a major population decline between the 1960s and 1980s that led the International Union for Conservation of Nature, or IUCN, to list them as critically endangered.

When conservation efforts began in the 1980s, combined with outreach programs to educate the public — and fishermen — “society gradually began to change ... and the population began to recover,” said Panagiotis Dendrinis.

Dendrinis, a marine biologist and coordinator of the Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Monk Seal — or MOM — that has pioneered the *Monachus monachus* conservation program, says the monk seal is the only seal species in the Mediterranean Sea and also “one of the rarest species of seal and marine mammal in the world.”

“To protect an animal like the Mediterranean monk seal in its natural environment, you essentially have to protect the entire marine ecosystem,” he said.

Conservation efforts have paid off, and in recent years, the species climbed down a notch on the IUCN's Red List of threatened species to “endangered.” About a year ago improved one step further, to “vulnerable.”

A unique seal rehab

Usually contacted by members of the public who find an animal in distress, MOM specialists tend to adult seals on location where possible, and transport young seals to the organization's rehabilitation center housed in the grounds of Athens zoo, on the outskirts of the Greek capital.

There, the young mammals are looked after by veterinarians, fed a special diet to provide them with the best nutrition and hone their swimming skills in a pool.

Their carers give them names — often after the people who found them — but make sure contact with humans is kept to a minimum to prepare the animals for their return into the wild.

The young seals typically stay in the rehab center for several months, until they've put on enough weight and their natural hunting instinct kicks in, allowing them to fend for themselves. They are then tagged so they can be tracked, and re-introduced into the wild.

MOM, the only center of its kind in the region, has cared for about 40 seals from far and wide, both on location and in its facilities, Dendrinis said.

“This year, we had a really pleasant surprise,” he said. A female seal that had been treated and released four years ago was spotted nursing a pup.

Planes, boats and cars to the rescue

Panagis was found in Cyprus, near where the body of his mother had been found a few days earlier. Alerted by locals, the organization arranged for the seal to be flown to Athens.

“Transportation is carried out with whatever is available,” said veterinary assistant Nikitas Vogiatzis,

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shortly after feeding Panagis. "Either by plane, or by boat, or even by taxi. "Konstantina came in a taxi, Panagis by plane, Renos came on a boat," he said, listing MOM's most recent wards.

Weighing just under 15 kilograms (33 pounds) when he arrived, the now 3-month-old seal has reached over 40 kilograms (88 pounds). Panagis is nearly ready for his return trip home, which MOM experts hope will happen in May.

Back into the wild

Renos — short for Renos-Pantelis — was found in November in the small Aegean island of Anafi by a nurse and a military conscript whom he was named after.

The seal pup was shipped to MOM's facility. He got medical treatment and was put on a special diet until he was old enough to move on to solid fish — the mackerel that Panagis is so fond of.

He recovered and on a cold, sunny February day, it was his turn to head back into the wild. MOM personnel loaded him into a crate and whisked him by speedboat to the uninhabited islet of Gyaros, the closest marine protected area to Athens.

The release location is chosen "based on there being enough food, and there being no disturbance by people, which is very important," said Vogiatzis, the veterinary assistant.

The crate is placed near the water, he said. Then, "you open the door, you say a prayer and you say: 'So long!'"

Renos' crate was deposited on a beach and the door opened. The young seal sniffed the air timidly, and waited. Slowly, he inched his way out of the crate, then picked up speed as he belly-hauled his way down the beach, splashed into the sea and was gone.

Meet the federal worker who went rogue: 'I hope that it lights a fire under people'

By CLAIRE SAVAGE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — To billionaire Elon Musk and his cost-cutting team at the Department of Government Efficiency, Karen Ortiz may just be one of many faceless bureaucrats. But to some of her colleagues, she is giving a voice to those who feel they can't speak out.

Ortiz is an administrative judge at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission -- the federal agency in charge of enforcing U.S. workplace anti-discrimination laws that has undergone tumultuous change since President Donald Trump took office. Like millions of other federal employees, Ortiz opened an ominous email on Jan. 28 titled "Fork in the Road" giving them the option to resign from their positions as part of the government's cost-cutting measures directed by Trump and carried out by DOGE under Musk, an unelected official.

Her alarm grew when her supervisor directed administrative judges in her New York district office to pause all their current LGBTQ+ cases and send them to Washington for further review in order to comply with Trump's executive order declaring that the government would recognize only two "immutable" sexes — male and female.

Ortiz decried management's lack of action in response to the directive, which she said was antithetical to the EEOC's mission, and called upon some 185 colleagues in an email to "resist" complying with "illegal mandates." But that email was "mysteriously" deleted, she said.

The next day, after yet another frustrating "Fork in the Road" update, Ortiz decided to go big, emailing the EEOC's acting chair Andrea Lucas directly and copying more than 1,000 colleagues with the subject line, "A Spoon is Better than a Fork." In it, Ortiz questioned Lucas's fitness to serve as acting chair, "much less hold a license to practice law."

"I know I take a great personal risk in sending out this message. But, at the end of the day, my actions align with what the EEOC was charged with doing under the law," Ortiz wrote. "I will not compromise my ethics and my duty to uphold the law. I will not cower to bullying and intimidation."

Ortiz is just one person, but her email represents a larger pushback against the Trump administration's

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sweeping changes to federal agencies amid an environment of confusion, anger and chaos. It is also Ortiz's way of taking a stand against the leadership of a civil rights agency that last month moved to dismiss seven of its own cases representing transgender workers, marking a major departure from its prior interpretation of the law.

Right after sending her mass email, Ortiz said she received a few supportive responses from colleagues -- and one calling her unprofessional. Within an hour, though, the message disappeared and she lost her ability to send any further emails.

But it still made it onto the internet. The email was recirculated on Bluesky and it received more than 10,000 "upvotes" on Reddit after someone posted it with the comment, "Wow I wish I had that courage."

"AN AMERICAN HERO," one Reddit user deemed Ortiz, a sentiment that was seconded by more than 2,000 upvoters. "Who is this freedom fighter bringing on the fire?" wrote another.

The EEOC did not feel the same way. The agency revoked her email privileges for about a week and issued her a written reprimand for "discourteous conduct."

Contacted by The AP, a spokesperson for the EEOC said: "We will refrain from commenting on internal communications and personnel matters. However, we would note that the agency has a long-standing policy prohibiting unauthorized all-employee emails, and all employees were reminded of that policy recently."

A month later, Ortiz has no regrets.

"It was not really planned out, it was just from the heart," the 53-year-old told The Associated Press in an interview, adding that partisan politics have nothing to do with her objections and that the public deserves the EEOC's protection, including transgender workers. "This is how I feel and I'm not pulling any punches. And I will stand by what I wrote every day of the week, all day on Sunday."

Ortiz said she never intended for her email to go beyond the EEOC, describing it as a "love letter" to her colleagues. But, she added, "I hope that it lights a fire under people."

Ortiz said she has received "a ton" of support privately in the month since sending her email, including a thank-you letter from a California retiree telling her to "keep the faith." Open support among her EEOC colleagues beyond Reddit and Bluesky, however, has proven more elusive.

"I think people are just really scared," she said.

William Resh, a University of Southern California Sol Price School of Public Policy professor who studies how administrative structure and political environments affect civil servants, weighed in on why federal workers may choose to say nothing even if they feel their mission is being undermined.

"We can talk pie in the sky, mission orientation and all these other things. But at the end of the day, people have a paycheck to bring home, and food to put on a table and a rent to pay," Resh said.

The more immediate danger, he said, is the threat to one's livelihood, or inviting a manager's ire.

"And so then that's where you get this kind of muted response on behalf of federal employees, that you don't see a lot of people speaking out within these positions because they don't want to lose their job," Resh said. "Who would?"

Richard LeClear, a U.S. Air Force veteran and EEOC staffer who is retiring early at 64 to avoid serving under the Trump administration, said Ortiz's email was "spot on," but added that other colleagues who agreed with her may fear speaking out themselves.

"Retaliation is a very real thing," LeClear said.

Ortiz, who has been a federal employee for 14 years and at the EEOC for six, said she isn't naive about the potential fallout. She has hired attorneys, and maintains that her actions are protected whistleblower activity. As of Friday, she still had a job but she is not a lifetime appointee and is aware that her health care, pension and source of income could all be at risk.

Ortiz is nonetheless steadfast: "If they fire me, I'll find another avenue to do this kind of work, and I'll be okay. They will have to physically march me out of the office."

Many of Ortiz's colleagues have children to support and protect, which puts them in a more difficult position than her to speak out, Ortiz acknowledged. She said her legal education and American citizenship also put her in a position to be able to make change.

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Her parents, who came to the United States from Puerto Rico in the 1950s with limited English skills, ingrained in her the value of standing up for others. Their firsthand experience with the Civil Rights Movement, and her own experience growing up in mostly white spaces in Garden City on Long Island, primed Ortiz to defend herself and others.

"It's in my DNA," she said. "I will use every shred of privilege that I have to lean into this."

Ortiz received her undergraduate degree at Columbia University, and her law degree at Fordham University. She knew she wanted to become a judge ever since her high school mock trial as a Supreme Court justice.

Civil rights has been a throughline in her career, and Ortiz said she was "super excited" when she landed her job at the EEOC.

"This is how I wanted to finish up my career," she said. "We'll see if that happens."

Ukrainian war veteran amputees learn adaptive skiing in Oregon

By CLAIRE RUSH and JENNY KANE Associated Press

HOODOO SKI AREA, Ore. (AP) — Ukrainian war veteran Oleksandr Shvachka lost his left leg to Russian tank fire outside Kyiv. Three years on, the latest step in his physical and mental rehabilitation recently unfolded under a brilliant blue sky on a snow-covered mountain more than 5,000 miles (8,047 kilometers) away.

Shvachka, 38, was one of five Ukrainian veterans who came to the Pacific Northwest for ski lessons this month with Oregon Adaptive Sports, an organization working to make sports more accessible to people with disabilities.

On a recent day, he listened attentively to an instructor before launching himself down a slope at Hoodoo Ski Area in central Oregon, leaning on two hand-held "outriggers," which resemble forearm crutches with short skis at the ends, for turns and balance as he picked up speed.

Shvachka was wounded in the village of Makariv outside the capital of Kyiv in March 2022, shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine the previous month. He said skiing on the mountain was an "amazing emotion."

"It's a new experience, and I'm so happy," he said.

The Oregon city of Corvallis has been sister cities with Uzhhorod in western Ukraine for over 30 years. Its sister city association is hosting the veterans, some of whom have been recovering in Uzhhorod's rehabilitation hospital, as well as two Ukrainian ski coaches, association co-founder Carol Paulson said.

The ski program's goal is to improve the veterans' physical and mental health and teach the Ukrainian ski coaches how to use adaptive ski equipment so they can share that knowledge with the war-torn country's thousands of amputees. The group had four days of lessons over the course of two weeks.

"It reminds them that they can participate fully in life," Paulson said. "The best thing is the feeling that they get not only of independence, but just of well-being."

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Paulson taught adaptive skiing to Vietnam War veterans who had lost limbs. She saw how being active on the mountain improved their mood and wanted to offer the same experience to Ukrainian war veterans.

"The peacefulness of skiing compared to other sports, too, is special," she said. "It's quiet. You have the pristine snow and the breeze of the wind."

For Shvachka, adaptive sports have been key in his physical and mental rehabilitation, while the other veterans provide motivation, he said.

In 2023, with his prosthetic leg, Shvachka ran a 10K race organized by the U.S. Marine Corps in Washington, D.C., and competed with other Ukrainian veteran amputees in Arnold Classic Europe, an offshoot of a fitness and body-building competition founded by Arnold Schwarzenegger.

In that multi-sport event, a group of eight veterans used ropes to pull four semitruck cabs weighing 35 tons (31.7 metric tons) over 65 feet (20 meters) in a little more than 30 seconds, according to the event's Instagram page, which described it as a strongman world record.

Pat Addabbo, executive director of Oregon Adaptive Sports, said the ski lessons highlight the transfor-

mative power of sport.

"What you're seeing here today is a great example of that — people from across the world, coming to our little ski area here in Oregon, to learn these life-changing skills that they hopefully can take home with them and teach others," Addabbo said.

The Ukrainian veterans and ski instructors will take outriggers with them back to Ukraine so they can start teaching three-track skiing using one full-size ski and two outriggers to others who have lost limbs.

"I think we are starting a new era of our war veteran rehabilitation program," said Kristian Minai, one of the Ukrainian instructors.

Minai also coaches Ukraine's national deaf ski team and is working on developing a national Paralympics ski team.

"Maybe, some day, we will see them from the podium in the Paralympic Games," he added with a smile.

Drawing huge crowds, Bernie Sanders steps into leadership of the anti-Trump resistance

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

WARREN, Mich. (AP) — Bernie Sanders is standing alone on the back of a pickup truck shouting into a bullhorn.

He's facing several hundred ecstatic voters huddled outside a suburban Detroit high school — the group that did not fit inside the high school's gym or two overflow rooms. The crowd screams in delight when he tells them that a combined total of 9,000 people had shown up for the rally.

"What all of this tells me, is not just in Michigan or in Vermont, the people of this country will not allow us to move toward oligarchy. They will not allow Trump to take us into authoritarianism," Sanders yelled. "We're prepared to fight. And we're going to win."

At 83 years old, Sanders is not running for president again. But the stooped and silver-haired democratic socialist has emerged as a leader of the resistance to Donald Trump's second presidency. In tearing into Trump's seizure of power and warning about the consequences of firing tens of thousands of government workers, Sanders is bucking the wishes of those who want Democrats to focus on the price of eggs or "roll over and play dead."

For now, at least, Sanders stands alone as the only elected progressive willing to mount a national campaign to harness the fear and anger of the sprawling anti-Trump movement.

He drew a crowd of 4,000 in Kenosha, Wisconsin, on Friday night. He faced another 2,600 or so the next morning a few hours away in Altoona, Wisconsin, a town of less than 10,000 residents. And his crowd of 9,000 in suburban Detroit exceeded his own team's expectations. By design, each stop was in a swing U.S. House district represented by a Republican.

Sanders, who was just elected to his fourth Senate term from Vermont, conceded that this is not the role he expected to play at this stage of his career.

In fact, his team intentionally waited in the early weeks of the Trump presidency to launch what they are now calling his "stop oligarchy tour" to see if a high-profile Democrat would fill the leadership void. Instead, Sanders — who is not a Democrat himself despite allying with Senate Democrats and running twice for the party's presidential nomination — has people wondering if he's considering another White House bid.

"This is like presidential campaign rallies, isn't it? But I'm not running for president, and this is not a campaign," Sanders told The Associated Press. "You gotta do what you gotta do. The country's in trouble and I want to play my role."

The divided Democratic resistance

Since losing the White House, Democrats across Washington have struggled to coalesce behind a consistent message or messenger to stop Trump's aggressive moves to slash the government workforce, weaken federal oversight and empower tech titan Elon Musk to execute his vision.

There has been no centralized movement to organize the anti-Trump resistance.

"You look around — who else is doing it? No one," Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., said of Sand-

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ers' efforts. "My hope is that the dam will break in terms of Democrats going on the offense ... We need to take the argument directly to the people."

Ocasio-Cortez, a longtime Sanders ally, said she would join him on the road in the coming weeks. She's also planning solo appearances in Republican-held congressional districts in Pennsylvania and New York — and perhaps others in places where Republicans have declined to hold in-person town halls where they might face protests.

"It's not about whether Bernie should or shouldn't be doing this. It's about that we all should," she said. "But he is unique in this country, and so long as we are blessed to have that capacity on our side, I think we should be thankful for it."

Beyond Sanders' tour, angry voters have so far relied on grassroots groups like Indivisible to organize a series of local protests. They have been effective in pressuring Trump's allies in some cases. A number of House Republicans facing angry questions have criticized Musk or questioned the cuts being carried out at his allies' behest.

Indivisible co-founder Ezra Levin, who has been critical of many Democratic leaders, praised Sanders for stepping up.

"I wish more Democrats were traveling the country, including to red states, to rally the the majority against Musk and Project 2025," Levin said. "Sure as hell beats (House Democratic leader Hakeem) Jeffries traveling the country for his children's book tour during a constitutional crisis."

During last month's congressional recess, Jeffries made two appearances to promote a children's book about democracy. He has also traveled to support House Democrats. This past weekend, he was in Selma, Alabama, to mark the 60th anniversary of Bloody Sunday.

The truth is that few, if any, Democratic leaders have the capacity to draw such crowds on short notice or organize the related logistics on a national scale. The party's nascent class of 2028 presidential prospects, a group that includes California Gov. Gavin Newsom, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, and Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro, have limited national profiles and they have been reluctant to step too far into the national spotlight so far.

Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, among the more outspoken Trump critics in Congress, said that Democrats must be better organized.

"People are desperate to be plugged into action right now. People see the threat. They are anxious and angry and motivated and they want to be sent in a direction to help," he said.

Murphy acknowledged that Sanders still has plenty of detractors within the Democratic Party who view him and his progressive policy ideas — replacing private and job-based health insurance with a government-funded "Medicare for All" plan, free public college, and the "Green New Deal" on climate policy — as too radical.

Indeed, it was just five years ago when Democrats coalesced around Joe Biden to effectively block Sanders from winning the party's 2020 presidential nomination.

"There still are a lot of folks who view Bernie as a danger to the party," Murphy said, "whereas I see his message as the core of what we need to build on."

Sanders was a staunch supporter of Biden over the last four years but criticized the Democratic Party in the aftermath of Kamala Harris' loss last fall, declaring that Trump's victory was possible only because Democrats had "abandoned" the working class.

United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain, who introduced Sanders in Michigan, said more Democrats need to "follow his lead to focus on working-class people and working-class issues."

"They've got to take a hard look in the mirror, in my opinion, and decide who the hell they want to represent," Fain said of Democrats. "We've been clear as a union, if they aren't looking out for working-class people, we're not going to be there for them."

The voters speak

The voters who packed venues across Wisconsin and Michigan over the weekend composed a diverse group, including some who did not support Sanders' past presidential campaigns. Most said that Demo-

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cratic leaders have not done enough to stop Trump.

"I'm here because I'm afraid for our country. The last six weeks have been horrible," said Diana Schack, a 72-year-old retired lawyer who attended her first Sanders rally on Saturday. "I am becoming a more avid Bernie fan, especially in light of the work he's doing traveling around the country. These are not normal times."

In Kenosha the night before, Amber Schulz, a 50-year-old medical worker, demanded that her party "step up and do something."

"Bernie is the only politician I trust," she said.

Tony Gonzales, 56, an independent from Pleasant Prairie, Wisconsin, said he's worried that Trump will "dismantle historic American standards" and try to stay in office beyond this term. The Constitution bars presidents from serving more than two terms, even as Trump has suggested he deserves a third.

"It's a dangerous time right now," Gonzales said. "What Bernie has to say — and the turnout — is important. His voice is still being heard."

Sanders delivered the same fiery populist message over the weekend that he has for decades, seizing on the nation's economic inequality to call for free health care, free public higher education and stronger social safety net programs. Sanders was especially focused on the team of billionaires Trump has appointed to serve as leaders in his administration, including Musk and a half dozen others.

"They want to dismantle the federal government and cut programs that working people desperately need," Sanders warned.

"Yes, the oligarchs are enormously powerful. They have endless amounts of money. They control our economy. They own much of the media, and they have enormous influence over our political system," he continued. "But from the bottom of my heart, I believe that if we stand together, we can beat them."

It's unclear how long that Sanders, an octogenarian who was hospitalized for a heart condition during his 2020 campaign, will continue in this role. A spokesperson said Sanders hasn't had any health issues since the 2019 episode.

He is not expected to slow down anytime soon. Sanders is leaning on his 2020 presidential campaign manager, Faiz Shakir, to organize his stops, backed by a handful of former presidential campaign staffers working on a contract basis.

Shakir, who lost his bid to become the new chair of the Democratic National Committee, acknowledged strategic differences within the party about how best to combat Trump.

Last month, veteran political strategist James Carville penned an opinion piece calling for Democrats to "roll over and play dead," betting that Trump and his party would ultimately suffer a political backlash from voters for going too far.

"One theory is you can play dead; you can strategically retreat," Shakir said. "Or, you play alive, and you go out to people and you talk to them with conviction and integrity."

Immigration agents arrest Palestinian activist who helped lead Columbia University protests

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Federal immigration authorities arrested a Palestinian activist Saturday who played a prominent role in Columbia University's protests against Israel, a significant escalation in the Trump administration's pledge to detain and deport student activists.

Mahmoud Khalil, a graduate student at Columbia until this past December, was inside his university-owned apartment Saturday night when several Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents entered and took him into custody, his attorney, Amy Greer, told The Associated Press.

Greer said she spoke by phone with one of the ICE agents during the arrest, who said they were acting on State Department orders to revoke Khalil's student visa. Informed by the attorney that Khalil was in the United States as a permanent resident with a green card, the agent said they were revoking that instead, according to the lawyer.

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A spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security, Tricia McLaughlin, confirmed Khalil's arrest in a statement Sunday, describing it as being "in support of President Trump's executive orders prohibiting anti-Semitism."

Khalil's arrest is the first publicly known deportation effort under Trump's promised crackdown on students who joined protests against the war in Gaza that swept college campuses last spring. The administration has claimed participants forfeited their rights to remain in the country by supporting Hamas.

McLaughlin signaled the arrest was directly connected to Khalil's role in the protests, alleging he "led activities aligned to Hamas, a designated terrorist organization."

As ICE agents arrived at Khalil's Manhattan residence Saturday night, they also threatened to arrest Khalil's wife, an American citizen who is eight months pregnant, Greer said.

Khalil's attorney said they were initially informed that he was being held at an immigration detention facility in Elizabeth, New Jersey. But when his wife tried to visit Sunday, she learned he was not there. Greer said she still did not know Khalil's whereabouts as of Sunday night.

"We have not been able to get any more details about why he is being detained," Greer told the AP. "This is a clear escalation. The administration is following through on its threats."

A Columbia University spokesperson said law enforcement agents must produce a warrant before entering university property, but declined to say if the school had received one ahead of Khalil's arrest. The spokesperson declined to comment on Khalil's detention.

In a message shared on X Sunday evening, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the administration "will be revoking the visas and/or green cards of Hamas supporters in America so they can be deported."

The Department of Homeland Security can initiate deportation proceedings against green card holders for a broad range of alleged criminal activity, including supporting a terror group. But the detention of a legal permanent resident who has not been charged with a crime marked an extraordinary move with an uncertain legal foundation, according to immigration experts.

"This has the appearance of a retaliatory action against someone who expressed an opinion the Trump administration didn't like," said Camille Mackler, founder of Immigrant ARC, a coalition of legal service providers in New York.

Khalil, who received his master's degree from Columbia's school of international affairs last semester, served as a negotiator for students as they bargained with university officials over an end to the tent encampment erected on campus last spring.

The role made him one of the most visible activists in support of the movement, prompting calls from pro-Israel activists in recent weeks for the Trump administration to begin deportation proceedings against him.

Khalil was also among those under investigation by a new Columbia University office that has brought disciplinary charges against dozens of students for their pro-Palestinian activism, according to records shared with the AP.

The investigations come as the Trump administration has followed through on its threat to cut hundreds of millions of dollars in funding to Columbia because of what the government describes as the Ivy League school's failure to squelch antisemitism on campus.

The university's allegations against Khalil focused on his involvement in the Columbia University Apartheid Divest group. He faced sanctions for potentially helping to organize an "unauthorized marching event" in which participants glorified Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack and playing a "substantial role" in the circulation of social media posts criticizing Zionism, among other acts of alleged discrimination.

"I have around 13 allegations against me, most of them are social media posts that I had nothing to do with," Khalil told the AP last week.

"They just want to show Congress and right-wing politicians that they're doing something, regardless of the stakes for students," he added. "It's mainly an office to chill pro-Palestine speech."

Syria's worst violence in months reopens wounds of the civil war

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

An ambush on a Syrian security patrol by gunmen loyal to ousted leader Bashar Assad escalated into clashes that a war monitor estimates have killed more than 1,000 people over four days.

The attack Thursday near the port city of Latakia reopened the wounds of the country's 13-year civil war and sparked the worst violence Syria has seen since December, when insurgents led by the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, overthrew Assad.

The counteroffensive against the Assad loyalists in the largely Alawite coastal region brought havoc to several cities and towns. Rights groups reported dozens of revenge killings resulting from Sunni militants targeting the minority Islamic sect, regardless of whether they were involved in the insurgency.

Here's a look at the latest violence in the war-wracked country:

What started the violence?

Tensions have been on the rise since Assad's downfall following sectarian attacks against Alawites, who ruled Syria for over 50 years under the Assad dynasty. The assaults continued despite promises from Syria's interim president that the country's new leaders will carve out a political future for Syria that includes and represents all its communities.

In their ambush, the pro-Assad Alawite gunmen overwhelmed government security forces and later took control of Qardaha, Assad's hometown, as Damascus scrambled to bring in reinforcements.

Defense Ministry spokesperson Col. Hassan Abdel-Ghani said Sunday that security forces have restored control of the region and will continue pursuing leaders of the galvanized insurgency.

But despite authorities calling for an end to the sectarian incitement, the clashes turned deadly, and many civilians were killed.

Who are the dead?

Most of the dead are apparently members of the Alawite community, who live largely in the country's coastal province, including in the cities of Latakia and Tartous. Rights groups estimate that hundreds of civilians were killed.

The Alawite sect is an offshoot of Shia Islam, and it once formed the core constituency of Assad's government in the Sunni-majority country.

Opponents of Assad saw Syria under the family's rule as granting privileges to the Alawite community. As the civil war intensified, militant groups emerged across the country and treated Alawites as affiliates of Assad and his key military allies, Russia and Iran.

Syria's new interim government is under Sunni Islamist rule. Interim President Ahmad Al-Sharaa, a former HTS leader, has promised that the country will transition to a system that includes Syria's mosaic of religious and ethnic groups under fair elections, but skeptics question whether that will actually happen.

Little is currently known about the Alawite insurgency, which is composed of remnants of Assad's web of military and intelligence branches, and who their foreign backers might be.

Why were the Alawites targeted?

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 745 civilians killed, mostly in shootings. In addition, 125 members of government security forces and 148 militants with armed groups affiliated with Assad were killed. Electricity and drinking water were cut off in large areas around Latakia, the group added.

Meanwhile, the Syria Campaign and the Syrian Network for Human Rights, which both advocated against Assad after the civil war began in 2011, said Saturday that both security forces and pro-Assad gunmen were "carrying out mass executions and systematic killings."

The SNHR estimated that 100 members of the government's security forces were killed Thursday, while 125 of an estimated 140 civilians were slain over the weekend in "suspected revenge killings."

The Associated Press could not verify those numbers, and conflicting death figures during attacks in Syria over the years have not been uncommon. Two residents in the coastal region said that many homes from Alawite families were looted and set on fire. They spoke from their hideouts on condition of anonymity, fearing for their lives.

Damascus blamed "individual actions" for the widespread violence against civilians and said government security forces were responding to the gunmen loyal to the former government.

Can Damascus restore calm after the clashes?

Damascus has struggled to reconcile with skeptics of its Islamist government, as well as with Kurdish-led authorities in the northeast and the Druze minority in the south. Al-Sharaa has lobbied to convince the United States and Europe to lift sanctions to pave the way for economic recovery to pull millions of Syrians out of poverty and make the country viable again.

Washington and Europe are concerned that lifting sanctions before Syria transitions into an inclusive political system could pave the way for another chapter of autocratic rule.

Al-Sharaa appealed to Syrians and the international community in an address over the weekend, calling for accountability for anyone who harms civilians and mistreats prisoners. Such human rights violations were rampant under Assad. Blaming remnants of the former government for the outbreak of violence, and certain foreign parties supporting them, Al-Sharaa also formed a committee composed mostly of judges to investigate the violence.

In a statement issued Sunday, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio urged Syrian authorities to "hold the perpetrators of these massacres" accountable. Rubio said the U.S. "stands with Syria's religious and ethnic minorities, including its Christian, Druze, Alawite, and Kurdish communities."

They were forced to scam others worldwide. Now thousands are detained on the Myanmar border

By HUIZHONG WU, JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI and MARTHA MENDOZA Associated Press

MAE SOT, Thailand (AP) — Thousands of sick, exhausted and terrified young men and women, from countries all over the world squat in rows, packed shoulder to shoulder, surgical masks covering their mouths and eyes.

Their nightmare was supposed to be over.

Last month, a dramatic and highly publicized operation by Thai, Chinese and Myanmar authorities led to the release of more than 7,000 people from locked compounds in Myanmar where they were forced to trick Americans and others out of their life savings. But survivors have found themselves trapped once again, this time in overcrowded facilities with no medical care, limited food and no idea when they'll be sent home.

One young man from India said about 800 people were being held in the same facility as him, sharing 10 dirty toilets. He said many of the people there were feverish and coughing. Like all former enslaved scammers who talked to The Associated Press, he spoke on condition of anonymity out of concern for his safety.

"If we die here with health issues, who is responsible for that?" he asked.

The armed groups who are holding the survivors, as well as Thai officials across the border, say they are awaiting action from the detainees' home governments.

It's one of the largest potential rescues of forced laborers in modern history, but advocates say the first major effort to crack down on the cyber scam industry has turned into a growing humanitarian crisis.

The people released are just a small fraction of what could be 300,000 people working in similar scam operations across the region, according to an estimate from the United States Institute of Peace. Human rights groups and analysts add that the networks that run these illegal scams will continue to operate unless much broader action is taken against them.

A high-profile crackdown

The trapped people, some of whom are highly educated and fluent in English, were initially lured to Thailand with promises of lucrative office jobs, only to find themselves locked in buildings where they describe being forced to sit at computers up to 16 hours a day running scams. Refusing to work could bring beatings, starvation and electric shocks.

"Your passport is confiscated, you cannot go outside and everything is like hell, a living hell," a trapped

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Pakistani man told The Associated Press.

Cyber scams run from compounds have flourished during the pandemic, targeting people around the world. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes estimates that between \$18 billion and \$37 billion was lost in Asia alone in 2023, with minimal government action against the criminal industry's spread.

Beijing began pushing the region's governments to crack down this year after a young Chinese actor was trafficked to Myanmar by people who promised him an acting job in Thailand. His girlfriend spearheaded a viral social media campaign that led to his release.

Following that rescue, a senior Chinese government official visited Thailand and Myanmar demanding an end to the scams. In response, Thailand cut electricity, internet and gas supplies to five border towns in Myanmar.

Shortly after, the ethnic militia groups that rule this part of Myanmar — the Kayin Border Guard Force and the Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army — asked some of the trapped scammers if they wanted to leave, and then escorted them out of their compounds.

From forced labor to detention

As the number of people released grew into the thousands, formerly enslaved scammers found themselves caught in indefinite detention just across a narrow, slow-moving river's width from freedom.

Most are being held either in army camps controlled by the Kayin Border Guard Force, or repurposed scam compounds, where many have been since early February.

For weeks, men and women have shared unsanitary conditions, sleeping on the floor and eating what their captors provide. At one point, the Border Guard Force said that over 7,000 people were crammed into these facilities, as China began busing citizens across the border for flights.

Exclusive photos obtained by AP underscore the detainees' desperation: Surgical masks, often two per face, cover their eyes, noses and mouths as they huddle under the watchful eyes of armed guards.

"It felt like a blessing that we came out of that trap, but the actual thing is that every person just wants to go back home," said another Indian man, 24, speaking softly on a contraband phone from inside a makeshift detention center. He asked to not publish his name out of concern for his safety and because the militias guarding them had confiscated their phones.

Last week, fights broke out between Chinese citizens waiting to go home and the security forces guarding them, two detainees told the AP.

An unconfirmed list provided by authorities in Myanmar says they're holding citizens from 29 countries including Philippines, Kenya and the Czech Republic.

Waiting for a \$600 plane ticket

Authorities in Thailand say they cannot allow foreigners to cross the border from Myanmar unless they can be sent home immediately, leaving many to wait for help from embassies that has been long in coming.

China sent a chartered flight Thursday to the tiny Mae Sot airport to pick up a group of its citizens, but few other governments have matched that. There are roughly 130 Ethiopians waiting in a Thai military base, stuck for want of a \$600 plane ticket. Dozens of Indonesians were bused out one morning last week, pushing suitcases and carrying plastic bags with their meager possessions as they headed to Bangkok for a flight home.

Thai officials held a meeting this week with representatives from foreign embassies, promising to move "as quickly as possible" to allow them to rescue their trapped citizens. But they warned that Thailand can only manage to receive 300 people per day, down from 500 previously, Monday through Fridays. It also announced it would let embassy staff cross over into Myanmar.

"The ministry attaches very high importance to this and is aware that there are sick people, and that they need to be repatriated," Nikorndej Balankura, spokesman for Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Thursday.

The Indian Embassy in Bangkok did not respond to requests for comment. The Czech Foreign Ministry says it cannot confirm a Czech citizen is among those repatriated. It says it is in touch with the embassies in Bangkok and Yangon over the issue and that the embassies have not been asked for assistance.

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Amy Miller, the Southeast Asia director of Acts of Mercy International who is based at the Thai-Myanmar border, says it's hard for the world to understand why all of the released workers aren't free.

"You can literally, with your naked eye, stand at the border and see people inside, on their balconies, in these compounds, and yet we cannot reach them," she said. Pausing a moment, she gestured out a nearby window toward the Friendship Bridge to Myanmar just blocks away. "I think what people don't understand is that to enter into another country is an act of war. You cannot just go in and receive these people out."

Assistance is scarce

Aiding the work on the front lines, especially for those countries with fewer resources, are a handful of small nonprofit groups with very limited funds.

In a nondescript Mae Sot home, Miller's organization receives escapees and a trickle of survivors who have made it across the river with comfortable couches, clean water, food and working phones to reach their families. She said today's unprecedented numbers are overwhelming the aid available across the river.

"When we're looking at numbers in the thousands, the ability to get them over to Thailand and process them and house them and feed them would be impossible for most governments," said Miller. "It really does require a kind of a global response."

The recent abrupt halt to U.S. foreign aid funding has made it even harder to get help to released scam center workers.

The United Nations' International Organization for Migration, for example, previously funded care for victims of trafficking in scam compounds in one shelter in Cambodia, but was forced to halt that work by the Trump Administration's funding freeze announced in January, according to a source with direct knowledge of the situation. The halt to funding has also impacted a network of civil society groups that worked to stop human trafficking and rescue survivors in Thailand.

"It's really heartbreaking to see that there's such an immense amount of people that are in need of assistance," said Saskia Kok, Head of Protection Unit in Thailand for the IOM.

In a statement, U.S. officials acknowledged the high pressure impasse.

"The United States remains deeply concerned about online scam operations throughout Southeast Asia, which affect thousands of Americans and individuals from many other countries," said a State Department spokesperson in a statement sent to the AP.

A bigger problem

While advocates estimate some 50 million people are living in modern slavery, mass rescues of enslaved workers are rare. In 2015, more than 2,000 fishermen were rescued from brutal conditions at sea, liberated after an Associated Press investigation exposed their plight. That same year hundreds of Indians were rescued from brick factories in India. And last year Brazilian prosecutors rescued 163 Chinese nationals working in "slavery-like" conditions at an electric vehicle factory construction site in northeastern Brazil.

"What we are seeing at the Thai-Myanmar border now is the result of years of inaction on a trafficking crisis that has had a devastating impact on thousands of people, many of whom were simply seeking better economic prospect, but were lured to these compounds on false pretenses," said Amnesty International Myanmar researcher Joe Freeman.

Being forced to commit a crime under threat of violence should not be criminalized, said Freeman. "However, in general we are aware of countries in the region repatriating their nationals from scam compounds only to then charge them with crimes."

Business as usual

It's not clear how much of an effect these releases will have on the criminal groups that run the scam centers.

February marked the third time the Thais have cut internet or electricity to towns across the river. Each time, the compounds have managed to work around the cuts. Large compounds have access to diesel-powered generators, as well as access to internet provider Starlink, experts working with law enforcement say.

"The resources is the one thing that they are not lacking and they've been able to bring them to bear in the past," said Benedikt Hoffman, acting representative for the United Nations Office on Drugs and

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Crime in the region.

The armed groups that staged the crackdown have also been accused of helping to run scam compounds in Myawaddy. The head of the Kayin Border Guard Force, General Saw Chit Thu, has been sanctioned by the European Union and the United Kingdom for profiting from scam compounds and human trafficking, respectively. Compounds in the DKBA's control are less well-documented in the public record, but activists say they also control a fair number.

"There is clearly a lot of pressure on the Border Guard Force to take action and helping people to leave is one of the most visible ways to do so," Hoffman said. "That said, it likely also reflects an adjustment to the business model, reducing the number of people involved — and with less attention, continuing lower key operations."

It will take simultaneous pressure exerted in multiple areas to truly shut down the compounds, said Hoffman.

In this crackdown, there have been no major prosecutions or compounds shut down.

"This doesn't affect anything," said a 23-year-old Pakistani man who had hoped to be freed only to be trapped in an army camp. The bosses, he said, are "rich as hell" and can buy anything they need to keep the lucrative operations going. Meanwhile, he said, conditions are worsening.

"My friends are in really bad condition, we can't survive here," he said, requesting anonymity out of fear for retribution from his guards. He asks a question that's been haunting him day in and day out for weeks: "Is anyone coming for us?"

Bills reward Allen with new contract after NFL MVP season. Deal is worth \$330M, AP source says

By JOHN WAWROW AP Sports Writer

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. (AP) — NFL MVP Josh Allen was rewarded Sunday with a contract extension worth \$330 million, including an NFL record \$250 million of it guaranteed, which makes him among the league's highest-paid players.

The Buffalo Bills announced the agreement, while two people with knowledge of the deal revealed the contract's value to The Associated Press. The people spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity because the Bills did not release that figure, which was first reported by ESPN.com.

The new deal adds two years to Allen's contract and locks the 28-year-old in through the 2030 season.

Cleveland quarterback DeShaun Watson's five-year contract signed in 2022 set the previous record in featuring \$230 million in guarantees, per Spotrac.com. The total value of Allen's new contract ranks second behind Kansas City's Patrick Mahomes, who signed a 10-year, \$450 million in 2020.

Meanwhile, Dallas quarterback Dak Prescott tops the NFL list in averaging \$60 million per season after signing a four-year, \$240 million contract extension last summer.

Allen's new contract follows his seventh NFL season in which he became the Bills third player to earn NFL MVP, and first since running back Thurman Thomas did so in 1991. The new deal eclipses Allen's previous contract, a six-year \$258 million deal he signed with Buffalo in August 2021.

Allen has established himself as one of the league's elite quarterbacks and rewritten nearly every franchise single-season passing and scoring record at his position. In doing so, he's overcome the many questions and criticisms he faced for being considered a raw and inaccurate player when Buffalo selected him with the No. 7 pick in the 2018 draft out of Wyoming.

Just as important, Allen has solidified what had been an unsettled position in Buffalo since Hall of Famer Jim Kelly retired following the 1996 season. The Bills under Allen have won five consecutive AFC East titles and are on a six-year playoff run.

Allen's MVP honor came during a season in which he essentially did more with what was considered less receiving talent around him. Adopting an "Everybody Eats" motto, Buffalo ran away with the AFC East by clinching the division with five games still left in a 13-win season and after the team traded top receiving option Stefon Diggs to Houston and lost No. 2 receiver Gabe Davis in free agency.

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Though Allen failed to top 4,000 yards for the first time since 2019, the quarterback enjoyed his most efficient season with a career-low six interceptions, a year after throwing a career-worst 18. Allen finished with 28 touchdowns passing, scored another 12 rushing and was credited with a touchdown receiving after completing a pass to Amari Cooper, who then lateraled the ball back to the quarterback.

The only thing missing for Allen is a Super Bowl appearance. The Bills have reached the AFC championship game in 2020 and this past season only to lose both times to Kansas City.

The new deal also follows a significant development in Allen's personal life. The quarterback proposed to actress and singer Hailee Steinfeld during the team's bye week in mid-November. Their relationship began in the spring of 2023, when pictures emerged of the two having dinner in New York City.

Allen credited Steinfeld for playing a major supporting role in his career development.

"She's been a huge part. The morale, the support. When I get home, she's my biggest fan, my biggest supporter. She's just the best," Allen told the AP in December.

The new contract is also expected to provide Buffalo much-needed savings under the salary cap entering the league's new business year, which opens Wednesday. The team was projected to be close to the cap limit after releasing veteran edge rusher Von Miller earlier in the day.

And the deal follows GM Brandon Beane spending the past weeks locking in the young core of the team by signing fourth-year edge rusher Greg Rousseau and third-year players linebacker Terrel Bernard and receiver Khalil Shakir to four-year contract extensions.

A two-time All-Pro, Allen's 76 wins, 262 total touchdowns and 30,595 total yards are the most by any NFL player through their first seven seasons in the league.

From a team perspective, Allen holds the top two single-season passing yards records topped by his 4,544 in 2020 and last season he passed Kelly for most total touchdowns with 262. Among the single-season team records he holds are most TD passes (37 in 2020), most completions (646 in 2021), best completion rate (69.2 percent in 2020).

Ex-central banker to replace Trudeau as Canada's prime minister after winning Liberal Party vote

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Former central banker Mark Carney will become Canada's next prime minister after the governing Liberal Party elected him its leader Sunday as the country deals with U.S. President Donald Trump's trade war and annexation threat, and a federal election looms.

Carney, 59, replaces Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who announced his resignation in January but remains prime minister until his successor is sworn in in the coming days. Carney won in a landslide, winning 85.9% of the vote.

"There is someone who is trying to weaken our economy," Carney said. "Donald Trump, as we know, has put unjustified tariffs on what we build, on what we sell and how we make a living. He's attacking Canadian families, workers and businesses and we cannot let him succeed and we won't."

Carney said Canada will keep retaliatory tariffs in place until "the Americans show us respect."

"We didn't ask for this fight. But Canadians are always ready when someone else drops the gloves," Carney said. "The Americans, they should make no mistake, in trade, as in hockey, Canada will win."

Carney navigated crises when he was the head of the Bank of Canada and when in 2013 he became the first noncitizen to run the Bank of England since it was founded in 1694. His appointment won bipartisan praise in the U.K. after Canada recovered from the 2008 financial crisis faster than many other countries.

The opposition Conservatives hoped to make the election about Trudeau, whose popularity declined as food and housing prices rose and immigration surged.

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

The surge in Canadian nationalism has bolstered the Liberal Party's chances in a parliamentary election

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expected within days or weeks, and Liberal showings have been improving steadily in opinion polls.

"The Americans want our resources, our water, our land, our country. Think about it. If they succeed they would destroy our way of life," Carney said. "In America health care is big business. In Canada it is a right."

Carney said America is "a melting pot. Canada is mosaic," he said. "America is not Canada. And Canada will never, ever will be a part of America in any way, shape or form."

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.

"These are dark days, dark days brought on by a country we can no longer trust," Carney said. "We are getting over the shock but let us never forget the lessons. We have to look after ourselves and we have to look out for each other. We need to pull together in the tough days ahead."

Trump has postponed 25% tariffs on many goods from Canada and Mexico for a month, amid widespread fears of a broader trade war. But he has threatened other tariffs on steel, aluminum, dairy and other products.

Carney picked up one endorsement after another from Cabinet ministers and members of Parliament since declaring his candidacy in January. He is a highly educated economist with Wall Street experience who has long been interested in entering politics and becoming prime minister, but he lacks political experience.

In 2020, he began serving as the United Nations' special envoy for climate action and finance.

Carney is a former Goldman Sachs executive. He worked for 13 years in London, Tokyo, New York and Toronto, before being appointed deputy governor of the Bank of Canada in 2003.

The other top Liberal leadership candidate was former Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, who received just eight percent of the vote. Trudeau told Freeland in December that 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.

Carney is expected to trigger an election shortly. Either he will call one, or the opposition parties in Parliament could force one with a no-confidence vote later this month.

Trudeau urged Liberals supporters to get involved.

"This is a nation-defining moment. Democracy is not a given. Freedom is not a given. Even Canada is not a given," Trudeau said.

Pope thanks volunteers for 'miracle of tenderness' as another Holy Year event passes without him

By NICOLE WINFIELD and SILVIA STELLACCI Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis thanked volunteers Sunday for the "miracle of tenderness" they offer the sick, as he continued his treatment for double pneumonia and doctors reported some positive news.

After more than three weeks in the hospital, the 88-year-old pope is responding well to treatment and has shown a "gradual, slight improvement" in recent days.

Francis on Sunday followed the opening day of a weeklong spiritual retreat in the Vatican for Holy See officials by video conference. He could see the officials, but they couldn't see him in the Gemelli hospital, the Vatican press office said. Francis also participated in Mass at the hospital's private chapel.

For the fourth consecutive Sunday, Francis didn't appear for his weekly noon blessing, but the Vatican distributed the text he would have delivered if he were well enough. In it, the Argentine pope thanked all those who were caring for him and others who are sick and experiencing a "night of pain."

"Brothers and sisters, during my prolonged hospitalization here, I too experience the thoughtfulness of service and the tenderness of care, in particular from the doctors and health care workers, whom I thank from the bottom of my heart," read the message from Gemelli hospital.

"And while I am here, I think of the many people who in various ways are close to the sick, and who are for them a sign of the Lord's presence. We need this, the 'miracle of tenderness' which accompanies those who are in adversity, bringing a little light into the night of pain," he wrote.

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The pontiff, who has chronic lung disease and had part of one lung removed as a young man, has remained in stable condition, with no fever and good oxygen levels in his blood for several days, doctors reported.

The doctors said that such stability "as a consequence testifies to a good response to therapy." It was the first time the doctors had reported that Francis was responding positively to the treatment for the complex lung infection that was diagnosed after he was hospitalized on Feb. 14.

But they kept his prognosis as "guarded," meaning that he's not out of danger. The Vatican said that the medical update from Saturday remained valid Sunday.

In his absence, the Vatican's day-to-day operations continued alongside celebrations of its Holy Year, the once every quarter-century Jubilee that brings millions of pilgrims to Rome. On Sunday, Canadian Cardinal Michael Czerny, who is close to Francis, celebrated the Holy Year Mass for volunteers that Francis was supposed to have celebrated.

During the Mass in St. Peter's Square, the giant banner bearing Francis' papal coat of arms fluttered from the loggia of the basilica above. Even while in the hospital, Francis is very much still the pope and in charge of the Catholic Church.

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

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.

A single-engine plane crashes near a Pennsylvania airport and all 5 aboard are taken to hospitals

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

A single-engine airplane carrying five people crashed and burst into flames Sunday in the parking lot of a retirement community near a small airport in suburban Pennsylvania, and everyone on board survived, officials and witnesses said.

The fiery crash happened around 3 p.m. just south of Lancaster Airport in Manheim Township, police chief Duane Fisher told reporters at an evening briefing. All five victims were taken to hospitals in unknown condition. Nobody on the ground was hurt, the chief said.

Brian Pipkin was driving nearby when he noticed the small plane climbing before it suddenly veered to the left.

"And then it went down nose first," he told The Associated Press. "There was an immediate fireball."

Pipkin called 911 and then drove to the crash site, where he recorded video of black smoke billowing from the plane's mangled wreckage and multiple cars engulfed in flames in a parking lot at Brethren Village. He said the plane narrowly missed hitting a three-story building at the sprawling retirement community about 75 miles (120 kilometers) west of Philadelphia.

A fire truck from the airport arrived within minutes, and more first responders followed quickly.

"It was so smoky and it was so hot," Pipkin said. "They were really struggling to get the fire out."

A dozen parked cars were damaged and Brethren Village residents were briefly asked to shelter in place as a precaution, Fisher said.

"I don't know if I'd consider it a miracle, but the fact that we have a plane crash where everybody survives and nobody on the ground is hurt is a wonderful thing," the police chief added.

The Federal Aviation Administration confirmed there were five people aboard the Beechcraft Bonanza. Its planned flight and destination were not released soon after the crash.

The conditions of the five also were not immediately known and authorities didn't elaborate on how they survived the crash.

Air traffic control audio captured the pilot reporting that the aircraft "has an open door, we need to return for a landing." An air traffic controller is heard clearing the plane to land, before saying, "Pull up!" Moments later, someone can be heard saying the aircraft was "down just behind the terminal in the park-

ing lot street area.”

The FAA said it will investigate.

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro said state police were assisting local authorities. “All Commonwealth resources are available as the response continues, and more information will be provided as it becomes available,” Shapiro said on social media.

The crash comes about a month after seven people were killed when an air ambulance burst into flames after crashing onto a busy Philadelphia street.

Israel cuts off electricity supply to Gaza, affecting a desalination plant producing drinking water

By MELANIE LIDMAN and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel cut off the electricity supply to Gaza, officials said Sunday, affecting a desalination plant producing drinking water for part of the arid territory. Hamas called it part of Israel’s “starvation policy.”

Israel last week suspended supplies of goods to the territory of more than 2 million Palestinians, an echo of the siege it imposed in the earliest days of the war.

Israel is pressing the militant group to accept an extension of the first phase of their ceasefire. That phase ended last weekend. Israel wants Hamas to release half of the remaining hostages in return for a promise to negotiate a lasting truce.

Hamas instead wants to start negotiations on the ceasefire’s more difficult second phase, which would see the release of remaining hostages from Gaza, the withdrawal of Israeli forces and a lasting peace. Hamas is believed to have 24 living hostages and the bodies of 35 others.

The militant group — which has warned that discontinuing supplies would affect the hostages — said Sunday that it wrapped up the latest round of ceasefire talks with Egyptian mediators without changes to its position.

Israel has said it would send a delegation to Qatar on Monday in an effort to “advance” the negotiations.

Israel had warned when it stopped all supplies that water and electricity could be next. The letter from Israel’s energy minister to the Israel Electric Corporation tells it to stop selling power to Gaza.

The territory and its infrastructure have been largely devastated, and most facilities, including hospitals, now use generators. Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassam said that Israel has “practically” cut off electricity since the war began and called the latest decision part of Israel’s “starvation policy, in clear disregard for all international laws and norms.”

The desalination plant was providing 18,000 cubic meters of water per day for central Gaza’s Deir al-Balah area, according to Gisha, an Israeli organization dedicated to protecting Palestinians’ right to freedom of movement. Executive director Tania Hary said that it’s expected to run on generators and produce around 2,500 cubic meters per day, about the amount in an Olympic swimming pool.

Israel’s restrictions on fuel entering Gaza have a larger impact, Hary said, and water shortages are a looming issue, because fuel is needed for distribution trucks.

Israel has faced sharp criticism over suspending supplies.

“Any denial of the entry of the necessities of life for civilians may amount to collective punishment,” the U.N. human rights office said Friday.

The International Criminal Court said there was reason to believe Israel had used “starvation as a method of warfare” when it issued an arrest warrant for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last year. The allegation is central to South Africa’s case at the International Court of Justice accusing Israel of genocide.

Israel has denied the accusations, saying it has allowed in enough aid and blaming shortages on what it called the United Nations’ inability to distribute it. It also accused Hamas of siphoning off aid.

The leader of the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, Abdul Malik al-Houthi, warned Friday that attacks against Israel-linked vessels off Yemen would resume within four days if aid doesn’t resume to Gaza. The Houthis described their earlier attacks as solidarity with Palestinians there.

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The ceasefire has paused the deadliest and most destructive fighting ever between Israel and Hamas, sparked by the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. The first phase allowed the return of 25 living hostages and the remains of eight others in exchange for the release of nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners.

Israeli forces have withdrawn to buffer zones inside Gaza, hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians have returned to northern Gaza and hundreds of trucks of aid entered per day until Israel suspended supplies.

US envoy describes talks with Hamas

The White House on Wednesday made the surprise confirmation of direct U.S. talks with Hamas.

On Sunday, envoy Adam Boehler told Israeli broadcaster Kan that Hamas has suggested a truce of five to 10 years while it would disarm. The militant group has previously called disarming unacceptable.

A senior Hamas official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss contacts with the U.S., said that the group had expressed its longstanding position that it would lay down its arms in return for a "fair and just solution" that includes an independent Palestinian state.

Boehler also told CNN that "I think you could see something like a long-term truce, where we forgive prisoners, where Hamas lays down their arms, where they agree they're not part of the political party going forward. I think that's a reality. It's real close."

When asked if he would speak with the militant group again, Boehler replied, "You never know."

He added: "I think something could come together within weeks," and expressed hope for a deal that would see all hostages released, not only American ones. Boehler has said four of the five American hostages in Gaza are dead, with Edan Alexander alive.

Hamas on Sunday didn't mention the talks, but reiterated its support for a proposal for the establishment of an independent committee of technocrats to run Gaza until Palestinians hold presidential and legislative elections.

Hamas' attack in October 2023 killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, inside Israel and took 251 people hostage. Most have been released in ceasefire agreements or other arrangements.

Many Israelis are pressing for a deal to bring everyone home. "We are here to send a clear message to the Israeli government: stop stalling," Zahiro Shahar Mor, nephew of slain hostage Avraham Munder, said in front of tents set up outside Israel's defense ministry in one demonstration.

Israel's military offensive has killed more than 48,000 Palestinians in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't say how many of the dead were militants.

With the cutoff of supplies to Gaza, Palestinians are reporting sharp price increases for dwindling items during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

"Since the ceasefire began, the situation has improved a little. But before that, the situation was very bad," said Fares al-Qeisi in the southern city of Khan Younis.

Chaos in Romania's capital after far-right Calin Georgescu barred from presidential redo

By STEPHEN McGRATH and VADIM GHIRDA Associated Press

BUCHAREST, Romania (AP) — Chaos broke out in Romania's capital Sunday evening as incensed supporters of the far-right populist Calin Georgescu protested the electoral body's decision to reject his candidacy in a presidential election redo. He won the first round of last year's race before a top court annulled the election.

The 62-year-old Georgescu filed his candidacy on Friday in the capital, Bucharest. The Central Election Bureau, also known by its Romanian acronym BEC, had 48 hours to register or reject it.

In its decision, the BEC cited the country's Constitutional Court ruling last year to cancel the election, arguing it was ordered due to "the candidate's failure to comply with electoral regulations."

"It would be unacceptable for the restarted election process to consider the same individual as eligible for the presidency," BEC said. The decision can be appealed before the Constitutional Court within 24 hours.

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Hundreds of protesters gathered outside BEC's headquarters to express anger over its decision, with many waving Romanian flags and chanting: "The last resort is another revolution!" Some protesters threw broken paving stones and other objects at the scores of riot police dispatched to the area, overturned a news vehicle and set a bush ablaze.

Georgescu reacted to the decision Sunday by calling it "a direct blow to the heart of democracy worldwide!" "I have one message left! If democracy in Romania falls, the entire democratic world will fall! This is just the beginning. It's that simple!" he said in a post on X. "Europe is now a dictatorship, Romania is under tyranny!"

The BEC's rejection of Georgescu's candidacy came after the Constitutional Court annulled the first-round results two days before the Dec. 8 runoff, after allegations emerged that Russia had run a coordinated online campaign to promote the outsider, who ran as an independent.

The court's unprecedented decision plunged the European Union and NATO member country into a protracted political crisis.

Last month, prosecutors launched a criminal investigation against Georgescu, accusing him of "incitement to actions against the constitutional order," supporting fascist groups and false declarations of electoral campaign funding and asset disclosures.

Before the Nov. 24 election, Georgescu, who is under judicial control and has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing, had polled in single digits and declared zero campaign spending. Allegations quickly emerged of electoral violations and Russian interference. Moscow denied that it had meddled in the election.

Georgescu has praised Russian President Vladimir Putin and questioned Ukraine's statehood, but says that he's not pro-Russia.

The first round of the rerun is scheduled for May 4. If no candidate wins more than 50% of the ballots, a runoff will follow on May 18. The deadline for presidential candidacy applications is March 15 at midnight.

George Simion, the leader of the far-right Alliance for the Unity of Romanians, who had backed Georgescu's bid, reacted to the BEC's decision on Sunday by calling it "a new abuse and a continuation of the coup d'état."

"Down with Ciolacu, down with the dictators!" he said in a post on Facebook, referring to Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu.

Since Romania canceled the election, Georgescu has become a cause célèbre among the far right, with support coming from prominent figures such as U.S. Vice President JD Vance and Elon Musk, who have both strongly criticized Romania for annulling the vote.

Musk reacted to the BEC decision in a repost of the news on X, saying: "This is crazy!"

Incumbent Bucharest Mayor Nicusor Dan also filed his candidacy on Friday as an independent under the campaign slogan "Honest Romania." The BEC registered his candidacy on Sunday.

Crin Antonescu, the joint presidential candidate backed by Romania's governing coalition — comprised of the Social Democratic Party, the National Liberal Party, and the small ethnic Hungarian UDMR party — also registered his presidential bid on Sunday.

'Bloody Sunday' 60th anniversary marked in Selma with remembrances and concerns about the future

By KIM CHANDLER and SAFIYAH RIDDLE Associated Press

SELMA, Ala. (AP) — Charles Mauldin was near the front of a line of voting rights marchers walking in pairs across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama on March 7, 1965.

The marchers were protesting white officials' refusal to allow Black Alabamians to register to vote, as well as the killing days earlier of Jimmie Lee Jackson, a minister and voting rights organizer who was shot by a state trooper in nearby Marion.

At the apex of the span over the Alabama River, they saw what awaited them: a line of state troopers, deputies and men on horseback. They kept going. After they approached, law enforcement gave a two-minute warning to disperse and then unleashed violence.

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"Within about a minute or a half, they took their billy clubs, holding it on both ends, began to push us back to back us in, and then they began to beat men, women and children, and tear gas men, women and children, and cattle prod men, women and children viciously," said Mauldin, who was 17 at the time.

Selma on Sunday marked the 60th anniversary of the clash that became known as Bloody Sunday. The attack shocked the nation and galvanized support for the U.S. Voting Rights Act of 1965. The annual commemoration pays homage to those who fought to secure voting rights for Black Americans and brought calls to recommit to the fight for equality.

For those gathered in Selma, the celebration comes amid concerns about new voting restrictions and the Trump administration's effort to remake federal agencies they said helped make America a democracy for all.

Speaking at the pulpit of the city's historic Tabernacle Baptist Church, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries said what happened in Selma changed the nation. He said the 60th anniversary comes at a time when there is "trouble all around" and some "want to whitewash our history." But he said like the marchers of Bloody Sunday, they must keep going.

"At this moment, faced with trouble on every side, we've got to press on," Jeffries said to the crowd that included the Rev. Jesse Jackson, multiple members of Congress and others gathered for the commemoration.

Members of Congress joined with Bloody Sunday marchers to lead a march of several thousand people across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. They stopped to pray at the site where marchers were beaten in 1965.

"We gather here on the 60th anniversary of Bloody Sunday when our country is in chaos," said U.S. Rep. Terri Sewell of Alabama.

Sewell, a Selma native, noted the number of voting restrictions introduced since the U.S. Supreme Court effectively abolished a key part of the Voting Rights Act that required jurisdictions with a history of racial discrimination to clear new voting laws with the Justice Department. Other speakers noted the Trump administration's push to end diversity, equity and inclusion efforts and a rollback of equal opportunity executive orders that have been on the books since the 1960s.

In 1965, the Bloody Sunday marchers led by John Lewis and Hosea Williams walked in pairs across the Selma bridge headed toward Montgomery.

"We had steeled our nerves to a point where we were so determined that we were willing to confront. It was past being courageous. We were determined, and we were indignant," Mauldin recalled.

He said the "country was not a democracy for Black folks" until voting rights. "And we're still constantly fighting to make that a more concrete reality for ourselves."

Kirk Carrington was just 13 on Bloody Sunday and was chased through the city by a man on a horse wielding a stick. "When we started marching, we did not know the impact we would have in America," he said.

Dr. Verdell Lett Dawson, who grew up in Selma, remembers a time when she was expected to lower her gaze if she passed a white person on the street to avoid making eye contact.

Dawson and Mauldin said they are concerned about the potential dismantling of the Department of Education and other changes to federal agencies.

Support from the federal government "is how Black Americans have been able to get justice, to get some semblance of equality, because left to states' rights, it is going to be the white majority that's going to rule," Dawson said.

"That that's a tragedy of 60 years later: what we are looking at now is a return to the 1950s," Dawson said.

Noem taps new ICE leaders and moves to identify leakers

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO Associated Press

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem on Sunday announced new leadership at the agency tasked with immigration enforcement as she also pledged to step up lie detector tests on employees to identify those who may be leaking information about operations to the media.

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"The authorities that I have under the Department of Homeland Security are broad and extensive and I plan to use every single one of them to make sure that we're following the law, that we are following the procedures in place to keep people safe and that we're making sure we're following through on what President Trump has promised," Noem told CBS' "Face the Nation."

While these polygraph exams are typically not admissible in court proceedings, they are frequently used by federal law enforcement agencies and for national security clearances.

"The Department of Homeland Security is a national security agency," DHS spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin said in a statement. "We can, should, and will polygraph personnel."

White House officials have previously expressed frustration with the pace of deportations, blaming it in part on recent leaks revealing cities where authorities planned to conduct operations.

Noem announcement of two new leadership appointments within the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement comes less than two months into the Trump administration and demonstrates the importance that the administration places on carrying out the president's deportation agenda.

Todd Lyons, the former assistant director of field operations for the agency's enforcement arm, will serve as acting ICE director. Madison Sheahan, secretary of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and Noem's former aide when she was governor of South Dakota, has been tapped to be the agency's deputy director.

The leadership changes come after ICE's acting director was reassigned on Feb. 21. Two other top immigration enforcement officials were reassigned Feb. 11. Those staffing changes came amid frustrations in the Trump administration about the pace of immigration arrests.

Noem also announced on Friday that the agency has identified and planned to prosecute two "leakers of information."

On Sunday, she said these two people "were leaking our enforcement operations that we had planned and were going to conduct in several cities and exposed vulnerabilities." She said they could face up to 10 years in federal prison.

Air Force intercepts aircraft flying in a restricted zone near Mar-a-Lago

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Air Force fighter jets intercepted a civilian aircraft flying in the temporarily restricted airspace near Donald Trump's Florida home Sunday, bringing the number of violations to more than 20 since the president took office on Jan. 20.

North American Aerospace Defense Command said in a statement that Sunday's incident, which took place as Trump finished a round of golf at his West Palm Beach golf course, saw F-16s deploy flares to get the attention of the civilian pilot. Jets also conducted an intercept on Saturday morning shortly after Trump arrived at the course from his private Mar-a-Lago club and residence.

The airspace intrusions in the heavily congested south Florida airspace have prompted fighter jet intercepts but did not alter Trump's schedule or impact his security, officials said. NORAD says the flares may have been visible from the ground but that they burn out quickly and don't pose danger.

Federal officials maintain a permanent flight restriction over Trump's club that expands to a radius of 30 nautical miles when the president is in residence.

Violations, and intercepts, are relatively routine, but NORAD is raising alarm over the frequency of the intrusions since Trump's inauguration, saying it has responded to more than 20 incidents and blames civilian pilots for not following regulations requiring them to check for airspace restrictions before taking off.

"Adherence to TFR procedures is essential to ensure flight safety, national security, and the security of the President," Gen. Gregory Guillot, the commander of NORAD and US Northern Command said in a statement. "The procedures are not optional, and the excessive number of recent TFR violations indicates many civil aviators are not reading Notice to Airmen, or NOTAMS, before each flight as required by the FAA, and

has resulted in multiple responses by NORAD fighter aircraft to guide offending aircraft out of the TFR."

Trump downplays business concerns about uncertainty from his tariffs and prospect of higher prices

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President Donald Trump is dismissing business concerns over the uncertainty caused by his planned tariffs on a range of American trading partners and the prospect of higher prices, and isn't ruling out the possibility of a recession this year.

After imposing and then quickly pausing 25% tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada that sent markets tumbling over concerns of a trade war, Trump said his plans for broader "reciprocal" tariffs will go into effect April 2, raising them to match what other countries assess.

"April 2nd, it becomes all reciprocal," he said in a taped interview with Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures." "What they charge us, we charge them."

Asked about the Atlanta Fed's warning of an economic contraction in the first quarter of the year, Trump seemingly acknowledged that his plans could affect U.S. growth. Still, he claimed, it would ultimately be "great for us."

When questioned whether he was expecting a recession in 2025, Trump responded: "I hate to predict things like that. There is a period of transition because what we're doing is very big. We're bringing wealth back to America. That's a big thing." He then added, "It takes a little time. It takes a little time."

On Wall Street, it was a tough week with wild swings dominated by worries about the economy and uncertainty about what Trump's tariffs.

Trump brushed aside concerns from businesses seeking stability as they make investment decisions. He said that "for years the globalists, the big globalists have been ripping off the United States" and that now, "all we're doing is getting some of it back, and we're going to treat our country fairly."

"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 Republican president said.

Trump last week lifted the Mexico and Canada tariffs on American car manufacturers, and then virtually all imports to the U.S., but kept them on goods from China.

More tariffs are coming this week, with Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick telling NBC's "Meet the Press" that 25% tariffs on steel and aluminum imports will take effect Wednesday. Lutnick said Trump's threatened tariffs on Canadian dairy and lumber though would wait until April.

"Will there be distortions? Of course," Lutnick said. "Foreign goods may get a little more expensive. But American goods are going to get cheaper, and you're going to be helping Americans by buying American."

Russian forces walked inside a gas pipeline to strike Ukrainian troops from the rear in Kursk

By JOANNA KOZLOWSKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Russian special forces walked inside a gas pipeline to strike Ukrainian units from the rear in the Kursk region, Ukraine's military and Russian war bloggers reported, as Moscow claimed fresh gains in its push to recapture parts of the border province that Kyiv seized in a shock offensive.

Ukraine launched a daring cross-border incursion into Kursk in August, marking the largest attack on Russian territory since World War II. Within days, Ukrainian units had captured 1,000 square kilometers (386 square miles) of territory, including the strategic border town of Sudzha, and taken hundreds of Russian prisoners of war.

According to Kyiv, the operation aimed to gain a bargaining chip in future peace talks and to force Russia to divert troops away from its grinding offensive in eastern Ukraine.

But months after Ukraine's thunder run, its soldiers in Kursk are weary and bloodied by relentless as-

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saults of more than 50,000 troops, including some from Russian ally North Korea. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers are at risk of being encircled, open-source maps of the battlefield show.

According to Telegram posts late Saturday by a Ukrainian-born, pro-Kremlin blogger, Russian operatives walked about 15 kilometers (9 miles) inside the pipeline, which Moscow had until recently used to send gas to Europe. Some Russian troops spent several days in the pipe before striking Ukrainian units from the rear near Sudzha, blogger Yuri Podolyaka claimed.

The town had some 5,000 residents before the full-scale February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, and it houses major gas transfer and measuring stations along the pipeline, which was once a major outlet for Russian natural gas exports through Ukrainian territory.

Another war blogger, who uses the alias Two Majors, said fierce fighting was underway for Sudzha, and that Russian forces managed to enter the town through a gas pipeline. Russian Telegram channels showed photos of what they said were special forces operatives, wearing gas masks and moving along what looked like the inside of a large pipe.

Ukraine's General Staff confirmed Saturday evening that Russian "sabotage and assault groups" used the pipeline in a bid to gain a foothold outside Sudzha. In a Telegram post, it said Russian troops were "detected in a timely manner" and that Ukraine responded with rockets and artillery.

"At present, Russian special forces are being detected, blocked and destroyed. The enemy's losses in Sudzha are very high," the General Staff reported.

A third Russian war blogger argued that the attacking force lacked the logistical backup to succeed.

"Food, water, ammunition, communications, charging electrical devices, power banks, the approach of the main forces, evacuating the wounded ... Two or three groups in the rear without all this — that's a disaster," the blogger, who describes himself as a soldier with the call sign Thirteenth, wrote on Telegram.

The Associated Press could not independently verify the accounts.

The Russian Defense Ministry reported Sunday that its troops had taken four villages north and northwest of Sudzha, with the closest lying some 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) from the center of the town. The claim came a day after the ministry reported the capture of three more villages near Sudzha.

Ukraine did not immediately comment on the Russian claims.

Trump questions Ukraine's survival, while France announces new aid package

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump said in an interview that aired Sunday that Ukraine "may not survive" as he continued to withhold American arms and intelligence in an effort to force Kyiv into peace negotiations with its invader.

In an interview with Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures," Trump was asked about a warning from Polish President Andrzej Duda "that without American support, Ukraine will not survive" and whether he was "comfortable" with that outcome.

He replied, "Well, it may not survive anyway." He added, "But we have some weaknesses with Russia. You know, it takes two."

In other developments, French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu said Sunday that France will use profits from frozen Russian assets to finance an additional 195 million euros (\$211 million) in arms for Ukraine, the latest in a series of military aid deliveries funded through the assets.

In an interview with the La Tribune Dimanche newspaper, Lecornu said Paris will send new 155 mm artillery shells and glide bombs for Mirage 2000 fighter jets it previously gave to Ukraine.

Ukrainian drones said to target Russian oil infrastructure

Elsewhere, Russian officials and Telegram channels reported that Ukrainian drones targeted oil infrastructure in southern and central Russia overnight into early Sunday. One drone struck an oil depot in Cheboksary, a Russian city on the Volga River about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) from the border, the local governor reported. According to Oleg Nikolaev, nobody was hurt, but the depot needed reconstruction work.

Footage circulated on Russian Telegram channels of what appeared to be a fire at or near one of Russia's largest oil refineries, in the southern city of Ryazan. Shot, a news channel on Telegram, cited local residents as saying they heard several nighttime blasts near the refinery. The local governor, Pavel Malkov,

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said Ukrainian drones had been shot down nearby. He claimed there had been no casualties or damage.

Ukraine did not immediately comment on either incident.

Satellite internet fuels sharp social media exchange

Concerns that Elon Musk could turn off Starlink satellite internet service to Ukraine prompted a sharp exchange Sunday on X involving Musk, the Polish foreign minister and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski wrote that if Musk's rocket company SpaceX, which runs Starlink, "proves to be an unreliable provider," Poland "will be forced to look for other suppliers."

Musk told Sikorski: "Be quiet, small man. You pay a tiny fraction of the cost. And there is no substitute for Starlink."

Rubio told Sikorski: "No one has made any threats about cutting Ukraine off from Starlink. And say thank you because without Starlink, Ukraine would have lost this war long ago and Russians would be on the border with Poland right now."

In fact, Russians are already on the border with Poland because the Russian region of Kaliningrad lies on Poland's northern border.

The back-and-forth between the three concluded with Sikorski thanking Rubio: "Thank you, Marco, for confirming that the brave soldiers of Ukraine can count on the vital internet service provided jointly by the U.S and Poland. Together, Europe and the United States can help Ukraine to achieve a just peace."

Islamic State-linked rebels in fresh attack in eastern Congo kill 9 villagers

By JUSTIN KABUMBA Associated Press

GOMA, Congo (AP) — Islamic State-linked rebels attacked a village in conflict-battered eastern Congo killing at least nine villagers, a local official and residents said Sunday.

The Saturday attack in the village of Ngohi Vuyinga in North Kivu province's Lubero territory also displaced dozens and several houses burned down, according to Samuel Kagheni, a local civil society leader.

Rebels with the Allied Democratic Forces, an IS affiliate in the region, attacked the villagers with guns and machetes while they were at their farms, Kagheni said.

"Yesterday's toll could rise because there were even some missing people," he said.

Eastern Congo has been battered by decades of violence, with more than 100 armed groups vying for control of the region's rich minerals. Among them are Rwanda-backed rebels who recently captured two major cities in another part of the region. The violence has resulted in about 7 million people being displaced, making it the world's largest humanitarian crisis.

The latest attack renewed safety concerns among locals who accused the government of not doing enough to stop the conflict.

"The peaceful population is still being killed, but there is no intervention on the government side," said César Kambale, a youth leader of the nearby Vuyinga village.

"Is our army, the FARDC (Congolese armed forces) really leading offensives against this enemy? ... Every day people are attacked, civilians are killed under the helpless eye of our FARDC," he said.

Top US health agency makes \$25,000 buyout offer to most of its employees

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Most of the 80,000 federal workers responsible for researching diseases, inspecting food and administering Medicare and Medicaid under the auspices of the Health and Human Services Department were emailed an offer to leave their job for as much as a \$25,000 payment as part of President Donald Trump's government cuts.

Workers cannot start opting in until Monday and have until 5 p.m. on Friday to submit a response for the so-called voluntary separation offer. The email was sent to staff across the department, which includes

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the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, and the National Institutes of Health as well as the Food and Drug Administration, both in Maryland.

The mass email went out to a "broad population of HHS employees," landing in their inboxes days before agency heads are due to offer plans for shrinking their workforces. HHS is one of the government's costliest federal agencies, with an annual budget of about \$1.7 trillion that is mostly spent on health care coverage for millions of people enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid.

The agency oversees health insurance for roughly half the country through Medicare for older adults and Medicaid for disabled and poor Americans.

There was no immediate comment Sunday from HHS.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Trump's health secretary, has hinted at plans at deep cuts to the staff. Last year, he promised to immediately clear out 600 employees at the NIH, the nation's biomedical research arm. He has not gone that far, but in an interview last month shortly after being sworn in last month, Kennedy said he wanted to remove some workers from the public health agencies.

"I have a list in my head," Kennedy said of potential firings at the agency. He said some workers "made really bad decisions" on nutrition guidelines.

The Trump administration, with the help of billionaire Elon Musk, has been trying to push out federal workers in an effort to cut costs. In January, most federal employees received a deferred resignation offer that came with eight months of pay. Thousands of probationary employees, too, have been fired across federal agencies, including at HHS.

The latest move to reduce the number of federal health workers comes as the the CDC is assisting with a deadly measles outbreak in West Texas and New Mexico and as lawmakers are debating deep cuts to Medicaid in the federal budget.

HHS workers are directed in the email to reach out to their local human resources office to submit for the voluntary separation.

Myles Garrett becomes the highest-paid non-quarterback in NFL history at \$40 million per year

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

Myles Garrett is staying in Cleveland after the Browns gave him a record four-year contract extension that makes the four-time All-Pro edge rusher the highest-paid non-quarterback in NFL history.

A person with knowledge of the details told The Associated Press that Garrett's deal includes \$122.8 million guaranteed, an average annual salary of \$40 million with a total value of \$204.8 million. The person spoke Sunday on condition of anonymity because terms weren't announced.

Garrett, the 2023 AP Defensive Player of the Year, had asked for a trade last month but the Browns were adamant about keeping the 29-year-old star in Cleveland.

Garrett's contract raises the bar for other non-QBs, including Bengals All-Pro wide receiver Ja'Marr Chase and Cowboys edge rusher Micah Parsons. Cincinnati already has stated plans to make Chase the highest-paid non-QB in the league.

Garrett, a first-round pick in 2017, had 14 sacks and 22 tackles for loss last season. He has 102 1/2 sacks in his eight seasons with the Browns.

Garrett has only played in three playoff games with Cleveland.

Panama releases dozens of detained deportees from US into limbo following human rights criticism

BY MEGAN JANETSKY, ALMA SOLÍS and MATÍAS DELACROIX Associated Press

PANAMA CITY (AP) — After weeks of lawsuits and human rights criticism, Panama on Saturday released dozens of migrants who were held for weeks in a remote camp after being deported from the United States, telling them they have 30 days to leave the Central American nation.

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It thrust many like Hayatullah Omagh, a 29-year-old who fled Afghanistan in 2022 after the Taliban took control, into a legal limbo, scrambling to find a path forward.

"We are refugees. We do not have money. We cannot pay for a hotel in Panama City, we do not have relatives," Omagh told the Associated Press in an interview. "I can't go back to Afghanistan under any circumstances ... It is under the control of the Taliban, and they want to kill me. How can I go back?"

Authorities have said deportees will have the option of extending their stay by 60 days if they need it, but after that many like Omagh don't know what they will do.

Omagh climbed off a bus in Panama City alongside 65 migrants from China, Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Nepal and other nations after spending weeks detained in poor conditions by the Panamanian government, which has said it wants to work with the Trump administration "to send a signal of deterrence" to people hoping to migrate.

Human rights groups and lawyers advocating for the migrants were waiting at the bus terminal, and scrambled to find the released migrants shelter and other resources. Dozens of other people remained in the camp.

Among those getting off buses were migrants fleeing violence and repression in Pakistan and Iran, and 27-year-old Nikita Gaponov, who fled Russia due to repression for being part of the LGBTQ+ community and who said he was detained at the U.S. border, but not allowed to make an asylum claim.

"Once I get off the bus, I'll be sleeping on the ground tonight," Gaponov said.

Others turned their eyes north once again, saying that even though they had already been deported, they had no other option than to continue after crossing the world to reach the U.S.

The deportees, largely from Asian countries, were part of a deal struck between the Trump administration and Panama and Costa Rica as the U.S. government attempts to speed up deportations. The administration sent hundreds of people, many families with children, to the two Central American countries as a stopover while authorities organize a way to send them back to their countries of origin.

Critics described it as a way for the U.S. to export its deportation process.

The agreement fueled human rights concerns when hundreds of deportees detained in a hotel in Panama City held up notes to their windows pleading for help and saying they were scared to return to their own countries.

Under international refugee law, people have the right to apply for asylum when they are fleeing conflict or persecution.

Those that refused to return home were later sent to a remote camp near Panama's border with Colombia, where they spent weeks in poor conditions, were stripped of their phones, unable to access legal council and were not told where they were going next.

Lawyers and human rights defenders warned that Panama and Costa Rica were turning into "black holes" for deportees, and said their release was a way for Panamanian authorities to wash their hands of the deportees amid mounting human rights criticism.

Upon being released Saturday night, human rights lawyers identified at least three people who required medical attention. One has been vomiting for over a week, another deportee had diabetes and hadn't had access to insulin in the camp and another person had HIV and also didn't have access to medicine in detention.

Those who were released, like Omagh, said they could not return home.

As an atheist and member of an ethnic minority group in Afghanistan known as the Hazara, he said returning home under the rule of the Taliban — which swept back into power after the Biden administration pulled out of the country — would mean he would be killed. He only went to the U.S. after trying for years to live in Pakistan, Iran and other countries but being denied visas.

Omagh was deported after presenting himself to American authorities and asking to seek asylum in the U.S., which he was denied.

"My hope was freedom. Just freedom," he said. "They didn't give me the chance. I asked many times to speak to an asylum officer and they told me 'No, no, no, no, no.'"

Still, he said that leaving the camp was a relief. Omagh and other migrants who spoke to the AP detailed

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scarce food, sweltering heat with little relief and aggressive Panamanian authorities.

In one case, Omagh and others said, a Chinese man went on a week-long hunger strike. In another, a small riot broke out because guards refused to give a migrant their phone. The riot, they said, was suppressed by armed guards.

Panamanian authorities denied accusations about camp conditions, but blocked journalists from accessing the camp and cancelled a planned press visit last week.

While international aid organizations said they would organize travel to a third country for people who didn't want to return home, Panamanian authorities said the people released had already refused help.

Omagh said he was told in the camp he could be sent to a third country if it gives people from Afghanistan visas. He said that would be incredibly difficult because few nations open their doors to people with a Afghan passport.

He said he asked authorities in the camp multiple times if he could seek asylum in Panama, and said he was told that "we do not accept asylum."

"None of them wants to stay in Panama. They want to go to the U.S.," said Carlos Ruiz-Hernandez, Panama's deputy foreign minister, in an interview with the AP last month.

That was the case for some, like one Chinese woman who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity, fearing repercussions from Panamanian authorities.

Upon getting off the bus, the first thing she wanted to do was find a Coca-Cola. Then, she'd find a way back to the U.S.

"I still want to continue to go to the United States and fulfill my American dream," she said.

How one small business is navigating Trump's on-again, off-again tariffs on Canadian goods

By MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — At Fishtown Seafood, owner Bryan Szeliga is worried about the oysters.

Szeliga, who operates three retail and wholesale locations in Philadelphia and Haddonfield, N.J., sells a range of seafood. But briny, slurpable oysters are the biggest part of his overall business. And 60% to 70% come from Canada.

The Trump's administration's on-again, off-again 25% tariffs on imports from Canada — which went into effect on Tuesday only to be suspended on some items for a month on Thursday — are giving Szeliga whiplash. The flip-flopping is making it tough to plan ahead. And if the tariffs do eventually go into effect, he'll likely need to raise prices and offer his customers fewer choices of oysters.

"Part of the problem of the 'chaos and shock and awe' approach to the negotiation is you can't actually really business plan based on knowing what is and isn't actually going to happen," he said. "That's a big problem."

Szeliga started Fishtown Seafood four years ago after other jobs in the food industry including chef and working for a nonprofit. His customers include neighborhood locals and others who shop at his retail shops as well as restaurant wholesale clients.

He sources some of his U.S. products directly from fish farms but for Canadian oysters he goes through dealers.

"They're larger companies that aggregate from all the (seafood) producers and then and then distribute throughout the country," he said.

There's also a quality consideration.

"Canadian oysters simply have the size, flavor profile, and brand recognition that our customers prefer and have grown to love," he said.

Trying to plan

On Tuesday, most of his suppliers told Szeliga they'd be raising prices. He only made one purchase while the tariff was in effect, buying some "sweet petite" oysters from Prince Edward Island, to make sure a wholesale client had enough product. He paid the whole 25% markup himself and didn't pass it along to

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his client, eating the extra cost. The suppliers' price increases are likely to come down now that the tariffs are postponed, but only for a month.

Now that he has a month reprieve, Szeliga said he plans to adjust his own inventory and work with his wholesale clients to plan out a menu that will be less affected by the tariffs. That might mean replacing higher-priced, higher-quality oysters with domestic or lower-priced Canadian offerings.

"Now that we have a picture of what this is probably going to look like, let's just start designing out your menus so that we're prepared and it's not complete bedlam again," he said. "Even if prices come down, we know prices are going to come up to X, Y, Z (when the tariffs return)." He said he'll be asking his clients, "What products are going to work for you in a month?"

A blow to the burgeoning oyster market

Szeliga isn't alone with his concerns – the entire oyster market could be affected.

The total value of U.S. imported seafood in 2023 was \$25.5 billion. Canada, as the largest supplier, delivered more than \$3.6 billion in seafood products to the United States in 2023. Imports of seafood from Canada into the U.S. rose 10% in 2024 to \$3.96 billion, according to the USDA.

While oysters are just a fraction of that – the most popular seafood remains shrimp, salmon and tuna – oyster demand has been growing. In 2022, oysters joined the National Fisheries Institute Top 10 List for the first time ever.

Szeliga has watched as the popularity meant more and more restaurants, beyond just oyster bars, began offering the bivalve on their menus. He worries that growth will now "fade and fizzle."

"I think it's really going to take the momentum out of what is a growth industry," he said.

Limiting choice, raising prices

Szeliga said he'll likely limit the number of oysters he carries in his shop from 12 to about 10 to make sure he can still offer a range of higher and lower price oysters that his customers want, even if he no longer carries the most expensive options.

Switching to oysters harvested only in the U.S. isn't an option, because although there are numerous types of oysters available on U.S. coasts, the majority of U.S. seafood is imported. Canada is the largest supplier of seafood to the U.S. That's hard to match.

"For domestic oysters the production is pretty maxed out right now," he said. "Oysters can take several years to grow and make it to market so a farmer would have needed to make a business selection several years ago to grow their business to be in a good position right now to take full advantage of this situation."

Szeliga worries that Canadian producers might start limiting what they sell to the U.S. market after the tariff confusion.

So ultimately, his customers should expect less choice of oysters, and for a higher price since not all prices will come back down after they've been marked up.

"Some products that were really 'value' purchases in the past. I think those suppliers, it forced them to realize they were value," he said. "And I think there are going to be products that aren't going to come back down (price-wise)," he said.

Authorities: Armed man shot by Secret Service near White House while Trump out of town

Associated Press undefined

WASHINGTON (AP) — An armed man believed to be traveling from Indiana was shot by U.S. Secret Service agents near the White House after a confrontation early Sunday, according to authorities.

No one else was injured in the shooting that happened around midnight about a block from the White House, according to a Secret Service statement. President Donald Trump was in Florida at the time of the shooting.

The Secret Service received information from local police about an alleged "suicidal individual" who was traveling from Indiana and found the man's car and a person matching his description nearby.

"As officers approached, the individual brandished a firearm and an armed confrontation ensued, during

which shots were fired by our personnel," the Secret Service said in a statement.

The man was hospitalized. The Secret Service said his condition was "unknown."

The Metropolitan Police Department will investigate because the shooting involved law enforcement officers. The police department declined to provide more details.

Mikaela Shiffrin sets World Cup podiums record with 3rd place in a slalom won by Katharina Truppe

ARE, Sweden (AP) — Mikaela Shiffrin set an all-time World Cup record Sunday with her 156th podium finish though she let victory slip away in a slalom.

Racing through steadily falling snow with a first-run lead, Shiffrin was only 25th-fastest in the second run to finish in third place, 0.19 seconds behind surprise winner Katharina Truppe.

Katharina Liensberger placed second, trailing 0.05 behind her Austria teammate, whose first career World Cup win was earned at age 29.

"Katharina Day!" Shiffrin said in the finish area as she hugged the two racers who beat her.

"I actually feel pretty good about it," Shiffrin said of her fifth slalom race in her comeback from a serious crash in November. "I maybe wasn't always perfect but I was pushing really hard."

Shiffrin's 156th top-3 result in her World Cup career broke a tie with Swedish great Ingemar Stenmark. Shiffrin also took the all-time wins record from Stenmark and now has 100 to his 86.

Truppe now has one from her 181st World Cup start, though she has three championship medals including the team event gold at the 2022 Beijing Olympics.

"It's just: 'Wow.' I'm a little bit speechless," said Truppe, who had been sixth-fastest in the morning run, trailing Shiffrin by 0.91. "First victory, it's crazy. I will enjoy it and soak up all this emotion."

Both Truppe and Shiffrin are aged 29 and won slalom bronze medals at the junior world championships though their careers were on different trajectories. Shiffrin won her medal aged 15 in 2011 and already had two World Cup slalom titles and Olympic gold before Truppe got her junior worlds medal in 2015.

Shiffrin needed to win Sunday to earn 100 race points and stay in contention — though only just — for a ninth career season-long slalom title. She missed four slalom races while recovering from her physical and psychological injuries.

"I'm still trying to get the repetition back. I just have to keep practicing it," she said.

With Olympic slalom champion Petra Vlhova skipping the entire season to recover from a knee injury, the door opened for a new World Cup title winner.

The World Cup season-ending last slalom is at Sun Valley, Idaho, on March 27 with four skiers ahead of Shiffrin and within 100 points of the lead to lift the crystal globe trophy.

Title-chasing contenders Zrinka Ljutic and Camille Rast, the world championships gold medalist last month, both were below their best form Sunday and placed 10th and 11th, respectively.

Ahead of going to the United States, the 21-year-old Ljutic leads Rast in the slalom standings by 41 points and will win the title with a top-three result. Liensberger, the 2021 champion, and Rast's Swiss teammate Wendy Holdener also could win.

Shiffrin said she plans to train in Europe before the trip across seven time zones, to the Idaho resort that last staged World Cup races in 1977.

"There's certainly some travel challenges. It's a really long distance," she said. "I guess one more race this season for me but I'm looking forward to it."

Musk and DOGE try to slash government by cutting out those who answer to voters

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — For decades, conservatives in Congress have talked about the need to cut government deeply, but they have always pulled back from mandating specific reductions, fearful of voter backlash.

Now, President Donald Trump's administration is trying to make major cuts in government through the so-called Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, run by billionaire Elon Musk — an initiative led by an unelected businessman who's unlikely to ever run for office and was appointed by a termed-out president who no longer needs to face voters again.

The dynamic of cutting government while also cutting out those who answer to voters has alarmed even some fiscal conservatives who have long pushed for Congress to reduce spending through the means laid out in the Constitution: a system of checks and balances that includes lawmakers elected across the country working with the president.

"Some members of the Trump administration got frustrated that Congress won't cut spending and decided to go around them," said Jessica Reidl of the conservative think tank The Manhattan Institute. Now, she said, "no one who has to face voters again is determining spending levels."

That may be changing.

On Thursday, facing mounting court challenges to the legality of Musk ordering layoffs, Trump told his Cabinet that Musk could only make recommendations about government reductions. And there were more signs that Congress, after sitting on the sidelines for nearly the first two months of Trump's administration, is slowly getting back into the game.

On Wednesday, Republican senators told Musk that he needed to ask Congress to approve specific cuts, which they can do on an up-or-down, filibuster-free vote through a process known as rescission.

Senators said Musk had never heard of the process before. That was a striking admission given that it's the only way for the executive branch to legally refuse to spend money that Congress has given it.

"To make it real, to make it go beyond the moment of the day, it needs to come back in the form of a rescission package," said Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, a longtime advocate of spending reductions who said he introduced the idea of rescission to Musk during the lunch meeting of the GOP caucus.

Of course, letting Congress have the final word may be constitutional, but it would open up the process to individual representatives or senators balking at cuts because of home-state interests or other concerns, as some have already. But Douglas Holtz-Eakin, a former director of the Congressional Budget Office and an economist in George W. Bush's administration, said that "messy" process is a superior one.

"There's always this instinct in people to insulate decisions from politics," Holtz-Eakin said. "It's a mistake in a democracy. It's really messy. You're not going to get the cleanliness of a corporate reorganization."

Riedl noted she has advocated for deep cuts for decades, but there's a reason Congress has balked.

"If Congress won't pass certain spending cuts, it's because the American people don't want it enough," she said. "If I want spending levels to be cut, it's my job to persuade the people of America to agree with me."

Trump and his supporters argue they did just that in the last presidential election when he promised to shake up Washington: "The people elected me to do the job and I'm doing it," Trump said during his address to Congress last week.

A corporate-style approach to government has long been the goal of conservatives, especially one segment that has recently called for a more CEO-style leader who is less tied down by democratic commitments to voters. Musk has embodied that, bringing the same disruptive, cost-cutting zeal he brought to his private companies. Some of his DOGE moves mirrored steps he took to slash the social media site Twitter, including the email offering buyouts, both times called "Fork in the Road."

Don Moynihan, a professor of public policy at the University of Michigan, said the effort seems more destructive than just an attempt to shrink government in ways conservatives have long advocated.

"It is usurping the role of Congress on spending and program design, using cuts as a backdoor way to impound and close agencies created by Congress," Moynihan said. "It is implementing an unprecedented

scale of disruption.”

Grover Norquist, an anti-tax activist whose pledge to make government small enough to “drown it in a bathtub” has made him an icon for small-government conservatives, cheered the DOGE project. He said Congress has to authorize any real reductions, but hoped that DOGE’s cuts show the legislative branch that voters will not panic when government is shrunk.

“If we do something for three years, they’ll make it the law,” Norquist said of Congress. “They’ll see it’s safe, they’ll see it’s successful. They’ll come in and put their name on it.”

Norquist acknowledged that Congress has repeatedly balked at the level of cuts that he would like to see, even under unified Republican control. He asserted that “95%” of Republicans support such reductions but “that wasn’t enough to get it across the finish line” in an era where the majority party usually only has a razor-thin margin of control in either chamber.

The past nearly half-century of politics has been defined by conservatives pledging to cut government spending, only to see it continue to grow. Republican Ronald Reagan swept into the presidency in 1980 pledging to cut government, but when he left eight years later its size had increased. The trend continued through Trump’s first term and during Democrat Joe Biden’s presidency.

Now, however, Trump will not face voters again, despite occasional quips about seeking a constitutionally prohibited third term. He has been open about his grudge against the federal bureaucracy, which he blames for many of his troubles during his initial four years in office.

“I don’t think previous presidents have had the same animus towards the federal government this one has,” Holtz-Eakin said.

He noted that Trump has launched a second cost-cutting initiative through traditional channels — his own Office of Management and Budget, which asked agencies to prepare for mass layoffs. That, Holtz-Eakin said, makes those coming reductions likelier to stick than DOGE cuts.

Holtz-Eakin said there are initial signs of voter discontent over the pace, depth and chaos of the cuts. “The usual way you visit that on a president is you wipe out his party in the midterms,” Holtz-Eakin said. “You never evade the voters.”

Trump’s transactional approach to diplomacy is a driving force on the world stage

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump, the real estate developer turned commander in chief, is laying bare his style of diplomacy in the early weeks of his new term: It’s a whole lot like a high-stakes business deal, and his No. 1 goal is to come out of the transaction on top.

The tactics are clear in his brewing trade war with Canada and Mexico, in his approach to Russia’s war on Ukraine and in his selection of the first country he will visit in his second term.

“President Trump approaches diplomacy and engages in a very transactional manner, with economics as the foundation and driving force behind international affairs,” retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg, the president’s special envoy to Ukraine and Russia, explained at an event in Washington this past week.

For Trump, it’s about leverage, not friendship; dollars as much as values; and hard power versus soft.

It’s not just a matter of negotiating style. At stake is the post-World War II international order as Trump’s actions raise doubts about American leadership around the globe.

He’s shaping a foreign policy that’s more inward looking and conscious of the bottom line, dismissing American soft-power levers such as the U.S. Agency for International Development as dubious and riddled by waste and suggesting that the United States might not defend fellow NATO members that aren’t meeting defense spending benchmarks set by the alliance.

Politics and presidents to a certain degree are all transactional. But Trump, who helped make himself a household name by burnishing an image as an intrepid real estate dealmaker, is taking it to another level as he navigates an increasingly complicated world.

The Republican president, in his previous life as a real estate titan, saw every deal as one in which

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there were clear winners and losers. In his return to the White House, he is more demonstrably injecting a what's-in-it-for-me approach to his dealings with both friend and foe.

Money talks

Edward Frantz, a University of Indianapolis historian who has studied the American presidency, said Trump's "ledger" approach might not be the most practical way to conduct diplomacy.

Frantz observed that Trump, 78, a baby boomer and football fan, seems inspired in his foreign policy-making by the ethos of legendary pro football coach Vince Lombardi, who famously said, "Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing."

"But diplomacy, especially in a more complicated world, might be more like soccer," Frantz said. "Sometimes you just need a tie. Sometimes you need to just survive and move on."

Trump on Thursday told reporters that he has decided to make Saudi Arabia the first overseas visit of his new term because the oil-rich kingdom has agreed to make a huge investment in the United States over the next four years.

"They've gotten richer, we've all gotten older. So I said, 'I'll go if you pay a trillion dollars, \$1 trillion to American companies,'" Trump said. He also made the kingdom his first overseas stop during his first White House term after the Saudis promised \$450 billion in U.S. investment.

Trump acknowledged that the United Kingdom, one of America's oldest allies, has traditionally been the first stop for U.S. presidents. But money talks.

Who has 'the cards' matters to Trump

In his dealings with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin, Trump has highly focused on who has the leverage. Putin has "the cards" and Zelenskyy does not, Trump has said repeatedly.

Zelenskyy appeared to be making some strides in assuaging Trump after their recent rocky meeting in the Oval Office ended with Trump and Vice President JD Vance criticizing the Ukrainian leader for what they said was insufficient gratitude for the tens of billions of dollars in U.S. assistance provided in the three years since Russia invaded.

Zelenskyy said later that how that meeting went down was "regrettable." He also made clear he was ready to sign off on a minerals deal with the U.S. — even without the explicit American security guarantees sought by the Ukrainians — that Trump wants.

In his Tuesday address before a joint session of Congress, Trump acknowledged Zelenskyy's fence-mending efforts. Trump also announced plans to send top advisers to Saudi Arabia this week for talks with Ukrainian officials.

But soon Trump was back to criticizing Zelenskyy, saying he does not have the leverage to keep fighting the war with Russia.

"I'm finding it more difficult, frankly, to deal with Ukraine, and they don't have the cards," Trump said. "In terms of getting a final settlement, it may be easier dealing with Russia, which is surprising, because they have all the cards."

Trump departs from years of US skepticism toward Russia

Trump's push on Zelenskyy — and pivot toward Moscow — marks a significant departure from traditional U.S. foreign policy toward Russia since the Cold War.

Others before Trump, including Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama, have tried resets with Russia, but perhaps never at a time as fraught. Deep skepticism toward Moscow, even in the best moments in the relationship, has been the standard operating posture in both Republican and Democratic administrations.

But Trump, who ran on a promise to quickly end the war, has veered from Democratic President Joe Biden's approach of making no major decision that could impact Ukraine without Kyiv's involvement.

At the same time, the new Republican administration has taken steps toward a more cooperative line with Putin, for whom Trump has long shown admiration.

Trump has ordered a pause on U.S. military aid for and intelligence-sharing with Kyiv, halted offensive cyberoperations against Russia by U.S. Cyber Command and disbanded a program aimed at seizing the

assets of Russian oligarchs as a means to punish the Kremlin for its invasion.

Keeping an eye on the ledger

Kellogg, who also served in Trump's first White House, recalled seeing Trump's "transactional diplomacy approach" early in the first term. Kellogg said that the president's first question in meetings with foreign leaders was often the same.

"As I found the very first time we were in the Cabinet room when a foreign official came in, the comment was, 'What is the trade imbalance between our two nations?'" Kellogg recalled, speaking at the Council on Foreign Relations event.

The trade ledger has been top of mind for Trump as he argues that for too long America has been played by friends and adversaries, including neighbors Canada and Mexico.

Trump last week announced 25% tariffs on many imports from Mexico and some imports from Canada amid widespread fears of the economic fallout from a broader trade war. He then postponed most of them.

The White House insists the pending tariffs are about stopping the smuggling of fentanyl. Trump has also at times suggested that the tariffs could be resolved by fixing the trade deficit.

The president on Friday was back to excoriating Canada, this time complaining about policies he said are hurting American dairy farmers and the lumber industry. He said he will act soon to even the ledger with Canada through reciprocal tariffs.

"Canada has been ripping us off for years on lumber and on dairy products," Trump said.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, whom Trump has taken to belittling as the governor of America's 51st state, said his country will not be backing down from Trump's trade war.

The episode has underscored Trump's willingness to embrace hard power to resolve differences, even if it means testing one of the world's most durable and amicable alliances.

The center-left Trudeau was so flummoxed by Trump's move that he found himself quoting the sharply conservative Wall Street Journal editorial page to make the point that this fight was unnecessary.

"It's not in my habit to agree with the Wall Street Journal," Trudeau said. "But Donald, they point out that even though you're a very smart guy, this is a very dumb thing to do."

Consumer prices fell in China in February and remain flat in a sluggish economy

BEIJING (AP) — Consumer prices fell in China in February for the first time in 13 months, as persistent weak demand was compounded by the early timing of the Lunar New Year holiday.

The National Bureau of Statistics said Sunday that the consumer price index dropped 0.7% in February compared with a year ago. On a monthly basis, prices were down 0.2% from January.

While many other countries wrestle with inflation, China's policymakers face flat to falling prices, and the possibility they could evolve into a deflationary spiral that would drag down the economy. The government stressed the need to increase domestic demand and consumer spending in an annual report last week to its ceremonial legislature, the National People's Congress, but held back on unveiling any dramatic new steps to boost the economy.

The Lunar New Year, a time when spending rises for travel, dining out and entertainment, came in late January this year instead of February, as it's based on the cycles of the moon. Holiday spending helped drive the consumer price index up 0.5% in January, but it then fell last month compared with 2024's elevated level.

Factoring out the impact of the holiday, the index rose 0.1% last month, Dong Lijuan, a statistician at the government's statistics bureau, said in a written analysis.

That is still far lower than ideal. Last week's government annual report included an inflation target of 2% for this year, but it is likely to fall far short of that goal. The consumer price index was flat in 2024, rising 0.2%.

Besides the early Lunar New Year, two other factors contributed to falling prices in February, Dong said: Better weather boosted farm production, driving down the price of fresh vegetables and automakers also

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stepped up promotions to try to boost sales, reducing prices for new cars.

The producer price index, which measures the wholesale price of goods, fell 2.2% in February, the statistics bureau said. Producer prices have been falling more sharply than consumer prices, putting pressure on companies to cut labor and other costs.

The falling prices are a symptom of both weak consumer spending and a massive expansion of factories to build electric vehicles, solar panels and other green-energy products, encouraged by government subsidies.

A burgeoning trade war with the United States could add to China's economic challenges, which include a prolonged real estate market crisis that is weighing on consumer confidence.

Government ministers, speaking to journalists at the National People's Congress on Sunday, pledged continued efforts to stabilize the real estate market and said that expanding employment in the current economic environment would be "a heavy task."

The employment situation is showing signs of improvement but the foundation for economic recovery remains unstable, said Wang Xiaoping, the minister of human resources and social security.

"The pressure on total employment remains unchanged," she said, noting that people are facing difficulties finding work and raising their incomes.

For real estate, a portion of this year's 4.4 trillion yuan (\$600 billion) in special local government bonds would go toward purchasing completed but unsold housing projects and converting them to affordable housing, apartments for young people, staff dormitories and other uses, said Ni Hong, the minister of housing and urban-rural development.

The government will also expand a program to rehabilitate older housing including adding all compounds built before 2000 to its urban renovation scheme, he said.

Today in History: March 10, the Tibetan uprising of 1959

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Monday, March 10, the 69th day of 2025. There are 296 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 10, 1959, thousands of Tibetans rebelled against occupying Chinese forces, surrounding the Dalai Lama's palace to protect him from potential harm. Fierce fighting between Tibetans and Chinese forces ensued in the following days, causing the Dalai Lama to flee Tibet for India, where he remains in exile today.

Also on this date:

In 1496, Christopher Columbus concluded his second visit to the Western Hemisphere as he left Hispaniola for Spain.

In 1864, President Abraham Lincoln assigned Ulysses S. Grant, who had just received his commission as lieutenant-general, to the command of the Armies of the United States.

In 1876, Alexander Graham Bell's assistant, Thomas Watson, heard Bell say over his experimental telephone: "Mr. Watson — come here — I want to see you" from the next room of Bell's Boston laboratory; they were the first words ever conveyed by telephone.

In 1913, abolitionist and Underground Railroad "conductor" Harriet Tubman died of pneumonia in Auburn, New York.

In 1969, James Earl Ray pleaded guilty in Memphis, Tennessee, to assassinating civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. (Ray later repudiated that plea, maintaining his innocence until his death.)

In 1993, Dr. David Gunn was killed outside the Pensacola Women's Medical Services clinic by anti-abortion activist Michael Griffin; it was the first killing attributed to a doctor's role in providing abortion care.

In 2019, a Boeing 737 Max 8 operated by Ethiopian Airlines crashed shortly after takeoff from the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, killing all 157 people on board.

Today's birthdays: Actor Chuck Norris is 85. Singer Dean Torrence (Jan and Dean) is 85. TV personality/business executive Barbara Corcoran (TV: "Shark Tank") is 76. Actor Sharon Stone is 67. Actor Jasmine Guy is 63. Music producer Rick Rubin is 62. Football Hall of Famer Rod Woodson is 60. Singer-songwriter Edie

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Brickell is 59. Actor Paget Brewster is 56. Actor Jon Hamm is 54. Rapper-producer Timbaland is 53. Actor Cristián (kris-tee-AHN') de la Fuente is 50. Actor Jeff Branson is 47. Singer Robin Thicke is 48. Olympic gymnastics gold medalist Shannon Miller is 48. Actor Thomas Middleditch is 43. Country singer-songwriter Carrie Underwood is 42. Actor Olivia Wilde is 41. Actor Emily Osment is 33. Rapper-singer Bad Bunny is 31.