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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.

My dear brothers,
take note of this:
Everyone should be
quick to listen, slow
to speak, and slow
to become angry,
for man's anger
does not bring
about the righteous
life that God desires.
James 1: 19-20

God's Spoken Word Ministries

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.

Canada, China Retaliate

The Canadian province of Ontario raised prices on electricity exported to the US states yesterday, adding a 25% surcharge to power transmissions to New York, Michigan, and Minnesota. Ontario Premier Doug Ford said the move was in response to ongoing tariff threats from the Trump administration.

An estimated 4.4% of New York's power in 2023 came from Ontario, while the regional grid operator servicing Michigan and Minnesota said less than 1% of its power came from Ontario. Still, Canadian officials projected about \$280K per day in revenue from the move, which rides a wave of anti-US sentiment in the country.

In related news, retaliatory tariffs from China on US agricultural imports kicked in yesterday, with Beijing placing 10% to 15% duties on products ranging from pork and beef to soybeans. China is the largest international market for US agriculture exports, amounting to nearly \$34B annually.

Breakthrough in Syria

Syria's transitional government—which toppled the Assad regime last year—signed a landmark deal yesterday with a US-backed Kurdish-led militia that controls the country's northeast. The agreement, signed by interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa and Syrian Democratic Forces leader Mazloum Abdi, consolidates northeastern Syria under central government control, including border crossings with Iraq and Turkey, airports, prisons, and vital oil and gas fields.

The breakthrough is a step toward unifying the country after years of civil war and sectarian divisions. It is also part of the government's effort to integrate all armed groups formed during the nearly 14-year conflict. The agreement guarantees Kurdish cultural and linguistic rights, which were long suppressed under the Assad regime; Syrian Kurds account for roughly 10% of the country's population. The Syrian Democratic Forces have been the main US partner in fighting the Islamic State.

The deal comes amid violent unrest in Syria's coastal regions that has killed more than 1,000 people since last week.

Meta Insider's Exposé

Meta developed a content censorship tool and offered data access to China in an effort to enter its market, according to a whistleblower complaint filed with the US Securities and Exchange Commission, free w/email). Sarah Wynn-Williams, a former global policy director at Meta who worked on China policy, said the company created a China-specific censorship system in 2015 and provided internal documents to support her claims.

China's Great Firewall regulates online content and blocks access to information deemed contrary to state interests. The complaint alleges Meta was willing to weaken Chinese users' rights and store user data on servers in China, which would have made it easier for the Chinese government to access personal information, including data from Hong Kong-based users. Meta had reportedly planned to appoint a "chief editor" with the authority to remove content.

Meta denies the allegations, saying the complaint was filed by a former employee terminated for poor performance. The company acknowledged exploring entry into the Chinese market but said it ultimately decided against it.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Michelle Obama and her brother, former college basketball coach Craig Robinson, launch "IMO" podcast, produced by Obama's media company Higher Ground.

UEFA Champions League knockout stage second leg kicks off today; see full schedule and storylines.

Stephen Curry takes assistant general manager role for men's and women's basketball at his alma mater, Davidson College.

Grammy-winning rapper Doechii named Billboard's 2025 Woman of the Year.

Los Angeles district attorney withdraws request to reduce sentencing in high-profile Menendez brothers murder case.

Science & Technology

NASA to eliminate the agency's office of the chief scientists and other roles as part of Trump administration's reduction in force.

Analysis questions Microsoft's recent announcement of a quantum computer relying on exotic Majorana particles, arguing the test used to confirm performance was insufficient.

New study suggests megalodons—a prehistoric shark considered to be one of the largest predators in history—grew up to 80 feet long, weighed 94 tons, and was shaped like a blue whale.

Business & Markets

US stock markets slide (S&P 500 -2.7%, Dow -2.1%, Nasdaq -4.0%); Nasdaq records worst day since 2022 as tariff policies worry investors over health of US economy.

Tesla shares fall over 15% in steepest drop since 2020.

Mortgage giant Rocket Companies to acquire digital real estate brokerage Redfin and take it private for \$1.75B; Redfin shares close up nearly 68% on the news.

Nirvana Insurance secures \$80M in Series C funding, valuing the AI-driven commercial trucking insurer at \$830.

Politics & World Affairs

Senate confirms former Oregon Rep. Lori Chavez-DeRemer (R) to lead the Labor Department.

House to vote today on stopgap funding bill ahead of Friday shutdown deadline.

US secretary of state says 83% of USAID programs will be cut.

Judge blocks deportation of Palestinian student who led Columbia University protests against Israel, pending ruling on petition; student has lawful permanent residency in the US.

Cargo ship carrying toxic chemicals crashes with US oil tanker in the North Sea off England's east coast; cause of fiery collision unknown, 37 people from both vessels brought ashore alive.

Guatemala's Volcano of Fire erupts, forcing 300 families to evacuate and putting another 30,000 at risk; the volcano, about 33 miles from Guatemala's capital, is one of the most active in Central America.



House comes down

The former Teddy Bear Day Care house was torn down on Monday. The property was recently purchased by Mark and Kelly Abeln. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Social Security to Reinstate Overpayment Recovery Rate **Policy Update Supports Fiscal Responsibility**

The Social Security Administration (SSA) announced it will increase the default overpayment withholding rate for Social Security beneficiaries to 100 percent of a person's monthly benefit. The Office of the Chief Actuary estimates this change will result in an increase in overpayment recoveries (i.e., a program savings) of about \$7 billion in the next decade.

"We have the significant responsibility to be good stewards of the trust funds for the American people," said Lee Dudek, Acting Commissioner of Social Security. "It is our duty to revise the overpayment repayment policy back to full withholding, as it was during the Obama administration and first Trump administration, to properly safeguard taxpayer funds."

The agency strives to pay the right person the right amount at the right time, and issues correct payments to most beneficiaries. When an overpayment does occur, the agency is required by law to seek repayment.

As of March 27, the agency will begin mailing notices about the new 100 percent withholding rate, rather than the recent adjustment of just 10 percent. The withholding rate change applies to new overpayments related to Social Security benefits. The withholding rate for current beneficiaries with an overpayment before March 27 will not change and no action is required. The withholding rate for Supplemental Security Income overpayments remains 10 percent.

People who are overpaid after March 27 will automatically be placed in full recovery at a rate of 100 percent of the Social Security payment. If someone cannot afford full recovery of their overpayment, they can contact Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 or their local office to request a lower rate of recovery.

Additionally, people have the right to appeal the overpayment decision or the amount. They can ask Social Security to waive collection of the overpayment, if they believe it was not their fault and can't afford to pay it back. The agency does not pursue recoveries while an initial appeal or waiver is pending.

Groton school board hears weight room proposal, future project updates

by Elizabeth Varin

Weight room improvements and expanded activities took the stage at Monday's school board meeting. The Groton Area board heard a presentation from community members working to upgrade the school's weight room, a project that has gained momentum in recent weeks.

Seth Erickson and Quinton Biermann presented plans to update the aging equipment as well as the room as a whole. Community members, including Erickson, Biermann, Justin Hanson and board member Tigh Flihs, began fundraising for the improvements a couple of weeks ago, and already are nearing \$55,000 in donations.

Erickson presented a layout designed with help from Push Pedal Pull that included new weight racks, fan bikes, a treadmill, leg press machine, plyometrics, storage for additional equipment and a seven-and-a-half foot by about 48 foot section of turf down the middle of the room. Some of the equipment in the weight room has been there for almost 20 years, and it just needs to get updated.

"We're going to be able to do this top to bottom brand new," he said. "It's just going to make it a better, safer weight room."

Biermann added the Groton facility is well behind what other schools and gyms in the area have. However, the proposal would bring it up to that level.

Board member Flihs added the district has only spent about \$3,400 on the weight room in the last decade. Now, with the private donations, the district could maybe even get some outdoor equipment for weight training.

While the effort was met with enthusiasm, board member Heather Lerseth-Flihs urged caution. She emphasized the need for a strategic approach to facility improvement, noting that discussion had taken place in the fall about renovating the football field. She encouraged the board to carefully prioritize projects to ensure long-term benefits.

"I just would like to make sure we're intentional about the projects we decide to move forward with," she said. "...I don't want the community thinking, 'Oh. You were really excited about the football field. Now you're really excited about this project.' I just want us to be intentional about the project the board asks for funds for."

Flihs said it wasn't really the board requesting private donations, but rather a grassroots effort. Hopefully if this project is done, people will see it and get excited for further improvements at the school.

In other business, Superintendent Joe Schwan told the board about a recent meeting with Langford school officials about potentially expanding the schools' cooperative agreement.

Fall 2024 was the first year of a cooperative agreement between the two districts for a combined football team. Schwan and Athletic Director Alexa Schuring met with Langford officials about other cooperative opportunities. Options include show choir, boys and girls soccer and cross country, Schwan said. Langford officials planned to speak with their students about activities they are interested in moving forward with.

"We'll see what kinds of interest they have and look into the logistics," Schwan said. "It's just a conversation at this point."

Groton officials have also been asking their students about potential new activities.

Schwan presented recent survey data from students indicating potential interest in bringing e-gaming, softball and Educators Rising chapters to the school.

Superintendent Schwan also reported to the board where the district is at in discussions of improvements at the football field.

"This isn't a plan by any means," he told the board. "This is just to let you know of the proposals coming in."

Two estimates have been received for converting the lighting to LED. One totals more than \$129,000, while the other estimates a cost between \$130,000 and \$140,000.

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Two estimates have also been received to build a new crow's nest. Those include one for \$222,684 for a crow's nest on the east side of the field on the bleachers. The other totaled \$173,934 for a concrete pad and a structure on the west side of the field.

Other improvements options include bringing in turf for the field or reseeding it.

- First grade teacher McKayla Hanson submitted her resignation effective at the end of the 2024-2025 school year.
- No school board election will take place this spring as only three people submitted paperwork for three positions on the board. Tigh Flihs and TJ Harder will continue their tenure on the board, while newcomer Samatha Weber will join the board in July for a three-year term.
- Fees for driver's education courses will stay the same for this year. Last summer, the district brought in more money than they spent on driver's education courses, leading to the decision to keep those fees steady at \$290 per student to take the summer course.

Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #16 Results

Team Standings: Cheetahs 6, Jackelopes 5, Chipmunks 4, Coyotes 4, Foxes 3, Shihtzus 2

Men's High Games: Butch Farmen 226 & 188, Austin Schuelke 202, Larry Frohling 182

Women's High Games: Nancy Radke 183, Vicki Walter 172, Shirlee Frohling 167

Men's High Series: Butch Farmen 582, Austin Schuelke 524, Brad Waage 522

Women's High Series: Nancy Radke 464, Vicki Walter 448, Sam Bahr 441

Week 16 Fun Game – 2 or more Strikes in same Frame – Chipmunks with 9!

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GFP Commission Holds March Meeting

The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) held their March Commission meeting at the Ramkota River Center March 6-7.

The Commission had several proposals for upcoming seasons and one finalization.

WILDLIFE PROPOSALS

Public Lands and Waters

The Commission continued discussions to align two rules with the United States Code of Federal Regulations, which was a recommendation made by the US Coast Guard. The first rule clarifies the usage of personal flotation devices be used in accordance with any requirements on the approval label or owner's manual. The second rule clarifies required fire extinguishers be in serviceable condition and not expired.

Prairie Elk

The Commission continued discussions on the Prairie Elk Season.

The Commission continued discussions to expand the West River Prairie Elk unit (PRE-WRA) to include all counties west of the Missouri River not currently in a Prairie Elk or Black Hills Elk hunting unit. A modification to the proposal to expand the season dates for Prairie Elk Unit 9A was approved, in addition to the expanded season dates for Prairie Elk Unit 27A to Sept. 1 – Dec. 31, and to allow the use of landowner-own-land, resident only antlerless elk license for this unit.

The Commission received the Department recommendation of 136 "any elk" and 280 "antlerless elk" licenses for the Prairie Elk Hunting Season, and license numbers for this season will be determined by the Commission during the April meeting.

Bighorn Sheep

The proposed 2025 Bighorn Sheep Hunting Season would run Sept. 1 – Dec. 31.

The Commission proposed to expand the BHS – BH4 unit to include those portions of Lawrence and Meade Counties west of Interstate 90.

The Commission proposed 7 total licenses for the Bighorn Sheep Hunting Season.

Mountain Lion

The Commission continued discussions on the 2025 mountain lion hunting season outside the Black Hills Fire Protection District, with the dates of December 26, 2024 - Dec. 25, 2025.

The Commission continued discussions on the proposal to allow the initiation of the pursuit of a mountain lion with dogs outside the Black Hills Fire Protection District to occur anywhere, where permitted by the landowner.

Duck Hunting Season

The Commission continued discussions on the 2025 duck hunting season dates:

High Plains Zone

October 11, 2025 – January 15, 2026

Low Plains North & Low Plains Middle Zone

September 27, 2025 – December 9, 2025

Low Plains South Zone

October 25, 2025 – January 6, 2026

Included in this proposal would be to allow the take of 3 pintail ducks in the traditional bag limit and to decrease the "bonus blue-winged teal season" from 16 to 9 days. Both of these proposals are in conjunction with changes made to US Fish and Wildlife Service's Federal Register.

Goose Hunting Season

The Commission continued discussions on the 2025 goose hunting season dates:

Canada Geese (and Brant)

Unit 1: October 1 – December 16, 2025

Unit 2 (including Bennett County): November 3, 2025 – February 15, 2026

Light Geese

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Statewide: September 27, 2025 – January 9, 2026

White-fronted Geese

Statewide: September 27 - December 9, 2025

The Commission also continued discussions on the proposal to repeal the Special Canada Goose season in Unit 3 and move Bennett County into Unit 2.

PARKS FINALIZATION

Bear Butte Public Use Restriction

The Commission reinstated the rule prohibiting the leaving of human remains at Bear Butte State Park.

Public Comment Opportunity and Upcoming Meeting

To hear the discussion on any of the topics on the agenda, audio from the meeting is available through South Dakota Public Broadcasting and will soon be available on the GFP website as part of the meeting archive.

To see these documents in their entirety, visit gfp.sd.gov/commission/information.

To be included in the public record and to be considered by the Commission, public comments must include a full name and city of residence and be submitted by 11:59 p.m. CT, March 30.

The next Regular Commission Meeting will be held April 3-4 at the Matthews Training Center in Pierre.



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

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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

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**SOUTH DAKOTA
NEWS WATCH**

Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

Trump's tariffs: South Dakota farmers prepare for impact

BY STU WHITNEY

South Dakota News Watch

During his March 4 address to a joint session of Congress at the U.S. Capitol, President Donald Trump defended his use of tariffs as a core economic and political strategy, adding a message to the agricultural community.

"Our farmers are going to have a field day right now," Trump said during the speech. "So to our farmers, have a lot of fun. I love you too."

In South Dakota, a state whose reliance on agricultural trade makes it more susceptible to the risks of tariffs and trade wars, the president's words were viewed as hopeful but not entirely reassuring.

Farmers have sturdy memories. They recall the volatility of commodity prices and exports during Trump's first White House stint, when much of the state's soybean flow to China was halted due to tariff retaliation and has struggled to recover.

"(Tariffs) will hurt our pocketbooks, obviously," said Rodney Koch, who grows soybeans and other crops north of Garretson, about 20 miles northeast of Sioux Falls. "But will we come out of it better in the long run? That's the hope."

U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds echoed that sentiment in a statement to News Watch, saying that "there needs to be an end game, and I believe the president is working with that same goal in mind."

So far, the only certainty is uncertainty.

On March 4, Trump slapped 25% tariffs on almost all imports from Canada and Mexico and an additional 10% on imports from China, rattling stock markets and triggering retaliatory actions from the countries involved.

Two days later, the president announced that he was postponing 25% tariffs on many imports from Mexico and some imports from Canada for a month amid widespread fears of the economic fallout.

Corn, wheat and soybean prices dropped in the days following the trade shakeup, and farmers weighed the impact of more expensive machinery and fertilizer coming down from Canada.

"One thing the market doesn't like is uncertainty because uncertainty means risk," said Jared McEntaffer, CEO of the Dakota Institute, an economic research and analysis organization in Sioux Falls. "If farmers are concerned that they're going to see lower commodity prices in the future, then naturally, they're going to start pulling back on their spending. And it becomes a ripple effect."

News Watch talked to farmers, business leaders, economists and politicians to try to clear up some misconceptions about tariffs and examine how South Dakota's farm economy could be impacted in the coming months and years.

What are tariffs exactly?

Tariffs are a tax on imports, in which the buyer pays a foreign seller an established tax rate based on what is being sold. Percentages are generally lower for countries with which the United States has a favorable trade agreement.

The money is collected by Customs and Border Protection agents at 328 ports of entry across the country. Because companies are paying more for the goods, that extra cost frequently gets passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices.

"There's a narrative out there that we're going to be imposing these taxes on Canada and Mexico," said McEntaffer. "That's not the case. The tax will be paid by American companies and consumers."

Before the federal income tax was established in 1913, tariffs were a major revenue source for the United States. That changed as global trade grew after World War II and the government needed larger revenue

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streams to support its operations.

In the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, the government collected about \$80 billion in tariffs and fees. That pales in comparison to the \$2.5 trillion from individual income taxes and the \$1.7 trillion from Social Security and Medicare taxes.

How do tariff policies impact South Dakota?

Farming helps drive the state economy, with agricultural production and processing accounting for about 14% of South Dakota's gross domestic product (the total value of all goods and services produced).

The wholesaling of corn, wheat and soybeans brought in \$10 billion in overall revenue in 2024, second among South Dakota industries to credit card issuing (\$18 billion).

Though many of these farm goods are sold domestically, a large percentage (including 60% of soybeans) are sold to international buyers.

South Dakota is the country's 12th largest agricultural exporting state, shipping \$5.4 billion in farm goods abroad in 2022, led by soybeans, corn, feed grains, beef, veal and wheat.

The largest international markets for these exports are, in order, Canada, Mexico and China, which are the three countries that Trump's administration has placed tariffs upon.

Don't tariffs impact U.S. imports, not exports?

The thing about tariffs is that there is almost always retaliation, as we've seen with Canada, Mexico and China. That's what is meant by trade wars.

In 2018, when Trump slapped a 25% tariff on goods from China, the Chinese government responded in kind. That greatly reduced the exporting of soybeans into China as that country looked to Brazil to fill the void.

As of November 2024, China accounted for only 44% of total U.S. soybean sales, down from 62% in 2016. From 2019-2023, an average of 73% of Brazil's exported soybeans went to China.

Following Trump's 2025 tariff announcement, Beijing retaliated with levies of up to 15% on various U.S. agricultural exports, including soybeans, wheat, meat and cotton.

Mexico's response will be watched closely, since that country is the top destination for United States corn exports.

"They're our No. 1 customer, and we value our customers," said DaNita Murray, executive director of South Dakota Corn, which represents the interests of corn producers across the state. "There's a balance between wanting to negotiate strong trade agreements and asking those countries to come to the table to negotiate in good faith while they're being slapped with tariffs."

What is President Trump's reasoning for the tariffs?

The economic reasoning revolves around boosting revenue and addressing trade deficits as well as trying to incentivize American companies such as automakers to shift manufacturing back to the United States.

But Trump has also talked of using tariffs as a bargaining tool to strengthen border security. During his March 4 address, he said that Mexico and Canada have "allowed fentanyl to come into our country at levels never seen before, killing hundreds of thousands of our citizens."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that there were 87,000 fentanyl-related U.S. deaths between October 2023 and September 2024, down from 114,000 the previous year.

Critics have questioned equating the northern border with the southern border on the subject of drug smuggling. U.S. customs agents seized 43 pounds of fentanyl at the Canadian border during the last fiscal year, compared to 21,100 pounds at the Mexican border.

"We understand that the president is using (tariffs) as a negotiating lever to stop the flow of fentanyl into the country," said Scott VanderWal, president of the South Dakota Farm Bureau. "Usually he gets what he wants by doing things like that."

But VanderWal, a third-generation family farmer from Volga, just west of Brookings, is also concerned about the fragile state of South Dakota's farm economy so soon after the COVID-19 pandemic, droughts and flooding as well as uncertainty about a new farm bill and federal spending cuts.

Nationally, net farm income decreased 4% in 2024, following a 19% drop the year before.

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VanderWal met with South Dakota Republican and U.S. Senate Majority Leader John Thune on March 4 in Washington to urge caution on trade policies as Trump acknowledged in his speech to Congress that there could be a "little disturbance" in the markets before the strategy bears fruit.

"What we hear from our members is that they can handle some temporary pain as long as there's some benefit on the other end," VanderWal said. "But we've been careful to help the administration understand that with the current ag economy, we would prefer that the president uses the tariffs sparingly."

What are South Dakota politicians saying?

Tariffs present a political quandary for South Dakota's congressional delegation, which is caught between Trump's enduring popularity (he carried the state with 63% of the vote in 2024) and the economic needs of their ag-based constituents.

So far, Thune, Rounds and U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson have publicly backed Trump's aggressive trade strategy while also calling for reasonable time limits and parameters.

"Unlike former President Biden, who didn't negotiate any new trade agreements which led to lower commodity prices, President Trump is a businessman and uses tariffs as leverage in negotiating important issues such as border protection," Rounds told News Watch. "He's pretty clearly expressed his desire for us to be patient as he works through those issues. Naturally, those of us that have always promoted free trade continue to look for progress."

Johnson told News Watch in February that fair trading relationships and stopping the flow of fentanyl across the border are important priorities and "it seems to me that the president has been very clear that these are areas where he wants to have leverage in conversations with these countries."

Kristi Noem, former South Dakota governor and U.S. representative who's now secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, has ardently supported the trade measures as a means of securing the border. Thune told CNN that Trump's actions are "an attempt to use (tariffs) in a targeted way to achieve and accomplish something that I think a lot of the Americans expect him to address."

Those statements illustrate a much different political climate than South Dakota Republican leaders operated under in 2018, when Trump levied tariffs against China during his first term in office.

At that time, Thune, Rounds and Noem sent a public letter to the president expressing "serious concern" over the tariffs and other trade policies that they said could push "an alarming number" of South Dakota farmers and ranchers "to the brink of economic collapse."

"Please keep in mind that U.S. export market share is diminishing daily at an alarming rate, and history has proven that once lost, export markets can take years, even decades to recapture," read the July 2018 letter.

How will tariffs impact current trade agreements?

One of the concerns is that igniting a tariff battle will reverse recent gains in the trade relationship with Mexico under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which was signed during Trump's first term.

Mexico repealed its ban on importing genetically modified (biotech) corn from the U.S. in February after a favorable ruling in an arbitration case brought by American trade representatives.

"We had some ups and downs with the previous Mexican administration, but things seem to be headed in the right direction," said Murray of South Dakota Corn, which monitors policy for a state ranked sixth in overall corn exports. "I know that the current administration (in Mexico) is interested in looking at USMCA and possibly making some improvements, and it could be a tough conversation with tariffs in the picture."

On March 6, Trump announced that imports from Mexico that comply with USMCA would be excluded from the 25% tariffs for a month. He also stated that potash (fertilizer) that U.S. farmers import from Canada would be tariffed at 10%, the same rate at which Trump wants to tariff Canadian energy products.

As for changing the dynamic and exploring global markets for corn exports, Murray noted India as a possibility and also various countries in Africa.

"You have mature corn markets like Mexico and Japan," she said. "And then you have new emerging possibilities, like India and, frankly, the continent of Africa. What are their protein needs? And can U.S.

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corn compete on a quality basis, as well as price, to make sure that it's U.S. corn that's feeding those chickens and pigs."

Will there be a farm bailout coming this time?

The "temporary pain" of U.S. farmers during the first go-round of Trump tariffs in 2018-19 was addressed by authorizing payments to U.S. farmers of \$28 billion to offset their losses from Chinese trade retaliation.

That was more than the \$21.8 billion that the Department of Defense spent in fiscal year 2019 for "nuclear delivery systems and weapons," including ballistic missile submarines, intercontinental ballistic missiles and bombers, according to Forbes.

"Taxpayers are going to be asked to initial checks to farmers in lieu of having a trade policy that actually opens and expands more markets," Thune said at the time. "There isn't anything about this that anybody should like."

Given the state of the federal deficit and the administration's focus on cutting government spending, it seems unlikely that a similar round of farm bailouts will be offered this time around.

That could make the sting felt by farmers more long-lasting if trade wars linger and tariffs become the norm, said Doug Sombke, president of the South Dakota Farmers Union.

"We haven't gained markets back from the last time, and we probably never will," said Sombke, a fourth-generation Brown County farmer. "The only reason we made it through last time was that we got substantial payments from the government, which contributed to the current budget deficit."

Tariffs on Canada could make it more expensive to buy farm machinery and other equipment, Sombke said, worsening an already difficult cycle of farmers struggling to make ends meet without government support.

In 2023, South Dakota received \$1.23 billion in farm subsidies, which ranked fourth behind Texas, Kansas and North Dakota.

"If you ask any CPA (certified public accountant) who is doing taxes for farmers, they'll tell you the same thing – farmers are making it on the payments," Sombke said. "If it wasn't for the subsidies and tax breaks and other payments they receive, they wouldn't make anything. That's how tight things are right now."

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



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Political deepfakes bill headed to South Dakota governor's desk

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 10, 2025 4:03 PM

A bill to require labels on political deepfakes within 90 days of an election passed the South Dakota Legislature on Monday at the Capitol in Pierre.

A deepfake is a digitally altered photo, video or audio of a person or people, meant to appear real, often created using artificial intelligence.

In the runup to the 2024 presidential primary, a robocall featuring an altered version of then-President Joe Biden's voice circulated in New Hampshire.

Senate Bill 164, which passed the House of Representatives 45-24, is a more narrowly tailored version of a proposal that first appeared in the Legislature in 2024, shortly after news of that robocall broke.

That version drew free speech concerns, in part from broadcasters worried it might sweep them up into liability for unwittingly hosting deepfakes.

SB 164, which passed the state Senate last week 32-3, explicitly exempts broadcasters, newspapers, websites or radio stations from liability. Sen. Liz Larson, D-Sioux Falls, introduced the bill.

If Gov. Larry Rhoden signs the bill, people or organizations that disseminate unlabeled deepfakes of South Dakota politicians with the intent to hurt a candidate, within 90 days of an election, would be subject to civil and criminal liability.

Unlabeled political deepfakes could be shared outside of the 90-day election window. Labeled deepfakes and deepfakes that constitute satire could be shared at any time.

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.

Former Yellowstone, Rushmore, Badlands superintendents say DOGE wiped out a generation of leaders

**Retirees warn that staff reductions and seasonal hiring chaos could affect visitors and
imperil natural resources**

BY: SETH TUPPER - MARCH 10, 2025 12:12 PM

If Dan Wenk had been fired during his first year in a permanent job with the National Park Service, the agency would've lost his many later accomplishments.

He would not have gone on to help lead a public-private partnership that raised \$75 million to redevelop visitor facilities at Mount Rushmore National Memorial, or a \$300 million negotiation to improve amenities at Yellowstone National Park with private funds, or the acquisition of the United Flight 93 crash site in Pennsylvania for a national memorial.

Wenk worked on those and other momentous projects during a four-decade career that began with his first permanent job as a landscape architect at Yellowstone.

Now he wonders how many potentially decades-long careers were extinguished on Feb. 14. That's when the Trump administration fired 1,000 park service employees — about 5% of the agency's workforce — who had yet to complete the probationary period for new hires. Another 700 employees reportedly accepted buyouts that were offered before the firings.

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"The feeder groups are being devastated in terms of future leaders of an organization," Wenk said.

Wenk and fellow former park service superintendents Cheryl Schreier and Mike Pflaum recently visited South Dakota Searchlight to express their concerns about the Trump administration's mass firings and spending cuts, carried out largely by billionaire Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency, known as DOGE. The actions have affected many federal agencies and programs, resulting in a reported 75,000 employee buyouts, 30,000 firings, and trillions of dollars in frozen or canceled federal grants, loans and foreign aid.

Wenk, Pflaum and Schreier each retired in South Dakota's Black Hills after decades-long careers culminating in the leadership of major park service sites, including Mount Rushmore and Yellowstone for Wenk, Mount Rushmore for Schreier, and Badlands National Park for Pflaum. Wenk's other postings included a stint as acting director of the park service.

Schreier is now the vice chair of The Coalition to Protect America's Parks, and Pflaum is the president-elect of the Association of National Park Rangers.

All three started as seasonal park service employees, like some of the recently fired workers did.

'My career is over'

Wenk said starting as a seasonal worker is a common park service career path, and it's an important thing to know about the probationary workers who lost their jobs.

"They may have been in the park service for many, many years," Wenk said, "and had finally gotten a permanent position."

Schreier's first permanent job was working as a protection ranger, securing the Liberty Bell and other historical treasures at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia. Pflaum got his first permanent job at Yellowstone, where he worked as a telecommunications operator in the dispatch center.

Recently fired employees in those types of positions might never get back on a career track that could have led to leadership. That includes Lydia Jones, who was fired from her first permanent park service job last month at Badlands National Park after working as a seasonal ranger in multiple parks for several years.

"I'm devastated," Jones wrote on social media, adding "my career is over."

Pflaum formerly worked with Jones at Badlands National Park.

"She was obviously a rising star," Pflaum said. "She was very good, very articulate, doing interpretive programs and managing the visitor center desk. And she got fired for 'poor performance,' which is absolutely untrue."

Pflaum said he's spoken with many current and retired park service employees in the past few weeks, and employees who were fired.

"There's absolutely an atmosphere of stress, anxiety and fear throughout the ranks," he said. "And that's not a good thing for mission accomplishment."

'It is going to have an impact this summer'

In the short term, mission accomplishment means hiring seasonal employees to staff many of the 433 park service sites that cover 133,000 square miles across the country. In South Dakota, park service locations include such well-known destinations as Mount Rushmore, the Badlands, Wind Cave National Park, Jewel Cave National Monument and Minuteman Missile National Historic Site.

The Trump/DOGE cuts have introduced chaos into the typically predictable seasonal hiring process. Trump ordered a federal hiring freeze in January, reportedly resulting in rescinded job offers for some seasonal park service workers.

After the mass firings on Feb. 14 and a public outcry, the Trump administration said it would hire back at least 50 of the park service jobs and authorize 5,000 seasonal positions, which would've been a reduction from recent years. Then the administration relented again and authorized 7,700 seasonal workers.

Wenk, Pflaum and Schreier said the confusion and delays will make filling seasonal jobs difficult. They said many seasonal workers may have been scared away or taken other jobs by now. Those that are

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hired could end up behind schedule with background checks and training. And they might lack permanent employees to train them because of the mass firings.

Wenk said visitors could suffer the consequences. Park service sites collectively receive more than 300 million visits per year.

"I think it is going to have an impact this summer," Wenk said, "especially as people start arriving in parks in the numbers that they traditionally do, and they expect the same kind of experience. It's not going to be there for them."

'You could lose something forever'

One of the experiences that could fall away is programming. At Mount Rushmore, summer programs include ranger talks, presidential reenactors and Native American dancers. The mountain carving receives more than 2 million visitors per year, and on some days, the crowds are overwhelming. Wenk said parks could be overwhelmed more often this summer due to staffing shortages.

"If it got crowded, we used to put a sign out — 'cut the programs' — because we've got to get people through here faster," Wenk said. "So there aren't going to be programs available for them to take advantage of."

Other problems could range from insufficiently cleaned bathrooms to inadequate emergency response times, the former superintendents said. Pflaum worries about safety.

"Lots of people, unfortunately, become ill or injured or lost or need rescue in our parks," he said. "I don't think those things will be non-existent, but will they be somehow delayed because of fewer rangers? Could lives hang in the balance? I don't know, but I think those are potential impacts."

Schreier said additional problems might be less visible and longer-term in nature, but ultimately devastating to the park service. They could include reductions in the scientific research that goes on behind the scenes in many parks, on topics ranging from geology and paleontology to invasive and endangered species.

"So if you don't have those individuals who are working on that, or the inventory and monitoring of those resources," Schreier said, "there may be years of data, and all of a sudden they're not collecting that data anymore."

The most serious danger is to the parks themselves, Wenk said, from having fewer people protecting the treasures they contain.

"A lot of the resources in the National Park Service are fragile, whether they be natural resources or cultural resources," he said. "And if you don't have the people to protect them, you could lose something forever."

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

Governors to laid-off federal workers: We'll hire you

States with thousands of vacancies are recruiting and sweeping aside red tape

BY: ROBBIE SEQUEIRA - MARCH 10, 2025 9:55 AM

Among the thousands of federal workers who've been forced out or taken buyouts in the past month, surely some would be perfect fits for the many vacancies in Pennsylvania's state government.

That, at least, is the thinking of Democratic Gov. Josh Shapiro, who recently directed his state to not only offer aid to laid-off constituents, but also to repost some job openings.

He's catching up to governors in other states — from Hawaii to Maryland — who see opportunity, even as they're scrambling to help panicked residents. The Trump administration and Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency task force have been culling federal workers across agencies while also threatening anyone who doesn't list in an email how they're making good use of their time.

The number of announced terminations tracked by global data company Statista exceeded 16,000 as

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of Feb. 25. That's in addition to the 75,000 federal employees who accepted buyouts offered by the administration in its earliest days. And President Donald Trump has directed Cabinet agencies to continue mass layoffs.

States are looking to hire those workers, though officials face challenges, such as offering lower salaries and having slower hiring processes.

In Maryland alone, Democratic Gov. Wes Moore estimates about 10,000 of his constituents could lose work in the shake-up. There are more than 5,000 openings in state government.

Pennsylvania has some 5,600 critical openings, from accountants to registered nurses, now described on a newly created website tailored to federal employees.

"This is an act of self-interest for the people of Pennsylvania, because I believe the commonwealth can benefit from the experience and expertise of these federal workers who have been forced out of their jobs," Shapiro said.

Officials in New Mexico, New York and Virginia — among the states with the highest numbers of federal workers — say they're offering a silver lining for all that displaced talent, providing ways to streamline the transition from federal government to jobs at the state and local level.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, made her recruitment pitch clear, stating, "The federal government might say, 'You're fired,' but here in New York, we say, 'You're hired.'"

Hawaii's Operation Hire Hawai'i is working to fast-track former federal employees into state agency jobs. Washington state lawmakers have introduced legislation to prioritize these displaced workers in hiring processes.

In Virginia, Gov. Glenn Youngkin, a Republican, launched the Virginia Has Jobs program — a website designed to help laid-off federal workers quickly connect with available state jobs.

Despite these efforts, states face significant hurdles in matching federal workers to state jobs. There are differing skill sets, mismatches in salaries, and the time it takes for a job application to wind its way through a state bureaucracy.

For workers, though, a lot of the difficulty is about coming to terms with the mind-boggling turn of events.

Emotional turmoil

For Victoria, who asked that she be identified by her middle name out of fear of retaliation, working for the federal government wasn't just a job — it was a commitment to nonpartisan public service.

She worked for three years as a contractor for the Federal Aviation Administration before being hired last year to a permanent federal position.

"The reason I wanted to be a federal employee in the first place is because it's supposed to be nonpartisan work," she said. "We're supposed to serve the public in pursuit of a mission, and for the FAA, that mission is aerospace safety."

Her probation was to end in April. She didn't make it.

"I got a call from our office manager at 6 p.m. on a Friday night, telling me I was being let go," Victoria recalled.

She got her official termination email hours later, minutes before midnight. It included a list of resources she couldn't access because they were, for her, suddenly behind a government firewall.

For people trying to assist workers such as Victoria, the scale and speed of the firings outpaced even what they figured was coming.

Caitlin Lewis is executive director at Work for America, a nonprofit that runs the new Civic Match initiative to help state governments recruit former federal workers. She foresaw a need for the project following the 2024 election.

"When we launched Civic Match in November, we anticipated about 4,000 political appointees and campaign staff seeking new jobs after the election. But what we've seen in the new year is a massive surge in laid-off civil servants looking for work," said Lewis.

One of the biggest obstacles? State hiring is slow.

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"The average time to hire in state government is 90 days. In local government, it's 136 days. That's a long process for workers who need jobs now."

If states don't act quickly, they risk losing experienced talent to the private sector, which moves faster in recruitment, she said. Many former federal workers are already transitioning into corporate roles, non-profits and consulting firms rather than waiting for state job openings.

Beyond slow hiring, another challenge is that not all laid-off federal employees want to stay in government.

"I'm not actually 100% sure that every single one of those workers who may be impacted is looking for another job in government," said Nicole Overley, commissioner of Virginia Works, a state agency focused on reemployment. "Virginia has over 4,500 open state jobs. But I'm not sure every individual who is transitioning from the federal workforce is necessarily looking for a state job."

Overley added that many federal employees may not even be aware of state job resources available to them.

"In the last 48 hours, we've had over 1,000 job seekers register for the March 5th virtual job fair," she said early this month. "I don't know if all federal workers who are impacted know about the resources that are out there — and that's where workforce development comes in."

Some states are working to speed up the process. Hawaii, for instance, has expedited its state hiring process through an executive order from Democratic Gov. Josh Green. In Pennsylvania, Shapiro has told the state's hiring office to compare federal work favorably to state work for the purposes of notching experience.

Maryland's schools desperately need substitute teachers now, Moore said in announcing resources recently, and anyone with an associate's degree can apply.

New Mexico is launching statewide initiatives that include a resource webpage, recruitment events and access to education and training programs.

In Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser has encouraged laid-off workers to consider district job openings, but she also wants to ensure they have access to unemployment benefits and housing support. The federal government is the district's largest employer, and the layoffs could devastate the city's economy.

Lower salaries

Another key hurdle is pay disparities between federal and state jobs.

In many states, federal workers make, on average, significantly more than state employees. They include Maryland, where federal workers earn 183% of state worker salaries, Virginia (175%), West Virginia (163%) and Idaho (157%), according to a Stateline review of data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics.

In states where federal workers earn less than state employees, such as New York (77% of state workers' salaries) and California (97%), the transitions might be easier, though the costs of living in those states are among the highest in the nation.

For Hawaii, the challenge is particularly stark. The state has one of the highest concentrations of federal employment outside the District of Columbia and Maryland — and federal jobs in Hawaii pay about three times more than state government positions.

To ensure laid-off federal employees can move quickly into state roles, Hawaii has set up an expedited timeline of 14 days from job application to hiring. That means, for example, passing along résumés from human resources to hiring departments on a daily basis and cutting some processes down to hours or days, Brenna Hashimoto, director of the state's Department of Human Resources Development, wrote in an email to Stateline.

It's too early to say how the system is going, Hashimoto wrote, but the state will collect data and report to the governor's office.

Some success

Despite the hurdles, there are signs of success in transitioning federal employees into state jobs.

Shane Evangelist, CEO of Neogov, which manages hiring software for state and local governments, said

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the potential scale of transitions is significant.

Evangelist shared examples of successful federal-to-state career transitions, including a former IRS employee to a state internal auditor, a federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention employee to a state epidemiologist, and a Census Bureau employee to an IT support analyst.

However, he warned that states risk losing the most skilled workers to the private sector unless they hire right away.

"The most talented workers move first," said Evangelist. "The ones who are smart, experienced and articulate — the kind of employees the government needs most — will be the first to go."

There are thousands of potential new job applicants.

On Jan. 19, federal civil servants made up only 8% of Civic Match's candidate pool. By late February, that skyrocketed to 45.1%. More than 3,300 former federal workers have signed up for Civic Match in just weeks, according to Lewis.

"These are not entry-level employees," Lewis said. "Many of them have spent over a decade in government roles, gaining deep expertise in policy, finance, environmental management and IT."

Struggles ahead

Despite state efforts, some former federal employees say they are struggling to find equivalent jobs in both government and the private sector.

"I've heard from people with 20 years in government who are being told their experience isn't transferable," said Victoria, the laid-off FAA worker.

"It's a nice gesture that the states are saying all of them want us to work for them, but how many state or private sector jobs actually have an equivalent to what I was doing at the federal level?" she said. "It's not a one-to-one match."

Some private-sector employers are undervaluing federal work experience, she noted, forcing federal employees to start at lower levels.

"I've heard from people with 20 years in federal government who were told they'd have to start three or four steps behind where they were," she said. "These companies know we're desperate, and they're using it to devalue our skills and pay us less."

For Victoria and others like her, the hardest part isn't just losing a job — it's the way federal employees have been portrayed.

"We're not some faceless deep-state bureaucrats," she said. "We're your neighbors, your friends, and the people you see walking down the street. We got into government because we wanted to serve."

"And if we were in it for the money, we wouldn't have chosen public service in the first place."

Stateline reporter Tim Henderson contributed to this report. Stateline reporter Robbie Sequeira can be reached at rsequeira@stateline.org.

Robbie Sequeira is a staff writer covering housing and social services for Stateline.

Man sentenced to 25 years in federal prison for damaging energy facilities in the Dakotas

BY: NORTH DAKOTA MONITOR STAFF - MARCH 10, 2025 6:36 PM

A Canadian man who pleaded guilty last fall to shooting at energy facilities in North Dakota and South Dakota was sentenced Monday to 25 years in prison.

Cameron Monte Smith, 50, also was ordered to pay more than \$2 million in restitution after being convicted in U.S. District Court of two counts of destruction of an energy facility.

Court documents show that Smith used a high-powered rifle to shoot at the Wheelock electric substation near Ray in northwest North Dakota in May 2023. The substation is operated by Mountrail-Williams Electric Cooperative and Basin Electric Power Cooperative. The shooting knocked out power to more than

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240 people, The Bismarck Tribune has reported.

Smith also used a rifle to shoot a transformer and pump station of the Keystone Pipeline in eastern South Dakota's Clark County in July 2022, court records show. The damage disrupted the pipeline, operated by TC Energy, which carries oil from Canada through North Dakota and South Dakota to facilities in Illinois and Texas.

"This sentence serves as a reminder that the Department of Justice will use all its resources to investigate and aggressively prosecute any attack on our critical civilian infrastructures," Jennifer Klemetsrud Puhl, acting U.S. attorney for the District of North Dakota, said in a statement.

Republicans control Congress, but need Democrats to help avert a shutdown just days away

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 10, 2025 3:10 PM

WASHINGTON — Republicans in Congress will try to pass a stopgap spending bill this week to avert a partial government shutdown and keep the government running through September, though they'll need Democrats' help to do it.

The 99-page stopgap spending bill, which House Republicans released over the weekend, is required since lawmakers haven't made any progress conferencing the dozen annual government funding bills that were supposed to become law by Oct. 1.

The continuing resolution, the third since October, would fund the federal government for the rest of fiscal year 2025 — marking the first time since fiscal 2013 that Congress has leaned on stopgap spending bills for the entire year, according to a report from the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., appears confident he'll be able to pass the bill in the House as soon as Tuesday, though he'll need nearly every one of the chamber's 218 GOP lawmakers to support passage, if it's going to make it to the Senate. At least one is already resistant.

If Republicans fail to approve the bill in the House, that would likely lead Johnson to sit down and negotiate a bipartisan agreement with Democrats, something he's not been inclined to do so far.

Meandering into a shutdown

The other option would be letting the federal government meander into a partial government shutdown. House Appropriations Chairman Tom Cole, R-Okla., wrote in a statement that the "continuing resolution ensures the government remains open and working for Americans."

"Democrats have a choice to join us or display their true intentions. Should they choose to vote to shut the government for negotiation leverage and their contempt of President Trump, they are readying to hurt hundreds of millions more," Cole wrote. "It's a battle they lost in November, and one the people will continue to see through. Our good-faith efforts provide an immediate solution to the deadline before us."

Kentucky's Thomas Massie isn't so supportive.

"Unless I get a lobotomy Monday that causes me to forget what I've witnessed the past 12 years, I'll be a NO on the CR this week," Massie posted on social media. "It amazes me that my colleagues and many of the public fall for the lie that we will fight another day."

In another post, Massie criticized GOP leadership for kicking the can down the road again, instead of negotiating the dozen full-year appropriations bills.

"The argument for CR in September 2024 was to fight in December 2024 after the election. The argument for CR in December 2024 was to fight in March 2025 after the inauguration," Massie wrote. "The argument for CR in March 2025 is to fight in September 2025 because... we're not ready yet !?!!"

'Hand a blank check to Elon Musk'

House Democrats don't appear inclined to help Republicans approve the stopgap spending bill in that

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chamber, saying it's not a typical continuing resolution and that it represents "a power grab for the White House."

"Elon Musk and President Trump are stealing from the middle class, seniors, veterans, working people, small businesses, and farms to pay for tax breaks for billionaires and big corporations," House Appropriations Committee ranking member Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., wrote in a statement.

"They have made it harder for Americans to get their Social Security benefits; shut down the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which has saved American families \$21 billion; fired 6,000 veterans and reportedly plan to make it harder for veterans to access benefits by firing an additional 80,000 VA employees; laid off hundreds of workers who build and maintain critical nuclear weapons; and shut down medical research labs. House Republicans' response: hand a blank check to Elon Musk," DeLauro added.

Eight Senate Democrats

House passage is just the first, and easiest hurdle, for the continuing resolution.

The bill must garner the support of at least eight Democrats in the Senate, a number that could very well increase in the days ahead if other Republican senators in that chamber come out against passage.

Kentucky Republican Sen. Rand Paul so far is the sole member of his party in the upper chamber to say he'll vote against the stopgap spending bill.

"Despite @DOGE's findings of loony left-wing USAID programs, the Republican spending bill continues to fund the very foreign aid @elonmusk proposes to cut!" Paul wrote on social media. "The bill continues spending at the inflated pandemic levels and will add \$2T to the debt this year. Count me as a hell no!"

Paul wrote in a separate post that he wasn't entirely sure if the administration could unilaterally cancel spending that Congress had approved, a debate that's working its way through the court system and is likely to wind up at the U.S. Supreme Court.

"Rubio canceling woke grants is great but a legal question remains — can the administration simply not spend \$ Congress gave to them?" Paul wrote, referring to U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio. "SCOTUS will ultimately decide but last week they initially upheld a lower court decision that is demanding \$ be spent.

"The best way to incorporate @DOGE cuts into overspending is for Congress to appropriate less \$. Unfortunately, this week Congress will agree to continue spending at Biden levels — ugh."

Senators from states Trump won

Bills in the Senate must get the support of at least 60 lawmakers to move past procedural votes and onto a simple majority final passage vote. Republicans hold 53 seats at the moment, making bipartisanship crucial for the vast majority of bills.

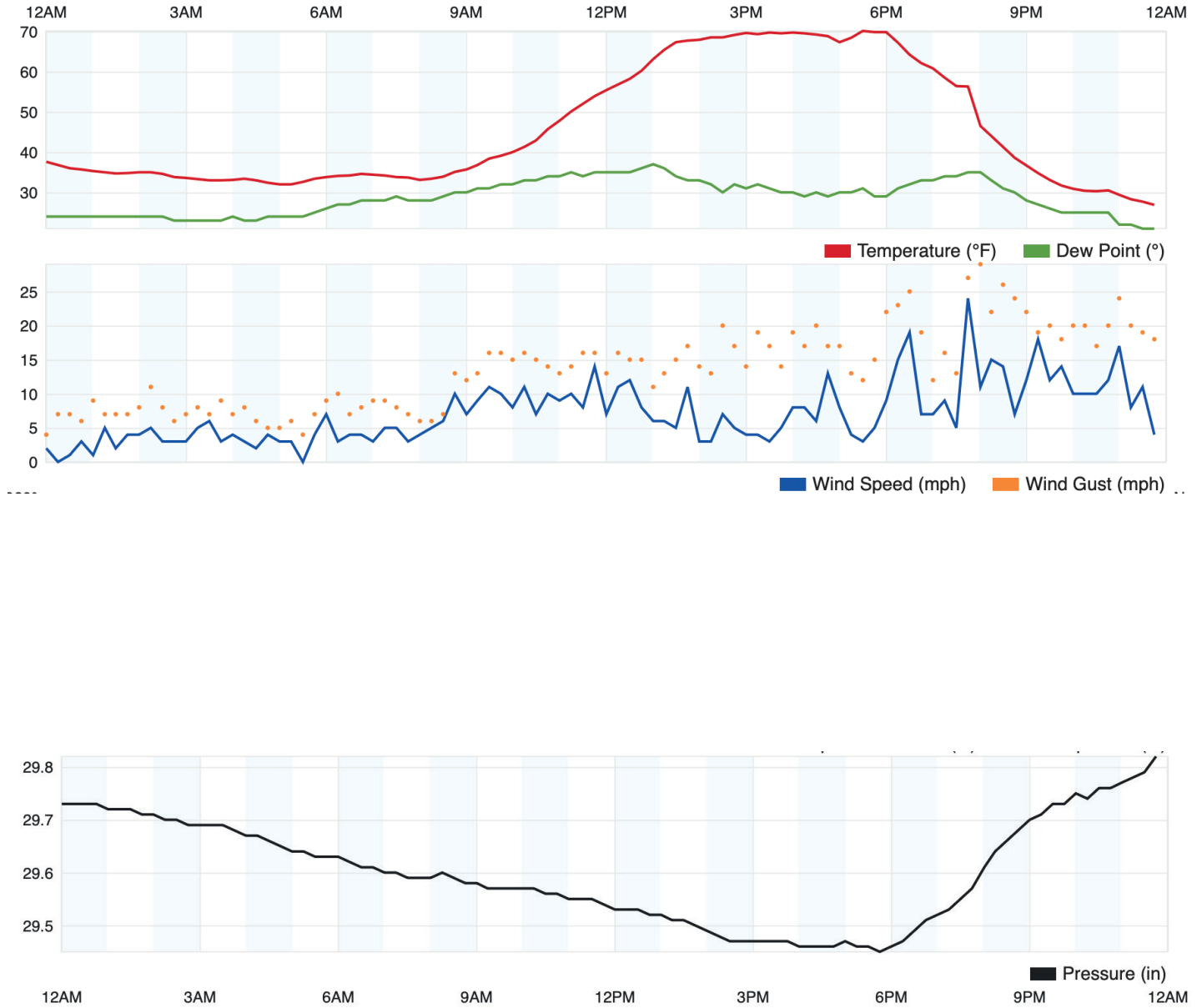
Senate Democrats include 10 members who represent a state President Donald Trump won during the November elections, a bloc that could see some of those lawmakers vote for the stopgap spending bill — Arizona's Ruben Gallego and Mark Kelly, Georgia's Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock, Michigan's Gary Peters and Elissa Slotkin, Nevada's Catherine Cortez Masto and Jacky Rosen, Pennsylvania's John Fetterman and Wisconsin's Tammy Baldwin. But that's far from a guarantee.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 45 °F

Increasing
Clouds

Tonight



Low: 26 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Wednesday



High: 61 °F

Mostly Sunny

Wednesday
Night



Low: 34 °F

Partly Cloudy

Thursday



High: 72 °F

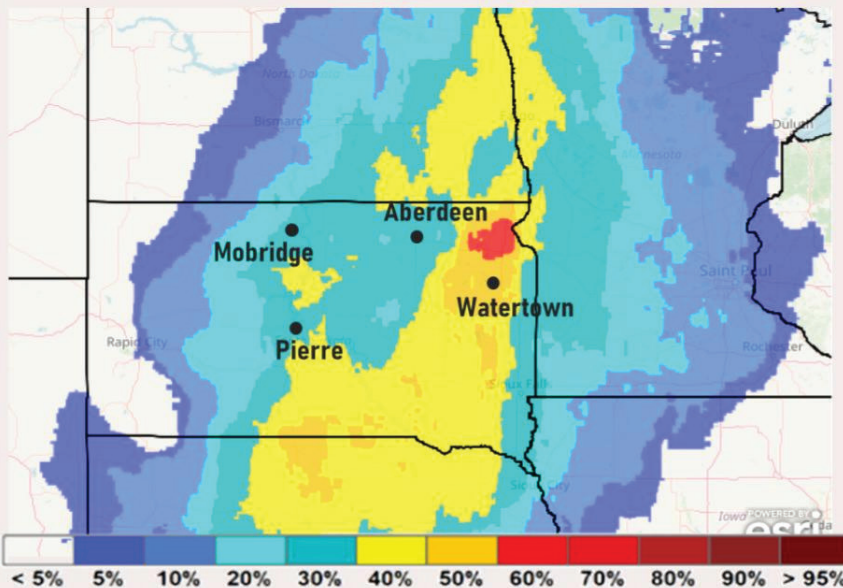
Partly Sunny
then Partly
Sunny and
Breezy

Winter Storm Likelihood of Impact

Likelihood of at least Moderate Impacts from 7pm Fri to 7pm Sat

March 11, 2025 4:06 AM

Moderate Impacts: Expect disruptions to daily life. Hazardous driving conditions. Use extra caution while driving. Closures and disruptions to infrastructure may occur.



What We Know

A winter weather system may bring light to moderate rain changing to snow Friday night and persisting on Saturday, along with windy conditions. Portions of the Dakotas and Minnesota may be impacted. **Adverse** travel conditions are possible.

What We Don't Know

The exact track and timing of this system and thus the location of heaviest precipitation and potential mixed precipitation, which both affect snowfall totals, and extent of travel impact from falling/blowing snow. **Stay tuned!**

What You Can Do

Continue to monitor the latest forecast from a reliable source, especially if you have travel plans.

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

A storm system will be moving through the Central Plains and into the Northern Plains Friday and Saturday. The eastern half of the forecast area, mainly James River Valley and eastward, may be experiencing rain changing to snow along with windy conditions. This area has a 40 to 60% chance of moderate impacts per the Winter Storm Severity Index. The system's track and timing are still being refined. This will determine precipitation type, when the changeover will occur, and the strength of the wind component. Continue to monitor the latest forecast from a reliable source!

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 70 °F at 3:22 PM (Record High)

Low Temp: 28 °F at 11:23 PM

Wind: 29 mph at 7:47 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 44 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 72 in 2024

Record Low: -27 in 1948

Average High: 39

Average Low: 17

Average Precip in March.: 0.27

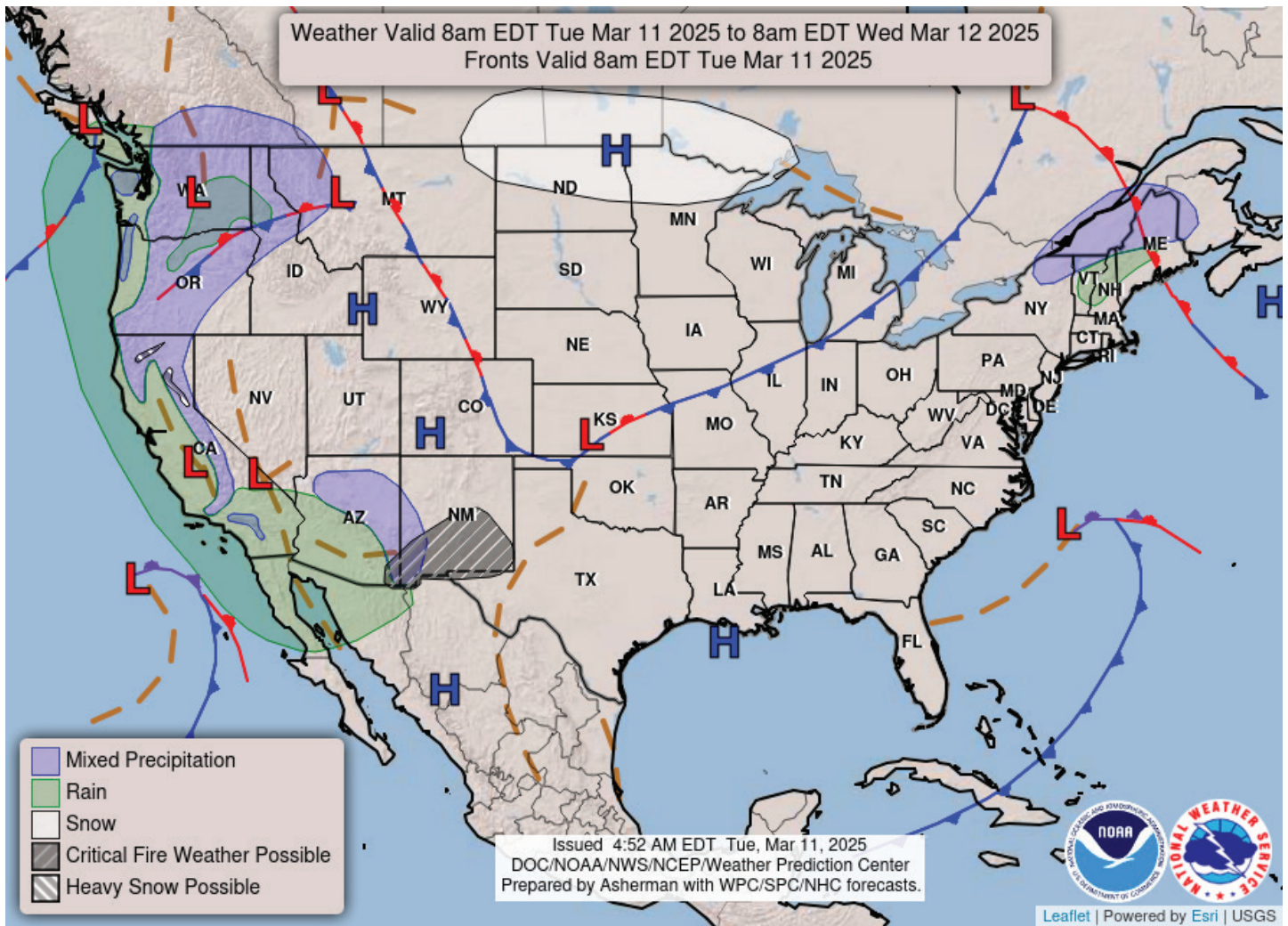
Precip to date in March.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.44

Precip Year to Date: 0.45

Sunset Tonight: 7:34:44 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:47:53 am



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Today in Weather History

March 11, 1991: A developing winter storm, centered to the south of the Black Hills, caused heavy snow to fall on the northern Black Hills from the evening of March 11 until the morning of March 12. Snowfall totals of 3-9 inches were reported, including 9 inches at Custer, 8 inches at Deerfield, and 8 inches at Lead.

March 11, 2011: A very intense low-pressure area moving across North Dakota brought widespread blizzard conditions to central and northeast South Dakota. The low-pressure area brought 1 to 3 inches of snowfall to the region. The new snow combined with 30 to 50 mph winds with gusts to 60 to 70 mph brought widespread whiteout conditions. Traffic was brought to a standstill, with many motorists having to be rescued and taken to a shelter. Hundreds of cars were stranded on mainly Highway 12 and Interstate 29. Two people traveling on Highway 10 in McPherson County told about how they became stuck and were picked up by another vehicle and that it took them over 2 1/2 hours to travel just a few miles to safety. Interstate-29 was closed from Watertown to Sisseton from 6 pm on the 11th until noon on the 12th. Many events were affected, including the Girl's State Basketball Tournament in Watertown. There were several overturned semis along with several vehicle accidents across the area. Some of the highest wind gusts included 56 mph at Watertown; 58 mph at Mobridge, Sisseton, and Faulkton; 59 mph at Aberdeen; 61 mph at Bowdle; 66 mph near Hillhead, and 71 mph west of Long Lake.

1888: The Great Blizzard of 1888 paralyzed the east coast from the Chesapeake Bay to Maine on March 11 through the 14th. The blizzard dumped as much as 55 inches of snow in some areas, and snowdrifts of 30 to 40 feet were reported. An estimated 400 people died from this blizzard. Click [HERE](#) for more information from History.com.

1911 - Tamarack, CA, reported 451 inches of snow on the ground, a record for the U.S. (David Ludlum)

1917: At 3:02 pm on Sunday, March 11, 1917, many New Castle lives were changed forever. In just a few terrifying minutes, 22 people were killed, hundreds were injured, 500 homes were damaged or destroyed, and many of the city's triumphant greenhouses were leveled in what would be part of \$1 million suffered in property damage.

1948 - Record cold followed in the wake of a Kansas blizzard. Lows of -25 degrees at Oberlin, Healy and Quinter established a state record for the month of March. Lows of -15 at Dodge City, -11 at Concordia, and -3 at Wichita were also March records. (The Weather Channel)

1953: An F4 tornado cut an 18-mile path through Haskell and Knox counties in Texas. Seventeen people were killed, and an eight-block area of Knox City was leveled.

1962 - One of the most paralyzing snowstorms in decades produced record March snowfalls in Iowa. Four feet of snow covered the ground at Inwood following the storm. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Unseasonably cold weather prevailed in the southeastern U.S., and a storm over the Gulf of Mexico spread rain and sleet and snow into the Appalachian Region. Sleet was reported in southern Mississippi. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A blizzard raged across the north central U.S. Chadron NE was buried under 33 inches of snow, up to 25 inches of snow was reported in eastern Wyoming, and totals in the Black Hills of South Dakota ranged up to 69 inches at Lead. Winds gusted to 63 mph at Mullen NE. Snow drifts thirty feet high were reported around Lusk WY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Twenty-one cities in the central and southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 95 degrees at Lubbock TX equalled their record for March. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Forty-four cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Record highs included 71 degrees at Dickinson ND and Williston ND, and 84 degrees at Lynchburg VA, Charleston WV and Huntington WV. Augusta GA and Columbia SC tied for honors as the hot spot in the nation with record highs of 88 degrees. A vigorous cold front produced up to three feet of snow in the mountains of Utah. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2006 - Phoenix's record run for dry days finally ends at 143 days. The last measured rain fell on October 18, 2005. Not only did the rain break the dry spell, the 1.40 inches that fell was a record amount for the date.

2011: On March 11, 2011, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake off the Pacific coast of Japan generated a tsunami. This series of ocean waves sped towards the island nation, with waves reaching 24 feet high. The result was devastation and utter destruction.



EITHER SIDE IS O.K. WITH ME

It was his first pastorate after completing seminary. He loved his members and served them faithfully. Upon learning that one of the members of his church was in the hospital, he hurried to visit her.

As he walked to her room, he asked a nurse if she was resting comfortably. "No," she responded, "we believe that she only has a few hours to live."

The news disturbed him, and he was visibly shaken. When he entered her room, the saintly lady recognized his fear. She looked at him compassionately and said, "Son, there's nothing to be scared about. I'm just going to cross over Jordan, and my Father owns both sides of the river. Either side is O.K. with me!"

John wrote, "He will remove all of their sorrows and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its sorrows are gone! And the one sitting on the throne said, 'Look, I am making all things new!'"

Presently, we live on the side of the river that is dominated by pain, suffering and sorrow. It is all we have experienced. God does indeed own it and we are fortunate that He is with us to comfort and sustain us on "this side of the river."

But we can rejoice in the hope of a new creation: a new heaven and a new earth. Once again He will make all things perfect and complete – including us, His children. With joy we can look forward to that day!

Prayer: Lord, with our limited minds we cannot imagine what heaven will be like. So, we ask You to increase our faith and trust in You and our hope for tomorrow. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!" Revelation 21:3-5

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: 17 Hrs 27 Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.10.25

13 15 34 36 39 10

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$25,910,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 42 Mins 38 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.10.25

7 8 13 21 42 8

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 57 Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.08.25

6 9 11 14 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$60,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 57 Mins 38 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.10.25

41 42 46 48 59 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 26 Mins 38 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.10.25

17 40 47 50 55 6

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$353,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 26 Mins 38 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

A new storm could spawn tornadoes in the South and whip up a blizzard in northern states

By JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A potent storm system is expected to pour heavy rain on western states later this week before rumbling into the central United States, where it could spawn tornadoes in the South and dump heavy snow across the parts of the Great Plains and Upper Midwest, creating blizzard conditions.

The ominous forecast comes as temperatures hit record highs in parts of the central U.S. after an active few days of weather across the nation. A possible tornado touched down in central Florida on Monday morning, tearing past a local television news station as its meteorologists were live on the air. No injuries were reported.

In Texas, thunderstorms on Saturday toppled semitrailers on Interstate 35 in Texas and flipped over a recreation vehicle at the Texas Motorplex drag racing strip south of Dallas, killing a man inside the RV.

Record temperatures heat up parts of Plains and Midwest

Much of the Midwest got hit by heavy snow and blizzard conditions last week, but the region began this week with springtime temperatures. Readings reached the 60s in many parts of Minnesota on Monday and hit 76 in the western town of Granite Falls by mid-afternoon.

Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska both set records Monday with temperatures in the low 80s (20s Celsius).

Readings in the 60s and low 70s (teens to 20s Celsius) were also common across South Dakota.

But dry conditions and high winds raised the wildfire risk over much of the Midwest, with red flag warnings out for most of Nebraska and South Dakota, and parts of Kansas, Missouri, Iowa and Minnesota.

Southern California could get drenched

The system moving in later this week is expected to begin with an atmospheric river soaking Southern California with heavy rain on Thursday, the National Weather Service projects. Atmospheric rivers are plumes of water vapor that form over the ocean and can drop tremendous amounts of moisture over land.

"Snow and wind will spread across the Intermountain West and Rockies Thursday into Friday before rapid development occurs over the Plains," according to the federal Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland.

Tornadoes take aim at the South

As the system moves east, a regional outbreak of severe thunderstorms is expected over large parts of several southern states beginning Friday and continuing into Saturday, according to the latest forecasts from the federal Storm Prediction Center.

That means a variety of severe weather hazards, from thunderstorms to so-called supercells that can spawn destructive tornadoes.

The worst weather could strike parts of Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi and Tennessee on Friday, then move into Alabama by Saturday, though it was too early to say which areas could be hardest hit.

High winds expected to increase wildfire threat

The threat of wildfires in parts of the Southwest is already high, with forecasts of critical wildfire conditions on Tuesday in the southeastern corner of Arizona and in southern New Mexico. Parts of west Texas also are at risk.

Strong winds that will likely accompany the incoming storm system are likely to add more concerns about wildfires later in the week, especially in the southern Plains, according to the National Weather Service.

Storm strikes Florida TV station

A powerful thunderstorm touched down along Interstate 4 in Seminole County north of Orlando, Florida, downing fences and blowing shingles off roofs, officials said.

The storm passed over local television station Fox 35's studios in Lake Mary as its meteorologists were on the air.

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"OK, take shelter. Everybody in the Fox 35 building, get to your safe space under your desk," said Fox 35 meteorologist Brooks Garner. "If you're not in a designated area, we're catching debris right now on the roof. Debris is on the roof right now."

Residents in Arizona, Texas clean up after earlier storms

In Texas, residents were cleaning up storm damage over the weekend.

Strong winds of up to 90 mph (145 kph) ripped the roof off a Days Inn along Interstate 45, and the high winds also damaged homes throughout Ellis County.

The 42-year-old man who died in the RV was identified as T.J. Bailey from Midlothian, Texas. His wife and two sons were inside the RV when it rolled over at the racetrack, Ellis County Justice of the Peace Chris Macon told The Dallas Morning News. Bailey's family members were treated at a hospital for non-life-threatening injuries.

In northern Arizona, snowstorms late last week led to a more than 15-mile (24-kilometer) backup on Interstate 40, leaving some motorists stranded for hours.

Talks begin between Ukraine and the United States in Saudi Arabia

By The Associated Press undefined

High-stakes talks between Ukraine and the United States have started in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Journalists briefly entered the room to see the two sides as the meeting began at a luxury hotel in the Red Sea port city on Tuesday.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio smiled for the camera, while Ukrainian officials sat without expression at a table across from them.

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister was on hand for the talks. American, Saudi and Ukrainian flags stood in the background. Officials answered no shouted questions.

The talks reflect a new diplomatic push after an unprecedented argument erupted during President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Feb. 28 visit to the White House.

They came hours after Russian air defenses shot down 337 Ukrainian drones over 10 Russian regions overnight, killing two people and injuring 18, according to officials.

Ukrainian officials told The Associated Press on Monday that they will propose a ceasefire covering the Black Sea, which would bring safer shipping, as well long-range missile strikes that have hit civilians in Ukraine, and the release of prisoners.

The Kremlin has not publicly offered any concessions. Russia has said it's ready to cease hostilities on condition that Ukraine drops its bid to join NATO and recognizes regions that Moscow occupies as Russian.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below.

Russian air defenses shot down 337 Ukrainian drones over 10 Russian regions overnight, military officials said Tuesday, in what appeared to be the biggest Ukrainian drone attack on Russia in the three-year war.

The attack came hours before the start of key Ukraine-U.S. talks in Saudi Arabia on how to stop Europe's biggest conflict since World War II. Two people were killed and 18 were injured, including three children, officials said.

A senior Ukrainian delegation, meanwhile, was to meet with America's top diplomat in Saudi Arabia about ending the three-year war with Russia. There was no immediate comment from Ukrainian or U.S. officials on the attack.

The talks in Saudi Arabia reflect a new diplomatic push after an unprecedented argument erupted during President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Feb. 28 visit to the White House. Ukrainian officials told The Associated Press on Monday that they will propose a ceasefire covering the Black Sea, which would bring safer shipping, as well long-range missile strikes that have hit civilians in Ukraine, and the release of prisoners.

The Kremlin has not publicly offered any concessions. Russia has said it's ready to cease hostilities on condition that Ukraine drops its bid to join NATO and recognizes regions that Moscow occupies as Russian.

Russian forces have held the battlefield momentum for more than a year and are pushing at selected points along the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line, especially in the eastern Donetsk region.

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Most of the Ukrainian drones fired at Russia overnight — 126 of them — were shot down over the Kursk region across the border from Ukraine, parts of which Kyiv's forces control, and 91 were shot down over the Moscow region, according to a statement by Russia's Defense Ministry.

Moscow's Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said over 70 drones targeted the Russian capital and were shot down as they were flying toward it — the biggest single attack on Moscow so far in the war.

Other attacked regions listed in the statement included Belgorod, Bryansk and Voronezh on the border with Ukraine and those deeper inside Russia, such as Kaluga, Lipetsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Oryol and Ryazan.

The governor of the Moscow region surrounding the capital, Andrei Vorobyov, said the attack damaged several residential buildings and a number of cars.

Another person was wounded on a highway in the Lipetsk region, Gov. Igor Artamonov said.

Sobyanin said the roof of a building in Moscow also sustained damage, which he described as "insignificant." Footage of the building, published by RIA Novosti, showed a charred spot on the facade of a multi-story residential building near the roof, with bits of the building's lining stripped off.

Flights were temporarily restricted in and out of six airports, including Domodedovo, Vnukovo, Sheremetyevo and Zhukovsky just outside Moscow, and airports in the Yaroslavl and Nizhny Novgorod regions.

Train traffic through the Domodedovo railway station in the Moscow region has also been briefly halted, local officials reported.

Local authorities also reported downing drones in the Tula and Vladimir regions adjacent to the Moscow region. It wasn't immediately clear why those regions weren't mentioned in the Defense Ministry's statement.

In the Saudi city of Jeddah, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and his delegation, including national security adviser Mike Waltz, were preparing to meet Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's team.

Two senior Ukrainian officials said Kyiv is ready to sign an agreement with the United States on access to Ukraine's rare earth minerals — a deal that U.S. President Donald Trump is keen to secure.

On his plane to Jeddah, Rubio said the U.S. delegation would not be proposing any specific measures to secure an end to the three-year conflict but rather wanted to hear from Ukraine about what they would be willing to consider.

"I'm not going to set any conditions on what they have to or need to do," Rubio told reporters accompanying him. "I think we want to listen to see how far they're willing to go and then compare that to what the Russians want and see how far apart we truly are."

Rubio said the rare earths and critical minerals deal could be signed during the meeting but stressed it was not a precondition for the United States to move ahead with discussions with either Ukraine or the Russians.

He said it may, in fact, make more sense to take some time to negotiate the precise details of the agreement, which is now a broad memorandum of understanding that leaves out many specifics.

China is ending its annual Congress with questions open over how to revive its slowing economy

By KEN MORITSUGU and SIMINA MISTREANU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China wrapped up its biggest political event of the year on Tuesday leaving one question unanswered: How far will it go to try to revive economic growth in 2025?

A recurring theme throughout the weeklong meeting of the nearly 3,000-member National People's Congress was the need to boost investment and consumer spending.

How much will be done to translate words into action will only become clear in the months ahead as the ruling Communist Party juggles priorities. What is clear is that a burgeoning trade war with the United States has left the outlook for the coming months uncertain.

The meeting ended in the absence of top political leader Zhao Leji, the chairman of the Standing Committee of the Congress. Zhao, who was supposed to host the closing session, had a respiratory tract infection, said Vice Chairman Li Hongzhong, who chaired the meeting in his place.

The rubber-stamp parliament voted overwhelmingly to approve an annual government work report, with

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2,882 votes for, one vote against and one abstention. Similar near-unanimous votes were recorded to pass the budget and an amendment to a law on deputies to the Congress, among other items.

At stake is the health of the world's second largest economy, a major exporter of products to countries around the world and an important market for foreign companies from Apple to Volkswagen. A prolonged property crisis has sapped consumer and business confidence, depriving the economy of its past vitality. Now, a tariff war unleashed by U.S. President Donald Trump is compounding those problems.

China holds back on major stimulus — for now

The Congress opened with the announcement of an economic growth target of "about 5%" for this year, a level that analysts said would be difficult to achieve with the measures detailed during this year's Congress.

They include borrowing more money for a slew of initiatives, such as giving 300 billion yuan (\$41.3 billion) in rebates to consumers who trade-in old cars and appliances for new ones. But much of the borrowing will go to supporting the housing market and local governments weighed down by debt.

"It is unclear how much of a jolt this budget will provide to underlying domestic demand and reflation efforts, despite the sizeable rise in the deficit," Jeremy Zook, the lead China analyst for Fitch Ratings, said in a report.

The ambitious 5% growth target signaled to analysts that more stimulus may be coming. Last year, the government surprised stock markets with various moves beginning in September to push growth up to 5%, also the target in 2024.

Finance Minister Lan Fo'an told journalists covering the Congress that the government had sufficient tools in reserve to deal with external or domestic uncertainties.

Xi seeks private sector help, within limits

Chinese President Xi Jinping seems bent on reinvigorating private businesses, which provide a large share of growth and jobs in the country's state-dominated economy. Years of regulatory crackdowns have shaken the confidence of entrepreneurs and other investors.

The Congress reviewed comments on a proposed law meant to improve the environment for private enterprises by regulating aspects of market access, financing, competition and property rights protection, among others. The legislation was not put to a vote.

Xi aims to send a "message to entrepreneurs, but also to local governments and regulators, that the private sector's important and it's necessary," Neil Thomas, a fellow on Chinese politics at the Asia Society Policy Institute, said ahead of the congress.

Private companies will also gain access to a higher share of loans than before, and financing for private businesses raised through bond issuance will be expanded, Chinese Premier Li Qiang said in the work report.

The foreign minister says the US shouldn't bully

Much rides on how far Trump pursues his trade wars with China and other countries.

China has diversified its export markets in recent years, but the U.S. remains a vital trading partner. The greater fear is not the tariffs themselves but the health of the U.S. economy and demand for Chinese products, said Alicia Garcia Herrero, the chief Asia-Pacific economist for Natixis investment bank.

Trump has raised tariffs on imports from China twice since taking office in January. China has shown no sign of backing down.

"If the American side goes further down this wrong path, we will fight to the end," Commerce Minister Wang Wentao told journalists during the Congress.

Asked about Trump's "America First" policy, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the law of the jungle would reign if all countries adopted a "my country first" approach.

"A big country should honor its international obligations and fulfill its due responsibilities," he said to journalists at the Congress. "It should not put selfish interests before principles, still less wield its power to bully the weak."

A Chinese buzzword makes a comeback

The government said in its annual report that it would address what it considers unproductive "rat-race" competition, invoking a term that was a buzzword in China five years ago among stressed-out younger

workers.

The government is applying the term “neijuan” — more commonly translated as “involution” — to companies and local governments rather than workers. A proliferation of green energy firms, for example, has led to gluts in solar panels and other equipment and fierce price wars that ultimately harm the industry.

“Their strategies are similar, which leads to extremely cruel competition,” Chinese tech leader Lei Jun, the CEO of Xiaomi and a delegate to the Congress, told state media.

The solutions are unclear, experts say, noting that government subsidies for green energy helped create the problem by encouraging so many start-ups.

Former President Rodrigo Duterte arrested in the Philippines on an ICC warrant over drug killings

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte was arrested Tuesday on a warrant from the International Criminal Court accusing him of crimes against humanity, the Philippine government said.

Duterte was detained at Manila’s international airport after arriving from Hong Kong, President Ferdinand Marcos’ office said in a statement. The ICC has been investigating mass killings during the former president’s deadly crackdown against illegal drugs.

“Upon his arrival, the prosecutor general served the ICC notification for an arrest warrant to the former president for the crime of crime against humanity,” the government said. “He’s now in the custody of authorities.”

The surprise arrest sparked a commotion at the airport, where lawyers and aides of Duterte loudly protested that they, along with a doctor and lawyers, were prevented from coming close to him after he was taken into police custody. “This is a violation of his constitutional right,” Sen. Bong Go, a close Duterte ally, told reporters.

The warrant of arrest sent by the ICC to Philippine officials, a copy of which was seen by The Associated Press, said “there are reasonable grounds to believe that” the attack on victims “was both widespread and systematic: the attack took place over a period of several years and thousands people appear to have been killed.”

Duterte’s arrest was necessary “to ensure his appearance before the court,” according to the March 7 warrant, adding that the former president was expected to ignore a court summons.

It said that although Duterte was no longer president, he “appears to continue to wield considerable power.”

“Mindful of the resultant risk of interference with the investigations and the security of witnesses and victims, the chamber is satisfied that the arrest of Mr. Duterte is necessary.”

There was no immediate comment on Duterte’s arrest from the court or the ICC prosecutor’s office.

Duterte’s arrest and downfall stunned and drove families of the victims of his bloody crackdowns against illegal drugs to tears.

“This is a big, long-awaited day for justice,” Randy delos Santos, the uncle of a teenager killed by police during an anti-drug operation in August 2017 in the Manila metropolis, told the AP.

“Now we feel that justice is rolling. We hope that top police officials and the hundreds of police officers who were involved in the illegal killings should also be placed in custody and punished,” delos Santos said.

Three of the police officers who killed his nephew, Kian delos Santos, were convicted in 2018 for the high-profile murder, which prompted Duterte at the time to temporarily suspend his brutal anti-drugs crackdown.

The conviction was one of at least three, so far, against law enforcers involved in the anti-drugs campaign, reflecting the concerns of families of victims of suspected extrajudicial killings that they would not get justice in the Philippines, hence, their decision to seek the help of the ICC.

It was not immediately clear where Duterte was taken by the police and when he would be flown to Eu-

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rope to be handed to ICC custody. The government said the 79-year-old former leader was in good health.

The ICC began investigating drug killings under Duterte from Nov. 1, 2011, when he was still mayor of the southern city of Davao, to March 16, 2019, as possible crimes against humanity. Duterte withdrew the Philippines in 2019 from the Rome Statute in a move human rights activists say was aimed at escaping accountability.

The Duterte administration moved to suspend the global court's investigation in late 2021 by arguing that Philippine authorities were already looking into the same allegations, arguing the ICC — a court of last resort — didn't have jurisdiction.

Appeals judges at the ICC ruled in 2023 the investigation could resume and rejected the Duterte administration's objections. Based in The Hague, the Netherlands, the ICC can step in when countries are unwilling or unable to prosecute suspects in the most heinous international crimes, including genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who succeeded Duterte in 2022 and became entangled in a bitter political dispute with the former president, has decided not to rejoin the global court. But the Marcos administration has said it would cooperate if the ICC asks international police to take Duterte into custody through a so-called Red Notice, a request for law enforcement agencies worldwide to locate and temporarily arrest a crime suspect.

Uganda deploys special forces to South Sudan to protect the government as fears of civil war grow

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — Uganda has deployed an unknown number of troops to South Sudan in a bid to protect the fragile government of President Salva Kiir as a tense rivalry with his deputy threatens a return to civil war in the east African nation.

Ugandan special forces have been deployed to Juba, the South Sudanese capital, "to support the government of South Sudan" against a possible rebel advance on the city, said Maj. Gen. Felix Kulayigye, a spokesperson for the Ugandan military.

"We sent a force there two days ago," he said. "We are not there for peacekeeping."

In deploying Ugandan soldiers to Juba, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni moved as a guarantor of the peace process that keeps Kiir and Machar together in a delicate government of national unity, Kulayigye told The Associated Press Tuesday.

Kiir and Museveni are allies, and Museveni has in the past intervened in the South Sudan conflict to keep Kiir in power.

The deployment of Ugandan troops to South Sudan underscores rising tensions in the oil-producing country that has been plagued by political instability and violence since it gained independence from Sudan in 2011.

The U.S. on Sunday ordered nonemergency government personnel to leave Juba. The U.N. is warning of "an alarming regression that could erase years of hard-won progress" in South Sudan.

The latest tensions stem from fighting in the country's north between government troops and a rebel militia, known as the White Army, that's widely believed to be allied with Machar.

Last week a South Sudanese general was among several people killed when a United Nations helicopter on a mission to evacuate government troops from the town of Nasir, the scene of the fighting in Upper Nile state, was shot at. Earlier in the week, after the White Army overran the military garrison in Nasir, government troops surrounded Machar's home in Juba and several of his allies were arrested. Deputy army chief Gen. Gabriel Duop Lam, who is seen as loyal to Machar, was among those detained.

Kiir had angered Machar's group earlier in the year by firing officials seen as loyal to Machar, who has charged that "persistent violations through unilateral decisions and decrees threaten the very existence" of their peace pact.

Kiir urged calm after last week's helicopter incident, saying in a statement that his government "will

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handle this crisis and we will remain steadfast in the path of peace.”

Civil war erupted in South Sudan in late 2013 when a rift between Kiir and Machar escalated into fighting along ethnic lines. Kiir, an ethnic Dinka, accused a group of soldiers loyal to Machar, an ethnic Nuer, of trying to take power by force.

Machar escaped Juba, and later rebels loyal to him came close to capturing Juba but were repulsed by a combined force of South Sudanese soldiers loyal to Kiir and Ugandan special forces.

More than 400,000 people were killed in the 5-year civil war that followed.

With the support of regional leaders and the international community, Kiir and Machar signed a peace deal in 2018 and Machar returned to Juba as South Sudan’s first vice president.

But the political rivalry between South Sudan’s top two leaders — with Kiir suspicious of his deputy’s ambitions and Machar calling Kiir a dictator — remains an obstacle to lasting peace. Both men have been accused of violating multiple ceasefires.

Kiir and Machar are under pressure from the U.S. and others to more quickly implement the 2018 peace deal and prepare for elections.

Challenges include the government’s failure to implement promised reforms such as completing the unification of the army command.

Presidential elections, repeatedly postponed, are now scheduled for 2026.

Greenland votes in key election as Trump wants to take control of the strategic island

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

NUUK, Greenland (AP) — The single polling station in Greenland’s capital city is ready.

This big Arctic island with a tiny population holds early parliamentary elections Tuesday that are being closely watched. U.S. President Donald Trump has made clear he wants to take control of the region that occupies a strategic North Atlantic location and contains rare earth minerals key to driving the global economy.

Trump’s overtures aren’t on the ballot, but they are on everyone’s minds.

This self-governing region of Denmark is home to 56,000 people, most from Indigenous Inuit backgrounds. It has been on a path toward independence since at least 2009. Now, Greenlanders are debating the best way to ensure they control their future.

“I think most of us have been scared since the new year because of (Trump’s) interest,” Pipaluk Lyngø, a member of parliament from the ruling Inuit Ataqatigiit, or United Inuit party, told The Associated Press. “So we’re really, really looking to Europe right now to see if we could establish a stronger bond with them to secure our sovereign nation.”

Opinion polls show most Greenlanders favor independence.

Most say they don’t dislike Americans, pointing to the good relations they have with the local Pituffik Space Base, formerly Thule Air Force Base, where U.S. military personnel have been stationed since 1951.

But Greenlanders show no sign of wanting to become Americans. Even some of Trump’s biggest fans cling to the principle that they should control their destiny. That includes Gerth Josefsen, a 53-year-old fisherman from Nuuk who sports a MAGA hat and is proud to have visited Mar-a-Lago, Trump’s Florida home.

Their mantra is that Greenland is open for business, but not for sale.

“The situation has changed because of Trump and because of the world,” said Doris Jensen, representative of the social democratic Siumut party who said she has always favored independence, “So we have decided in our party that we have to do (it) more quickly.”

Trump’s attention has transformed the deeply local process of democracy. Suddenly, the presence of journalists from as far away as Japan and Croatia are reminders that these are far from normal times.

After candidates’ final televised debate at a school auditorium in Nuuk, Prime Minister Mute Bourup Egede was greeted by about 75 supporters who were almost outnumbered by photographers and cameramen.

“All these reporters are frightening to us,” said Aviaja Sinkbaek, who works at the school. “It means that

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something must be happening soon.”

She added: “I wonder what Trump has up his sleeve.”

Politics in Greenland have a different rhythm. Debates during campaigning rarely got heated. People who became too animated were asked to step outside. Issues included building a skilled workforce and how to decorate the new airport, which opened a runway long enough to handle jumbo jets in November.

On Tuesday, the capital’s lone polling station at the Nuuk sports hall will have political parties pitching tents outside, with campaigners offering hot drinks and Greenlandic cake -- a raisin-laced bread served with butter -- in hopes of swaying voters.

A bus will circle the city of about 20,000 people, offering rides.

Unofficial election results should be available soon after polls close, but they won’t be certified for weeks as ballot papers make their way to the capital from remote settlements by boat, plane and helicopter.

That’s because there are no roads connecting communities across the island’s 2.16 million square kilometers (836,330 square miles), which make Greenland the world’s 12th biggest country.

Now the vast size has drawn outside attention.

Greenlanders know what they have. They hope the rare earth minerals will help diversify an economy where government jobs account for 40% of employment.

But the government has imposed strict rules to protect the environment on the island, most of which is covered by ice year-round. The harsh atmospheric conditions raise questions about whether extracting them is commercially feasible.

Hurricane-strength gusts over the weekend triggered warnings for boats and building materials to be securely tied down. As the wind howled like a revving jet engine, local people retreated to their homes to play board games.

Pope gets good news from doctors: An upgraded prognosis that he’s no longer in immediate danger

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis woke up Tuesday to good news from his doctors: They upgraded his prognosis and say he is no longer in imminent danger of death as a result of the double pneumonia that has kept him hospitalized for nearly a month in the longest and gravest threat to his 12-year papacy.

The 88-year-old pope isn’t out of the woods yet, however. Doctors are still cautious and have decided to keep him hospitalized for several more days to receive treatment, not to mention a period of rehabilitation he will likely need.

But the doctors said he remains stable and has consolidated improvements in recent days, according to blood tests and his good response to treatment. Francis, who has chronic lung disease, is still using supplemental oxygen during the day and a ventilation mask at night to help him breathe.

In an early update Tuesday, the Vatican said Francis woke up around 8 a.m. after a quiet night. The Argentine Jesuit has regularly been sleeping in while at Gemelli hospital, given his usual wakeup time at the Vatican is around 4:30 a.m.

Late Monday, doctors lifted their “guarded” prognosis for the pope, meaning they determined he was no longer in imminent danger as a result of the original respiratory infection he arrived with on Feb. 14. But their caution remained, given Francis’ fragility and risks of other complications.

“In view of the complexity of the clinical picture and the important infectious picture presented on admission, it will be necessary to continue medical drug therapy in a hospital setting for additional days,” the Vatican statement said.

In a sign of his improved health, Francis followed the Vatican’s weeklong spiritual retreat via videoconference on Monday in both the morning and afternoon sessions, something he was likely to continue to do through the week.

The retreat, an annual gathering that kicks off the Catholic Church’s solemn Lenten season leading to Easter, continues through Friday. The Vatican has said Francis would participate “in spiritual communion”

with the rest of the hierarchy, from afar.

Francis could see and hear the Rev. Roberto Pasolini, preacher of the papal household, but the priests, bishops, cardinals and nuns gathered for the retreat in the Vatican auditorium could not see or hear him.

Pasolini is delivering a series of meditations this week 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.

Francis, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, had what was just a bad case of bronchitis when he was hospitalized last month. The infection progressed into a complex respiratory tract infection and double pneumonia that has sidelined Francis and raised questions about the future.

He was still keeping his eye on things, however. The Vatican said he had been informed about the floods in his native Argentina, sent a telegram of condolences and expressed his closeness to the affected population.

In his own words: Pope Francis has long been up front about his health problems and eventual death

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis has written and spoken at length about sickness, aging and death, and personally directed that his doctors provide the fairly detailed daily updates that have punctuated his own battle with pneumonia.

On Monday, they reported good news: Francis was no longer in imminent danger of death but needed to remain hospitalized for several more days to receive treatment.

The 88-year-old pope is merely responding to the sometimes morbid interest in the health of popes over centuries, and is making his own the somewhat-mixed legacy of St. John Paul II. The Polish pope suffered from Parkinson's disease, and his decline was on public view for years. But the Vatican never admitted he had the disease until after he was dead.

Francis' candor with his own fragility is very much in keeping with a decision he made early on in his papacy to be up front about his health: He granted an unprecedented tell-all interview to an Argentine doctor who published a book in 2021 detailing Francis' physical and mental health history. And last week, Francis recorded an audio message from the hospital that laid bare the weakness of his voice, and the labored, breathless effort it took for him to utter just a few words.

Here are a few of Francis' past musings on sickness, ageing and death and how they might affect the future of his pontificate.

On growing old:

Francis has long complained about the way society treats old people, saying they are part of today's consumerist "throwaway culture" when they are deemed no longer productive. For that reason especially, he insisted that Pope Benedict XVI continue to be part of the life of the church during his 10-year retirement.

Francis' views on ageing have been consistent, even as he himself has aged and become dependent on a wheelchair and walker to get around.

In the 2010 book "On Heaven and Earth," written alongside his friend the Argentine Rabbi Abraham Skorka, Francis denounced the cruelty that confronts elderly people. He shamed families who shut their grandparents away in nursing homes and neglect to visit them.

"The elderly are sources of the transmission of history, the people who give us memories, they are the memory of the people, of a nation, of the family and of the culture, religion," said Francis, who at the time was the archbishop of Buenos Aires.

On death in general:

In the same book, then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio recalled that his grandmother Rosa, who helped raise him, had the words of an adage framed on her bedside table that stayed with him all his life: "See that God sees you, see that he is watching you, see that you will die and you don't know when."

He referred to the saying again in 2018 in a speech to priests, and that his grandmother had instructed

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him to recite it every day "so you will remember that life has an end."

"I didn't understand much at the time, but that verse, since I was three years old, has stuck with me," he told the priests. "And it helped me. The thing was kind of bleak, but it helped me."

On his own health problems:

The Argentine journalist and physician, Dr. Nelson Castro, revealed in his 2021 book "The Health of Popes," that Francis had reached out to him within a few months of his 2013 election with a suggestion that he write a book about the history of the health of the popes, including his own.

Castro was granted access to the Vatican Secret Archives to research the lives and deaths of past popes and had a sit-down interview with Francis on Feb. 19, 2019, during which the reigning pope spoke at length and in detail about his various ailments over the years: The respiratory infection that resulted in the removal of the upper lobe of his right lung, the gangrenous gallbladder he had removed when he was provincial superior of the Jesuits, the compressed vertebrae, flat feet and fatty liver he has lived with.

The most noteworthy revelation was that Francis said he saw a psychiatrist weekly during six months of Argentina's military dictatorship. He had sought out help to manage his anxiety when he was trying to hide people from the military and ferry them out of Argentina.

"In those six months she helped me with respect to how to manage the fears of that time," he told Castro. "If you can imagine what it was like to transport someone hidden in the car — covered by a blanket — and pass through military controls. ... It created an enormous tension in me."

He said the therapy also helped him to maintain a sense of equilibrium in making decisions of all kinds, and that in general he believes all priests must understand human psychology.

"We should offer a mate to our neuroses," he said, referring to the South American tea. "They are our companions for life."

On his own death:

As early as 2014 Francis was already assuming his papacy would be short-lived and that his own death was not far off.

"I realize that this is not going to last long, two or three years, and then ... off to the house of the Father," he told reporters in 2014 while traveling home from one of his early foreign trips, to South Korea.

He told Castro later that he thought about death — a lot — but that it didn't scare him "one bit."

Francis made plans, too: He decided his tomb will be in St. Mary Major basilica, not in the Vatican, so he can be near his favorite icon of the Madonna, the Salus Populi Romani ("Salvation of the People of Rome"), which is located there.

More recently, he has taken to speaking about upcoming events that he is pretty sure he won't be around for, and indicating who might.

In 2023, speaking to reporters about the Vatican's warming relations with Vietnam, Francis concurred that the country warranted a papal visit.

"If I don't go, surely John XXIV will," he said chuckling, referring to a future pope who might be named for the progressive, Vatican II-era pontiff, John XXIII.

Majority of the world's population breathes dirty air, report says

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BENGALURU, India (AP) — Most of the world has dirty air, with just 17% of cities globally meeting air pollution guidelines, a report Tuesday found.

Switzerland-based air quality monitoring database IQAir analyzed data from 40,000 air quality monitoring stations in 138 countries and found that Chad, Congo, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India had the dirtiest air. India had six of the nine most polluted cities with the industrial town of Byrnihat in northeastern India the worst.

Experts said the real amount of air pollution might be far greater as many parts of the world lack the monitoring needed for more accurate data. In Africa, for example, there is only one monitoring station for every 3.7 million people.

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More air quality monitors are being set up to counter the issue, the report said. This year, report authors were able to incorporate data from 8,954 new locations and around a thousand new monitors as a result of efforts to better monitor air pollution.

But last week, data monitoring for air pollution was dealt a blow when the U.S. State Department announced it would no longer make public its data from its embassies and consulates around the world.

Breathing in polluted air over a long period of time can cause respiratory illness, Alzheimer's disease and cancer, said Fatimah Ahamad, chief scientist and air pollution expert at Malaysia-based Sunway Centre for Planetary Health. The World Health Organization estimates that air pollution kills around 7 million people each year.

Ahamad said much more needs to be done to cut air pollution levels. The WHO had earlier found that 99% of the world's population lives in places that do not meet recommended air quality levels.

"If you have bad water, no water, you can tell people to wait for half an hour a day, the water will come. But if you have bad air, you cannot tell people to pause breathing," she said.

Several cities like Beijing, Seoul, South Korea, and Rybnik in Poland have successfully improved their air quality through stricter regulations on pollution from vehicles, power plants and industry. They've also promoted cleaner energy and invested in public transportation.

Another notable effort to curb severe air pollution was the Association of Southeast Asian Nations agreement on transboundary haze pollution. Even though its had limited success so far, ten countries in the region pledged to work together to monitor and curb pollution from large forest fires, a common occurrence in the region during dry seasons.

Shweta Narayan, a campaign lead at the Global Climate and Health Alliance, said many of the regions witnessing the worst air pollution are also places where planet-heating gases are released extensively through the burning of coal, oil and gas. Slashing planet-warming emissions to slow the heating up of the planet can also improve air quality, she said.

Air pollution and climate crisis "are two sides of the same coin," she said. ____

Follow Sibi Arasu on X at @sibi123

Kentucky bourbon makers fear becoming 'collateral damage' in Trump's trade war

By BRUCE SCHREINER and DYLAN LOVAN Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — With a new distillery set to open soon, the makers of Brough Brothers bourbon in Kentucky were ready to put their business plan into action. They were looking to ramp up whiskey production to break into lucrative new markets in Canada and Europe.

Now the on-again, off-again threat of tariffs has disrupted those plans.

Efforts by the Black-owned distiller to gain a foothold in Canada are on hold, as are plans to break into Germany and France, said Brough Brothers Distillery CEO Victor Yarbrough. That's because the iconic American spirit's widening global appeal is caught in the crossfire of trade conflicts instigated by President Donald Trump.

"It's extremely frustrating," said Yarbrough, who started the Louisville distilling company with his brothers, Bryson and Chris. "We are collateral damage."

For distillers looking to sell to consumers of all political stripes, talking politics can be as distasteful as discussing Prohibition. But along with the turmoil and uncertainty over tariffs, bourbon makers and other U.S. firms trying to do business in Canada are confronting public relations challenges still reverberating from the president's blunt-force "America First" approach to international relations.

With Canadian hockey fans booing the U.S. national anthem and some liquor stores north of the border clearing American spirits from their shelves even before there's clarity over tariffs, businesses like Brough Brothers are watching to see how the trade conflict plays out.

In the building being converted into the new distillery near the Ohio River, drywall dust covers the floor of

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the project that the brothers hope will raise the company's profile in the ultra-competitive bourbon world.

"I believe there's going to be some type of repair of the relationships that needs to happen," said Yarbrough, who was hoping, before the trade war erupted, to introduce his bourbon in New Brunswick and later expand to Ontario and other parts of Canada. "So I think some type of media blitz, PR blitz is definitely going to have to take place."

An expanding market hampered by uncertainty

The trade wars pose an immediate threat to an American-made success story, built on the growing worldwide taste for bourbon, Tennessee whiskey and other products.

Kentucky Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear said the president's zig-zagging tariff policy is hurting the American economy and will lead to higher consumer prices while disrupting business.

"It's not just the imposition of tariffs, it's this month-to-month, 'I may do it to you at any moment' policy," said Beshear, a potential presidential candidate in 2028. "You can't create stability."

Trump on Thursday postponed 25% tariffs on some imports from Canada for a month amid fears of the economic fallout from a broader trade war. Yarbrough said his company's expansion plans are still in limbo.

"It doesn't change our situation," he said. "Just as quickly as it changed to a reprieve, it could just as quickly turn into next month that we're back on."

For an industry that has to plan well into the future, based on aging its whiskey products, such angst is widespread in Kentucky, which produces 95% of the world's bourbon supply. At this point even a delay in tariffs wouldn't alleviate the practical problems confronting U.S. whiskey makers.

"The issue for us is long-term planning, and a postponement does nothing for us in long-term planning except leaves it still up in the air," said Judy Hollis Jones, president and CEO of Buzzard's Roost in Louisville, which sells to two provinces in Canada and has been looking to expand.

"Maybe other people adapt to it easier than I do, but I tend to like some certainty," Jones said.

The Kentucky Distillers' Association says the newest trade conflicts feel like *deja vu*. The industry group has long sounded the alarm that tariffs and retaliatory levies would wreak havoc on the spirits industry. Along with the North American trade dispute, the European Union is set to reinstate a tariff by April 1 on American whiskey if nothing is done to head it off.

That trans-Atlantic dispute is a reprise of Trump's first-term tariffs on European steel and aluminum. The EU's retaliatory tariff caused American whiskey exports to the EU to plunge 20%, costing distillers more than \$100 million in revenue from 2018 to 2021, the Distilled Spirits Council says. Once the tariff was suspended, EU sales rebounded for American distillers.

Threat of 'irreparable harm' to distillers

Now, Europe's infatuation with Kentucky bourbon and other U.S. spirits is threatened by the potential 50% tariff — double the previous levy — that would inflict "irreparable harm to distillers large and small," said Chris Swonger, the council's CEO.

Tariffs amount to a tax, which whiskey producers can either absorb in reduced profits or pass along to customers through higher prices — and risk losing market share in highly competitive markets. In 2024, the EU was by far the largest export market for U.S. distilled spirits, followed by Canada, the council said.

Trump maintains that open trade has cost the U.S. millions of factory jobs and that tariffs are the path to American-made prosperity.

Large distillers possess the capital and market reach to ride out disruptions caused by tariffs — built-in luxuries that most small producers don't have.

Canada accounts for just 1% of total sales for Brown-Forman Corp., the maker of Jack Daniel's Tennessee Whiskey, and the Louisville-based company could withstand disruptions there, said its CEO, Lawson Whiting.

But Whiting said the decision by Canadian provinces to take American products off store shelves is "worse than a tariff because it's literally taking your sales away." He called it "a very disproportionate response to a 25% tariff."

The threat of a prolonged trade war has Brough Brothers exploring other options. They could lean harder into domestic sales or look for other markets overseas — but again, it's hard to plan.

"Talking about this is starting to make my head hurt," Yarbrough said.

For Tom Bard, another Kentucky craft distiller, the risk is that all his hard work to gain a foothold in Canada could evaporate due to the cross-border trade conflict.

Bard and his wife, Kim, own The Bard Distillery in Muhlenberg County in western Kentucky. Their products had penetrated British Columbia and Alberta, but a new purchase order for north of the border is on hold amid Trump's ever-changing trade war.

"That hurts," Bard said. "For a small distillery like us, where every single pallet that goes out the door makes a huge difference, that's huge for us."

Bard said his team invested heavily to break into Canada, where business grew so quickly that he had hoped it would account for at least 25% of his overall sales this year.

"We'd love to ship as much of it as we can to Canada," Bard said. "We just expanded our distillery to take advantage of all the global demand for our products. What we hate is that once we get this equipment online this year, that we won't be able to run it full throttle because we'll be afraid to put too much inventory away not knowing what's going to happen."

The dispute needs to be resolved before Canadian distributors will risk accepting shipments of American spirits, he said.

Bard plans to ramp up domestic distribution to try to make up for lost sales in Canada.

"We're small-business Americans, so we're going to make it work," he said. "But it would be nice to not have these roadblocks."

Deterrence among the key questions as army chiefs from 30-plus countries talk about a Ukraine force

By SAMYA KULLAB and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine has key questions it wants answered as army chiefs from over 30 countries arrive Tuesday in Paris for talks on creating an international force to deter future Russian aggression once a ceasefire is established. They include troop size, location and crucially, military options in the event of a transgression.

The Paris meeting is the most significant culmination so far of French and British efforts to rally nations under a so-called "coalition of the willing" to safeguard Ukraine by establishing a reassurance and deterrence force to dissuade Russia from invading again.

The talks will include nearly all 32 countries of the NATO alliance — notably without the United States — as well as Commonwealth nations and Asian powers Japan and South Korea, said a French military official. Participants will be invited to spell out what their militaries might be able and willing to contribute be that troops, weapons or other assistance.

Some Ukrainian officials are wary of any deal without clearly identified security guarantees. For them, a key question is how such a coalition will respond if Russia violates any future ceasefire agreement. What kind of military response would follow a large-scale offensive by Russia and how quickly will that response materialize?

Western and Ukrainian officials said that, while there is plenty of thinking and resolve, there is no definitive plan for military options yet. First, they must assess what willing countries might be able to offer. The Associated Press spoke to Western and Ukrainian officials in Kyiv, as well as French officials in Paris and British officials in London. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to speak openly about sensitive matters.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has welcomed the proposal but expressed skepticism, telling The AP in an interview in February that foreign troops alone would not be a sufficient guarantee of security for his country, and that such a plan should be backed up by weapons from the U.S. and Europe, and support for Kyiv to develop its own defense industry.

"Diplomats are discussing, military officials are discussing, but we still don't have real proposals," said a senior Ukrainian official about the plan. The talks "are not in the first stage, we did a lot in the first stage,

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but we still don't have a real solid approach."

What means of deterrence?

As President Donald Trump has appeared to nix the idea of U.S. security guarantees and other U.S. officials said this will fall on Europe to enforce, the French-British plan looks to create a force equipped with enough military might to dissuade Russia from attacking Ukraine again. "That is the crux of it," said a Western official in Kyiv.

The force being envisaged by France and Britain would aim to reassure Ukraine and deter another large-scale Russian offensive after any ceasefire, a French military official told AP. It could include heavy weaponry and weapons stockpiles that could be rushed within hours or days to aid in Ukraine's defense in the event of a Russian attack that shatters any truce, the official said.

The Western official in Kyiv, offering another idea on the table, said they could incorporate direct and immediate strikes on Russian assets in the event of a violation.

Details of the contours of the proposal have emerged piecemeal in recent weeks as technical discussions have been ongoing between Western diplomatic and military officials in Ukraine and other European capitals.

Political leaders have convened key summits in the past two months to establish common ground. It was discussed at a summit of more than a dozen mostly European leaders in London on March 2, and at a virtual planning meeting on March 5 called by the U.K. and attended by officials from about 20 countries.

France and Britain are now casting the net even wider in their search for nations willing to back the blueprint and provide the force with teeth. The Paris talks on Tuesday will include not just NATO and European Union nations but also Asian and Oceania countries. Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea will dial into the discussions remotely, the French military official said. Turkey, which has the largest army in NATO and a robust defense industry and shared stakes in the Black Sea, will attend. NATO nation Canada will also be represented.

The United States — NATO's most militarily powerful member — was not invited because European nations want to show that they are able to shoulder a large part of the job of safeguarding Ukraine once a truce is in effect, the French military official said.

The contours of a plan

Last month, some Western officials described a small Europe-dominated "reassurance force" of less than 30,000 troops, rather than an ambitious army of peacekeepers posted along the 600-mile (1,000 kilometer) front line.

But other officials have said the numbers were under discussion. According to one version of the proposal, troops would be posted away from the front line at key infrastructure sites such as nuclear power plants and backed by Western air and sea power. The front line would largely be monitored remotely, with drones and other technology. Air power, including U.S. air power based outside Ukraine, perhaps in Poland or Romania, would be in reserve to deter breaches and reopen Ukrainian airspace to commercial flights.

Allied navies could also play a role in the Black Sea clearing mines and patrolling to keep international waters safe.

The idea is to "aggregate" the capabilities those countries are ready to provide in order to be able to offer security guarantees to make sure the peace deal is "robust and verifiable," with the aim to get some U.S. backstop, another French official said.

"To get signals on the U.S. backstop, the 'able and willing' European countries must be able to aggregate their capabilities and demands," he said.

Cautious Ukrainian optimism

Some Western officials cautioned that there will be several stages to a peace plan and a broader range of countries could join the coalition later on. The first step could be a one-month freeze, as proposed by Zelenskyy and European leaders, as a confidence building measure.

The Ukrainian officials said they were optimistic about the coalition of the willing, conceding they have few other options with NATO off the table.

"I fully believe it's very possible," said one senior Ukrainian official. "Trump is comfortable with the idea,

the idea is very positive for us, and if Europe wants to be a real player, they should do this.”
“If they lose this opportunity, we will be in a very difficult situation,” he added.

What to expect after South Korea’s Constitutional Court rules on the impeachment of President Yoon

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea’s Constitutional Court could soon rule on whether to dismiss or reinstate impeached conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol. That doesn’t mean the political crisis caused by Yoon’s short-lived imposition of martial law is over.

South Korea’s already-severe political divide between conservatives and liberals will likely intensify as Seoul grapples with major foreign policy challenges like U.S. President Donald Trump’s “America First” foreign policy platform and North Korea’s increasing military cooperation with Russia.

Here’s what to expect about the court’s likely impending verdict on Yoon’s Dec. 3 martial law decree that is testing South Korea’s democracy.

What might the court do?

The Constitutional Court has been deliberating whether to formally end Yoon’s presidency since the liberal opposition-controlled National Assembly in December voted to suspend him. Yoon is also facing a separate criminal trial after his arrest and indictment by prosecutors in January for alleged rebellion in connection with his martial law decree.

If the Constitutional Court rules against him, he will be officially thrown out of office and a national election will be held for a successor within two months.

If the court rules for Yoon, he would return to presidential duties. It was earlier unclear whether or how soon he might return to work, because he had been in jail until Saturday.

Yoon is South Korea’s first president who has been arrested while in office, and there are no clear laws or past rulings that could guarantee his immediate return to office, analysts say. But he was eventually released from prison, after a Seoul court canceled his arrest and allowed him to stand his criminal trial without being detained.

After hearing 16 witnesses, the court ended arguments on Feb. 25, but it hasn’t announced when it will announce a verdict. Observers say it could come as early as this week or next week, citing past cases where the court ruled on former presidents.

The biggest issue is why Yoon sent hundreds of troops and police officers to the assembly after declaring martial law. Yoon says he wanted to maintain order, but some top military and police officers sent there have said that Yoon ordered them to drag out lawmakers to block an assembly vote about his decree or detain his political rivals.

Lawmakers eventually managed to get in and vote down his decree. No violence and no arrests of politicians actually happened.

What fallout is expected?

Hundreds of thousands of people had earlier rallied near the assembly, calling for Yoon’s ouster. But those protests have since been scaled down after Yoon’s impeachment. Yoon supporters have also regularly staged major rallies to denounce Yoon’s impeachment.

Ousting Yoon from office would prompt his supporters to ramp up protests before a presidential by-election to boost prospects for a new conservative president. Reinstating him would rekindle huge liberal demonstrations demanding Yoon’s resignation, according to Choi Jin, director of the Seoul-based Institute of Presidential Leadership.

“No matter what decision the Constitutional Court comes up with, South Koreans’ division and extremely polarized politics can’t help but to deepen,” Choi said.

Acting President Choi Sang-mok said Tuesday the government won’t tolerate any illegal, violent protests, saying concerns about physical clashes between pro- and anti-Yoon forces are growing ahead of the court’s verdict on Yoon.

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Pro-Yoon rallies turned violent in January when protesters stormed the Seoul Western District Court after it approved Yoon's formal arrest warrant. The protesters attacked police officers with bricks, steel pipes and other objects. The attack injured 17 police officers.

What about Yoon's rebellion trial?

Investigative authorities have alleged that Yoon's martial law enforcement amounted to rebellion, describing it as riots with the purpose of undermining the constitution. If he's convicted of rebellion, he could face the death penalty or life imprisonment.

Results of Yoon's criminal trial will likely be affected by the Constitutional Court ruling.

The Constitutional Court's endorsement of Yoon's impeachment would confirm his violation of the constitution and could help increase prospects for Yoon's conviction of rebellion, said Park SungBae, a lawyer specializing in criminal law.

But a rejection would mean that the Constitutional Court believed Yoon's martial law decree wasn't serious enough to warrant dismissal, or maybe wasn't even illegal. Prosecutors would subsequently find it burdensome to raise Yoon's alleged rebellion at the criminal trial, Park said.

Prosecutors indicted Yoon only on charges of rebellion, because he has presidential immunity from most criminal prosecution. Some could question whether his criminal trial should continue if his impeachment is overturned at the Constitutional Court.

Even if the Constitutional Court reinstates Yoon, Choi said that Yoon's authority has already been badly hurt, so South Korea's leadership vacuum will likely continue.

Ukraine will propose a limited ceasefire during talks with the US in Saudi Arabia, officials say

By MATTHEW LEE and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — A Ukrainian delegation set to meet with America's top diplomat in Saudi Arabia about ending the 3-year war with Russia will propose a ceasefire covering the Black Sea and long-range missile strikes, as well as the release of prisoners, two senior Ukrainian officials said Monday.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about Tuesday's meeting, also told The Associated Press that the Ukrainian delegation is ready during the talks to sign an agreement with the United States on access to Ukraine's rare earth minerals — a deal that U.S. President Donald Trump is keen to secure.

The officials discussed the confidence-building measures, with no further details, ahead of the Ukrainian negotiating team's meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Jeddah.

Kyiv is trying to repair the damage done when Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Feb. 28 visit to Washington descended into an Oval Office argument with Trump and Vice President JD Vance.

At stake is the military aid and intelligence previously offered by the United States that had helped Ukraine in the war but is now paused as Washington pushes for a peace agreement.

Rubio and Zelenskyy landed a few hours apart Monday in Saudi Arabia, but did not meet.

Zelenskyy met with the kingdom's powerful crown prince Monday evening, with the president saying they "had a detailed discussion on the steps and conditions needed to end the war and secure a reliable and lasting peace."

"Saudi Arabia provides a crucial platform for diplomacy, and we appreciate this," Zelenskyy said online.

Rubio also met Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, thanking him for hosting the talks and also discussing Yemen's Houthi rebels, who are threatening to restart their attacks in the Red Sea.

Speaking to reporters aboard his plane before arriving, Rubio said he and national security adviser Mike Waltz would take stock of Ukraine's responses in Saudi Arabia.

If Ukraine and the U.S. reach an understanding acceptable to Trump, that could accelerate his administration's push to peace talks.

"What we want to know is, are they interested entering some sort of peace conversation and general outlines of the kinds of things they could consider, recognizing that it has been a costly and bloody war

for the Ukrainians. They have suffered greatly and their people have suffered greatly," Rubio said. "And it's hard in the aftermath of something like that to even talk about concessions, but that's the only way this is going to end and prevent more suffering."

He added: "I'm not going to set any conditions on what they have to or need to do. I think we want to listen to see how far they're willing to go and then compare that to what the Russians want and see how far apart we truly are."

Zelenskyy has said his team meeting Rubio will include his chief of staff Andriy Yermak, Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha and Defense Minister Rustem Umerov. Rubio will lead the U.S. team.

The rest of Europe remains skeptical about the talks as it has been sidelined by Washington.

The European Union last week agreed to boost the continent's defenses and to free up hundreds of billions of euros for security in response to the Trump administration's shift in stance on Ukraine.

White House special envoy Steve Witkoff told Fox News on Monday that the pause of U.S. intelligence-sharing with Ukraine has not limited defense intelligence-sharing.

"We never shut off intelligence for ... anything defensive that the Ukrainians need," Witkoff said.

A pause on sharing U.S. intelligence that can be used for offensive purposes by Ukrainian forces remains in effect, according to a U.S. official familiar with the matter who was not authorized to comment and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The official suggested that progress could be made toward reinstating intelligence-sharing with Ukraine during the Saudi talks.

New York fires 2,000 prison guards who refuse to return to work after wildcat strike

By MICHAEL HILL Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — New York fired more than 2,000 prison guards Monday for failing to return to work after a weeklong wildcat strike that crippled the state's correctional system, but said enough officers had come back on the job to declare the illegal work stoppage over.

"After 22 days of an illegal strike, the governor and I are happy to report it is now ended," Commissioner Daniel Martuscello said during a virtual press briefing.

The state and the guards' union struck a new deal to end the strike this weekend, but it was contingent on at least 85% of staff returning to work by Monday morning. Although the number returning fell short of the 85% goal, Martuscello said the state would honor the deal's overtime and some other provisions.

He said the National Guard would remain in place at prisons in a support position while the department undertakes an aggressive recruiting campaign to attract additional employees. About 10,000 security staff are available to work in prisons across the state, he said, down from about 13,500 before the wildcat strike.

"Termination letters have been sent to over 2,000 officers who remained on strike. Officers and sergeants who did not have preapproved medical leave and didn't return by this morning, 6:45 a.m. deadline, have been terminated effective immediately," Martuscello said.

An email seeking comment was sent to the guards' union, the New York State Correctional Officers & Police Benevolent Association.

Guards upset over working conditions began illegally walking off the job Feb. 17 at many state prisons, forcing Gov. Kathy Hochul to send National Guard troops in to maintain operations. Inmates have complained about deteriorating conditions behind bars since the walkout. And the death of a 22-year-old man this month at a prison near Utica is being investigated by a special prosecutor.

The walkout violates a state law barring strikes by most public employees and was not sanctioned by the guards' union. Two previous deals aimed at ending the strike failed to coax enough guards back to end the crisis.

Like the other deals, this one addresses a key complaint of the striking guards with a 90-day suspension of a provision of a state law that limits the use of solitary confinement. Guards will work 12-hour shifts and the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision will not discipline officers who par-

anticipated in the strike if they returned by the Monday deadline.

Multiple inmates have died since the walkouts began, though it was unclear if strike-related prison conditions played a role in the deaths.

Onondaga County District Attorney William Fitzpatrick is investigating the death of Messiah Nantwi at Mid-State Correctional Facility on March 1 as a special prosecutor. Authorities have declined to provide details, but a court filing by the attorney general's office said there is "probable cause to believe" that as many as nine correctional officers either caused or could be implicated in his death.

Fifteen prison staffers were placed on leave following Nantwi's death.

It is the second criminal investigation into a state prison inmate death in recent months. Six guards were charged with murder last month in the December death of Robert Brooks, who was incarcerated at the Marcy Correctional Facility, across the street from the Mid-State prison.

'Nervous and rushed': Massive Fukushima plant cleanup exposes workers to high radiation and stress

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

OKUMA, Japan (AP) — The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant's radiation levels have significantly dropped since the cataclysmic meltdown 14 years ago Tuesday. Workers walk around in many areas wearing only surgical masks and regular clothes.

It's a different story for those who enter the reactor buildings, including the three damaged in the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. They must use maximum protection — full facemasks with filters, multi-layered gloves and socks, shoe covers, hooded hazmat coveralls and a waterproof jacket, and a helmet.

As workers remove melted fuel debris from the reactors in a monumental nuclear cleanup effort that could take more than a century, they are facing both huge amounts of psychological stress and dangerous levels of radiation.

The Associated Press, which recently visited the plant for a tour and interviews, takes a closer look.

Cleaning 880 tons of melted fuel debris

A remote-controlled extendable robot with a tong had several mishaps including equipment failures before returning in November with a tiny piece of melted fuel from inside the damaged No. 2 reactor.

That first successful test run is a crucial step in what will be a daunting, decades-long decommissioning that must deal with at least 880 tons of melted nuclear fuel that has mixed with broken parts of internal structures and other debris inside the three ruined reactors.

Akira Ono, chief decommissioning officer at the Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, which manages the plant, says even the tiny sample gives officials a lot of information about the melted fuel. More samples are needed, however, to make the work smoother when bigger efforts to remove the debris begin in the 2030s.

A second sample-retrieval mission at the No. 2 reactor is expected in coming weeks.

Operators hope to send the extendable robot farther into the reactor to take samples closer to the center, where overheated nuclear fuel fell from the core, utility spokesperson Masakatsu Takata said. He pointed out the target area as he stood inside the inner structure of the No. 5 reactor, which is one of two reactors that survived the tsunami. It has an identical design as No. 2.

Hard to see, breathe or move

Radiation levels are still dangerously high inside the No. 2 reactor building, where the melted fuel debris is behind a thick concrete containment wall. Earlier decontamination work reduced those radiation levels to a fraction of what they used to be.

In late August, small groups took turns doing their work helping the robot in 15- to 30-minute shifts to minimize radiation exposure. They have a remotely controlled robot, but it has to be manually pushed in and out.

"Working under high levels of radiation (during a short) time limit made us feel nervous and rushed," said Yasunobu Yokokawa, a team leader for the mission. "It was a difficult assignment."

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Full-face masks reduced visibility and made breathing difficult, an extra waterproof jacket made it sweaty and hard to move, and triple-layered gloves made their fingers clumsy, Yokokawa said.

To eliminate unnecessary exposure, they taped around gloves and socks and carried a personal dosimeter to measure radiation. Workers also rehearsed the tasks they'd perform to minimize exposure.

The mission stalled early on when workers noticed that a set of five 1.5-meter (5-foot) pipes meant to push the robot into the reactor's primary containment vessel had been arranged in the wrong order.

A camera on the robot also failed because of high radioactivity and had to be replaced.

The workers' highest individual radiation dose was more than the overall average but still far below anything approaching a 100-millisievert five-year dose limit.

Even so, a growing number of workers are concerned about safety and radiation at the plant, said Ono, the decommissioning chief, citing an annual survey of about 5,500 workers.

In 2023, two workers splashed with contaminated sludge at a water treatment facility suffered burns and were hospitalized, though they had no other health problems.

Making sure it's safe

Yokokawa and a plant colleague, Hiroshi Ide, helped in the 2011 emergency and work as team leaders today. They say they want to make the job safer as workers face high radiation in parts of the plant.

On the top floor of the No. 2 reactor, workers are setting up equipment to remove spent fuel units from the cooling pool. That's set to begin within two to three years.

At the No. 1 reactor, workers are putting up a giant roof to contain radioactive dust from decontamination work on the top floor ahead of the removal of spent fuel.

To minimize exposure and increase efficiency, workers use a remote-controlled crane to attach pre-assembled parts, according to TEPCO. The No. 1 reactor and its surroundings are among the most contaminated parts of the plant.

What's next?

Workers are also removing treated radioactive wastewater. They recently started dismantling the emptied water tanks to make room to build facilities needed for the research and storage of melted fuel debris.

After a series of small missions by robots to gather samples, experts will determine a larger-scale method for removing melted fuel, first at the No. 3 reactor.

Experts say the hard work and huge challenges of decommissioning the plant are just beginning. There are estimations that the work could take more than a century. The government and TEPCO have an initial completion target of 2051, but the retrieval of melted fuel debris is already three years behind, and many big issues remain undecided.

Ide, whose home in Namie town, northwest of the plant, is in a no-go zone because of nuclear contamination, still has to put on a hazmat suit, even for brief visits home.

"As a Fukushima citizen, I would like to make sure the decommissioning work is done properly so that people can return home without worries," he said.

For Trump the peace negotiator, might makes right. History offers different lessons

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

As President Donald Trump seeks to end wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, his approach to both seems to boil down to giving the stronger party what it wants and pushing the weaker to accept it.

His defenders view it as hardnosed realpolitik — a recognition that the strong eventually prevail, so better to cut one's losses in the interest of a certain kind of peace. "You don't have the cards right now," Trump told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in their White House blowup.

"He's transactional," said Aaron David Miller, a former veteran U.S. diplomat now at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Trump is "looking for quick wins — deals, I would argue — not anything remotely related to the incredibly difficult work" of conflict resolution.

But the eventual outcome of conflicts is not always determined by military power alone — see America's

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20-year war in Afghanistan, where the world's strongest military failed to defeat a tenacious insurgency. And the mercurial Trump has a way of complicating any unified theory of his actions: In recent days, he has threatened new sanctions against Russia and his administration unnerved some Israelis by negotiating directly with Hamas, which the U.S. and Israel view as a terrorist group.

Peace through strength?

Trump has offered Russian President Vladimir Putin nearly everything he wants before peace negotiations even begin, by ruling out NATO membership for Ukraine, and suspending military aid and intelligence sharing that Ukraine relies on as it fends off Russian attacks.

At the same time, he has pressed Zelenskyy to share Ukraine's mineral wealth with the U.S. without formal security guarantees in return.

In the Middle East, Trump has lavished support on Israel, restoring military aid that had been paused by the Biden administration and embracing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's goals of returning all the hostages and eradicating Hamas – which could be mutually exclusive. Trump has yet to make clear whether his long-term vision for peace includes a two-state solution -- long a pillar of U.S. policy in the Middle East.

For Hamas, which started the war with its Oct. 7, 2023, attack, Trump has publicly offered only threats and ultimatums. But the administration recently held direct talks with the group rather than going through mediators.

Alon Pinkas, a former senior Israeli diplomat, said Trump's actions suggest he doesn't see Netanyahu as a power player like Putin or Chinese President Xi Jinping, but more as a "local warlord."

"He's part of my empire. He's not a decisionmaker," Pinkas said, describing Trump's approach to the Israeli leader.

In both conflicts, the weaker party has remained defiant

Zelenskyy has reached out to Ukraine's European allies, who have pledged to beef up their own defenses, and he has vowed to fight on even as he seeks to repair ties with Washington.

Hamas has dismissed Trump's threats and says dozens of remaining hostages will only be returned in exchange for an end to the war. A fragile truce negotiated by the Biden administration and the Trump team is in limbo, with Israel threatening to resume the fighting.

Diana Buttu, a Palestinian analyst who advised peace negotiators in the 2000s, says Trump's strategy is unlikely to succeed.

Hamas, which has already survived a 15-month Israeli onslaught, "doesn't give two hoots about him," she said. "They don't see that he's got any leverage over them."

The strong do as they wish – but not always

The limits of military power have been debated for millennia.

Thucydides' fifth century B.C. history of the war between Athens and Sparta includes a famous debate over the use of military power known as the Melian Dialogue.

Athens lands a fleet at the island of Melos and makes the city-state an offer it can't refuse. Join the empire, pay tribute and you won't be obliterated. The Athenians famously advise the Melians to "try to get what it is possible for you to get," considering that "the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept."

The Melians refuse, appealing to "fair play and just dealing." They warn the Athenians that such belligerence could drive other small states into the arms of Sparta. Athens lays siege to Melos, and after months of fighting sacks it, putting the men to death and sending the women and children into slavery.

It's a grim parable — and perhaps a cautionary tale for Canada, Greenland and Panama.

In more recent conflicts, however, military might has only gone so far. Hamas has survived five wars against the most powerful military in the Middle East, the last sparked by a surprise attack that caught Israel's vaunted security agencies unaware.

Ukraine held off the Russian invasion after many thought it would be quickly overrun. The Biden administration had even suggested Zelenskyy flee, an offer he famously declined.

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Even in Melos, the outcome was not so clear-cut. Twelve years after Athens seemingly proved that might makes right, it lost the war to Sparta.

A more even-handed approach

The United States' most successful diplomatic forays have tended to involve a more even-handed approach. It helps if the warring parties are in what political scientists refer to as a mutually hurting stalemate.

Then-President Jimmy Carter secured the landmark Camp David peace agreement after twisting the arms of Israelis and Egyptians alike just five years after they fought the last of several wars.

The Good Friday Agreement that ended decades of violence in northern Ireland came after both Britain and Irish republicans concluded that outright victory was impossible.

Trump's supporters boast that he thinks outside the box in the Middle East, but for decades, the U.S. has built its approach around ironclad support for Israel — and its peace efforts have repeatedly failed.

The Abraham Accords brokered by Trump in his first term — in which Israel forged ties with four Arab countries — sidelined the Palestinians. Hamas said its Oct. 7 attack was partly driven by the sense that the Palestinian cause had been forgotten.

Buttu recalls meeting with American diplomats from previous administrations who told Palestinians essentially the same thing Trump told Zelenskyy.

At a meeting in November 2000 about a major settlement under construction in east Jerusalem, "the Americans turned to us and said, 'There's just no way, you're just going to have to accept defeat and move on... You're going to have to lick your wounds,'" Buttu said.

The peace process collapsed around that time as a Palestinian uprising erupted. Twenty-five years later, the conflict is deadlier than ever and no less intractable.

"They told the Israelis that might is right," Buttu said. "It encourages them to be even mightier."

Trump warns that arrest of Palestinian activist at Columbia will be 'first of many'

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ and PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President Donald Trump warned Monday that the arrest and possible deportation of a Palestinian activist who helped lead protests at Columbia University will be the first "of many to come" as his administration cracks down on campus demonstrations against Israel and the war in Gaza.

Mahmoud Khalil, a lawful U.S. resident who was a graduate student at Columbia until December, was detained Saturday by federal immigration agents in New York and flown to an immigration jail in Louisiana.

"We know there are more students at Columbia and other Universities across the Country who have engaged in pro-terrorist, anti-Semitic, anti-American activity," Trump wrote in a social media post. "We will find, apprehend, and deport these terrorist sympathizers from our country — never to return again."

But a federal judge in New York City ordered Monday that Khalil not be deported while the court considered a legal challenge brought by his lawyers. A hearing is scheduled for Wednesday.

Khalil's detention drew outrage from civil rights groups and free speech advocates, who accused the administration of using its immigration enforcement powers to squelch criticism of Israel.

He is the first person known to be detained for deportation under Trump's promised crackdown on student protests.

Federal immigration authorities also visited a second international student at Columbia on Friday evening and attempted to take her into custody but were not allowed to enter the apartment, according to a union representing the student.

Khalil, 30, had not been charged with any crime related to his activism, but Trump has argued that protesters forfeited their rights to remain in the country by protests he claimed support Hamas, the Palestinian group that attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. The U.S. has designated Hamas as a terrorist organization.

Khalil and other student leaders of Columbia University Apartheid Divest have rejected claims of anti-semitism, saying they are part of a broader anti-war movement that also includes Jewish students and groups. But the protest coalition, at times, has also voiced support for leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah,

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another Islamist organization designated by the U.S. as a terrorist group.

The U.S. Education Department on Monday warned some 60 colleges, including Harvard and Cornell, that they could lose federal money if they fail to uphold civil rights laws against antisemitism and ensure "uninterrupted access" to campus facilities and education opportunities. The Trump administration is already pulling \$400 million from Columbia.

A group of Columbia faculty members expressed concern Monday that Khalil's detention was intended to suppress free speech by students and staff who are not U.S. citizens.

"The attack on Mahmoud Khalil is intended to make them quake in their boots, and to make all of us quake in our boots," said Michael Thaddeus, a Columbia math professor. "Our message to Washington is that we are not silenced, we are not afraid, and we stand together, determined to defeat this ongoing assault on our fundamental rights."

In their legal complaint, Khalil's attorneys accused the government of retaliating against him for his "constitutionally protected advocacy on behalf of Palestinian human rights."

Typically, the government has to meet a higher bar to expel a person who has permanent residency in the U.S., like showing someone has been convicted of a serious crime.

Born in Syria to Palestinian parents, Khalil entered the U.S. to attend Columbia in 2022. He subsequently got married to an American citizen, who is now eight months pregnant.

Khalil emerged as one of the most visible activists in large protests at Columbia last year, serving as a mediator on behalf of pro-Palestinian activists and Muslim students. That role put him in direct touch with university leaders and the press — and drew attention from pro-Israel activists, who in recent weeks called on the Trump administration to deport him.

"He took a public facing role, and now he's being targeted for speaking to the media," another student protester, Maryam Alwan, told The Associated Press.

More recently, Khalil faced investigation by a new disciplinary body set up at Columbia University, which sent him a letter last month accusing him of potentially violating a new harassment policy by calling a school official a "genocidal dean" online.

Khalil told The Associated Press last week that he served as a spokesperson for protesters but did not play a leadership role.

"They are alleging that I was the leader of CUAD or the social media person, which is very far from reality," he said, using the acronym for Columbia University Apartheid Divest.

Khalil received a master's degree from Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs last semester. He previously graduated from the Lebanese American University in Beirut with a computer science degree and worked at the British Embassy in Beirut's Syria office, according to his biography on the Society for International Development's website.

A few hundred protesters rallied near an Immigration and Customs Enforcement field office in Manhattan on Monday to demand Khalil's release.

"By arresting Mahmoud, Trump thinks he can strip us of our rights and strip us of our commitment to our people," Ibtihal Malley, a New York University student, told the crowd. "To that we say: You are wrong."

Back on campus, Columbia sophomore Pearson Lund was among those who found the potential stripping of Khalil's green card concerning.

"At what point does this process stop?" the physics student said as he entered campus through a security line guarded by city police officers.

Disney didn't copy 'Moana' from a man's story of a surfer boy, a jury says

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A jury on Monday quickly and completely rejected a man's claim that Disney's "Moana" was stolen from his story of a young surfer in Hawaii.

The Los Angeles federal jury deliberated for only about 2 ½ hours before deciding that the creators of

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"Moana" never had access to writer and animator Buck Woodall's outlines and script for "Bucky the Surfer Boy."

With that question settled, the jury of six women and two men didn't even have to consider the similarities between "Bucky" and Disney's 2016 hit animated film about a questing Polynesian princess.

Woodall had shared his work with a distant relative, who worked for a different company on the Disney lot, but the woman testified during the two-week trial that she never showed it to anyone at Disney.

"Obviously we're disappointed," Woodall's attorney Gustavo Lage said outside court. "We're going to review our options and think about the best path forward."

In closing arguments earlier Monday, Woodall's attorney said that a long chain of circumstantial evidence showed the two works were inseparable.

"There was no 'Moana' without 'Bucky,'" Lage said.

Defense lawyer Moez Kaba said that the evidence showed overwhelmingly that "Moana" was clearly the creation and "crowning achievement" of the 40-year career of John Musker and Ron Clements, the writers and directors behind 1989's "The Little Mermaid," 1992's "Aladdin," 1997's "Hercules" and 2009's "The Princess and the Frog."

"They had no idea about Bucky," Kaba said in his closing. "They had never seen it, never heard of it."

"Moana" earned nearly \$700 million at the global box office.

A judge previously ruled that Woodall's 2020 lawsuit came too late for him to claim a piece of those receipts, and that a lawsuit he filed earlier this year over "Moana 2" — which earned more than \$1 billion — must be decided separately. That suit remains active, though the jury's decision does not bode well for it. Judge Consuelo B. Marshall, who is also overseeing the sequel lawsuit, said after the verdict that she agreed with the jurors' decision about access.

"We are incredibly proud of the collective work that went into the making of Moana and are pleased that the jury found it had nothing to do with Plaintiff's works," Disney said in a statement.

Musker and Disney's attorneys declined to comment outside the courtroom.

The relatively young jury of six women and two men watched "Moana" in its entirety in the courtroom. They considered a story outline that Woodall created for "Bucky" in 2003, along with a 2008 update and a 2011 script.

In the latter versions of the story, the title character, vacationing in Hawaii with his parents, befriends a group of Native Hawaiian youth and goes on a quest that includes time travel to the ancient islands and interactions with demigods to save a sacred site from a developer.

Around 2004, Woodall gave the "Bucky" outline to the stepsister of his brother's wife. That woman, Jenny Marchick, worked for Mandeville Films, a company that had a contract with Disney and was located on the Disney lot. He sent her follow-up materials through the years. He testified that he was stunned when he saw "Moana" in 2016 and saw so many of his ideas.

Along with her testimony saying she didn't show "Bucky" to anyone, messages shared by the defense showed she eventually ignored Woodall's queries to her and had told him there was nothing she could do for him.

Disney attorney Kaba argued there was no evidence Marchick ever worked on "Moana" or received any credit or compensation for it.

Kaba pointed out that Marchick, now head of features development at DreamWorks Animation, worked for key Disney competitors Sony and Fox during much of the time she was allegedly making use of Woodall's work for Disney.

Woodall also submitted the script directly to Disney and had a meeting with an assistant at the Disney Channel, which Marchick arranged for him, to talk about working as an animator. But jurors agreed that this didn't give them reason to believe that "Bucky" made its way to Musker, Clements or their collaborators.

Lage, Woodall's attorney, outlined some of the similarities of the two works in his closing.

Both include teens on oceanic quests.

Both have Polynesian demigods as central figures and shape-shifting characters who turn into, among other things, insects and sharks.

In both, the main characters interact with animals who act as spirit helpers.

Kaba said many of these elements, including Polynesian lore and basic "staples of literature," are not copyrightable.

Shape-shifting among supernatural characters, he said, appears throughout films including "The Little Mermaid," "Aladdin," and Hercules, which made Musker and Clements essential to the Disney renaissance of the 1990s and made Disney a global powerhouse.

Animal guides go back to movies as early as 1940's "Pinocchio" and appear in all of Musker and Clements' previous films, he said.

Kaba said Musker and Clements developed "Moana" the same way they did the other films, through their own inspiration, research, travel and creativity.

The lawyer said thousands of pages of development documents showed every step of Musker and Clements' creation, whose spark came from the paintings of Paul Gauguin and the writings of Herman Melville.

"You can see every single fingerprint," Kaba said. "You can see the entire genetic makeup of 'Moana.'"

Doctors declare Pope Francis no longer in imminent danger due to pneumonia, but remains hospitalized

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Doctors said Monday Pope Francis is no longer in imminent danger of death as a result of pneumonia that has kept him hospitalized for nearly a month, but have decided to keep him hospitalized for several more days to receive treatment.

In a late update, the doctors said the 88-year-old pope remains stable and has consolidated improvements in recent days, as determined by blood tests and positive responses to drug treatments.

The Vatican said the doctors had lifted their previous "guarded" prognosis, meaning they determined he was no longer in imminent danger as a result of the original respiratory infection he arrived with on Feb. 14. But their caution remained.

"However, in view of the complexity of the clinical picture and the important infectious picture presented on admission, it will be necessary to continue medical drug therapy in a hospital setting for additional days," according to the Vatican statement.

In a sign of his improved health, Francis followed the Vatican's weeklong spiritual retreat via videoconference on Monday in both the morning and afternoon sessions.

As he did on Sunday, Francis participated in the retreat remotely from the Rome hospital where he is being treated. He could see and hear the Rev. Roberto Pasolini, preacher of the papal household, but the priests, bishops and cardinals gathered for the retreat in the Vatican auditorium could not see or hear him.

Pasolini is delivering a series of meditations this week 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, 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.

Francis also resumed his physical and respiratory therapy at the Gemelli hospital, and rested and prayed inbetween. Francis has been using a nasal tube for supplemental oxygen to help him breathe during the day and a noninvasive mechanical ventilation mask at night, therapy that he was continuing Monday.

The 88-year-old pope, who has chronic lung disease and had part of one lung removed as a young man, had what was just a bad case of bronchitis when he was hospitalized last month. 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.

Francis was still keeping his eye on things. The Vatican said he had been informed about the floods in his native Argentina and expressed his closeness to the affected population. In addition, a Vatican cardinal close to Francis spoke out Monday to refute some negative media reports that have circulated in his absence.

The Vatican development office released a letter written by Cardinal Michael Czerny to one of Francis'

close friends, the Argentine social justice activist Juan Grabois. Grabois had travelled to Rome to pray for Francis at Gemelli hospital, and some Italian media reported last month that he had tried to forcibly get into Francis' 10th floor hospital suite, a claim he denied.

In the March 6 letter, Czerny told Grabois that Francis "knew of your presence in Rome and your daily vigils of prayer and spiritual solidarity at Gemelli Polyclinic and I'm sure this gave him a true comfort and support."

"Additionally, I know that you join me in strongly repudiating the unfounded versions that have circulated in some media about alleged inappropriate behavior in the hospital," Czerny wrote.

The Vatican is always abuzz with rumor but has gone into overdrive with speculation about Francis' health and talk of conclaves, even though Francis is very much alive and in charge. The fact that Czerny felt it necessary to defend one of Francis' friends suggested that the rumor and maneuvering in Francis' absence had crossed a line.

On Thursday, the Vatican will mark the 12th anniversary of Francis' election, the first with the pope out of sight but still 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.

Senate confirms Lori Chavez-DeRemer as Trump's labor secretary

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ Associated Press

The Senate voted Monday to confirm Lori Chavez-DeRemer as U.S. labor secretary, a Cabinet position that puts her in charge of enforcing federally mandated worker rights and protections at a time when the White House is trying to eliminate thousands of government employees.

Chavez-DeRemer will oversee the Department of Labor, one of several executive departments named in lawsuits challenging the authority of billionaire Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency to order layoffs and access sensitive government data.

The Labor Department had nearly 16,000 full-time employees and a proposed budget of \$13.9 billion for fiscal year 2025. Some of its vast responsibilities include reporting the U.S. unemployment rate, regulating workplace health and safety standards, investigating minimum wage, child labor and overtime pay disputes, and applying laws on union organizing and unlawful terminations.

Several prominent labor unions, including the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, endorsed Chavez-DeRemer's nomination. The former Republican congresswoman from Oregon is the daughter of a Teamster, and during her one term in the House earned a reputation as pro-labor.

The Senate voted to confirm Chavez-DeRemer 67-32, with 17 Democrats voting yes and three Republicans voting no.

The Senate has now confirmed all but one of Trump's picks for his Cabinet. Its Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions had voted 14-9 in favor of her nomination last week, with all Republicans except Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky giving Chavez-DeRemer their support. Three Democrats on the committee — Sens. John Hickenlooper of Colorado, Tim Kaine of Virginia and Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire — voted with the majority.

During her confirmation hearing before the committee, several Republican senators grilled Chavez-DeRemer about her decision to co-sponsor legislation that would have made it easier for workers to unionize and penalized employers who stood in the way of organizing efforts.

She declined to explicitly state whether she still backed the Protecting the Right to Organize Act, also known as the PRO Act.

Chavez-DeRemer explained she had signed on as a co-sponsor because she wanted a seat at the table to discuss important labor issues. Under further questioning, she walked back some of her support of the bill, saying that she supported state "right to work" laws, which allow employees to refuse to join a union in their workplace.

The PRO Act did not come up for a vote during her time in Congress, but the legislation was reintroduced in the House and Senate last week.

"As we speak, Donald Trump and his billionaire buddies are stealing the American dream away from working families, rigging every lever of society in favor of the billionaire class," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said in a statement. "That's why we need the PRO Act, to empower hardworking Americans to bargain for better wages, benefits, and safer working conditions."

During her time in Congress Chavez-DeRemer also co-sponsored legislation which sought to protect public-sector workers from having their Social Security benefits docked because of government pension benefits. That bill also stalled because it didn't have enough Republican support.

Chavez-DeRemer walked a fine line during her confirmation hearing, attempting to appeal to both Democrats and Republicans. On the subject of whether the federal minimum wage was overdue for an increase, she said she recognized it hadn't been raised from \$7.25 an hour since 2009 but that she would not want to "shock the economy."

Some Democratic senators and workers' rights advocates have questioned how much independence Chavez-DeRemer would have as President Donald Trump's labor secretary and where her allegiance would lie in an administration that has fired thousands of federal employees.

LA district attorney says he won't support resentencing the Menendez brothers because they lied

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The district attorney of Los Angeles County said Monday that he does not support the resentencing of Lyle and Erik Menendez because the brothers have repeatedly lied about why they killed their parents at their Beverly Hills home in 1989.

Resentencing, which could make the brothers immediately eligible for parole, is just one of the pathways they are pursuing to walk free after their 1996 convictions for murder. District Attorney Nathan Hochman's predecessor, who lost reelection, had backed resentencing, and advocates for the siblings had waited anxiously to see whether the new DA would do the same.

Hochman told reporters his decision hinged on the fact the brothers had failed to take "complete responsibility" for lies told as the case unfolded, including their original claim that they did not kill their parents. He said their repeated argument that they shot their parents in self-defense does not match the facts of the case that show their premeditated steps to plan the killings and make it look like a gang hit.

"They have lied to everyone for the last 30 years," Hochman said.

Hochman compared the Menendez case to that of Sirhan Sirhan, who shot and killed U.S. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy in 1968. He noted that, like the Menendez brothers, Sirhan had many letters of support and was determined to be a low-risk inmate. However, Gov. Gavin Newsom blocked his parole in 2022, saying Sirhan still posed an unreasonable threat to the public.

Hochman called it an "instructive case" because, like Sirhan, the Menendez brothers "fell short" of taking full responsibility for their crimes.

The county's top prosecutor said he would support resentencing in the future if the brothers "finally come clean with the court, with the public, with the DA's office, with their own family members and acknowledge all these lies." He acknowledged the siblings have taken positive steps toward rehabilitation, including earning advanced degrees and repeatedly scoring low on inmate risk assessments.

A resentencing hearing initiated by a court has been scheduled for later in March.

The pair began their bid for freedom in recent years after new evidence of their father's sexual abuse emerged, and they have the support of most of their extended family.

Family members of Erik and Lyle Menendez slammed Hochman's assertion that the brothers do not meet the standards for resentencing.

"Let's be clear: Erik and Lyle are not the same young boys they were more than 30 years ago," the Justice for Erik and Lyle Coalition said in a statement Monday. "They have apologized for the horrific actions they took. They have apologized to us. And, they have demonstrated their atonement through actions that have helped improve countless lives. Yet, DA Hochman is effectively asking for them to publicly apologize

to a checklist of actions they took in a state of shock and fear.”

Hochman, who took office in December, said last month that he opposed a new trial for the Menendez brothers. The siblings, who are now in their 50s, were sentenced to life in prison without parole after being convicted in 1996 of the murders of their entertainment executive father Jose Menendez and mother Kitty Menendez.

In October, then-District Attorney George Gascón, whom Hochman defeated in November’s election, recommended the brothers be resentenced to 50 years to life, which would make them immediately eligible for parole. Hochman called his predecessor’s recommendation a “desperate political move.”

Hochman filed a motion to rescind Gascón’s request that includes a step-by-step analysis of the case showing the brothers crafted alibis and lied to police immediately after the killings.

In addition to pursuing resentencing, the siblings have also submitted a clemency plea to Newsom, who had said he would not make a decision until Hochman reviewed the case. The governor last month ordered the state parole board to investigate whether the brothers would pose a risk to the public if they are released.

Newsom didn’t immediately comment on Hochman’s news conference. But the governor did announce Monday that he would propose a new parole board process similar to the review the Menendez brothers are undergoing that could clear a path for more prison sentences to be shortened.

Tamara Goodall, a cousin of the brothers, last week asked that Hochman be removed from the case, citing bias. The district attorney rejected that claim.

“I will follow the facts and the law wherever they take us,” he said.

Musk eyes Social Security and benefit programs for cuts while claiming widespread fraud

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Elon Musk pushed debunked theories about Social Security on Monday while describing federal benefit programs as rife with fraud, suggesting they will be a primary target in his crusade to reduce government spending.

The billionaire entrepreneur, who is advising President Donald Trump, suggested that \$500 billion to \$700 billion in waste needed to be cut.

“Most of the federal spending is entitlements,” Musk told the Fox Business Network. “That’s the big one to eliminate.”

The comments on the popular program and other benefits provided to Americans could rattle politicians on both sides of the aisle as Musk works to downsize the federal government, especially as he already faces blowback for his chainsaw-wielding approach to laying off workers and slashing programs.

Musk’s estimate for the level of fraud in entitlements far outpaces figures from watchdogs like Social Security’s inspector general, who previously said there was \$71.8 billion in improper payments from fiscal years 2015 through 2022. That’s less than 1% of benefits paid out during that time period.

Musk also said there were “20 million people who are definitely dead marked as alive in the Social Security database.” However, the leader of the agency has rejected claims about widespread payments to dead people.

“These individuals are not necessarily receiving benefits,” said Lee Dudek, Social Security’s acting commissioner.

The interview with Fox Business was a reminder of Musk’s deep skepticism and even hostility toward the program, which provides monthly benefits to retirees and some children. Trump has promised to defend Social Security from cuts, but Musk has described it as “the biggest Ponzi scheme of all time,” and the administration is shutting down some of the agency’s offices.

Musk said Monday that federal entitlements are “a mechanism by which the Democrats attract and retain illegal immigrants by essentially paying them to come here and then turning them into voters.” The allegation echoed the “great replacement” theory, which claims that politicians are trying to expand their

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power by reshaping the country's racial demographics.

The interview was conducted in the White House complex by Larry Kudlow, who served as an economic adviser to Trump during his first term. During the conversation, Musk seemed to acknowledge the unusual nature of his role in the administration.

"Frankly, I can't believe I'm here doing this," Musk said. "It's kind of bizarre."

Musk is the world's richest person and still runs his private enterprises as he advises the president on ways to overhaul the federal government.

He also thanked Trump for his confidence, saying, "Without the president's support, we couldn't make any progress here."

Trump has publicly backed Musk and given him extraordinary influence over the federal government. However, the Republican president has indicated a shift in approach, saying that Musk's team would use a "scalpel" rather than a "hatchet."

Musk has not often spoken publicly since joining the administration, preferring instead to present a stream of consciousness on X, his social media platform. On Monday, he accused Democrats of attacking Tesla dealerships; bragged about X being "the top source for news on Earth;" and accused Arizona Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly, a former fighter pilot and astronaut, of being a traitor for visiting Ukraine over the weekend.

Musk's sitdown with Kudlow was his third interview since joining Trump's administration, and he hasn't strayed from his ideological safe space. He previously did a joint interview with the president and Sean Hannity of Fox News, and he sat down with Joe Rogan, a podcaster who endorsed Trump last year.

Republicans have spent decades trying to reduce the size and scope of the federal government, and many have cheered Musk's work.

"The American people are sick of the swamp. They're sick of waste, fraud and abuse," said Rep. Richard Hudson of North Carolina, who leads the National Republican Congressional Committee. "For the first time ever, we finally have the tools to affect it. So I think the voters are going to reward us."

But there are signs of backlash and skepticism. Some Republicans have even boasted of blocking budget cuts.

Oklahoma Rep. Tom Cole issued a statement saying three federal offices in his state — the National Weather Center in Norman, the Social Security Administration Office in Lawton and the Indian Health Services Office in Oklahoma City — would stay open.

"I am thrilled to announce that common sense has prevailed," he said. Cole added that "all three of these places provide vital and valuable services to Oklahomans and I am so proud to have advocated for them."

About half of Americans said it's "a bad thing" that Trump has given Musk a prominent role in his administration, according to a mid-February CNN/SSRS poll. Only a third saw it as "a good thing."

Another mid-February survey by The Washington Post and Ipsos found that Americans were divided on whether Musk is mainly cutting wasteful spending or necessary programs, with about a third falling into each camp. Another quarter said they weren't sure.

Stocks' sell-off worsens as Wall Street wonders how much pain Trump will accept for the economy

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. stock market's sell-off cut deeper on Monday as Wall Street questioned how much pain President Donald Trump will let the economy endure through tariffs and other policies in order to get what he wants.

The S&P 500 dropped 2.7% to drag it close to 9% below its all-time high, which was set just last month. At one point, the S&P 500 was down 3.6% and on track for its worst day since 2022. That's when the highest inflation in generations was shredding budgets and raising worries about a possible recession that ultimately never came.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 890 points, or 2.1%, after paring an earlier loss of more than 1,100, while the Nasdaq composite skidded by 4%.

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It was the worst day yet in a scary stretch where the S&P 500 has swung more than 1%, up or down, seven times in eight days because of Trump's on -and- off -again tariffs. The worry is that the whipsaw moves will either hurt the economy directly or create enough uncertainty to drive U.S. companies and consumers into an economy-freezing paralysis.

The economy has already given some signals of weakening, mostly through surveys showing increased pessimism. And a widely followed collection of real-time indicators compiled by the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta suggests the U.S. economy may already be shrinking.

Asked over the weekend whether he was expecting a recession in 2025, Trump told Fox News Channel: "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."

Trump says he wants to bring manufacturing jobs back to the United States, among other reasons he's given for tariffs. His Treasury secretary, Scott Bessent, has also said the economy may go through a "detox" period as it weans off an addiction to spending by the government. The White House is trying to limit federal spending, while also cutting the federal workforce and increasing deportations, which could hinder the job market.

The U.S. job market is still showing stable hiring at the moment, to be sure, and the economy ended last year running at a solid rate. But economists are marking down their forecasts for how the economy will perform this year.

At Goldman Sachs, for example, David Mericle cut his estimate for U.S. economic growth to 1.7% from 2.2% for the end of 2025 over the year before, largely because tariffs look like they'll be bigger than he was previously forecasting.

He sees a one-in-five chance of a recession over the next year, raising it only slightly because "the White House has the option to pull back policy changes" if the risks to the economy "begin to look more serious."

"There are always multiple forces at work in the market, but right now, almost all of them are taking a back seat to tariffs," according to Chris Larkin, managing director, trading and investing, at E-Trade from Morgan Stanley.

In response to the market sell-off, White House spokesman Kush Desai noted that a number of companies have responded to Trump's "America First" economic agenda with "trillions in investment commitments that will create thousands of jobs."

Trump met on Monday with tech industry CEOs, but the event was closed to the news media.

The worries hitting Wall Street have so far been hurting some of its biggest stars the most. Big Tech stocks and companies that rode the artificial-intelligence frenzy in recent years have slumped sharply.

Nvidia fell another 5.1% Monday to bring its loss for the year so far to more than 20%. It's a steep drop-off from its nearly 820% surge over 2023 and 2024.

Elon Musk's Tesla fell 15.4% to deepen its loss for 2025 to 45%. After getting an initial post-election bump on hopes that Musk's close relationship with Trump would help the electric-vehicle company, the stock has slumped on worries that its brand has become intertwined with Musk. Protests against the U.S. government's efforts to cull its workforce and other moves have targeted Tesla dealerships, for example.

Stocks of companies that depend on U.S. households feeling good enough about their finances to spend also fell sharply. Cruise-ship operator Carnival dropped 7.6%, and United Airlines lost 6.3%.

It's not just stocks struggling. Investors are sending prices lower for all kinds of investments whose momentum had earlier seemed nearly impossible to stop at times, such as bitcoin. The cryptocurrency's value has dropped below \$80,000 from more than \$106,000 in December.

Instead, investors have bid up U.S. Treasury bonds as they look for things whose prices can hold up better when the economy is under pressure. That has sent prices for Treasuries sharply higher, which in turn has sent down their yields.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury tumbled again to 4.22% from 4.32% late Friday. It's been dropping since January, when it was approaching 4.80%, as worries about the economy have grown. That's a major

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move for the bond market.

All the uncertainty, though, hasn't shut down dealmaking on Wall Street. Redfin's stock jumped 67.9% after Rocket said it would buy the digital real estate brokerage in an all-stock deal valuing it at \$1.75 billion. Rocket's stock sank 15.3%.

ServiceNow fell 7.9% after the AI platform company said it was buying AI-assistant maker Moveworks for \$2.85 billion in cash and stock.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 155.64 points to 5,614.56. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 890.01 to 41,911.71, and the Nasdaq composite sank 727.90 to 17,468.32.

In stock markets abroad, European indexes largely fell following a mixed session in Asia.

Indexes fell 1.8% in Hong Kong and 0.2% in Shanghai after China said consumer prices fell in February for the first time in 13 months. It's the latest signal of weakness for the world's second-largest economy, as persistent weak demand was compounded by the early timing of the Lunar New Year holiday.

'More than brick and mortar:' DC begins removing 'Black Lives Matter' plaza near the White House

By ASHRAF KHALIL and JACQUELYN MARTIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Starlette Thomas remembers coming down almost daily to the intersection of 16th and H streets, to protest police brutality and systemic racial iniquities during the summer of 2020.

On Monday, the 45-year old Bowie, Maryland resident returned to the site of those protests to mourn the end of Black Lives Matter Plaza.

"I needed to be here today. I can't just let this go away," Thomas said, as jackhammers began tearing into the giant yellow letters in the street. Thomas discretely secured a chunk of pavement and said holding it made her feel conflicted.

"To walk away with a piece of that, it means it's not gone," she said. "It's more than brick and mortar."

Crews started work Monday to remove the large yellow "Black Lives Matter" painted on the street one block from the White House. D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser announced the change last week in response to pressure from Republicans in Congress. The work is expected to take about six weeks and the words will be replaced by an unspecified set of city-sponsored murals.

The painting of those words was an act of government-sponsored defiance during President Donald Trump's first term. The removal amounts to a public acknowledgement of just how vulnerable the District of Columbia is now that Trump is back in the White House and Republicans control both houses of Congress.

Bowser, a Democrat, ordered the painting and renamed the intersection Black Lives Matter Plaza in June 2020. It came after days of chaotic protests at that location following the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer; Bowser had clashed with Trump over her handling of the protests.

But now Bowser has little power to fend off encroachments on D.C.'s limited autonomy. Bowser said last week on X that, "The mural inspired millions of people and helped our city through a painful period, but now we can't afford to be distracted by meaningless congressional interference. The devastating impacts of the federal job cuts must be our number one concern."

Among those who gathered to witness the work Monday was Megan Bailiff, CEO of Equus Striping, the pavement marking company that originally painted the letters.

Bailiff called the dismantling of Black Lives Matter Plaza, "historically obscene" and said its presence was, "more significant at this very moment than it ever has been in this country."

The far right celebrated the shift online, with conservative provocateur Charlie Kirk visiting the site to hail, "the end of this mass race hysteria in our country."

In Trump's second term, Bowser has worked to avoid conflict and downplay any points of contention. She traveled to Mar-a-Lago in Florida to meet with Trump after the election and has publicly emphasized their points of agreement.

Trump recently revived a frequent campaign talking point about wanting a federal "takeover" of the nation's capital, describing Washington as being riddled with crime, graffiti and homeless encampments.

Bowser has refused to comment on reports that the White House is preparing an executive order targeting Washington. She publicly said that the greatest threat to the so-called Home Rule autonomy was "some of the people in Congress."

Congressional Republicans have repeatedly threatened to interfere in city affairs in large and small ways. A measure currently before Congress, named the BOWSER Act, seeks to completely revoke the Home Rule Act of 1973, which grants the capital city limited autonomy.

Ontario slaps 25% tax increase on electricity exports to US in response to Trump's trade war

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Ontario's premier, the leader of Canada's most populous province, announced that effective Monday it is charging 25% more for electricity to 1.5 million American homes and businesses in response to U.S. President Donald Trump's trade war.

Ontario provides electricity to Minnesota, New York and Michigan.

"I will not hesitate to increase this charge. If the United States escalates, I will not hesitate to shut the electricity off completely," Ontario Premier Doug Ford said at a news conference in Toronto.

"Believe me when I say I do not want to do this. I feel terrible for the American people who didn't start this trade war. It's one person who is responsible, it's President Trump."

Ford said Ontario's tariff would remain in place despite the one-month reprieve from Trump, noting a one-month pause means nothing but more uncertainty. Quebec is also considering taking similar measures with electricity exports to the U.S.

Minnesota says Ontario tariff will have minimal impact

Minnesota receives only a small share of its electricity from Ontario, but Democratic Gov. Tim Walz was sharply critical of Trump's actions that led to Monday's announcement from Ford.

"The first victims of Trump's Trade war? Minnesotans struggling to pay their skyrocketing electric bill," Walz said on X with a link to a story about Ontario's move. "Minnesotans cannot afford Trump's billionaire-run economy. We have to put a stop to this madness."

In a brief press availability later Monday, Walz acknowledged that Minnesota doesn't get a lot of electricity from Ontario, but he's worried about Manitoba following suit.

"So look, even if it were one megawatt, this is totally unnecessary. And the fact of the matter is, it doesn't impact Donald Trump one bit. It impacts ratepayers in Minnesota. For what? These are our friends," he said.

Walz said he's even more worried about the impact on Minnesota if Canadian potash fertilizer gets caught up in the trade war. "If it starts with this, the one that I'm really worried about is potash, when it comes behind it. If they do potash, that's a big one on agriculture," he said.

Walz said he discussed these concerns last week when he spoke with the premiers of Ontario and Manitoba. He said they told him the dispute is broader than just their trading relations with Minnesota.

"They were very clear that it's not Minnesota -- we're huge trading partners."

Minnesota Power, the main electrical utility serving the part of Minnesota that borders Ontario, gets only a "very small" proportion of its power from the province, company spokesperson Amy Rutledge said.

Minnesota Power bought only about \$300,000 worth of electricity from Ontario last year, and only for four months out of the year. The utility serves over 150,000 customers, mostly with power it generates itself in Minnesota, she said. While it gets about 11% of its power supply from Manitoba Hydro, she said, that's not affected by Ontario's announcement.

"We really expect any impact on our customers to be negligible," Rutledge said.

Midcontinent Independent System Operator, the organization that manages a regional power grid that stretches from Manitoba to Minnesota to Louisiana, also expects little effect, spokesman Brandon Morris said. MISO gets under half its power from Canada, and less than half of that comes from Ontario, he said.

Michigan worries about reliability of electric grid now

Matt Helms, public information officer for the Michigan Public Service Commission, said the impact on

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Michigan customers is likely to be “small” and most of Michigan’s electricity is produced by utility companies in the state or through long-term contracts.

Of greater concern to the commission is the reliability of the electric grid, as electricity flows between the U.S. and Canada as part of an interconnected grid.

“Any action to limit or disrupt these flows would remove a layer of protection and make all of us — Canadians and Americans alike — more vulnerable to grid-scale outages,” Helms said.

In New York, Gov. Kathy Hochul said she has ordered state energy officials to conduct a review on how much the tariffs could drive up electricity and other energy costs in the state.

“These federal tariffs have been poorly conceived from the start: crafted in secret with no transparency and no clear economic rationale, they’ve only served to destabilize our capital markets and create uncertainty among New York families and businesses,” said Hochul, a Democrat.

Trade war intensifies

The new surcharge is in addition to the federal government’s initial \$30 billion Canadian dollars (\$21 billion) worth of retaliatory tariffs applied on items like American orange juice, peanut butter, coffee, appliances, footwear, cosmetics, motorcycles and certain pulp and paper products.

Trump launched a new trade war last week by imposing tariffs against Washington’s three biggest trading partners, drawing immediate retaliation from Mexico, Canada and China and sending financial markets into a tailspin.

“It needs to end. Until these tariffs are off the table, until the threat of tariffs is gone for good, Ontario will not relent,” Ford said.

EPA froze ‘green bank’ funds worth billions, climate group suit says

By MATTHEW DALY and MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A nonprofit that was awarded nearly \$7 billion by the Biden administration to finance clean energy and climate-friendly projects has sued President Donald Trump’s Environmental Protection Agency, accusing it of improperly freezing a legally awarded grant.

Climate United Fund, a coalition of three nonprofit groups, demanded access to a Citibank account it received through the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, a program created in 2022 by the bipartisan Inflation Reduction Act and more commonly known as the green bank. The freeze threatens its ability to issue loans and even pay employees, the group said.

“The combined actions of Citibank and EPA effectively nullify a congressionally mandated and funded program,” Maryland-based Climate United wrote in a Monday court filing.

In a related action, the Coalition for Green Capital, a separate group that received \$5 billion from the Biden-era program, sued Citibank Monday, alleging breach of contract over the refusal to disburse the grant funds awarded by the EPA.

“Citi’s actions have blocked CGC from deploying funds appropriated by Congress for energy projects to lower electricity costs and provide clean air and water for all Americans,” the Washington-based group said in a statement.

The two nonprofits are among eight groups tapped by then-EPA Administrator Michael Regan to receive \$20 billion to finance tens of thousands of projects to fight climate change and promote environmental justice. The money was formally awarded in August.

While favored by congressional Democrats, the green bank drew immediate criticism from Republicans, who routinely denounced it as an unaccountable “slush fund.” Regan sharply disputed that claim.

The bank was quickly targeted by EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin, who was confirmed to the role in late January. In a video posted on X, Zeldin said the EPA would revoke contracts for the still-emerging program. Zeldin cited a conservative journalist’s undercover video made late last year that showed a former EPA employee saying the agency was throwing “gold bars off the Titanic” — presumably a reference to

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spending before the start of Trump's second term.

Zeldin has repeatedly used the term "gold bars" to accuse the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund's recipients of misconduct, waste and possible fraud.

According to the lawsuit filed in federal court, Citibank cut off access to Climate United's bank account on February 18 — an action the bank did not explain for weeks.

The cutoff took place as Zeldin made multiple public appearances accusing Climate United and other groups of misconduct, eventually announcing that the funds were frozen, according to the lawsuit. Climate United said the EPA has refused to meet with the group.

Several Democratic lawmakers slammed Zeldin's attacks on the green bank as a "sham investigation and unsubstantiated funding freeze."

The Trump administration's "baseless attacks on these investments will only cost jobs, increase prices and harm our communities," Maryland Sen. Chris Van Hollen, Massachusetts Sen. Ed Markey and Michigan Rep. Debbie Dingell said in a statement Monday. The three Democrats pushed for creation of the green bank.

Citibank said it was reviewing the Climate United lawsuit.

"As we've said previously, Citi has been working with the federal government in its efforts to address government officials' concerns regarding this federal grant program," the bank said in a statement Monday. "Our role as financial agent does not involve any discretion over which organizations receive grant funds. Citi will of course comply with any judicial decision."

The EPA declined to comment, citing pending litigation. A hearing on the case is scheduled for Wednesday in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

In its court filing, Climate United pointed to the resignation of Denise Cheung, a high-ranking prosecutor in the U.S. Attorney's Washington office, who said she was forced to step down after refusing demands from top Trump administration officials to freeze the climate groups' assets.

Zeldin raised questions in a letter to the agency's watchdog about the EPA's use of Citibank to hold the money, a structure that allowed the eight entities to be used as "pass throughs" for eventual grant recipients. The process undermined transparency, Zeldin alleged.

He also questioned the qualifications of some of the entities overseeing the grants and said some were affiliated with the Biden administration or Democratic politics, including Stacey Abrams, a former Democratic nominee for Georgia governor. Trump singled out Abrams over her ties to the green bank in his address to Congress last week.

In a letter to EPA officials on March 4, Climate United disputed Zeldin's allegations. The group's lengthy application material is publicly available and the EPA used a rigorous selection process, Climate United said, adding that its spending is transparent.

In addition to Climate United, the new fund has awarded money to other nonprofits, including the Coalition for Green Capital, Power Forward Communities, Opportunity Finance Network, Inclusiv and the Justice Climate Fund. Those organizations have partnered with a range of groups, including Rewiring America, Habitat for Humanity and the Community Preservation Corporation.

The green bank represents ideas Congress enacted that the Trump administration doesn't like: fighting climate change and helping communities that are often low-income or majority-Black and Hispanic, said Ilmi Granoff, a climate finance expert at the Sabin Center for Climate Change Law at Columbia University.

"The resources have already been spent, which means they're trying to come up with pretexts to do something the government is not supposed to do, which is claw back resources" that Congress provided, Granoff said, comparing the Trump administration's investigations to a "fishing expedition."

The Trump administration said Friday that it's pulling \$400 million from Columbia University, canceling grants and contracts because of what the government describes as the Ivy League school's failure to squelch antisemitism on campus.

Donald Trump is reviving the fortunes of governments and leaders that talk tough against him

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Canada's governing Liberal Party appeared poised for a historic election defeat this year. Then Donald Trump declared economic war and threatened to annex the entire country as a 51st state. Now the Canadian Liberals and their new prime minister could come out on top.

Then there's Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, facing a groundswell of visible support at home for her approach to Trump's tariff threats. There's Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who visited the White House last month and was knocked on his heels, then went back to Europe to receive what many offered as a hero's welcome. Even Emmanuel Macron's comeback in French polls might be linked, some say, to his taking a more robust approach with the new U.S. president during recent weeks.

Saying the United States will always do what's best for the United States first, Trump has shaken up decades of international order. In weeks, he has sent leaders of other nations scrambling to shore up their own economies, partnerships and defenses against a Russia threat — and solidify their own polls at home, too.

"Trump is like a flaming freight train that is igniting everything in its path," said Kory Teneycke, a conservative Canadian campaign director. "It's not just a big thing. It's almost the only thing that is moving the electorate right now."

Everyone, it seems, is responding to Trump. But nearly two months after his blizzard of executive orders, threats and trade wars, some leaders are steadying their messages with defiance and plans — not that they will necessarily change the Trump administration's approach to it all.

Scrambling and dread in Europe

For great swaths of the European continent, Trump's reversal of three years of support for Ukraine after Russia's invasion was received as an existential matter. Trump's false claim that Zelenskyy started the war — and the American president's thrashing of Zelenskyy in the Oval Office Feb. 28 — undermined 80 years of cooperation with Europe on the understanding that the U.S. would help protect those nations from the Russian threat after World War II. Trump also limited Ukraine's access to intelligence and weaponry.

The confrontation laid bare the limits of a full-court press by America's allies aimed at reshaping Trump's determination to end Russia's invasion even if the terms are not to Ukraine's liking. And a lot of Europe didn't like it much.

Leaders immediately backed up the Ukrainian president on social media. Visual confirmation came the next day, when British Prime Minister Keir Starmer enveloped Zelenskyy in a hug in front of 10 Downing Street for all to see. It was a visual hint at what one historian suggests could happen: "Oddly enough, NATO might become kind of a anti-Trump alliance," said Robert Bothwell, a professor of Canadian history and international relations at the University of Toronto. "He's doing a good job of creating that."

That could happen reasonably quickly; some European leaders are already understanding that Trump is setting them adrift to face Russia alone.

For years, Trump had complained that NATO allies weren't contributing enough to Europe's defense. Macron, too, had pushed for a stronger, more sovereign Europe since his own election in 2017, and has since insisted that the EU step up and start acting as a strategic world power. And within moments of his Feb. 23 election as Germany's likely next chancellor, Friedrich Merz, declared that his "absolute priority" will be for Europe to "really achieve independence from the U.S."

Germany, Europe's biggest economy, is expected under its likely coalition government to loosen restrictions on borrowing money for defense spending. Meanwhile last week, the EU's 27 member nations signed off on a plan to loosen budget restrictions so that willing EU countries can increase their military spending. But for all that, Europe's leaders were sidelined from talks in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Tuesday to end the war.

Canada's conservatives struggle

Canada's federal Conservatives and their leader Pierre Poilievre were heading for a massive victory in Canada's federal election this year — until, Teneycke says, Trump's near-daily trade and annexation threats

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derailed them.

"It's the kiss of death to have JD Vance say something nice about you or have Elon Musk tweet out support for you. Every time Musk says something nice about Pierre Poilievre he goes down a point or two," he said. "Stop helping. You are not helping."

Teneycke was the campaign director for Doug Ford's recent Progressive Conservative party win in the Canadian province of Ontario. Ford's government just won big by having Ford stand up strong for Canada against Trump.

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 federally in a parliamentary election expected within days or weeks, and Liberal showings have been improving in opinion polls.

The change in the polls is dramatic. In mid-January a poll by Nanos, the Liberals trailed the opposition Conservatives and Poilievre 47% to 20%. This week the latest poll has the Liberals within 2 points. And that was before the party chose former central banker Mark Carney to replace Justin Trudeau.

"They are coming right back from the dead," Bothwell said. "I am amazed. And it is all Trump."

Bothwell says Trump's appeal is merely to American nationalism — what he calls a type of it "that is offensive to all foreigners." He says Canadians are rallying around the flag as if it's wartime.

"If somebody comes up and kicks sand in your face and then spits in your eye, you don't like it," Bothwell said. "It's a response to provocation. And a very serious provocation."

Mexico has a less confrontational approach

In Mexico, a jubilant Sheinbaum celebrated with fellow citizens at a huge rally Sunday after many American tariffs were delayed,

Although she appears strong now, it is not clear whether the 62-year-old president's political support would weaken if the Mexican economy deteriorates because of tensions with the United States. "The president will overcome everything," said Mariana Rivera, a 40-year-old social activist who held up a massive Mexican flag as high as her arms allowed.

While her predecessor and populist ally managed an amicable relationship with Trump in his last term, some questioned if Sheinbaum would be able to strike up the same dynamic. But with approval above 80% and a steady peso, even Sheinbaum's critics have admitted that the leader has been able to navigate the chaotic waters with expertise.

"She's a leader that has chosen a very rational, reasonable strategy, a strategy that focuses on cooperation ... at the same time that Trudeau has come at with very conflictive language," said Palmira Tapia, a political analyst in Mexico.

Sheinbaum has repeatedly said she would manage relations with Trump with a "cool head," especially when it comes to Trump's promise of 25% tariffs, something economic forecasters said would sink Mexico's economy into a recession.

To appease Trump, Sheinbaum has directed 10,000 troops to the U.S.-Mexico border, stepped up crackdowns on fentanyl and sent 29 cartel bosses to face justice in the U.S. While Canada and China immediately responded to last week's tariffs by reciprocating, Sheinbaum bided her time. After Trump said he would delay the tariffs, she turned a planned march into a "festival."

Where will the ripples end? Trump is already so unpopular in Canada that hockey great Wayne Gretzky, a friend of Trump's who has not spoken up for Canada, has become a pariah in his home country.

"This is Wayne Gretzky — the best-known and best-regarded Canadian in my life time. Since the early 80's this guy has been Canadian like a beaver and maple syrup," Teneycke said. "He's absolutely iconic, and he would be booed if he took center ice at any NHL game in Canada right now over the Trump thing. It's flabbergasting."

An office known for enforcing special education is now focused on Trump's political priorities

By COLLIN BINKLEY and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Education Department's Office for Civil Rights is known best for enforcing the right to disability services across America's schools. But under President Donald Trump, it's taking a frontline role in his political battles.

Trump appointees have halted thousands of pending cases while they open new investigations aligned with the president's campaign promises. Career staffers have been sidelined and pressured to quit, and those who remain are being ordered to refocus priorities on antisemitism, transgender issues and anti-DEI complaints.

A memo Friday from the civil rights office's chief announced antisemitism cases are now the top priority, taking aim at colleges where pro-Palestinian protests brought accusations of anti-Jewish bias. That followed a decision to cut \$400 million in federal money going to Columbia University, where on Saturday immigration officials arrested a Palestinian activist who was involved in leading student protests.

Hanging in the balance are the types of cases the office traditionally has focused on — students with disabilities who need services they aren't getting, or students facing harassment tied to their skin color.

It's normal for new presidential administrations to pause civil rights cases while they get acclimated, but this transition brought a longer and more rigid freeze than others. Trump officials lifted the freeze for disability cases on Feb. 20, and last week, new Education Secretary Linda McMahon said all cases could resume as normal.

During Trump's first month in office, the Office for Civil Rights resolved about 50 cases, according to a staffer who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retribution. By comparison, the office resolved more than 3,000 complaints in the same window of Trump's first term, and almost 500 under former President Joe Biden.

Even the most urgent cases, which are traditionally granted exceptions, sat idle during the freeze. Staff lawyers were told not to respond to outside calls or emails, leaving families in the dark.

Another staff member at the civil rights office described desperate emails from parents whose schools refused to make accommodations for their children's disabilities. "We were just ignoring their emails," said the person, who also spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

Tylisa Guyton of Taylor, Michigan, filed a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights on Jan. 20 over her 16-year-old son's repeated suspensions from a suburban Detroit school district, alleging a white administrator was targeting him and a group of other Black children. The teen has been out of school since Dec. 4. Even as investigations resume, she has heard nothing from the civil rights agency.

"He's still asking every day, 'When can I go back to school?'" Guyton said of her son.

The memo Friday told staffers antisemitism would be an "investigative and enforcement priority." It added the memo should not be interpreted as "deprioritizing" any other form of OCR enforcement activity." But staffers said that's the most likely outcome as dwindling ranks of employees face heavier caseloads tied to the president's agenda.

On Monday, the Education Department sent a letter to 60 colleges warning they could lose federal money if they fail to make campuses safe for Jewish students. The list includes Harvard, Cornell and many others where pro-Palestinian protests led to accusations of anti-Jewish bias.

Politics usually play into the office's priorities to some degree, and Republicans similarly accused Biden officials of going too far when they opened cases into COVID-19 mask bans or in support of transgender students. But several longtime staffers said this is the first time they've seen cases tied to political agendas edge out their everyday work.

Trump has called for a total shutdown of the Education Department, calling it a "con job" infiltrated by leftists. At her Senate hearing, McMahon said the civil rights office might be better served if it moves to the Justice Department.

Some cases are moving forward, but others appear to be stalled, Marcie Lipsitt, said a special education

advocate in Michigan.

"I've said to everyone, "You're going to have to fight harder for accountability because there will be no accountability at the U.S. Department of Ed, if there is a U.S. Department of Ed," she said.

At the same time, Trump's officials have continued to open their own "directed investigations" — proactive inquiries that depart from the office's typical work responding to complaints. The office has opened more than a dozen such investigations, many aimed at pressuring universities to stop allowing transgender athletes or to take a harder stance against pro-Palestinian protesters.

It adds up to more work for fewer employees at the office of about 500 workers. Staffers say field offices across the country were hit after dozens of department workers were put on leave in response to Trump's orders against diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. Many others took buyouts pushed by the Trump administration, leaving some field offices without administrators in key leadership jobs.

Minor changes to the office's policies could also carry outsize impact. Complaints to the office can't move forward unless the filer signs a consent form allowing their name to be disclosed during the investigation. For years, the office sent reminders if the form was not submitted — parents often didn't know it was required. But an updated case manual from the Trump administration drops the reminders.

Staffers say it means more cases will be dismissed on a technicality.

Some special education advocates have begun filing more cases with state agencies, said Brandi Tanner, an Atlanta-based psychologist and special education advocate. In conversations at a recent conference in California, disability advocates expressed uncertainty and anxiety, Tanner said.

"It's kind of like, we're very scared about what else is going to continue to come down the pike," she said. "Are students going to lose their rights?"

Trump loves the Gilded Age and its tariffs. It was a great time for the rich but not for the many

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In President Donald Trump's idealized framing, the United States was at its zenith in the 1890s, when top hats and shirtwaists were fashionable and typhoid fever often killed more soldiers than combat.

It was the Gilded Age, a time of rapid population growth and transformation from an agricultural economy toward a sprawling industrial system, when poverty was widespread while barons of phenomenal wealth, like John D. Rockefeller and J.P. Morgan, held tremendous sway over politicians who often helped boost their financial empires.

"We were at our richest from 1870 to 1913. That's when we were a tariff country. And then they went to an income tax concept," Trump said days after taking office. "It's fine. It's OK. But it would have been very much better."

The desire to recreate that era is fueled by Trump's fondness for tariffs and his admiration for the nation's 25th president, William McKinley, a Republican who was in office from 1897 until being assassinated in 1901.

Though Trump's early implementation of tariffs has been inconsistent — with him imposing them, then pulling many back — he has been steadfast in endorsing the idea of 21st century protectionism. There have even been suggestions that higher import tariffs on the country's foreign trading partners could eventually replace the federal income tax.

Experts on the era say Trump is idealizing a time rife with government and business corruption, social turmoil and inequality. They argue he's also dramatically overestimating the role tariffs played in stimulating an economy that grew mostly due to factors other than the U.S. raising taxes on imported goods.

And Gilded Age policies, they maintain, have virtually nothing to do with how trade works in a globalized, modern economy.

"The most astonishing thing for historians is that nobody in the Gilded Age economy — except for the very rich — wanted to live in the Gilded Age economy," said Richard White, a history professor emeritus at Stanford University.

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Trump says high tariffs and low interest rates, like those the U.S. had after the Civil War, can hastily pay down today's federal debt and fatten government coffers while boosting domestic manufacturers and enticing foreign producers to move to the U.S.

It's not a new theme for him.

"I am a Tariff Man," Trump declared in a 2018 online post. Campaigning for a second term last fall, Trump said of the McKinley era, "We were a very wealthy country, and we're going to be doing that now." Today, he says "tariff" is his favorite word and represents "a very powerful weapon that politicians haven't used because they were either dishonest, stupid or paid off in some other form."

The White House has rushed to raise tariffs on imports from China and on aluminum and steel made abroad while promising that import levies will soon increase on the European Union, as well as new, foreign-made cars, microchips and pharmaceuticals. Trump also increased tariffs on Canada and Mexico, though he later delayed most of them.

He has similar plans for potentially every country the U.S. does business with, saying broad "reciprocal" import taxes are coming April 2nd and will be consistent with levies other countries charge U.S. manufacturers to export their goods.

Dartmouth College economics professor Douglas Irwin said Trump advocating for modern tariffs by pointing to the 1890s is flawed.

"We did grow rapidly in the late 19th century," he said. "But it's a stretch to attribute it to tariffs."

"The president is more accurate when he paints with a broader brush and says, 'Look, this entire period with fiscal surpluses we grew rapidly.' That's true of this 40-year period," added Irwin, author of "Clashing over Commerce: A History of U.S. Trade Policy."

"But, when you dig down to the details and say, 'We raised tariffs in this instance,' that's where things go awry. Or the story doesn't quite hold together as well," Irwin said.

Was America really at its wealthiest from 1870 to 1913?

The Gilded Age featured extraordinary wealth for a small class of people that largely obscured rampant poverty for many other Americans. The name comes from a 1873 novel, co-written by Mark Twain, which satirized the greed and deceit of the era's government and politicians.

Many contemporary leaders were openly influenced by the famed robber barons, builders of monopolies who stoked industrialization while shaping the way millions of other Americans lived and worked.

Rockefeller became the exemplar of the era when his Standard Oil empire made him the world's first billionaire. Morgan was an investment banker and legendary financier of industrial interests. Cornelius Vanderbilt amassed a breathtaking fortune through shipping and railroads, while steel magnate Andrew Carnegie was also a dedicated philanthropist who argued the rich had a moral responsibility to use their wealth to better a deeply unequal society.

Overall, the U.S. economy grew rapidly between 1870 and 1913, though there were dips and recessions, too.

Some historians call it the second industrial revolution because of major increases in manufacturing and factory output. New industries like steel, electricity and petrochemicals boomed, as did sectors including construction and machinery.

But White said those years were marked by erratic economic growth, and those upturns were mostly fueled by millions of immigrants joining the U.S. workforce. Indeed, the number of U.S. residents jumped from 38.5 million-plus in 1870 to more than 106 million by 1920.

Another factor was the seizing of land from Native Americans during U.S. expansion west. That meant exploiting natural resources along the way — including gold, silver, timber, grazing and farmland, as well as coal, copper and oil, especially after the discovery of the Spindletop geyser in Texas in 1901.

Average wages rose, but so did inequality, with almost no social safety net. Working conditions were often so abhorrent, meanwhile, that the labor movement began gaining strength, as did progressive politicians clamoring for breaking up monopolies.

"This is the height of antimonopoly, political turmoil, the rise of labor in the United States," said White, author of "The Republic for Which it Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age,

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1865-1896." "And the reason was, people did not regard this as a particularly healthy economy."

In fact, despite the growth, standards of living fell, including life expectancy and key health indicators, White said.

Could tariffs replace the federal income tax?

The modern federal income tax came into fruition with the ratification of 16th Amendment in 1913, ending the 43-year era when Trump says the country was wealthiest. He has not expressly detailed plans to end a national income tax since retaking the White House, and he can't do so without an act of Congress and upending the federal budget in almost incalculable ways.

In fiscal year 2024, the federal government collected about \$4 trillion in individual income tax and tax withholdings, according to the Treasury Department, compared with customs duties accounting for around \$76.4 billion.

But the president nonetheless signed a Day 1 executive order calling for the creation of the External Revenue Service to "collect tariffs, duties, and other foreign trade-related revenues." Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick suggested Trump's goal there was "to abolish the Internal Revenue Service and let all the outsiders pay."

Republican strategist Karl Rove, author of "The Triumph of William McKinley: Why the Election of 1896 Still Matters," has defended the notion of low, reciprocal tariffs on U.S. foreign trading partners.

But Rove also says that tariffs can't realistically replace a federal income tax. He noted in a February op-ed that from 1863 to 1913 tariffs brought in nearly half the U.S. government's revenue but last year they accounted for less than 2% of federal revenue.

Why does Trump so revere McKinley?

In his inaugural address, Trump called McKinley a "great president" and "natural business man," who he said "made our country very rich through tariffs and through talent." Hours later, he signed an executive order overturning an Obama administration directive and renaming America's tallest peak Mount McKinley.

But today's economy is immeasurably different than in McKinley's time.

Global communication is now virtually instantaneous. Back then, communication was cumbersome and products were often fully assembled before being exported. Shipping could take months. Today's goods often contain raw material components or parts that need to be assembled that are sourced all over the world and then built in places different from where they are ultimately sold.

The disruption of such carefully calibrated, multinational logistical systems by the coronavirus pandemic was a key reason why everything from leather couches to flooring to microchips for new cars suddenly became scarce. And that helped feed record inflation beginning in 2021 that continues to dog the U.S. economy today.

Robert W. Merry, author of "President McKinley: Architect of the American Century," said McKinley was the leading voice on tariffs at a time when they dominated policy discussions because they were the federal government's chief source of revenue, given that no income tax existed.

But Trump differs with McKinley in using tariffs as a "bludgeon to get other countries to do our bidding on efforts that have nothing to do with revenue, or economic matters or trade." The president has done that with Canada and Mexico, using tariff threats to try to force those countries to take harder lines against drug smuggling and illegal immigration.

"Nobody would have even considered such a thing in McKinley's day," Merry said.

McKinley champions the Tariff Act of 1890

McKinley hailed from Canton, in northeast Ohio and was son of an iron foundries owner who was especially sensitive to overseas competition. He won a seat in Congress representing a steel-producing district and so promoted tariffs that one humor magazine used a cartoon on its cover to unflatteringly dub him the "Napoleon of Protectionism."

As chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, McKinley championed the Tariff Act of 1890, which set the then-highest import tax in U.S. history, raising taxes to 49.5% on 1,500-plus items — everything from glass to tin plates to cayenne pepper. The results were quickly poor for the economy and for Republicans.

"It led to an increase in prices, a kind of inflation, even before the bill took effect," Merry said. "The

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argument was, it was carte blanche for retailers and industrialists who basically jacked up their prices unnecessarily."

Americans dealt Republicans landslide congressional defeats during the 1890 midterms, voting scores of incumbents out of office — including McKinley. The tariff fallout also helped Grover Cleveland win the White House for Democrats in 1892, after he lost his reelection the previous cycle.

McKinley rebounded, though. He was elected Ohio governor and eventually won the presidency in 1896 on a campaign slogan Trump has repeated: "I am a tariff man standing on a tariff platform." His campaign also got boosts from big donations by major industrialists like Rockefeller, who were strongly opposed to McKinley's populist Democratic opponent, William Jennings Bryan.

Just as in McKinley's time, today's business titans have worked to ingratiate themselves to Trump. Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg was among the technology leaders who traveled to Trump's Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida, where Elon Musk, the world's richest man, was already a fixture, before Inauguration Day.

Meta, Google and Microsoft joined other major firms donating \$1 million to Trump's inaugural committee, while Amazon Prime Video is set to distribute a documentary about first lady Melania Trump. Some business interests are hoping Trump will usher in a new era of antitrust, in which the government does less to block highly profitable corporate consolidation.

What was the 'great tariff commission'?

Ignoring some of the political problems tariffs created for Republicans in his favored era, Trump instead has focused on repeating how import taxes after the Civil War helped the U.S. pay off debts it incurred during the fighting — and eventually achieve government budget surpluses.

From 1866 to 1893, the U.S. ran nearly three straight decades of budget surpluses, fueled largely by tariffs and high domestic taxes on things like alcohol and tobacco, as well as the sale of federal lands. Paying down debt helped lower interest rates.

Trump has even begun trumpeting what he calls the "great tariff commission of 1887," which the president says was tasked with helping the government spend all those surpluses.

Irwin said there was a tariff commission, but it was actually convened five years earlier in 1882. It also recommended reducing tariffs, which Congress didn't do.

"It's hard to say it was a political success. It's hard to say it was an economic success," Irwin said. "Because we spent a lot of the 1890s with double digit unemployment."

That's because federal budget surpluses eventually began to effectively decrease the U.S. money supply and cause deflation. Meanwhile, higher tariffs increased the cost of living for many Americans, which, coupled with a financial crisis in Great Britain, helped trigger the Panic of 1893.

That resulted in railroad bankruptcies, a stock market crash and a crushing recession in which unemployment reached 25% nationally. Then-President Cleveland's lack of solutions was a key factor in voters turning on him and the Democrats and toward McKinley three years later.

McKinley also differed with Trump on key issues

Trump has used his opening weeks back in office to champion U.S. expansionism in ways unseen in the modern era.

He's refused to rule out U.S. military forces seizing back control of the Panama Canal and suggested buying Greenland from Denmark, making Canada the 51st state and even working with Israel to put American developers in charge of turning the Gaza Strip into a seaside "Riviera."

There are echoes of McKinley there, because, as president, he moved to expand the reach of the U.S. The Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico became American territories as part of the treaty that ended the Spanish-American War in December 1898.

But the comparison is not so easy. McKinley was also skeptical of U.S. expansionism, even writing himself a note at the start of the war and carrying it as a reminder, Merry said.

"While we are conducting war, and until its conclusion, we must keep all we get," the note said. "When the war is over, we must keep what we want."

Shortly after winning reelection in 1900, meanwhile, McKinley began rethinking tariffs, as a stronger and still-growing U.S. manufacturing base made him more appreciative of foreign markets.

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"McKinley began to see that, if we were going to be able to sell our goods overseas — as we were going to need to do because we would have more goods than we'd have a market for — we were going to have to accept goods as well," Merry said.

He said that McKinley gave a speech in Buffalo, New York, outlining "this concept of reciprocity, which was: I'm prepared to bring down tariffs. Even me. Even William McKinley."

"That was his first big initiative after being reelected," Merry said.

In that speech on Sept. 5, 1901, McKinley said, "A policy of goodwill and friendly trade relations will prevent reprisals. Reciprocity treaties are in harmony with the spirit of the times. Measures of retaliation are not."

Trump is now promising that similar, reciprocal tariffs will take effect next month. But actually successfully pulling that off will be another difference from McKinley, who never got the chance.

The day after his Buffalo speech, McKinley was shot by anarchist Leon Czolgosz. He died on Sept. 14, 1901.

More than 30 nations will participate in Paris planning talks on a security force for Ukraine

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Military officials from more than 30 nations will take part in Paris talks on the creation of an international security force for Ukraine, a French military official said Monday.

Such an international force would aim to dissuade Russia from launching another offensive after any ceasefire in Ukraine comes into effect.

The long list of participants in Tuesday's discussions will also include Asian and Oceania nations that will join remotely, the French official said. The international makeup of the meeting offers an indication of how broadly France and Britain — which are working together on plans for the force — are casting their net as they aim to build what the French official described as a coalition of nations "able and willing" to be part of an effort to safeguard Ukraine in the event of a ceasefire.

The French military official spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss the blueprint for the force that is shrouded in secrecy and the Paris talks that will consider it.

The force being envisaged by France and Britain would aim to reassure Ukraine and deter another large-scale Russian offensive after any ceasefire, the official said. It could include heavy weaponry and weapons stockpiles that could be rushed within hours or days to aid in Ukraine's defense in the event of a Russian attack that shatters any truce, the official said.

The French-British blueprint will be presented to military officials from more than 30 nations in the first part of Tuesday's talks, the official said.

The talks' second part will include "more precise and concrete" discussions where the participants will be invited to say whether and how their militaries might be able to contribute, the official said.

"It's not, 'This is what we need,'" the official said. "It's more, 'What are you bringing to the pot?'"

The official stressed, however, that the ultimate decision on whether nations take part in the force would be taken at a political level, by government leaders.

Army chiefs or their representatives from nearly all of the 32 nations of the NATO military alliance will attend the Paris talks — with the notable exception being the United States.

The official said the United States wasn't invited because European nations want to demonstrate that they can take responsibility for a large part of the post-ceasefire security framework for Ukraine.

Also attending will be the chiefs of staff of Ireland and Cyprus and a representative from Austria — all nations that are not NATO members but are in the European Union.

Australia and New Zealand, which are Commonwealth nations, as well as Japan and South Korea, will listen into the talks remotely, the official said.

Ukraine will be represented by a military official who is also a member of the country's security and defense council.

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 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."

Several veteran budget hawks are giving DOGE mixed reviews, including some who say Musk's early

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targets demonstrate success and show more potential than previous efforts to downsize the government. A January poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that about 3 in 10 U.S. adults strongly or somewhat approve of Trump's creation of DOGE while about 4 in 10 Americans oppose eliminating a large number of federal jobs.

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 Monday morning, she still has 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.

Her parents, who came to the U.S. mainland 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."

A boat capsizes in Congo and 25 are dead, many of them soccer players

By JEAN-YVES KAMALE Associated Press

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) — A boat has capsized in southwestern Congo and killed 25 people, many of them soccer players, authorities said Monday.

The players were returning from a match in Mushie city in Mai-Ndombe province on Sunday night when the vessel capsized on the Kwa River, said Alexis Mputu, the provincial spokesman.

Mputu suggested that the poor visibility at night may have been a factor.

At least 30 other people survived, said Renacle Kwatiba, the local administrator of Mushie territory.

Deadly boat accidents are common in the central African country, where late-night travels and overcrowded vessels are often blamed. Authorities have struggled to enforce maritime regulations.

Congo's rivers are a major means of transport for its more than 100 million people, especially in remote areas where infrastructure is poor or nonexistent.

Hundreds have been killed in boat accidents in recent years as more people abandon the few available roads for wooden vessels packed with passengers and their goods.

Supreme Court will take up state bans on conversion therapy for LGBTQ+ children, in a Colorado case

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court agreed on Monday in a case from Colorado to decide whether state and local governments can enforce laws banning conversion therapy for LGBTQ+ children.

The conservative-led court is taking up the case amid actions by President Donald Trump targeting transgender people, including a ban on military service and an end to federal funding for gender-affirming care for transgender minors.

The justices also have heard arguments in a Tennessee case over whether state bans on treating transgender minors violate the Constitution. But they have yet to issue a decision.

Colorado is among roughly half the states that prohibit the practice of trying to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity through counseling.

The issue is whether the law violates the speech rights of counselors. Defenders of such laws argue that they regulate the conduct of professionals who are licensed by the state.

The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver upheld the state law. The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta has struck down local bans in Florida.

In 2023, the court had turned away a similar challenge, despite a split among federal appeals courts that had weighed state bans and come to differing decisions.

At the time, three justices, Samuel Alito, Brett Kavanaugh and Clarence Thomas, said they would have taken on the issue. It takes four justices to grant review. The nine-member court does not typically reveal how justices vote at this stage of a case so it's unclear who might have provided the fourth vote.

The case will be argued in the court's new term, which begins in October. The appeal on behalf of Kaley Chiles, a counselor in Colorado Springs, was filed by Alliance Defending Freedom, a conservative legal organization that has appeared frequently at the court in recent years in cases involving high-profile social issues.

Chiles has had to turn away clients because of the law, ADF lawyer Jim Campbell said Monday on a conference call for reporters, though he declined to say how many.

Chiles said the law, with potential fines of \$5,000 and license suspension or even revocation, "interferes with my ability to serve my clients with integrity."

One of ADF's earlier cases was a 5-4 decision in 2018 in which the justices ruled that California could not force state-licensed anti-abortion crisis pregnancy centers to provide information about abortion.

Chiles' lawyers leaned heavily on that decision in asking the court to take up her case. They wrote that

Chiles doesn't "seek to 'cure' clients of same-sex attractions or to 'change' clients' sexual orientation."

In arguing for the court to reject the appeal, lawyers for Colorado wrote that lawmakers acted to regulate professional conduct, "based on overwhelming evidence that efforts to change a child's sexual orientation or gender identity are unsafe and ineffective."

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.

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."

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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.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, asked on Monday about the talks, said: "It doesn't matter what we're expecting. It matters what the United States is expecting."

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.

Tibetans scuffle with police outside the Chinese Embassy in India as they mark uprising anniversary

By RISHI LEKHI and ASHWINI BHATIA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Dozens of Tibetan protesters clashed with police outside the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi on Monday as Tibetans living in exile marked the 66th anniversary of their uprising against China that was crushed by Chinese forces.

As in past years, police blocked the protesters from entering the embassy and briefly detained some of them after wrestling them to the ground.

Hundreds also marched in the north Indian town of Dharamshala, the seat of the exiled Tibetan government and home of Dalai Lama, their 89-year-old spiritual leader. Separately, about a hundred Tibetan women gathered at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, an area designated for protests close to Parliament.

The protesters shouted anti-China slogans, carried Tibetan flags and played the national anthems of Tibet and India.

India considers Tibet to be part of China, although it hosts the Tibetan exiles. The 1959 independence uprising was quelled by the Chinese army, forcing Dalai Lama and his followers into exile in India.

Many had their faces painted in colors of the Tibetan national flag. The demonstrators observed a minute of silence to remember Tibetans who lost their lives in the struggle against China. Monks, activists, nuns and schoolchildren marched across the town with banners reading, "Free Tibet" and "Remember, Resist, Return."

Penpa Tsering — the president of the Central Tibetan Administration, as the exiled Tibetan government calls itself — accused China's leadership of carrying out a "deliberate and dangerous strategy to eliminate the very identity of the Tibetan people."

"This marks the darkest and most critical period in the history of Tibet," Tsering told the gathering. "As we commemorate the Tibetan National Uprising Day, we honor our brave martyrs, and express solidarity with our brothers and sisters inside Tibet who continue to languish under the oppressive Chinese government."

The Tibetan government-in-exile in India accuses China of denying the most fundamental human rights to people in Tibet and trying to expunge the Tibetan identity.

China claims Tibet has been part of its territory for centuries, but the Tibetans say the Himalayan region was virtually independent until China occupied it in 1950.

The Dalai Lama denies China's claim that he is a separatist and says he only advocates substantial autonomy and protection of Tibet's native Buddhist culture.

Young people who aspired to government service dismayed by Trump ending the federal fellows program

By GARY FIELDS and CHRISTINE FERNANDO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A young economist who had uprooted her life for civil service. A fierce housing advocate terminated just before buying her first home. A semifinalist whose dreams were dashed before they materialized.

For decades, the Presidential Management Fellows program was seen as a building block for the civil service with the expectation that the few who earned the position would one day become leaders in the federal workforce. Now the road ahead is uncertain. Hundreds of the fellows have been terminated or placed on administrative leave amid a nationwide slashing of the federal workforce.

One of President Donald Trump's executive orders ended the program, which was created in 1978 to entice highly qualified workers with advanced degrees to join the federal government.

Trump's Republican administration had ordered agencies to lay off nearly all probationary employees, potentially affecting hundreds of thousands of workers in one fell swoop. That included recent classes of the fellows program, which has a two-year probationary period.

Fellows had persevered through an intense selection process that included multiple tests and evaluations as well as a blind interview. The agency website said about 10% of applicants are accepted, although that number has been recently as low as just 3%.

Charles Conyers, an Office of Personnel Management retiree who was a fellow in the class of 2003, said he was saddened and puzzled about the administration eliminating a program that brought to the government some of the "brightest minds in America." He said losing their skills and ending a program that attracted and groomed exceptional future leaders was tragic.

While many fellows affected by the job cuts were reluctant to speak on the record, several did. As a group, they said they loved their jobs and see federal civil service as a way to serve their country. All would welcome, if given a chance, the opportunity to get back to work and use their expertise.

'An incredible brain drain'

Jenn Kauffman, who has a background in public health and labor studies, was a semifinalist for the fellows program this year and had been waiting to hear if she would be accepted. As layoffs were announced, she began to worry if it would continue.

"I worked really hard and wanted that satisfaction to see it through," she said.

On Feb. 19, during the week finalists would have been named, the Trump administration announced an executive order cutting the program.

Kauffman, 45, said she was crushed by the decision and worries that the mass layoffs and dissolution of the fellows program will forever change public service.

"It's so easy to decimate something but so much harder to rebuild," she said. "And I worry that the

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incredibly talented people who may have been my cohort or colleagues are going to go elsewhere, and there will be an incredible brain drain. It's such a loss for the American people."

At the Forest Service, a perfect fit

Sydney Smith, 28, said many of the fellows were shocked at being let go because they came in to the government with ideas on how to make it more efficient.

Smith studied chemistry as an undergraduate student at Willamette University in Oregon before going on to study accounting at George Washington University. She heard about the presidential fellows program but was skeptical she would get in because of the low acceptance rate.

After she made it as a finalist in 2023, she started working for the U.S. Forest Service as an accountant. She's a backpacker who loves the outdoors and is passionate about making public lands accessible. It was a perfect fit.

Now Smith's goal is to finish the CPA exams, something she was doing to make herself even more qualified for federal service.

"I'm hopeful that in the future that there will be room for me in the government," she said. "I don't know what that would look like, but I am hopeful that it still exists."

A high school dream derailed

McKenzie Hartman, 26, was an economist for the IRS research division in Ogden, Utah, when she received an email Feb. 19 that she should return to the office with all her equipment.

The next day, a manager collected her equipment and walked her out. On the way home, Hartman took a wrong turn because her mind was elsewhere.

"It felt surreal," she said. "I had planned on working for the federal government since high school."

Hartman lost access to her office's video conferencing software and couldn't join her colleagues for her own goodbye gathering. She had to call in instead. Her termination letter came the following weekend.

"It's crazy to get a letter terminating you for performance when everyone around you is saying incredible things about your performance," Hartman said.

Since then, she has been applying for jobs and embarked on a road trip with her partner through several national parks, where she's seen protests against the Trump administration's cuts.

"For a lot of us, there is a question on whether we'll return to federal service," she said. "Many of us would like to, and this was what we wanted for our careers, but it's demoralizing."

A surprise, 'gut-wrenching' termination

Bianca Nelson, 31, had been working for the Department of Housing and Urban Development in the unit she calls the "front door of HUD." She never planned to leave. On Feb. 14, she got an email that she was terminated, effective immediately.

Nelson and her partner were planning to buy their first home that month — their "dream apartment." Now, they've had to lean on savings to keep them afloat. She called it "gut-wrenching."

She had to forward the termination email to her boss, who had not been told she or others would be fired. Days later, she picked up her belongings, including a bell given to her at a New York City Housing Authority groundbreaking ceremony — a memento representing her love for her work.

Since then, she has spent her days organizing paperwork for unemployment and insurance, taking networking calls, volunteering with her union, organizing a resource fair for other fired federal workers in her area and volunteering with housing advocacy organizations.

Ending the program, she said, is "closing a pipeline to future leaders."

Worrying about those who need help

Madeleine Parker's fellowship began in September 2023, one month after she finished her doctorate degree in city and regional planning from the University of California, Berkeley.

Parker, 32, chose to work in housing because of its importance in offering families stability. She said she had hoped to continue working for the federal government.

"It's been hard to step back from that," she said.

She is trying to strategize on what comes next while worrying about the people who need the help.

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"There's the personal impact of my own job, but I have this immense concern about the impacts on the people we serve, from the programs I worked on and that my colleagues worked on, from affordable housing development to disaster recovery," she said.

'We made a difference'

Juliane Alfen, 25, left her workplace at the U.S. Agency for International Development in tears, exiting to cheers from supporters who protested the abrupt way one of the world's preeminent aid organizations had been decimated.

A 2023 fellow, her goal was to build a life and career around federal service.

Alfen learned of the fellowship through her graduate school program in international affairs at the University of California, San Diego. The day she learned she'd made it to finalist, she said, "I literally screamed and called my mom on the phone." There had been more than 10,000 initial applicants.

Now, when she looks at her LinkedIn account, everyone is job hunting. She said she would love the opportunity to return to USAID, though the prospects for that are uncertain given the Trump administration's gutting of the agency through his adviser Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency and halting its humanitarian work.

"I feel," Alfen said, "like we made a difference."

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

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Canada's next prime minister has already helped run two Group of Seven economies in crisis 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 landslide 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.

Canadians are booing the American anthem

"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 from 2008, and then in 2013 when 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 managed 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.

Americans 'would destroy our way of life'

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."

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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 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.

Canada facing 'nation-defining moment'

Carney is credited with keeping money flowing through the Canadian economy during the financial crisis by acting quickly in cutting interest rates to their lowest level ever of 1%, working with bankers to sustain lending through the crisis and, critically, letting the public know rates would remain low so they would keep borrowing. He was the first central banker to commit to keep them at a historic low for a definite time, a step the U.S. Federal Reserve would follow.

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 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 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.

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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 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 on Sunday, 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 also targeted the Bremen, Hannover, Duesseldorf, Dortmund, Leipzig/Halle and Stuttgart airports. At the smaller Weeze and Karlsruhe/Baden-Baden airports, only security workers were called out.

The German airports' association, ADV, estimated that more than 3,500 flights in total would be canceled and about 560,000 passengers affected.

The union announced the strike last 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.

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

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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.

Trump loves Gilded Age tariffs. It was a great time for the rich but not for the many

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In President Donald Trump's idealized framing, the United States was at its zenith in the 1890s, when top hats and shirtwaists were fashionable and typhoid fever often killed more soldiers than combat.

It was a time of rapid population growth and transformation from an agricultural economy toward a sprawling industrial system, in which poverty was widespread while barons of phenomenal wealth held tremendous sway over politicians who often helped further grow their financial empires.

"We were at our richest from 1870 to 1913. That's when we were a tariff country. And then they went to an income tax concept," Trump said days after taking office. "It's fine, it's OK. But it would have been very much better."

The desire to recreate the Gilded Age is fueled by Trump's fondness for tariffs. It's also why he praises the nation's 25th president, William McKinley, a Republican who was in office from 1897 until being assassinated in 1901.

Experts on the era say Trump, also a Republican, is idealizing a time rife with government and business corruption, social turmoil and inequality. They also argue he's dramatically overestimating the role tariffs played in stimulating the economy.

"The most astonishing thing for historians is that nobody in the Gilded Age economy — except for the very rich — wanted to live in the Gilded Age economy," said Richard White, a history professor emeritus at Stanford University.

Trump says high tariffs and low interest rates, like those the U.S. had after the Civil War, can hastily pay down today's federal debt and fatten government coffers while boosting domestic manufacturers and enticing foreign producers to move to the U.S.

The White House has rushed to raise tariffs on imports from China and on aluminum and steel made abroad while promising import levies will soon increase on new, foreign-made cars, microchips and pharmaceuticals. Trump also increased tariffs on Canada and Mexico, though he later delayed most of them.

Trump has similar plans for potentially every country the U.S. does business with, saying broad "re-

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ciprocal" import taxes are coming April 2 and will be consistent with levies other countries charge U.S. manufacturers to export their goods.

Was America really at its wealthiest from 1870 to 1913?

The Gilded Age featured extraordinary wealth for a small class of people that largely obscured rampant poverty for many other Americans. Many contemporary politicians were openly influenced by the famed robber barons, builders of monopolies who stoked industrialization while shaping the way millions of other Americans lived and worked.

Overall, the U.S. economy grew rapidly between 1870 and 1913. Some historians call it the second industrial revolution because of major increases in manufacturing and factory output.

But White said that those years were marked by erratic economic growth and that upturns were mostly fueled by millions of immigrants joining the U.S. workforce. Another factor was the seizing of land from Native Americans during U.S. expansion west. That meant exploiting natural resources along the way.

"This is the height of antimonopoly, political turmoil, the rise of labor in the United States," said White, author of "The Republic for Which it Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896." "And the reason was, people did not regard this as a particularly healthy economy."

Why does Trump revere McKinley?

In his inaugural address, Trump called McKinley a "great president" and "natural business man," who he said "made our country very rich through tariffs and through talent." Hours later, Trump signed an executive order overturning an Obama administration directive and renaming America's tallest peak Mount McKinley.

But today's economy is immeasurably different than in McKinley's time.

Back then, products were often fully assembled before being exported, and shipping could take months. Today's goods often contain raw material components or parts that need to be assembled, that come from all over the world. Supply chains are calibrated based on instantaneous communications.

McKinley was a congressman representing a steel-producing Ohio district known as the "Napoleon of Protectionism." He championed the Tariff Act of 1890, which set the then-highest import tax in U.S. history.

"It led to an increase in prices, a kind of inflation, even before the bill took effect," said Robert Merry, author of "President McKinley: Architect of the American Century." "The argument was, it was carte blanche for retailers and industrialists who basically jacked up their prices unnecessarily."

Voters dealt Republicans landslide congressional defeats during the 1890 midterms when even McKinley lost. He eventually rebounded to win the presidency in 1896.

Ignoring the political problems tariffs created for Republicans, Trump instead has focused on repeating how high tariffs after the Civil War helped the U.S. pay off debts and eventually achieve government budget surpluses.

From 1866 to 1893, the U.S. ran nearly three straight decades of budget surpluses, fueled largely by tariffs and high domestic taxes on things like alcohol and tobacco as well as the sale of federal lands.

But federal budget surpluses eventually began to effectively decrease the U.S. money supply and cause deflation. Meanwhile, higher tariffs continued to increase the cost of living, which, coupled with a financial crisis in Great Britain, helped trigger the devastating economic depression known as the Panic of 1893.

McKinley changed his mind on tariffs

Shortly after winning reelection in 1900, meanwhile, McKinley began rethinking tariffs, as stronger U.S. manufacturing had made him more appreciative of foreign markets.

"McKinley began to see that, if we were going to be able to sell our goods overseas, as we were going to need to do because we would have more goods than we'd have a market for, we were going to have to accept goods as well," Merry said.

He said that McKinley gave a speech in Buffalo, New York, on Sept. 5, 1901, outlining "this concept of reciprocity, which was: I'm prepared to bring down tariffs. Even me. Even William McKinley."

Trump is now promising that similar, reciprocal tariffs will take effect next month. But pulling that off will be another difference from McKinley.

The day after his Buffalo speech, McKinley was shot. He died on Sept. 14, 1901.

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" to show how the racist system distorted the humanity of his country with what he called "a daily tally of injustice," has died. He was 92.

The South African government confirmed Fugard's death and said South Africa "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 "The Blood Knot" and two productions of "Master Harold'... and the Boys."

"The Blood Knot" tells of how the relationship between two Black half-brothers deteriorates because one has lighter skin and can pass for white, which ultimately leads to him treating his darker half-brother as an inferior.

"We were cursed with apartheid but blessed with great artists who shone a light on its impact and helped to guide us out of it. We owe a huge debt to this late, wonderful man," South African Sports, Arts and Culture Minister Gayton McKenzie said of Fugard.

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.

He challenged the apartheid government's segregation laws by collaborating with Black actors and writers, and "The Blood Knot" — where he played the light-skinned brother — was believed to be the first major play in South Africa to feature a multiracial cast.

Fugard became a target for the 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 during apartheid, 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.

Fugard told an interviewer that the best theater in Africa would come from South Africa because the "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."

He viewed his work as an attempt to sabotage the violence of apartheid. "The best sabotage is love," he said.

"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 his surrogate parents. One rainy afternoon, the bonds between them are stressed to breaking point when the teenage boy begins to abuse the servants.

"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."

Anti-apartheid activist Desmond Tutu was in the audience when the play opened in 1983 — at the height of apartheid.

"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."

In a review of one play in 1980, TIME magazine said Fugard's work "indicts the impoverishment of spirit and the warping distortion of moral energy" that engulfed both Blacks and whites in apartheid South 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'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." Fugard said he was broke and needed the job, but it included witnessing the caning of lawbreakers. "It was the darkest period of my life," he said.

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.

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 named after him 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.

AI made its way to vineyards. Here's how the technology is helping make your wine

By SARAH PARVINI AP Technology Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — When artificial intelligence-backed tractors became available to vineyards, Tom Gamble wanted to be an early adopter. He knew there would be a learning curve, but Gamble decided the technology was worth figuring out.

The third-generation farmer bought one autonomous tractor. He plans on deploying its self-driving feature this spring and is currently using the tractor's AI sensor to map his Napa Valley vineyard. As it learns each row, the tractor will know where to go once it is used autonomously. The AI within the machine will then process the data it collects and help Gamble make better-informed decisions about his crops — what he calls "precision farming."

"It's not going to completely replace the human element of putting your boot into the vineyard, and that's one of my favorite things to do," he said. "But it's going to be able to allow you to work more smartly, more intelligently and in the end, make better decisions under less fatigue."

Gamble said he anticipates using the tech as much as possible because of "economic, air quality and regulatory imperatives." Autonomous tractors, he said, could help lower his fuel use and cut back on pollution.

As AI continues to grow, experts say that the wine industry is proof that businesses can integrate the technology efficiently to supplement labor without displacing a workforce. New agricultural tech like AI can help farmers to cut back on waste, and to run more efficient and sustainable vineyards by monitoring water use and helping determine when and where to use products like fertilizers or pest control. AI-backed tractors and irrigation systems, farmer say, can minimize water use by analyzing soil or vines, while also helping farmers to manage acres of vineyards by providing more accurate data on the health of a crop or what a season's yield will be.

Other facets of the wine industry have also started adopting the tech, from using generative AI to create custom wine labels to turning to ChatGPT to develop, label and price an entire bottle.

"I don't see anybody losing their job, because I think that a tractor operator's skills are going to increase

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and as a result, and maybe they're overseeing a small fleet of these machines that are out there, and they'll be compensated as a result of their increased skill level," he said.

Farmers, Gamble said, are always evolving. There were fears when the tractor replaced horses and mules pulling plows, but that technology "proved itself" just like AI farming tech will, he said, adding that adopting any new tech always takes time.

Companies like John Deere have started using the AI that wine farmers are beginning to adopt. The agricultural giant uses "Smart Apply" technology on tractors, for example, helping growers apply material for crop retention by using sensors and algorithms to sense foliage on grape canopies, said Sean Sundberg, business integration manager at John Deere.

The tractors that use that tech then only spray "where there are grapes or leaves or whatnot so that it doesn't spray material unnecessarily," he said. Last year, the company announced a project with Sonoma County Winegrowers to use tech to help wine grape growers maximize their yield.

Tyler Klick, partner at Redwood Empire Vineyard Management, said his company has started automating irrigation valves at the vineyards it helps manage. The valves send an alert in the event of a leak and will automatically shut off if they notice an "excessive" water flow rate.

"That valve is actually starting to learn typical water use," Klick said. "It'll learn how much water is used before the production starts to fall off."

Klick said each valve costs roughly \$600, plus \$150 per acre each year to subscribe to the service.

"Our job, viticulture, is to adjust our operations to the climatic conditions we're dealt," Klick said. "I can see AI helping us with finite conditions."

Angelo A. Camillo, a professor of wine business at Sonoma State University, said that despite excitement over AI in the wine industry, some smaller vineyards are more skeptical about their ability to use the technology. Small, family-owned operations, which Camillo said account for about 80% of the wine business in America, are slowly disappearing — many don't have the money to invest in AI, he said. A robotic arm that helps put together pallets of wine, for example, can cost as much as \$150,000, he said.

"For small wineries, there's a question mark, which is the investment. Then there's the education. Who's going to work with all of these AI applications? Where is the training?" he said.

There are also potential challenges with scalability, Camillo added. Drones, for example, could be useful for smaller vineyards that could use AI to target specific crops that have a bug problem, he said — it would be much harder to operate 100 drones in a 1,000 acre vineyard while also employing the IT workers who understand the tech.

"I don't think a person can manage 40 drones as a swarm of drones," he said. "So there's a constraint for the operators to adopt certain things."

However, AI is particularly good at tracking a crop's health — including how the plant itself is doing and whether it's growing enough leaves — while also monitoring grapes to aid in yield projections, said Mason Earles, an assistant professor who leads the Plant AI and Biophysics Lab at UC Davis.

Diseases or viruses can sneak up and destroy entire vineyards, Earles said, calling it an "elephant in the room" across the wine industry. The process of replanting a vineyard and getting it to produce well takes at least five years, he said. AI can help growers determine which virus is affecting their plants, he said, and whether they should rip out some crops immediately to avoid losing their entire vineyard.

Earles, who is also cofounder of the AI-powered farm management platform Scout, said his company uses AI to process thousands of images in hours and extract data quickly — something that would be difficult by hand in large vineyards that span hundreds of acres. Scout's AI platform then counts and measures the number of grape clusters as early as when a plant is beginning to flower in order to forecast what a yield will be.

The sooner vintners know how much yield to expect, the better they can "dial in" their wine making process, he added.

"Predicting what yields you're going to have at the end of the season, no one is that good at it right now," he said. "But it's really important because it determines how much labor contract you're going to

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need and the supplies you'll need for making wine."

Earles doesn't think the budding use of AI in vineyards is "freaking farmers out." Rather, he anticipates that AI will be used more frequently to help with difficult field labor and to discern problems in vineyards that farmers need help with.

"They've seen people trying to sell them tech for decades. It's hard to farm; it's unpredictable compared to most other jobs," he said. "The walking and counting, I think people would have said a long time ago, 'I would happily let a machine take over.'"

Today in History: March 11, massive earthquake and tsunami in Japan kill nearly 20,000

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, March 11, the 70th day of 2025. There are 295 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9 earthquake and resulting tsunami struck Japan's northeastern coast, killing nearly 20,000 people and severely damaging the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station.

Also on this date:

In 1918, what were believed to be the first confirmed U.S. cases of a deadly global flu pandemic were reported among U.S. Army soldiers stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas; 46 soldiers would die. (The influenza outbreak would ultimately kill an estimated 20 million to 40 million people worldwide.)

In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Lend-Lease Act, which provided war supplies to Allied countries during World War II.

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev was chosen to succeed the late Konstantin Chernenko as general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party.

In 2004, three days before general elections in Spain, 10 bombs exploded in quick succession inside commuter trains in Madrid, killing 193 people in an attack linked to al-Qaida-inspired militants.

In 2006, former Serb leader Slobodan Milošević was found dead at age 64 of a heart attack in his prison cell in the Netherlands, abruptly ending his four-year U.N. war crimes trial.

In 2010, a federal appeals court in San Francisco upheld the use of the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance and "In God We Trust" on U.S. currency.

In 2012, U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Robert Bales shot and killed 16 Afghan villagers — mostly women and children — as they slept. (Bales later pleaded guilty and was sentenced to life in prison without parole.)

In 2021, President Joe Biden signed into law a \$1.9 trillion COVID relief package that he said would help defeat the virus and nurse the economy back to health. Lower-income Americans would receive up to \$1,400 in direct payments, along with extended unemployment benefits.

Today's birthdays: Media mogul Rupert Murdoch is 94. Former ABC News correspondent Sam Donaldson is 91. Musician Flaco Jimenez (FLAH'-koh hee-MEH'-nez) is 86. Singer Bobby McFerrin is 75. Actor Elias Koteas (ee-LY'-uhs koh-TAY'-uhs) is 64. Actor Alex Kingston is 62. Actor John Barrowman is 58. Singer Lisa Loeb is 57. Actor Terrence Howard is 56. Actor Johnny Knoxville is 54. Basketball Hall of Famer Becky Hammon is 48. Rock musicians Benji and Joel Madden (Good Charlotte; The Madden Brothers) are 46. Singer LeToya Luckett is 44. Actor Thora Birch is 43. Actor Jodie Comer is 32.