

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 1 of 75

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Leadlines](#)
- [4- Gov. Rhoden Signs 19 Bills into Law](#)
- [4- Closure Scheduled on S.D. Highway 10 for Bridge Replacement Project Near Houghton](#)
- [5- Closure Scheduled for Eastbound Wasta Rest Area on Interstate 90](#)
- [5- Gov. Rhoden Signs Attorney General Jackley's Bills into Law](#)
- [6- The Life of Deloris Sombke](#)
- [7- SD SearchLight: With governor's veto, all three child care proposals stymied during 2025 legislative session](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: South Dakota governor signs bill loosening one of nation's harshest drug laws](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: Carbon pipeline company seeks pause in permitting schedule after SD adopts eminent domain ban](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: Advocates brace for Trump cuts to Education Department, a step toward elimination](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: Trump administration to roll back many EPA regulations, revisit contested water rule](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: U.S.-made beer, bourbon, motorcycles and more on tariff list in Trump trade war with EU](#)
- [16- SD SearchLight: Shutdown looms as 'unified' U.S. Senate Dems oppose GOP's stopgap spending bill](#)
- [17- SD SearchLight: Former Greenpeace employee tells jury he emphasized nonviolence at Dakota Access Pipeline protests](#)
- [19- Weather Pages](#)
- [23- Daily Devotional](#)
- [24- Subscription Form](#)
- [25- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [26- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [27- News from the Associated Press](#)



Thursday, March 13

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potato with gravy, peaches, peas and carrots, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Biscuits.

School Lunch: Chicken nachoes, refried beans.

State A Girls Tournament, Spearfish (BHSU)

Groton Lions Club Meeting, 6 p.m., 104 N Main.

Friday, March 14

Senior Menu: Chicken strips, au gratin, mied vegetables, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast cookie.

School Lunch: Fish nuggets, baby bakers.

State A Girls Tournament, Spearfish (BHSU)

Saturday, March 15

State A Girls Tournament, Spearfish (BHSU)

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 2 of 75

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.

Tariff-Go-Round

Canada and the European Union yesterday announced another round of tariffs on US imports, with Canada applying a 25% levy on steel products and the EU targeting a range of agricultural products. Officials said the moves were retaliatory for tariffs put in place by the Trump administration.

The US exports roughly \$2T annually to countries around the globe (second to China, at around \$3.5T). Generally speaking, tariffs act as taxes on imports into the country that levies the fee. The administration has generally favored using tariffs to affect policy, focusing on fentanyl production and illegal immigration, having put in place broad 25% tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada before moderating the rules. The day-to-day changes have left many in a state of uncertainty.

Greenland's New Government

Greenland's center-right Demokraatit Party won a surprise general election victory yesterday, a closely watched decision that comes amid growing calls from residents for independence and President Donald Trump repeatedly expressing interest in acquiring the mineral-rich territory.

The Demokraatit Party, which advocates for a gradual approach to independence from Denmark, won around 30% of the vote. Party leader Jens-Frederik Nielsen has openly opposed Trump's wishes to acquire the territory and will now hold talks with other parties to try to form a government coalition and move toward full sovereignty.

Greenland has been controlled by Denmark for nearly 300 years, but the Arctic island of approximately 56,000 people has been gradually moving toward greater autonomy, achieving self-rule status in 2009. Greenland's strategic significance is partly due to its mineral, oil, and gas resources. The island's location between Russia, Europe, and the US is also advantageous for defense and trade purposes, including being home to the northernmost US military base.

Pokémon Go(ne)

Video game developer Niantic, maker of the popular augmented reality Pokémon Go, sold its game division yesterday to Scopely for a reported \$3.5B. The sale is one of the top 10 largest deals in industry history—behind the acquisition of Scopely by Saudi-owned Savvy Games in 2023.

Pokémon Go, based on the three-decade-old Japanese franchise featuring a range of creatures that protagonists must catch in a ball for study, boasts around 90 million active players per month. In the game, players walk around real-world environments in an attempt to find and collect a wide variety of creatures. Critics have accused Niantic of amassing user data—both location-based and augmented reality environments—to sell without consent.

Niantic founder and CEO, John Hanke, helped create Meridian 59, one of the first MMORPGs—massively multiplayer online roleplaying games—ultimately selling his game studio in 1996. He then helped lead mapping startup Keyhole, which was acquired by Google and formed the core technology behind Google Maps.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 3 of 75

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Harvey Weinstein's retrial of his 2020 rape and sexual assault conviction set for April 15; Weinstein's conviction was thrown out last year by the New York Court of Appeals.

UEFA Champions League quarterfinals set after second leg of Round of 16 wraps.

Tiger Woods biopic film in the works, to be produced by Barack and Michelle Obama.

Spotify paid out all-time high of \$10B in royalties to music industry in 2024, including more than \$1M to nearly 1,500 individual artists.

Sequel to 1984 cult comedy "This Is Spinal Tap" set for Sept. 12 release.

Science & Technology

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration lays off more than 1,000 people as part of Trump administration's workforce reduction plan; agency's duties include collecting data to monitor and predict storms, coastal restoration, and more.

DNA analysis reveals Stone Age Europeans successfully voyaged overseas to North Africa roughly 8,000 years ago; marks the first evidence of sea voyaging across the Mediterranean during this period.

Google reveals Gemma 3, an open-access AI model for developers that can interpret text, images, and short videos.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.5%, Dow -0.2%, Nasdaq +1.2%) after cooler-than-expected inflation data and as traders scoop up tech stocks, including Nvidia (+6.4%).

US consumer price index rises 2.8% year over year in February, down from 3% in January.

iRobot shares fall over 35% after Roomba maker raises doubt about its future.

Intel shares rise over 11% in after-hours trading after former board member Lip-Bu Tan named as CEO; comes three months after former CEO's ousting.

US budget deficit rises in February, surpasses \$1T for first five months of fiscal year 2025; the figure sets a record and is up \$318B from the same period in 2024, or roughly 38% higher.

Politics & World Affairs

Senate Democrats expected to reject GOP-led House-passed funding bill as Friday midnight shutdown nears; House adjourns for the week.

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) won't run for reelection in 2026, adds to list of open seats in states like Michigan and Minnesota as Democrats seek to regain Senate majority.

Immigration officials arrest more than 32,000 migrants who have been living in the US without legal status since Jan. 21, per latest Homeland Security data.

Pakistan's army says insurgents who attacked passenger train Tuesday killed 21 hostages; security forces rescued more than 300 others and killed all 33 assailants.

Gov. Rhoden Signs 19 Bills into Law

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Larry Rhoden signed the following 19 bills into law:

- SB 15 expands the policy advisory committee for animal damage control;
- SB 25 clarifies the adoption and use of the plumbing code;
- SB 66 revises certain provisions related to capital improvements of state buildings;
- SB 76 repeals reporting and testifying requirements to the committees on health and human services regarding nursing facilities and long-term healthcare needs;
- SB 77 updates terminology related to ambulance operators;
- SB 78 authorizes a change in bullet diameter for use in taking certain animals;
- SB 80 revises provisions regarding students and trainees engaged in the practice of funeral service;
- SB 83 revise the penalty and provides treatment for the ingestion of certain controlled substances;
- SB 110 revises licensure and supervision requirements for physical therapists and physical therapist assistants;
- SB 116 revises and repeals provisions related to street racing prohibitions and provides a penalty therefor;
- SB 135 exempts a motor vehicle insurer from a certain title fee;
- SB 155 reduces the amount of net receipts of unclaimed property deposited into the general fund;
- SB 174 includes certain types of vehicles in the abandoned titling process;
- SB 179 modifies requirements for off-road vehicle dealers at special events;
- SB 193 allows an applicant to have an interpreter present during the driving portion of a driver license exam;
- HB 1094 modifies laws regarding school bus safety and provides a penalty therefor;
- HB 1192 removes the maximum fee permitted to be charged by a notary;
- HB1195 revises a provision related to the termination of parental rights of a child adjudicated abused or neglected; and
- HB 1196 updates Uniform Unclaimed Property Act to include provisions related to virtual currency and notice requirements.

Governor Rhoden has signed 125 bills into law this legislative session.

Closure Scheduled on S.D. Highway 10 for Bridge Replacement Project Near Houghton

ABERDEEN, S.D. – Beginning Monday, March 17, 2025, a bridge replacement project is scheduled to begin over the James River (Sand Lake) on S.D Highway 10 west of Houghton. Highway 10 will be closed to through traffic during the bridge replacement project. Motorists should plan to use an alternative route. A signed detour route will be provided using U.S. Highway 281 and S.D. Highway 37.

The prime contractor for this \$4.8 million project is RR Schroeder Construction, Inc. of Glenwood, MN. The overall project completion date is November 2025.

Closure Scheduled for Eastbound Wasta Rest Area on Interstate 90

WASTA, S.D. – Beginning on Monday March 17, 2025, the eastbound Wasta Rest Area located on Interstate 90 will be temporarily closed for a planned sanitary sewer upgrade project. All work is anticipated to be completed in one month. The rest area will reopen to the public when the project is complete. During the planned closure, travelers are encouraged to find alternate accommodations.

The prime contractor for this \$499,000 project is Mainline Contracting of Rapid City, S.D. The eastbound Wasta Rest Area sanitary sewer upgrade project completion date is Thursday, April 17, 2025.

Gov. Rhoden Signs Attorney General Jackley's Bills into Law

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Larry Rhoden signed nine bills into law, including six bills that were introduced by Attorney General Marty Jackley. He signed those six bills in a signing ceremony with the Attorney General, and you can find a photo of that signing [here](#).

"As stewards of taxpayer dollars, we have a responsibility to ensure integrity in how those dollars are spent," said Governor Larry Rhoden. "My team worked closely with Attorney General Jackley throughout the legislative process to get these bills to a place that protects taxpayer dollars while making sure that the punishment fits the crime."

The Rhoden Administration has successfully trained 100% of state employees on integrity, public trust, and a service mindset; continues to move forward on implementation of the Project BISON accounting system; has reviewed, updated, improved, and even added dozens of internal controls; and is allocating more resources to Board of Internal Controls through the budget process.

Governor Rhoden signed the following six bills that were introduced by Attorney General Jackley:

SB 58 revises provisions related to human trafficking, prohibits the obstruction of human trafficking enforcement, and provides a penalty therefor;

SB 59 revises provisions relating to the delivery, possession with intent to deliver, and possession of unauthorized articles in a state correctional facility, and provides a penalty therefor;

SB 60 expands the access and investigatory authority of the state auditor;

SB 61 modifies the authority of the Board of Internal Control;

SB 62 establishes mandatory reporting requirements related to improper governmental conduct and crime, and provides a penalty therefor; and

SB 63 establishes protections for state employees who report improper governmental conduct and crime.

"Today, our State is choosing to better protect taxpayer dollars and those State employees reporting crimes to the Attorney General," said Attorney General Marty Jackley.

Governor Rhoden also signed the following three government accountability bills:

SB 144 requires legislative approval for significant capital expenditures by the Department of Game, Fish and Parks;

SB 145 requires legislative approval of real property leases that are necessary for the operation of state government and exceed specified durations or rental payments; and

SB 146 revises provisions on interim transfers and appropriations.

Governor Rhoden has signed 106 bills into law this legislative session.

The Life of Deloris Sombke



Deloris Eileen Sombke, 88, of Indianapolis, passed away peacefully March 11, 2025. She was born February 1, 1937 in Ferney, South Dakota to Clarence and Flora (Erdmann) Sombke. Deloris graduated from Groton High School in Groton, South Dakota. She attended Concordia Teacher College in Seward, Nebraska, obtaining her teacher's certificate and began her teaching career at Zion Lutheran School in Tobias, Nebraska. She continued her education at Seward, receiving her Bachelor of Science in Education in 1964. In 1960 she began teaching at Calvary Lutheran School in Lincoln, Nebraska. Deloris came to Indianapolis in August of 1966, to teach at Trinity Lutheran School where she continued until she retired in 2002. Deloris received her

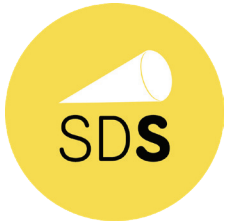
Master's Degree in Education from Butler University in 1976.

Deloris loved the Lord, and was active at Trinity Lutheran Church. Over the years she taught Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. She was also involved with the Youth Group, LWML, Trinity Business Women, Single Sisters, CART, Wednesday Women's Bible Study, Circle, and Friendship Bible Study. She was also an excellent Prayer Warrior.

Visitation will be Friday, March 14, 2025 from 6:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. and Saturday, March 15, 2025 from 9:00 a.m. until the time of service at 10:00 a.m. at Trinity Lutheran Church, 8540 East 16th Street, Indianapolis.

Deloris was preceded in death by her parents; and her brothers, Harlowe, James and Eugene Sombke. She is survived by her sisters, Janise Mahon, Norma Wacholz, Beverly Hite, and Bette Martin; sister-in-law, Esperanza Sombke; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Memorial contributions are suggested to Trinity Lutheran Church or School. Final care and arrangements are entrusted to Shirley Brothers Washington Memorial Chapel. www.shirleybrothers.com



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

With governor's veto, all three child care proposals stymied during 2025 legislative session

Bill to extend subsidies to early adult educators had cleared both chambers

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 12, 2025 7:37 PM

South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden has vetoed a bill offering financial assistance to a broader swath of child care workers.

Rhoden's Wednesday veto of House Bill 1132 closes the book, for now, on all three child care bills drawn up by a task force convened to study ways out of the state's affordability and access woes – and the resultant difficulties for workplace recruiters. Lawmakers could override Rhoden's action with a two-thirds vote of each chamber when they gather on March 31 to consider his vetoes.

HB 1132 would open up child care tuition assistance to full-time child care workers if their household incomes are 300% of the federal poverty line or less. The subsidy is currently available to any households at 209% of the poverty level or below.

In a letter to lawmakers explaining his veto, Rhoden said he didn't feel an expansion of the subsidy program was fair to all South Dakotans.

"This would be the first time in South Dakota that our state safety net programs would give enhanced benefits to people working one type of job or occupation," the governor wrote.

He also cited the lack of an appropriation to cover additional costs for what would have been an expanded program.

Supporters had urged their fellow lawmakers to think less in terms of fairness to all occupations and more about the practical impact of this particular flavor of preferential treatment: More day care openings for parents all across the state.

Laws similar to HB 1132 have been used in states like Kentucky and North Dakota to help child caregivers afford their own child care, thereby allowing them to stay at work and care for the children of others.

"We had hoped that our state could think about things differently," said Sen. Tim Reed, R-Brookings, who carried HB 1132 in the Senate and was co-lead of the task force.

Kayla Klein, of the nonprofit group Early Learner South Dakota, called HB 1132 "a solution" that had proven its worth.

"I am disheartened by the decision, but want all of those providers, families and children out there to know that we will continue to search for solutions to make meaningful and impactful change," Klein said Wednesday.

The Senate's 20-14 passage of HB 1132 had stood as a bright spot for the advocates who've spent years looking for ways to open up more day care slots and hold the line on prices – sometimes high enough to make staying home with kids a wiser financial move for parents than working. Klein said after the Senate vote she was "thrilled that the legislative body has taken the child care crisis and words from their constituents to heart."

"This brings us one step closer to stabilizing the child care industry — the workforce behind the workforce," Klein said at the time.

Senate had sided with help for child care workers

Reed had carried that message on the Senate floor, and the message carried the day in spite of opposition that sounded much like Rhoden's reasoning for the veto.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 8 of 75

Sen. Kevin Jensen, R-Canton, argued that it's unfair to give a "carve out" to day care workers and not workers in other fields.

"The one group that I think should be included in this are our teachers," he said, referring to K-12 teachers. "Why don't our teachers get a break on their child care?"

Some lawmakers in the House had similar reservations.

"We in the Legislature, and most certainly those of us serving on appropriations, know full well that child care is not the only sector of our economy that is struggling to build and maintain the workforce," Rep. Jack Kolbeck, R-Sioux Falls, said on Feb. 19.

Subsidy hike, grad student plans fail

The other planks of advocates' hoped-for child care platform had less success.

On Feb. 20, the state Senate's budget committee voted 5-3 against pitching in more state dollars to the subsidy program.

The subsidy bill would have upped payments to families who get child care assistance. In South Dakota, the federal grant funds that support the subsidy pay up to 75% of the market rate cost – a rate calculated biennially – for child care.

The task force had hoped to bump that up to 90% of the market rate, getting closer to covering the cost of care.

"If we're going to provide assistance, we should do it at the market rate," Reed told the Senate Appropriations Committee.

There's a delicate dance to setting child care rates, according to Kerri Tietgen of EmBe, a nonprofit with two large centers in Sioux Falls.

"The true cost of child care continues to rise, driven by increasing wages for child care, teachers, higher food prices and the need to maintain a safe and enriching environment for children," she said. "Our organization continuously looks for ways to offset costs, but like many providers, we're stuck between rising expenses and the ceiling of affordable rates for families."

But South Dakota can't afford to spend more on child care subsidies, said Jason Simmons of the state Department of Social Services.

The state can only get \$32 million in federal money for the subsidy, Simmons said, and already has to chip in an \$800,000 match to receive that. Because of the cap on federal dollars, the state would need to come up with \$8.25 million to cover everyone who's eligible at the higher rate.

Since the state can't afford to make up the difference, Simmons said, the subsidy change "would greatly reduce the number of people that are eligible for the program."

South Dakota already does a better-than-average job with reimbursements, he said. Federal guidelines suggest that a state reimburse at 75% of the market rate, and South Dakota is one of just 17 states to "reimburse that high."

"South Dakota isn't often mentioned as one of the top states in the nation for reimbursement rates, and we are in this area," Simmons said.

Sen. Taffy Howard moved to defeat Reed's bill. The Rapid City Republican said she's suspicious of subsidies and questions whether the state ought to have a role in child care. "We have to admit this is a welfare program, and our nation is broke," Howard said.

No help for graduate students

Before using his carve-outs argument on the Senate floor against HB 1132, Jensen voiced it during panel discussion of the proposal to extend child care help to graduate students, Senate Bill 118.

"I'm concerned that it's another carve out where we expect the entire state to pay for a few people's needs," Jensen said Feb. 5, when the bill had a hearing with the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

SB 118 aimed to adjust an existing "carve-out" within the child care subsidy program. Undergraduate

students who have children and fit income guidelines can access the subsidy under current law, regardless of how many hours they may work between classes. Income-eligible graduate students with kids can't, however, unless they work 80 hours or more a month.

SB 118 would have changed that by opening the subsidy up to income-eligible grad students with a combined total of 80 monthly hours at work or in class.

Sen. Sydney Davis, its prime sponsor, told the Senate Education Committee on Feb. 2 that the state ought to encourage grad students with kids to better themselves. People with master's degrees contribute to the state's economy and fill important roles that South Dakotans with less education cannot, she said.

But Department of Social Services Secretary Matt Althoff called SB 118 "a boutique tweak" to the law. He told the committee he understands that graduate student parents might have difficulties, but said they're also in a more privileged position than undergraduates.

"But we do say no, an awful lot, and that is an ongoing thing in our stewardship of the safety net," Althoff said. "We have set clear, bright lines."

The committee sided with Althoff and defeated SB 112 on a 5-3 vote.

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.

South Dakota governor signs bill loosening one of nation's harshest drug laws

Dropping ingestion from felony to misdemeanor for first two offenses among 19 bills signed Wednesday

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 12, 2025 6:25 PM

South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden has signed a bill that will loosen his state's felony ingestion statutes, which are among the nation's strictest laws on drug use.

Senate Bill 83 reduces first- and second-offense ingestion of controlled substances from class five felonies to class one misdemeanors. Maximum penalties for the charges, which typically stem from urine test results, will fall from five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine to a year in jail and a \$2,000 fine.

Rhoden penned a letter to lawmakers explaining his decision to sign the bill and affixed it to a press release announcing he'd signed it and 18 other bills into law on Wednesday.

The letter noted law enforcement's stiff opposition to the bill, but also that third and subsequent offenses will remain felonies, and that South Dakota needs to focus more squarely on rehabilitation. His "difficult decision" to sign the bill, he said, "cannot be the end of the discussion."

"We need all three branches of government – the legislature, the executive branch, and the judiciary – to continue working toward solutions," he wrote. "We must expand treatment opportunities and make sure that the punishment fits the crime."

Next steps for courts, prisons

He also wrote that the Unified Judicial System (UJS) will "assemble a task force" to look into the state's treatment resources and its treatment courts.

One mismatch between the bill's verbiage and the state's treatment setup within UJS rules is apparent already.

SB 83 suggests the use of the Honest Opportunity for Probation Enforcement (HOPE) program as a probation option for those convicted of first- and second-offense ingestion. That program requires participants to call a phone number every day to find out if they're required to take a drug test. Those who fail see jail time.

According to current UJS rules, however, HOPE is only available for people charged with felonies.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 10 of 75

Data from the UJS, requested by South Dakota Searchlight, shows 14,968 felony ingestion charges have been filed in the state in the past 10 years. Thousands of those cases resulted in prison sentences; thousands more in jail and probation terms.

As of Feb. 28, there were 133 men and 71 women imprisoned by the state Department of Corrections with ingestion as their highest-level offense, according to DOC spokesman Michael Winder.

Those inmates are not receiving adequate treatment, Rhoden said in his letter. The governor had hoped to secure funding for a new men's prison this legislative session, but was rebuffed by lawmakers. The governor subsequently signed an executive order creating a task force to reevaluate the state's correctional needs.

"With the limited availability for rehabilitation at the current State Penitentiary, all we can really do is lock 'em up," he wrote.

No inmates released, no records cleared

The law will take effect July 1, but will not retroactively remove previous felonies from a person's criminal record or cause state prison inmates to be immediately released.

South Dakota is the only state in the U.S. with a specific law that allows prosecutors to charge people with felonies for failed drug tests if the drugs in question are controlled substances like methamphetamine or cocaine. Ingestion of marijuana can draw misdemeanor charges.

SB 83 was the latest in a yearslong effort to overturn or adjust the felony ingestion law. Bills seeking to do so had appeared in every legislative session but one since 2020.

The 2025 iteration came from freshman Sen. Tamara Grove, R-Lower Brule. It passed her chamber by a single vote and the House of Representatives by five.

In a Wednesday press release, Grove said felony convictions follow people around their whole lives, making it difficult to find work or housing and contributing to the stressors that drive continued addiction.

South Dakota's use of "heavy penalties and prison time has cost taxpayers millions of dollars, shattered communities and our families," she wrote.

"Sadly, the children who are connected suffer the most."

Eighteen other new laws

Rhoden also signed a bill into law Wednesday that would outlaw competitive street racing. That bill was inspired by a series of incidents in Sioux Falls, one of which killed a 35-year-old man from Valley Springs.

He also affixed his signature to a bill creating a trust fund for the state's unclaimed property dollars. That money comes into the state's possession when left abandoned for three years. Every cent of unclaimed property remains a perpetual liability for the state. Claims from the moneys' rightful owners, when made, are paid out of the general fund, but the vast majority of the money is never collected.

Senate Bill 155 reduces the amount of unclaimed property deposited into the general fund, instead redirecting it into an interest-bearing account. In a separate action, lawmakers passed a resolution that will ask voters in 2026 to allow the State Investment Council to manage that fund.

Senate Bill 193, also signed into law Wednesday, allows an applicant to have an interpreter present during the driving portion of a driver's license exam.

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.

Carbon pipeline company seeks pause in permitting schedule after SD adopts eminent domain ban

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 12, 2025 2:38 PM

Summit Carbon Solutions wants the schedule of proceedings for its South Dakota permit application "paused for review and adjustment" after the state's Legislature and governor approved a ban on the use of eminent domain for carbon dioxide pipelines.

The company filed a motion Wednesday with the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission asking for a suspension of the scheduling order and an indefinite extension of the deadline for regulatory action on the application. The existing schedule includes a multi-day evidentiary hearing in August and September.

Summit cited House Bill 1052, signed last week by Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden, as a significant obstacle to completing land surveys along the pipeline's planned route.

"With the passage of HB 1052, the Applicant's ability to obtain survey permission has changed," wrote Summit attorney Brett Koenecke. "The surveys which are necessarily required to inform the route decisions as to right of way will be significantly delayed."

Summit spokeswoman Sabrina Zenor responded to South Dakota Searchlight questions with a statement reiterating language in the motion and adding, "Summit Carbon Solutions remains committed to working through this process and advancing the project in states that support energy and innovation."

Eminent domain is a legal process for acquiring access to land for projects that have a public benefit, with compensation for landowners determined by a court. It's commonly used for projects such as electrical power lines, water pipelines, oil pipelines and highways.

The ban has been hailed as a victory by some landowners who have resisted Iowa-based Summit's proposed \$9 billion carbon capture pipeline. The project would transport carbon dioxide emissions from dozens of ethanol plants in five states to an underground storage site in North Dakota. It would qualify for billions in federal tax credits incentivizing the sequestration of heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions.

The project has permits in other states, although some are being challenged in court. South Dakota regulators rejected Summit's first application in 2023, largely due to the route's conflicts with local ordinances that mandate minimum distances between pipelines and existing features. The company has since made adjustments to its route and reapplied.

Critics of the project are interpreting Summit's motion as another victory for the opposition.

"This request for extension is a clear sign that Summit knows they have lost the trust of South Dakota, and will be unable to proceed on their original timeline without being able to force surveys on unwilling landowners," said Chase Jensen, of Dakota Rural Action, in a statement.

Rhoden, a longtime advocate for property rights, described the ban last week as a way to restore trust between landowners and developers. Summit issued a statement last week criticizing the ban as unfairly targeting its project and said "all options are on the table" when asked if it was considering legal action.

The company is not the first to encounter trouble earning a permit for a carbon capture pipeline in South Dakota. Navigator CO2 canceled its \$3 billion project in October 2023, citing the "unpredictable nature of the regulatory and government processes involved, particularly in South Dakota and Iowa." South Dakota regulators had denied Navigator's permit application a month earlier.

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

Advocates brace for Trump cuts to Education Department, a step toward elimination

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - MARCH 12, 2025 5:41 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Education Department's move Tuesday to cut more than 1,300 employees sparked concerns across the country over the ramifications the layoffs could have on the agency's abilities to carry out its core functions.

As Education Secretary Linda McMahon confirmed Tuesday night on Fox News that the move was a step on the way to shutting down the department, education researchers and advocates cast serious doubt that the department's key programs would not be affected, predicting harms would be felt by students, families and schools as a result.

"They can say whatever they want in terms of that there won't be an impact, but there's no way that cutting half of the staff of the department is not going to have a huge impact," Robert Kim, executive director of the advocacy group Education Law Center and a former Obama administration official, told States Newsroom.

President Donald Trump campaigned on dismantling the 45-year-old agency in his quest to move education "back to the states."

In an effort spearheaded by billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk, the Trump administration has taken major steps to slash federal government spending and eliminate what they see as waste, targeting the Education Department and roughly halving the department's workforce.

'Bureaucratic bloat'

Asked Wednesday about the department's mass layoffs, Trump told reporters that he "felt very badly, but many of them don't work at all — many of them never showed up to work."

"When we cut, we want to cut, but we want to cut the people that aren't working or not doing a good job. We're keeping the best people," he said.

Trump reiterated that "we're going to move education into the states, so that the states, instead of bureaucrats working in Washington ... can run education."

Much of the funding and oversight of schools already occurs at the state and local levels, and the federal government legally cannot dictate the curriculum of schools.

McMahon told Fox News on Tuesday that with these cuts, the department took "the first step of eliminating what I think is bureaucratic bloat."

Sweeping cuts

When Trump took office, the department had 4,133 workers.

But with Tuesday's cuts, the agency said roughly 2,183 employees remain. In recent weeks, nearly 600 workers took voluntary resignation opportunities or retirement, and in February, 63 probationary employees were terminated, according to senior department officials.

Senior officials said Tuesday the department will also be ending leases on office buildings in San Francisco, New York, Boston, Chicago, Dallas and Cleveland and will eventually consolidate from three office buildings in Washington, D.C., to just one location.

The layoffs are reported to have hit wide swaths of the department, with the Office for Civil Rights, Office of Federal Student Aid and Institute of Education Sciences taking the biggest hits, according to Education Reform Now, a nonprofit group that advocates for more resources for education.

A step toward elimination

Senior officials stressed Tuesday that the cuts would not affect the department's ability to deliver on civil rights investigations, the rollout of the federal student aid application, Title I funding for low-income school districts and other statutorily mandated functions Congress has given the agency.

But education law and policy experts disagreed.

"We have to remember: This is one of the leanest Cabinet agencies there is across government — it's the smallest by far — there was not a lot of fat on the bones in this department," Kim, who worked in the department's Office for Civil Rights during the Obama administration, said.

Will Ragland, vice president of research, advocacy and outreach at the Center for American Progress, a left-leaning think tank, said the cuts are a major step toward the administration's goal of getting rid of the department.

Ragland, a former teacher who also worked in the Obama-era Education Department, said the "direct impacts from the firings of half of this agency will leave it less able to ensure that kids from low-income communities, students with disabilities, our federal aid processes, run the way they ought to and they reach the kids they're supposed to."

Rachel Perera, a fellow in governance studies in the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution, said she thinks the cuts are a way for the administration to "accomplish dismantling the work of the department without going through Congress."

Perera, who studies inequality in K-12 education, pointed out that some of the department's offices were already "wildly underfunded."

"The idea that this is motivated by some genuine interest in making these agencies more efficient is a farce — it's just ridiculous to engage with those ideas in a serious manner," she said.

Kim said the cuts should be viewed "in context with the larger goal of this administration, which is to dramatically reduce the federal role in education altogether and to transfer billions of dollars from the public sector into private education."

"This is not just about staffing," he said. "This is about a broad reduction, if not outright elimination, of the federal role in education and federal funding and support for education and, in particular, public education."

Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom's Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

Trump administration to roll back many EPA regulations, revisit contested water rule

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - MARCH 12, 2025 4:59 PM

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will seek to undo more than 30 regulations, including some aimed at lowering carbon emissions and curbing pollution, as well as redefining what waters and wetlands the federal government can regulate, Administrator Lee Zeldin said Wednesday.

The agency will take 31 actions covering a host of issues that amounted to "the largest deregulatory announcement in U.S. history," Zeldin said in a brief video posted to the EPA website Wednesday afternoon.

Zeldin framed the moves as part of President Donald Trump's campaign promise to encourage energy production and cut regulations focused on slowing climate change.

"Today, the green new scam ends as the EPA does its part to usher in the golden age of American success," Zeldin said.

'A despicable betrayal'

Democrats and environmental groups criticized the moves, especially the reconsideration of a 2009 agency finding that greenhouse gas emissions harm human health and safety.

The finding has been the basis for regulations targeting climate pollution, and Zeldin said that "all actions that rely on" the finding would also be reconsidered.

"This is a despicable betrayal of the American people," New Jersey U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone, the top Democrat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said in a statement. "President Trump and

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 14 of 75

his EPA Administrator are now pretending that climate pollution does not endanger human health or the environment – not because there is any scientific justification, but because it helps line the pockets of their billionaire corporate polluter friends.”

Legal challenges promised

Pallone said he would fight the Trump administration’s endangerment finding reversal, which he called “unlawful and unjustified.”

The environmental group the Center for Biological Diversity also pledged to take the agency to court over the move and predicted it would not withstand a legal challenge.

“The Trump administration’s ignorance is trumped only by its malice toward the planet,” Jason Rylander, legal director at the Center for Biological Diversity’s Climate Law Institute, said in a statement. “This move won’t stand up in court. We’re going to fight it every step of the way.”

Other actions announced Wednesday include revising mercury and toxic pollutant standards that the EPA said targeted coal plants, changing emissions standards for cars and trucks that some Republicans have said equate to an electric vehicle mandate and terminating the agency’s Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights.

The announcement came a day after Zeldin canceled \$20 billion in grants for sustainable energy projects.

Waters of the United States

Not included in the 31-action package was a separate announcement Wednesday that the EPA will write a new rule to revise a long-disputed definition of what waters can be regulated by the federal government.

The agency will work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to establish a new definition of “waters of the United States,” the term for what the EPA and other federal agencies can regulate under the Clean Water Act, that complies with a 2023 U.S. Supreme Court decision that struck down the broad definition the Biden administration had employed.

The first Trump administration considerably narrowed the scope of federal oversight of non-navigable waters, part of a decades-long battle over the reach of the Clean Water Act.

The new definition will be drafted to lower permitting costs and regulatory burdens on farmers, builders and landowners, the agency release said.

“The previous Administration’s definition of ‘waters of the United States’ placed unfair burdens on the American people and drove up the cost of doing business,” Zeldin said. “Our goal is to protect America’s water resources consistent with the law of the land while empowering American farmers, landowners, entrepreneurs, and families to help Power the Great American Comeback.”

In the 2023 case that arose from Idaho landowners who objected to federal permitting requirements to build on their own property, the Supreme Court ruled that waters must have a “continuous surface connection” to navigable waters to fall under federal jurisdiction.

The EPA under Democratic presidents had used broader definitions that included waterways and wetlands if they had connection to larger navigable waters.

Battle over regs renews

Reaction to the announcement Wednesday fell along the partisan and special interest lines that have defined the conflict for years, with Democrats and environmental groups calling for stronger protections and Republicans and industry groups praising a new approach.

Sen. Shelly Moore Capito, a West Virginia Republican who chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, said a new definition would eliminate “ambiguity and unnecessary burdens for landowners” while aligning with the court decision.

“I commend EPA and USACE for taking this first step to carefully provide the clarity landowners, farmers, businesses, and local governments have been asking for by refining the scope of WOTUS without excessive overreach,” she said in a statement. “This action ensures that only wetlands with a true, continuous

connection to jurisdictional waters fall under federal oversight.”

Jim Murphy, the director of legal advocacy at the environmental group National Wildlife Federation, said the action would further push responsibility for water regulation to states and local governments, especially as the EPA cuts its staff as part of a government-wide effort by the Trump administration to shrink the federal workforce.

The “Supreme Court decision greatly narrowed the scope of streams and wetlands that can be protected by the law and that narrowing is already reflected in the current rule,” Murphy wrote in a statement. “With the likelihood of a skeletal workforce at EPA, this move will put even more pressure and expense on states and localities to ensure our water is safe.”

Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

U.S.-made beer, bourbon, motorcycles and more on tariff list in Trump trade war with EU

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MARCH 12, 2025 4:53 PM

WASHINGTON — The European Union released a lengthy list Wednesday of U.S. goods, from Kentucky bourbon to household appliances, slated for retaliatory tariffs in response to President Donald Trump’s taxes on steel and aluminum imports that went into effect overnight.

The 27-nation bloc announced late Tuesday it plans to impose the countermeasures starting April 1 if the Trump administration does not cool the escalating trade war between the major trading partners.

Trump’s 25% levies on imported steel and aluminum kicked in early Wednesday. The United States is Europe’s largest market for exported steel, totaling roughly 8 billion euros, or \$8.7 billion, in 2024, according to European Commission figures.

“The trade relations between the European Union and the US are the biggest in the world. They have brought prosperity and security to millions of people, and trade has created millions of jobs on both sides of the Atlantic,” said the commission’s President Ursula von der Leyen in a statement.

“We firmly believe that in a world fraught with geopolitical and economic uncertainties, it is not in our common interest to burden our economies with tariffs. We are ready to engage in meaningful dialogue,” von der Leyen also said.

Tariffs fully in place April 13

The EU’s 99-page list of American imports set to be taxed next month includes beer, cosmetics, hardware and metal tools, components for energy pipelines, motorcycles, and hundreds of other products.

The tariffs will be fully in place by April 13, according to von der Leyen, and could affect up to \$28 billion in U.S. goods, essentially matching the value of European imports taxed under Trump’s latest tariffs.

Canada quickly followed the European bloc Wednesday in announcing counter-tariffs on the U.S., according to information obtained by The Associated Press.

Canada is the largest foreign supplier of steel and aluminum to American buyers. The U.S. has imported on average \$541.8 million worth of steel from Canada each month since March 2024, according to the International Trade Administration.

Trump withdrew a threat Tuesday to double the tariffs on metals from Canada after Ontario agreed to drop a surcharge for three U.S. states that buy electricity from the northern province.

Visit with Irish prime minister

Trump doubled down Wednesday on further taxing EU imports, including cars. During a planned visit from Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin to celebrate U.S.-Irish relations in advance of St. Patrick’s Day, Trump told reporters “of course I will respond” to the EU’s anticipated tariffs, according to reporters in the room.

"As you know we're going to be doing reciprocal tariffs, so whatever they charge us, we're charging them," Trump said alongside Martin in the Oval Office.

"If they charge us 25 or 20% or 10% or 2% or 200%, then that's what we're charging them," Trump continued during joint comments to the press.

The visit between Trump and Martin remained light and amicable, and Trump praised Ireland for "quickly" approving a previously planned expansion of his golf resort on the country's west coast but said he scrapped the project because final EU approval would "take at least seven years."

Trump also commented that EU lawsuits against the U.S.-based tech companies Apple and Meta are "unfair." The European Commission is expected to fine the companies for breaking an EU digital markets law. Separately, after a yearslong back-and-forth, Europe's top court ordered Apple in September to pay Ireland roughly \$14 billion in back taxes.

U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said in a statement Wednesday the EU "has opposed the United States' efforts to reindustrialize" and that its economic policies are "out of step with reality."

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

Shutdown looms as 'unified' U.S. Senate Dems oppose GOP's stopgap spending bill

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 12, 2025 4:43 PM

WASHINGTON — Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer appeared to announce Wednesday that a partial government shutdown will begin on Friday at midnight, when a stopgap spending law expires.

"Funding the government should be a bipartisan effort, but Republicans chose a partisan path drafting their continuing resolution without any input, any input, from congressional Democrats," Schumer said during a brief floor speech. "Because of that, Republicans do not have the votes in the Senate to invoke cloture on the House CR."

Schumer, of New York, said Senate Democrats were "unified" on instead passing a stopgap spending bill that would fund the federal government through April 11, which he argued would give Congress more time to negotiate final agreement on the dozen full-year spending bills.

"I hope our Republican colleagues will join us to avoid a shutdown on Friday," Schumer said.

While voters in November gave the GOP control of both chambers of Congress, the stopgap spending bill the House passed Tuesday cannot make it through the Senate without Democrats.

Republicans hold 53 seats at the moment, but moving past procedural votes requires at least 60 senators to vote in favor of limiting debate.

Kentucky GOP Sen. Rand Paul has publicly opposed the House's stopgap spending bill, meaning that at least eight Senate Democrats would have to break ranks to move toward final passage.

Further complicating matters, the House left Tuesday for its weeklong St. Patrick's Day recess and won't return to Capitol Hill until Monday, March 24.

So were the Senate to amend the House-passed stopgap spending bill, which funds the government through the end of September, that chamber wouldn't be around to vote on it before the Friday shutdown deadline.

And even if the Senate were to pass Democrats' month-long stopgap spending bill as Schumer suggested, which seems highly unlikely, the House wouldn't be around to vote to send it to President Donald Trump.

What happens in a shutdown?

The federal government has experienced its fair share of partial government shutdowns in the past when Congress and the president failed to come to agreement on time.

The executive branch has broad authority during such a funding lapse to divide federal workers up as

either exempt, meaning they keep working, or non-exempt, who are essentially furloughed. The military is exempt.

Both sets of federal employees under federal law receive back pay after Congress and the White House reach an agreement to fund the government, usually with a stopgap spending bill.

But partial government shutdowns have sweeping impacts on federal operations and any funding lapse this year would have much broader repercussions than the one that lasted for well over a month during Trump's first term.

That shutdown, which began in December 2018, didn't impact the Departments of Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Labor or Veterans Affairs, because Congress had already approved the four full-year spending bills that cover their operations.

Lawmakers had also approved the Legislative Branch appropriations bill, meaning members of Congress and their staff were exempt from negative repercussions.

None of the dozen annual spending bills have yet to become law, meaning all the departments and agencies that make up the federal government would be affected.

Administration of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid is generally not hindered by a shutdown, though the Trump administration had yet to post any contingency plans as of Wednesday afternoon.

'Often difficult and rapid' judgments in shutdown

The only remnant of the Biden administration's shutdown guidance that remained on the Office of Management and Budget's website was a 17-page Q&A document that notes every "operational decision during a lapse in appropriations requires individual, and often difficult and rapid, judgments about facts and the law."

"In preparing contingency plans for potential future lapses in appropriations, agencies should ensure that this analysis is undertaken carefully, but with a view towards allowing funded and excepted activities to continue in an effective manner," it states.

The Internet archive maintains the agency-by-agency breakdown of how the federal government would have operated during a shutdown during the Biden administration. But those plans will likely be updated, possibly completely rewritten, by the Trump administration.

Shutting down the federal government is also disruptive to the economy.

A report from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said the 2018-2019 shutdown "delayed approximately \$18 billion in federal discretionary spending for compensation and purchases of goods and services and suspended some federal services."

CBO estimated that shutdown reduced gross domestic product by \$11 billion "lower than it would have been."

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.

Former Greenpeace employee tells jury he emphasized nonviolence at Dakota Access Pipeline protests

BY: MARY STEURER - MARCH 12, 2025 9:15 AM

MANDAN, N.D. — A former Greenpeace employee who trained demonstrators during the Dakota Access Pipeline protests told jurors Tuesday that he never engaged in underhanded efforts to undermine the pipeline.

Greenpeace has spent the last two weeks on trial in Morton County District Court related to its involvement in the protests against the pipeline in 2016 and 2017.

Thousands of protesters camped in south central North Dakota just north of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, where the pipeline now crosses under the Missouri River. The demonstrations were started by tribal members who oppose the pipeline out of the belief that it threatens the tribe's water supply, has

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 18 of 75

harmed sacred cultural sites and infringes on unceded Sioux Nation land.

Pipeline developer Energy Transfer claims that Greenpeace encouraged protesters to cause millions of dollars of damages to the pipeline, and that it deliberately defamed the company in order to get banks to divest.

Energy Transfer has held out Navajo activist and former Greenpeace employee Cy Wagoner as a key figure in this plan.

Greenpeace hijacked what was otherwise a peaceful and locally led movement, the company claims. Attorneys for Energy Transfer say Greenpeace paid thousands to send Wagoner and others affiliated with the Native activist group Indigenous Peoples Power Project to teach protesters to use tactics including vandalism, trespassing and intimidation to stop the pipeline.

Wagoner on Tuesday said none of this is true.

He said that he and his fellow trainers were committed to nonviolence, and that their training sessions reflected this.

Wagoner said during the trainings, he told attendees to follow the leadership of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and to conduct themselves respectfully at all times. The training included admonitions against using violence, as well as instruction about deescalation tactics, he said.

He also said the trainings he and others provided were not Greenpeace's idea. The tribe asked him to come to Standing Rock to educate people about nonviolent protest tactics, he said.

Wagoner said he then sought grant money from Greenpeace to support the effort. The grant included money for travel, lodging, food, camping supplies and winter gear, he said.

Wagoner said that if Greenpeace hadn't agreed to provide that grant, he and the other trainers would have found other funding.

Over the course of the trial, attorneys for Energy Transfer have repeatedly brought up a text that Wagoner sent to a colleague about the nature of the protests.

"I would not be OK to replicate things that happened there," he wrote.

Wagoner said Tuesday that the message was taken out of context. He said he was referring to challenges to the Indigenous Peoples Power Project faced providing nonviolent direct action training. By the time he first arrived at the camps, he said other groups not affiliated with the Indigenous Peoples Power Project or Greenpeace were already providing training of their own.

He said he believes that training did not place the same emphasis on nonviolence or safety, though he acknowledged he did not attend any. As a result, demonstrators were putting themselves in danger and getting arrested, he said.

Trey Cox, an attorney representing Energy Transfer, questioned Wagoner over whether the trainers encouraged protesters to use lockbox devices — also known as "sleeping dragons" — to tie themselves to construction equipment and render it unusable. Energy Transfer has placed a considerable amount of emphasis on lockboxes as evidence of the lengths Greenpeace allegedly went to stop the pipeline.

Some Greenpeace employees acknowledged during previous testimony that the organization brought lockboxes to the protest camps, though Wagoner said Tuesday he was not aware of this.

He said that he never instructed anyone to use the devices.

Cox showed Wagoner photos from the protests that appeared to show three other Indigenous Peoples Power Project members using lockboxes, including one who was receiving money from Greenpeace to train protesters.

Wagoner said he never used lockboxes and did not encourage others to do so.

"They made decisions on their own," he said.

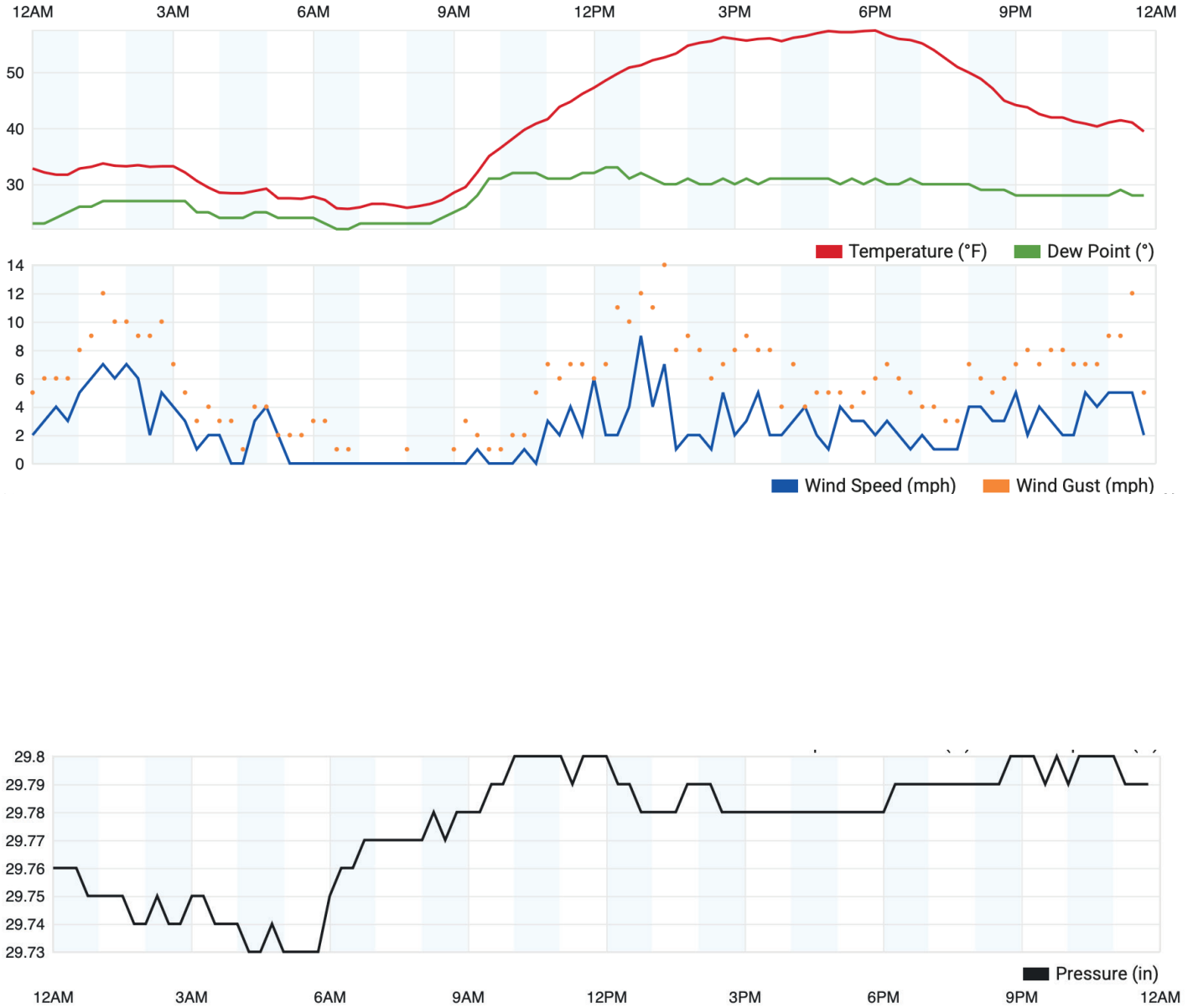
Greenpeace started presenting its case Monday afternoon. On Tuesday, an attorney representing Greenpeace said the defense could wrap up its case as early as Friday.

Mary Steurer is a reporter based in Bismarck for the North Dakota Monitor. A native of St. Louis, Steurer previously worked as the local government reporter for the Casper Star-Tribune newspaper in Wyoming.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 19 of 75

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 20 of 75

Today



High: 73 °F

Partly Sunny

Tonight



Low: 45 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Friday



High: 69 °F

Partly Sunny then Chance Rain

Friday Night



Low: 24 °F

Rain and Blustery then Rain/Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow

Saturday



High: 37 °F

Chance Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow



Rain & Snow Mix Coming Late Week/Weekend

March 12, 2025
6:24 PM

Key Messages

- Deep low pressure system develops Friday over Nebraska, loops northeast over Iowa Minnesota and Wisconsin Saturday then zips up into Canada
- Spreads moisture back to the Dakotas while also drawing colder air down into the Dakotas
 - Precipitation Friday PM - Saturday PM
 - Rain Friday, changing to snow from west to east - maybe a few rumbles of thunder
 - All snow Saturday with lowered visibility due to winds

★ Slight changes in storm track & strength could mean substantial changes to precipitation type, timing and placement of heaviest precipitation ★

Precipitation Timing & Type

	3/14 Fri				3/15 Sat							
	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
Aberdeen	45%	45%	85%	85%	85%	75%	75%	40%	40%	15%	15%	5%
Britton	45%	45%	90%	90%	90%	90%	90%	60%	60%	35%	35%	10%
Chamberlain	40%	40%	80%	80%	80%	60%	60%	20%	20%	5%	5%	0%
Clark	40%	40%	90%	90%	90%	90%	90%	60%	60%	30%	30%	5%
Eagle Butte	40%	40%	40%	40%	40%	10%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Eureka	50%	50%	70%	70%	70%	45%	45%	15%	15%	5%	5%	0%
Gettysburg	50%	50%	65%	65%	65%	40%	40%	10%	10%	5%	5%	0%
McIntosh	35%	35%	35%	35%	35%	10%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Milbank	35%	35%	90%	90%	95%	95%	95%	80%	80%	50%	50%	10%
Miller	45%	45%	80%	80%	80%	70%	70%	30%	30%	10%	10%	0%
Mobridge	45%	45%	50%	50%	50%	25%	25%	5%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Murdo	50%	50%	60%	60%	60%	20%	20%	5%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Pierre	45%	45%	60%	60%	60%	30%	30%	10%	10%	0%	0%	0%
Redfield	45%	45%	85%	85%	85%	80%	80%	45%	45%	15%	15%	5%
Sisseton	40%	40%	90%	90%	95%	95%	95%	75%	75%	45%	45%	10%
Watertown	35%	35%	90%	90%	90%	90%	90%	75%	75%	40%	40%	5%
Webster	40%	40%	90%	90%	90%	90%	90%	65%	65%	35%	35%	10%
Wheaton	35%	35%	90%	90%	95%	95%	95%	85%	85%	55%	55%	15%

Created: 5 pm CDT Wed 3/12/2025. Shows most impactful weather for the period beginning at the time shown. Weather symbols display where Probability of Precipitation ≥ 0%.

- Rain + - Thunderstorms + - Fz Rain + - Wintry Mix + - Snow +



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

We've got a few more points to make with regards to the upcoming system, with the potential for a wintry mix, heavy snowfall and strong winds. As models come together over next day or two we should be able to get into this with greater detail

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 21 of 75

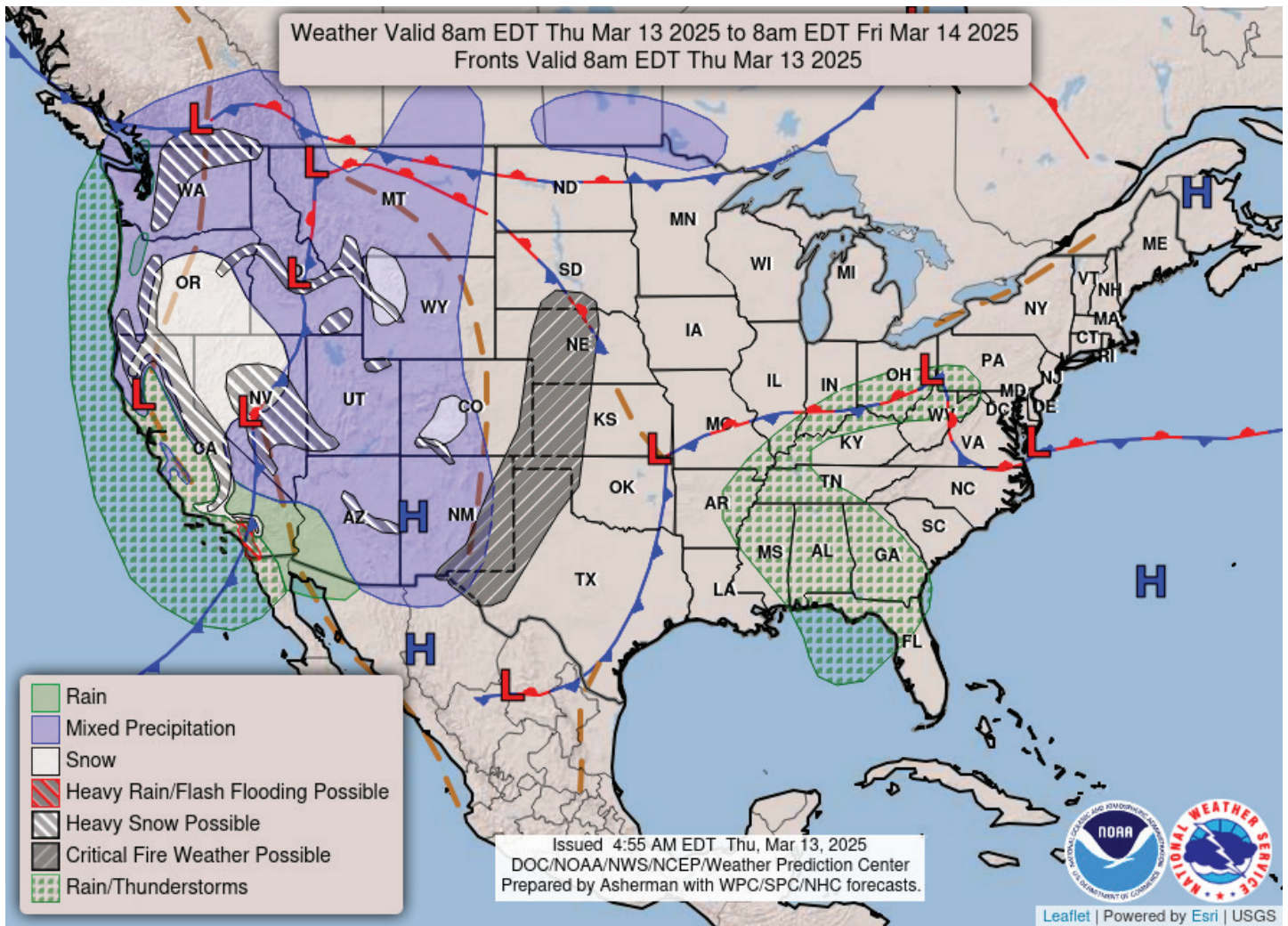
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 58 °F at 5:01 PM
Low Temp: 26 °F at 6:43 AM
Wind: 14 mph at 1:21 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 51 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 71 in 2012
Record Low: -28 in 1896
Average High: 40
Average Low: 18
Average Precip in March.: 0.32
Precip to date in March.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.49
Precip Year to Date: 0.45
Sunset Tonight: 7:37:24 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:44:07 am



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 22 of 75

Today in Weather History

March 13, 1971: During an evening thunderstorm in Moody County, South Dakota, lightning destroyed a transformer plant in Coleman. Damages were estimated at \$250,000.

March 13, 1997: A winter storm began with widespread freezing drizzle, creating icy roadways and walkways, before changing over to snow. Before the snow was over, 2 to 8 inches had fallen on an already expansive and deep snowpack. The winds accelerated to 20 to 40 mph, resulting in widespread blowing and drifting snow. Visibilities were reduced to near zero at times, making travel treacherous. Many roads again became blocked by snowdrifts, and several were closed. Many area schools were still closed, adding to an already substantial total of days missed for the winter season. Some people were stranded and had to wait out the storm. Some airport flights were canceled. The icy roads and low visibilities resulted in several vehicle mishaps as well. There was a rollover accident west of Mobridge and an overturned van 7 miles west of Webster. On Interstate-29, there were several rollover accidents, including vehicles sliding off of the road. Some snowfall amounts included, 4 inches at Timber Lake, Mobridge, Eureka, Leola, Britton, and Clark, 5 inches at Leola, 6 inches at Waubay and Summit, and 8 inches at Pollock.

1907 - A storm produced a record 5.22 inches of rain in 24 hours at Cincinnati, OH. (12th-13th) (The Weather Channel)

1951 - The state of Iowa experienced a record snowstorm. The storm buried Iowa City under 27 inches of snow. (David Ludlum)

1953: An F4 tornado cut an 18-mile path through Haskell and Knox counties in Texas. 17 people were killed, and an eight-block area of Knox City was leveled.

1977 - Baltimore, MD, received an inch of rain in eight minutes. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 - A winter storm produced heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada Range of California, and the Lake Tahoe area of Nevada. Mount Rose NV received 18 inches of new snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Unseasonably cold weather prevailed from the Plateau Region to the Appalachians. Chadron NE, recently buried 33 inches of snow, was the cold spot in the nation with a low of 19 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Residents of the southern U.S. viewed a once in a life-time display of the Northern Lights. Unseasonably warm weather continued in the southwestern U.S. The record high of 88 degrees at Tucson AZ was their seventh in a row. In southwest Texas, the temperature at Sanderson soared from 46 degrees at 8 AM to 90 degrees at 11 AM. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from northwest Texas to Wisconsin, Iowa and Nebraska during the day, and into the night. Severe thunderstorms spawned 59 tornadoes, including twenty-six strong or violent tornadoes, and there were about two hundred reports of large hail or damaging winds. There were forty-eight tornadoes in Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa, and some of the tornadoes in those three states were the strongest of record for so early in the season, and for so far northwest in the United States. The most powerful tornado of the day was one which tore through the central Kansas community of Hesston. The tornado killed two persons, injured sixty others, and caused 22 million dollars along its 67-mile path. The tornado had a life span of two hours. Another tornado tracked 124 miles across southeastern Nebraska injuring eight persons and causing more than five million dollars damage



FITNESS THAT MATTERS MOST

Bear Bryant, the legendary football coach, was once informed that some of his players were griping and complaining about his strenuous workouts. Calling the team into their locker room he said quietly and with confidence, "Men, you can't live soft all week and play tough on Saturday."

Success in any athletic endeavor requires self-sacrifice and tough training routines. It conditions the athlete to endure fatigue and outlast the competition. It is often the difference between winning and losing, victory and defeat.

Paul often referred to the importance of physical training and winning. He was aware of its value. But in a letter to Timothy, he established an important priority for Christians. "Physical exercise has some value," he wrote, "but spiritual exercise is much more important for it promises a reward in both this life and the one to come."

We spend a lot of money on physical fitness. In fact, one major research firm in America estimated that as a nation, we spend over 200 billion dollars annually on fitness programs and exercise equipment. Although physical health is very important we must always make spiritual health our main priority. Each day that we live we must invest some time in reading and studying His Word, in prayer and worshiping Him. God expects us to develop our "spiritual muscles" to overcome evil.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to accept our responsibility to develop our spiritual resources by allowing Your power to work with us. May our faith grow stronger each day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come. 1 Timothy 4:8

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 24 of 75

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 25 of 75



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.11.25

1 19 26 38 69 15

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$277,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 4 Mins
49 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.12.25

4 17 21 28 48 4

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$26,180,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 19 Mins
48 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.12.25

5 8 10 20 44 1

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 34 Mins 48
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.12.25

7 9 11 12 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$64,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 34
Mins 48 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.12.25

30 31 45 56 69 25

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 3 Mins
49 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.12.25

11 13 28 51 58 1

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$378,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 3 Mins
48 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 26 of 75

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

Midwest carbon-capture pipeline could be delayed after eminent domain ban in South Dakota

By SARAH RAZA and JACK DURA Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The company behind an \$8.9 billion carbon-capture pipeline proposed for five Midwestern states said Wednesday it wants to indefinitely delay its plans after South Dakota passed a law limiting its ability to acquire land for the project.

But even as it filed a motion to suspend its pipeline permit application timeline with the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission, the Iowa-based Summit Carbon Solutions said it remains committed to the pipeline.

Summit attorney Brett Koenecke said the action was needed because the legislation approved by South Dakota lawmakers and quickly signed into law by the governor changed the company's ability to survey the route.

"The resulting delays in obtaining the surveys mean that the timelines involved in Commission action on this application are unrealistic," Koenecke wrote in the motion. If the commission approves the motion, they can set a new deadline for the permit application.

The proposed 2,500-mile pipeline would carry carbon emissions from ethanol plants in Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota to be stored underground permanently in North Dakota. By lowering carbon emissions from the plants, the pipeline would lower their carbon intensity scores and make them more competitive in the renewable fuels market.

The project had approvals in Iowa, Minnesota and North Dakota. But in South Dakota, a new law banned the use of eminent domain — the government seizure of private property with compensation — specifically for carbon-capture projects.

The eminent domain bill sponsor Republican Rep. Karla Lems said Summit is "trying to get their feet back under them" after the eminent domain ban.

Summit's move was "generally good news" for Frank James, director of advocacy group Dakota Rural Action, which opposed allowing eminent domain for the project.

"It means the work that we did at the legislature with our allies was impactful," he said. "It clearly shows the citizens of South Dakota really question these false solutions to climate change."

Tad Hepner, vice president of strategy and innovation at the Renewable Fuels Association, disagreed, saying stopping Summit in South Dakota would put ethanol producers in the state at a competitive disadvantage to out-of-state plants connected to the pipeline.

"We don't want to see haves and have-nots," he said. "We want as many ethanol producers to be able to sequester their CO2 as possible."

North Dakota Gov. Kelly Armstrong said Tuesday he doesn't know how Summit will get its pipeline into North Dakota given South Dakota's eminent domain ban.

Armstrong said he is concerned because officials and industry leaders were hopeful of eventually using carbon dioxide to extract oil. North Dakota is the No. 3 oil-producing state in the country, producing about 1.2 million barrels of oil per month.

Summit has already spent more than \$1 billion on the project, Summit spokesperson Sabrina Zenor said. Despite the South Dakota suspension, "all options" are still on the table, the company said.

"Summit Carbon Solutions remains committed to working through this process and advancing the project in states that support energy and innovation," the company said in a statement.

Dura reported from Bismarck, North Dakota.

Pakistan's leader to meet with survivors and commandos who ended an insurgents' train attack

By ABDUL SATTAR Associated Press

QUETTA, Pakistan (AP) — Pakistan's prime minister traveled to restive southwestern Balochistan province Thursday to meet survivors of a train attack and the commandos who rescued over 300 passengers from the insurgents who killed 21 civilians and four troops.

The Baloch Liberation Army, an outlawed group behind multiple deadly attacks in recent months, claimed responsibility for the attack that began Tuesday and ended Wednesday when troops killed all 33 insurgents in an operation that the military said resulted in no further passenger deaths. The train was heading from the Balochistan capital, Quetta, to the northern city of Peshawar when insurgents blew up the track, forcing nine coaches and the engine of the Jafer Express train to stop partially inside a tunnel.

The BLA regularly targets Pakistani security forces and has attacked trains, but had never been able to hijack any train in the past. They have also attacked outsiders such as Chinese workers, thousands of whom are involved in multibillion-dollar infrastructure projects in Balochistan.

Oil- and mineral-rich Balochistan is Pakistan's largest and least populated province. Members of the ethnic Baloch minority say they face discrimination and exploitation by the central government.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was to visit Quetta on Thursday. Authorities said arrangements were made to transport the bodies of victims to their hometowns and people who were wounded were receiving medical treatment.

In an overnight statement, the military said it had "confirmed intelligence" indicating that the assault was "orchestrated and directed by terrorist ring leaders operating from Afghanistan, who were in direct communication with the terrorists throughout the incident."

Pakistan often accuse Kabul of sheltering Pakistani Taliban and BLA, a charge the Afghan government denies.

However, the military in the statement urged the Afghan Taliban government to uphold its responsibilities and deny the use of its soil for terrorist activities against Pakistan.

According to a military statement, the "terrorists, after blowing up the railway track, took control of the train and held the passengers hostage including women, children and elderly, using them as human shields."

Most of the survivors said the assailants opened fire on the windows of the train, entered the cars and killed or wounded people before taking them hostage.

Three soldiers who had been guarding the railroad track were also killed, according to military spokesman, Lt. Gen. Ahmad Sharif.

Ohtani's Tokyo airport arrival hidden from fans hoping to catch a glimpse of Japanese star

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Hundreds of fans at Tokyo's Haneda Airport, who lined up 10 deep and hoped to catch a glimpse of Shohei Ohtani as he arrived on Thursday, saw nothing of the Los Angeles Dodgers superstar.

What they saw was a 40-meter-long (130 feet) temporary white wall to shield the players in case they came through the arrival area. The Chicago Cubs exited this way when they arrived late Wednesday night.

The Dodgers were seen on the tarmac disembarking from their charter from Phoenix, and Ohtani was one of the first off. But the players didn't make it to the arrival area, apparently taking an escape route.

The next chance to see Ohtani and the Dodgers will be Friday when the teams open practice at the Tokyo Dome.

The two-game series to open the MLB season is Tuesday and Wednesday, early evening starts in Tokyo. Games will go live in the early morning the same day in North America. Japan is 13 hours ahead of the American east coast.

Fans waited for hours inside the terminal, hoping Ohtani might show. Many carried signs of welcome.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 29 of 75

One was a bright yellow board that read, "I love LA." Others wore Dodgers caps and shirts and other garb.

Several times excited fans reached high with smartphones, thinking Ohtani had arrived. It was always a false alarm — they mere passengers from other flights.

Patient and polite, fans eventually departed the reception area when it was clear that Japan's most famous citizen would not appear.

Most fans were hopeful, but realistic.

"I just came hoping for any chance I might see him. But I knew, probably not," Satoshi Yoshii, a local accountant, said. "But you come with hope because of who he is."

Misaki Ueta came with her husband Reishi and a friend, Ryusei Takahashi. The two men wore Ohtani's No. 17 Dodgers jersey.

"We just came to be able to breathe the same air," Misaki said. "The Ohtani air."

Others came for the event — like a rock concert.

"I don't care if I can't see him because I'm not really a fan of Ohtani," Kotomi Miyakoda said. Standing alongside was her friend, also Kotomi — Kotomi Nakatsu.

"I'm not a fan but I want to see him, the person," Nakatsu said.

This is billed as the Japan Series by MLB. It also could be billed as the Marketing-Ohtani-in-Japan Series. Ohtani is MLB's most marketable asset.

This is the second straight season that MLB has opened its season in Asia. Last year it was South Korea with the Dodgers and San Diego Padres, and where the gambling scandal broke around Ohtani's interpreter.

Cubs vs. Dodgers

The teams come to Tokyo with five Japanese players. The Dodgers have Ohtani and pitchers Yoshinobu Yamamoto and Roki Sasaki. The Cubs come with designated hitter Seiya Suzuki and pitcher Shota Imanaga.

Imanaga and Yamamoto are expected to oppose each other on Tuesday in the first game.

The American clubs will face the Yomiuri Giants and the Hanshin Tigers in exhibition games on Saturday and Sunday.

Marketing the Dodgers in Japan

Chris Marinak, MLB's chief operations officer, talked with The Associated Press in an interview about the advantages of having a player like Ohtani.

"It helps to have a generational talent like Ohtani — essentially the best player in the game — to be from a different market," Marinak said. "It changes how you can communicate about the game in different markets."

It's not difficult. Japan has adopted the Dodgers as its national team. There has always been a strong connection but now it's rock solid since Ohtani won the World Series with the Dodgers.

The Dodgers have set up an exhibition in central Tokyo called "Dodgers Experience at MLB Tokyo Series." Fans can see the World Series trophy and championship rings.

There's also a chance to view the Dodgers' rich history, dating to Brooklyn before the team moved to Los Angeles to start the 1958 season. There are also interactive experiences where fans can try to hit an Ohtani pitch.

Japanese artist Takashi Murakami has also designed artwork around the series. His work will also be on display during the series.

Not a cheap ticket

Tickets on resale sites have been listed at as much as \$20,000 for a single game. Many tickets for resale are more in the \$2,000-\$8,000 range.

Reselling tickets for above the face value is technically illegal in Japan. The government approved the rule before the 2021 Tokyo Olympics.

Rubio could face an unfriendly reception from close G7 allies over Trump's policies

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

LA MALBAIE, Canada (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio may be walking into unusually unfriendly territory this week when he meets his counterparts from the Group of 7 industrialized democracies — strong American allies stunned by President Donald Trump's actions against them.

Just hours after Trump's steel and aluminum tariffs kicked in — prompting responses from the European Union and Canada and threatening to ignite full-scale trade wars with close U.S. partners — Rubio arrived at the scenic Quebec town of La Malbaie on the St. Lawrence River for two days of talks starting Thursday with the top diplomats of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan. All of them have been angered by the new American president's policies.

Rubio will likely be hearing a litany of complaints about Trump's decisions from once-friendly, like-minded countries in the G7 — notably host Canada, to which Trump has arguably been most antagonistic with persistent talk of it becoming the 51st U.S. state, additional tariffs and repeated insults against its leadership.

Canadian Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly, the official host who will see each participant separately, said that "in every single meeting, I will raise the issue of tariffs to coordinate a response with the Europeans and to put pressure on the Americans."

"The only constant in this unjustifiable trade war seems to be President Trump's talk of annexing our country through economic coercion," Joly said Wednesday. "Yesterday, he called our border a fictional line and repeated his disrespectful 51st state rhetoric."

Rubio downplayed Trump's "51st state" comments, saying Wednesday that the president was only expressing what he thought would be a good idea.

The G7 grouping "is not a meeting about how we're going to take over Canada," Rubio said, noting that they would focus on Ukraine issues and other common topics.

Facing allies as tariffs take hold

On tariffs, Rubio said G7 partners should understand that these are a "policy decision" by Trump to protect American competitiveness.

"I think it is quite possible that we could do these things and at the same time deal in a constructive way with our allies and friends and partners on all the other issues that we work together on," Rubio told reporters on a refueling stop in Ireland as he headed to Canada from talks with Ukrainian officials in Saudi Arabia. "And that's what I expect out of the G7 and Canada."

Asked if he expected a difficult reception from his counterparts, Rubio brushed the question aside: "I don't know, should I be? I mean, they've invited us to come. We intend to go. The alternative is to not go. I think that would actually make things worse, not better."

Rubio notably skipped a meeting of G20 foreign ministers — a bigger but less powerful group that includes developing nations — last month in South Africa because of his concerns that the agenda, which included climate change and diversity, did not align with Trump administration policies.

The agenda for the G7 meeting includes discussions on China and the Indo-Pacific; Ukraine and Europe; stability in the Americas; the Middle East; maritime security; Africa; and China, North Korea, Iran and Russia.

Discussing peace in Ukraine

Rubio and Trump's national security adviser, Mike Waltz, had been in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, earlier in the week securing a potentially huge win for the administration — a possible ceasefire to end the Russia-Ukraine war, an issue that galvanized the G7 since even before the conflict began.

Armed with Ukraine's acceptance of the proposal for a 30-day ceasefire but still awaiting a Russian response, Rubio can expect cautiously optimistic responses from his fellow diplomats.

Yet, Trump's apparent desire to draw Russian President Vladimir Putin back into the fold — including saying he would like to see Russia rejoin the group to restore it to the G8 — continues to alarm G7 members. They united behind Ukraine, with large amounts of military assistance and punishing economic sanctions against Moscow, after the invasion began in February 2022.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 31 of 75

Russia was thrown out of the G8 after it annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014.

Among international groupings, the G7 — whose members, with the exception of Japan, are all NATO allies — had been the toughest on Russia.

At the last G7 foreign ministers meeting before the 2022 invasion, members warned Russia in a joint statement in December 2021 of “massive consequences” should it attack Ukraine. Three months later, they coordinated to impose sweeping financial, travel and other sanctions on Moscow.

Since Trump’s election, that appears to be changing, at least from the U.S. side.

Rubio said his goal was not to antagonize Russia as it considers the ceasefire proposal “by issuing statements that are abrasive in any way.” He noted that all of the sanctions against Russia remain in place but that new threats of action could be counterproductive to getting Putin on board with the U.S. peace plan.

That throws into question hopes that the G7 can unify around a common statement condemning Russia.

Britain, along with France, has been spearheading efforts to set up a “coalition of the willing” to help safeguard a future ceasefire in Ukraine, including with troops on the ground. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer — who has said the plan will only work with U.S. security guarantees to back it up — plans to host a virtual meeting of about two dozen countries Saturday to discuss progress.

Rubio and other Trump administration officials have so far refused to endorse European peacekeepers.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said G7 unity has been critical in ensuring that “Putin to this day hasn’t achieved his war aims in Ukraine.”

“The way to peace goes via strength and unity — a language that Putin understands,” she said in a statement before the meeting.

Communal sweating in saunas is the hottest wellness trend taking over the UK

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — It may be winter and there may be a biting chill in the air, but the dozen men and women who have packed this small sauna room in east London are happily sweating away in their swimwear.

It’s more than 90 degrees Celcius (194 Fahrenheit) in here — and it’s about to get even hotter.

As ice blocks infused with lavender oil melt over sizzling hot stones, releasing fragrant steam, “sauna master” Oliver Beryl turns on some ambient music and starts to vigorously wave a towel in a circular motion above his head to spread overpowering waves of dry heat around the room.

“Now try finding someone and sit back to back with them,” Beryl suggests. “Or, if you want, maintain eye contact with the person sitting next to you.” A brief hesitation, but most gamely oblige for a few minutes.

Sauna-bathing has taken London and the rest of the U.K. by storm, particularly among trendy 20- and 30-somethings interested in trying a new pastime that’s healthier than nights out in pubs and bars.

Sweating it out in communal spaces for relaxation, physical or mental therapy and socializing has long been a staple of many cultures around the world, from Scandinavia’s saunas and Native American sweat lodges to Japan’s onsens and Turkish baths.

But the most popular saunas now are those that emphasize community and “connectedness,” or offer something novel alongside sitting in a heated box. Think sauna club nights featuring DJs, saunas combined with a poetry workshop, or “aufguss” (meaning “infusion” in German) rituals like the one hosted by Beryl — an intense session blending heat therapy, music and scent.

Many sites also offer open-air ice baths next to the saunas so people can cycle between hot and cold.

‘It’s exhilarating’

“I loved the feeling of losing yourself. It’s a 15-minute detachment from normal life,” said Jess Carmichael as she emerged from her first “aufguss” at Community Sauna Baths in Stratford, east London.

She likened the exhilaration she felt to the experience of running into the freezing sea with hundreds of others on New Year’s Day.

“I think people need this right now — this warmth coming from the outside and feeling that you’re shar-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 32 of 75

ing an experience with others," she added.

Charlie Duckworth, a co-founder of Community Sauna Baths, said it all started in 2022 when he and fellow "sauna nutters" installed two small saunas — including one in a horse box — in a disused parking lot in the trendy neighborhood of Hackney.

The not-for-profit social enterprise proved so popular that it has since expanded to four sites across the capital, with two more opening soon.

A large part of the appeal for many fans is that saunas serve as "a place of communion," much like a pub or a church, Duckworth said.

"Sauna lowers inhibitions and also gives you a feeling of mild euphoria," not unlike the effects of social drinking, he said. "I think it's an excellent place to socialize."

Around the U.K., the number of public sauna sites has jumped from 45 in 2023 to 147 so far this year, according to the British Sauna Society.

'Have a bit more fun with it'

Compared to countries where the practice is steeped in tradition, one benefit of the U.K.'s sauna culture being so new is that providers can "have a bit more fun with it and be more creative," Duckworth said.

At Peckham Sauna Social in south London, weekends feature relaxed ambient sauna nights with resident DJs and a non-alcoholic cocktail bar. One of its most popular monthly sessions is the "creative writing sauna": a short poetry reading followed by a chai tea and writing workshop afterward in the lounge.

"Reading in the sauna was something I'd never done before — just being hot and sweaty and dripping onto the page was challenging at first," said Caroline Druitt, a writer who leads the workshops.

Something about sharing a chat with other semi-clothed strangers in the sauna seemed to encourage participants to be more open about sharing their ideas and writings, Druitt said. "Besides, I know that many of my best ideas have come out of the bath," she added.

Reported health benefits

Besides reducing stress and getting ideas flowing, some swear by saunas and cold plunges for soothing joint inflammation and improving heart health and sleep.

Some studies go further, with one suggesting a link between going to the sauna at least four times a week and a reduction in the risk of psychosis among middle-aged Finnish men.

"Authentic sauna done well should be as regular as the gym, and doing it regularly is what offers the reported health benefits," said Gabrielle Reason, secretary at the British Sauna Society.

While those health benefits aren't yet well established — and those with high blood pressure or heart conditions should check with their doctors before going to a sauna and ice bath — many converts return regularly for the mood boost.

"It just resets your brain in a really lovely way," said Callum Heinrich, submerged in a barrel of frigid water, his skin still steaming from the sauna. He says he attends twice a week when he can. "For your mental health, it is the best thing in the world."

Pope marks the 12th anniversary of his papacy hospitalized but with condition improving

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis marked the 12th anniversary of his papacy Thursday with increasingly positive medical updates four weeks into his hospitalization for double pneumonia.

The pope spent another tranquil night, the Vatican said in its brief morning statement.

A chest X-ray confirmed improvements, the Vatican said on Wednesday, just two days after days after doctors declared he's no longer in imminent danger of death. The latest medical bulletin said that the 88-year-old pope's condition remained stable, but indicated a complex picture considering his overall fragility.

The Holy See hasn't said how the anniversary of his election as the 266th pope might be commemorated. It is a public holiday at the Vatican and Masses are planned in his honor at churches in Rome. No medical bulletins will be issued.

Francis on Wednesday remotely followed a Lenten spiritual retreat that has been a mainstay of his pa-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 33 of 75

pany. He continues to receive high flows of oxygen through nasal tubes during the day and a non-invasive mechanical mask to aid his rest at night.

The former Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected on the fifth ballot of the 2013 conclave, which was called after Pope Benedict XVI resigned.

While Francis has praised Benedict's humility in stepping down and said he might follow in his footsteps, more recently he has said the papacy is a job for life.

Another milestone comes Friday, when Francis marks four weeks of hospitalization.

'We will just die in silence': US aid cuts hit Ethiopia's fragile Tigray region

By SAMUEL GETACHEW and FRED HARTER Associated Press

MEKELE, Ethiopia (AP) — As a displaced person in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, 76-year-old Haile Tsege is no stranger to hunger.

During its war with Tigray fighters that devastated the region in 2020-2022, Ethiopian government restrictions on the rebellious region reduced aid flows to a trickle. Then in 2023, U.S. and U.N. aid distributions of grain were halted for months over a corruption scandal.

Now the Trump administration's dismantling of the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, has again halted food deliveries to a sprawling camp of over 20,000 people outside Tigray's regional capital, Mekele.

"We will just die in silence," said Tsege, one of the 2.4 million people in Tigray who depend on humanitarian grain, most of it provided by the U.S.

Ethiopia with its over 125 million people had been the biggest beneficiary of U.S. aid in sub-Saharan Africa, receiving \$1.8 billion in the 2023 financial year. In addition to life-saving food, the funds were spent on HIV medications, vaccines, literacy programs and jobs creation, as well as services for 1 million refugees hosted by Ethiopia.

Most of these programs have been stopped. The USAID staffers who oversaw them have been placed on administrative leave and told not to work, as they face the threat of termination. The U.S. Embassy didn't respond to questions.

Emergency food was exempted from President Donald Trump's executive order, signed on his first day in office, suspending foreign aid during a 90-day review amid the administration's allegations of waste.

Aid agencies in Ethiopia had to apply to USAID for waivers to continue handing out U.S. grain. These have been secured, but USAID's payments system is still not functioning.

As a result, a consortium of aid agencies in Tigray has had to stop distributions to the over 1 million people it has been responsible for feeding with U.S.-provided grain. It has no money to pay for fuel, trucks and drivers to distribute existing food stockpiles.

That includes 5,000 metric tons of sorghum — enough to feed 300,000 people for a month — stuck in a storage facility in Mekele that could rot before it reaches those in need.

"This is just one warehouse. There are several others across the region," said Teklewoini Assefa, head of the Relief Society of Tigray, part of the consortium. "This will create malnutrition, disease. If this situation continues, what follows? Death."

He added: "Everything boils down to the payment system."

The effects of the aid cuts are widespread, with many USAID contracts terminated. Already, Ethiopia has been forced to lay off 5,000 local healthcare workers who were working on its HIV response.

Tigray relied heavily on U.S. funds. More than two years after the war killed hundreds of thousands, full-scale recovery efforts are yet to start. The region's health system is in ruins and hundreds of schools remain closed.

In 2024, child malnutrition stood at 21% in some areas, according to a survey reviewed by The Associated Press — far above the World Health Organization's threshold of 15% at which a situation is classified as an emergency.

Now, aid workers say many programs to improve nutrition have halted. Projects to deliver medicines and vaccines have stopped. Dozens of camps for displaced people have had water sources cut off.

"The impact has been huge," said Ashenafi Asmelash, executive director of Mums for Mums, which has had two USAID-funded programs terminated. One helped build long-term resilience among farmers. The other helped improve the nutrition of children and new mothers.

Management Sciences for Health, another Tigray organization, has halted a project to combat tuberculosis and told its staff to expect mass layoffs in March, according to a senior executive, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

Efforts to assist thousands of women who were raped during the war have been derailed, said Rigat Bishaw at Ayder Hospital, Tigray's biggest healthcare facility.

This includes counseling and physiotherapy sessions for survivors run by the U.S.-based Center for Victims of Torture, which received a stop-work order from the Trump administration in February and furloughed its staff.

CVT also halted a program to train health workers to recognize sexual abuse cases and refer survivors to appropriate health services.

"This sudden disruption is having a huge impact on the healing of traumatized people," said Yohannes Fisseha, a CVT manager.

Major projects to support people living with HIV, improve access to life-saving nutrition services and improve relations between war-affected communities have also been cut off, said Yirga Gebregziabher, the Tigray branch manager of an Ethiopian organization called OSSHD, which helped implement the projects.

The organization has been forced to fire dozens of expert staff.

"Our picture of America was as a protector of rights, a positive force in the world," Yirga said. "That image has now been broken. If there was a process, maybe the shock would have been less. But there was no consultation, no engagement."

Syria flashes signs of peril and promise in a week of violence and diplomacy

By ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — After Syria's longtime autocratic ruler was toppled late last year, the man who led rebel groups to victory immediately faced a new challenge: unifying the country after more than a decade of civil war.

The peril and promise of Syria under interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa — the former leader of an Islamist insurgent group — were on dramatic display over the past week. After days of deadly sectarian violence, a diplomatic triumph united a powerful force in the country's northeast with the new national army.

By Tuesday, it seemed as if Syria had made major steps toward quelling the tensions that erupted over the weekend. But analysts say the country still has a long way to go, and that the risks of sliding back into civil war, or partitioning the country along ethnic and sectarian lines, remain.

The "path to rebuilding trust" will require Syria's new leaders to do more to "protect lives and foster a sense of unity among all communities," said Ammar Kahf, executive director of Omran Center for Strategic Studies in Istanbul.

Building a stable, pluralistic society is also key to convincing Western countries to lift crushing economic sanctions that were placed on Syria during the brutal rule of former President Bashar Assad.

A week of political whiplash

Beginning last Thursday, clashes between government security forces and armed groups loyal to Assad spiraled into sectarian revenge attacks that killed hundreds of civilians, most of them Alawites, a minority sect to which Assad belongs.

Government reinforcements eventually restored order, and calm appeared to hold by late Monday. That same day, al-Sharaa had signed a landmark pact under which Kurdish-led forces in the country's northeast would be merged with the new national army.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 35 of 75

The deal marked a major step toward unifying the disparate factions that had carved up Syria into de facto mini-states during its civil war. The civil war began in 2011 after the Assad government's brutal crackdown on massive anti-government protests.

Not a professional army

Most of the armed factions that fought to unseat Assad announced in January that they would join the national army. In practice, though, they have maintained their own leadership.

"This is not a professional army," said Issam al-Reis, a military adviser with Etana, a Syrian research group. "In theory, there are plans to join the factions into an army and merge everybody together under the Ministry of Defense. But so far, in reality, on the ground, everybody is still under his own umbrella."

On the other side, there are thousands of former soldiers from the disbanded Assad-era army who are now unemployed and "very easy targets" for local or international actors interested in upsetting Syria's fragile stability, al-Reis said.

The sectarian violence over the weekend was difficult to contain, analysts say, because the government had to turn to a patchwork of undisciplined factions — including armed civilians -- to combat pro-Assad militants who attacked security forces along the coast. Members of some of those factions launched bloody revenge attacks on Alawite civilians.

The violence only reinforced the "significant challenge to the Syrian (government's) efforts to consolidate power," said Kahf, of the Omran Center for Strategic Studies.

A landmark deal

Unexpectedly, the violence appears to have expedited the deal to bring the Kurdish-led armed group controlling most of northeastern Syria, known as the Syrian Democratic Forces, under the umbrella of the national army.

The agreement came about when it did because al-Sharaa "needed to achieve a diplomatic victory" after the weekend violence damaged his image, said Ahmed Aba Zeid, a Syrian researcher. At the same time, the SDF calculated it could "achieve greater gains if it gave Sharaa this gift at this time," he said.

Under the agreement, border crossings, airports and oil fields in the northeast will also be brought under the central government's control by the end of the year. Many details still need to be ironed out — including who will manage prisons holding Islamic State fighters captured by SDF — but the agreement gives al-Sharaa a much-needed political boost.

He appears to have eliminated "the two most significant threats of division in the country within days," Aba Zeid said.

International players pushing for unification

The agreement between the SDF and the Syrian government came about with the blessing of two important international players: the United States, which has supported the SDF as a key ally in the fight against the Islamic State militant group; and Turkey, which backs Syria's new leaders.

"This would not have happened if the Turks weren't willing to let it happen," according to a senior U.S. defense official who said Washington encouraged SDF to reach an agreement with Syria's leaders. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to comment publicly.

Although not written into the agreement, the official said Ankara had demanded assurances that the SDF would remove foreign fighters linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, a Kurdish separatist group that had waged a decades-long insurgency in Turkey before recently announcing a ceasefire.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a speech Tuesday, "The full implementation of the agreement reached yesterday will serve the security and peace of Syria."

Still, the new Syrian government faces an array of challenges.

Since the fall of Assad, Israel has seized pockets of territory in southern Syria, saying that it is moving to protect its borders.

With sanctions by the U.S. and its allies still in place, the country will struggle to make significant investments in its economy and rebuild areas destroyed during the civil war.

Alawites and other minorities that were already skeptical of the Islamist-led authorities in Damascus

are more frightened — and hostile — than they were a week ago, despite promises by the country's new leaders that those who attacked civilians will be held accountable.

Al-Reis said that reassuring them will require the government to take "very strong measures" against the perpetrators.

Vaccinating poultry could help cut soaring egg prices but US remains hesitant

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Vaccines could be a key means of suppressing bird flu and avoiding the slaughter of millions of chickens, which is blamed for egg prices averaging nearly \$6 a dozen. But the move has been delayed in part because of concerns it could jeopardize chicken exports worth billions of dollars a year.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has announced plans to spend \$100 million to study bird flu vaccines to fight the disease in concert with meat chicken, egg and turkey groups. That's part of a larger \$1 billion effort to invest in more protections to keep the virus off farms that President Donald Trump believes will help lower egg prices.

Chicken meat producers remain the most resistant to vaccines because of concerns they could harm meat exports, which totaled nearly \$4.7 billion last year. Egg and turkey producers sell most of their products in the U.S. and have been hit hardest by the virus.

Why is a vaccine needed?

Without a new policy including vaccines, the government will continue to slaughter every flock with a bird flu infection to limit the spread of the disease. Those deaths have totaled over 166 million birds in the U.S. since 2022.

Most birds killed are egg-laying chickens, and the death of so many hens is the main reason egg prices keep rising. The average price per dozen has hit \$5.90, and in some part of the country, it is far higher.

Poultry veterinarian Simon Shane, who runs www.Egg-News.com, said the government is hesitant to use vaccines and change its policy of killing birds largely because of the meat chicken industry's opposition.

"Basically this is a political issue, and this only came to a head because eggs are at \$8 to \$9 a dozen, and it's embarrassing the government — embarrassing the present administration," Shane said.

Why doesn't the US use a bird flu vaccine?

Before using vaccinations, the government must decide how to devise an effective system and monitor for outbreaks within vaccinated flocks that might not show any symptoms, said John Clifford, the USDA's former longtime chief veterinary officer, who now works with a poultry industry export group. Once that is figured out, the industry can negotiate with countries to minimize trade problems.

"What the industry wants is the ability to develop the strategic plan to share that with the trading partners and then find out what kind of impact that that will have on trade," Clifford said.

There are fears that vaccinating could allow the virus to linger undetected in flocks and mutate in ways that could make it more of a threat to humans and allow sick birds to get into the food supply. Like with other diseases, properly cooking chicken to 165 degrees Fahrenheit (74 degrees Celsius) will kill bird flu, but the industry and chicken buyers don't want it there at all.

For meat chicken, known as broilers, the virus isn't as significant because those birds are slaughtered at 6 to 8 weeks old and thus have less chance of being infected compared with egg-laying hens, which live to 2 years or older. Also most broilers are raised in the Southeast, which hasn't had as many outbreaks as the Midwest and West.

Another delay to vaccinating concerns distribution. Egg farmers want to administer it through chicken feed or water, saying it's not practical to give shots to millions of birds in a single barn.

It can also be difficult to tell the difference between a vaccinated bird and one that has been sick with the virus. That would make other countries nervous about importing meat.

"People have talked about how expensive it would be to monitor vaccinated populations. And it would be. But where do we want to spend our money?" said Dr. Carol Cardona, a bird flu expert at the University

of Minnesota. "We're spending our money hand over fist right now in depopulation and to buy eggs for breakfast."

What does the experience in other countries show?

China and Mexico have been vaccinating their poultry for years, but they take different approaches.

In Mexico chicken are vaccinated, but Clifford said the country doesn't slaughter flocks when infections are found. That basically ensures the virus is present in poultry.

China still slaughters vaccinated flocks when infections are found, which has proven more effective at limiting the spread of the virus and reigning in outbreaks.

Clifford said the U.S. would need to continue culling flocks with outbreaks even after vaccinating, and it might make sense to give shots only to egg layers and turkeys, not broilers.

Will it help egg prices?

Don't expect big relief anytime soon.

The USDA, which did not respond to a request for comment for this article sent last week, clearly isn't moving to vaccinate immediately. And, regardless, it will take time to raise new hens.

"We're going to have to wait to replace those with new hatched chicks, and it takes 20 weeks before they even start laying," Shane said. "So I don't know where they're going to get the eggs from."

Prices may ease somewhat later this year after peak demand, which happens around Easter, if massive egg farms in Iowa, Ohio, California and elsewhere can avoid more outbreaks.

The USDA has predicted that average egg prices will be 41% higher than the 2024 average of \$3.17 per dozen. That would mean \$4.47 per dozen, slightly below the current average.

A government program made tax filing free and more efficient. Musk and DOGE may get rid of it anyway

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Mia Francis, a 22-year-old barista from Boston, filed her taxes on her own this year for the first time, using a free government tax filing program that made it easy because it did most of the work for her.

Francis said it took 45 minutes to finish her taxes with the IRS Direct File program, an electronic tax return filing system that the IRS made permanent last year and that has rolled out to 25 states.

Francis is expecting a \$530 refund. And because she saved cash by not using a commercial tax preparation company to file her taxes, "that money will go a long way," she said. She plans to use it for a trip to Amsterdam this year.

Despite its popularity with Francis and other members of the American public, the IRS Direct File's fate remains unclear as Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency cleave their way through the federal bureaucracy. So far, the program is still available for use ahead of the April 15 tax filing deadline, and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent committed during his January confirmation hearing to maintaining it, at least for this tax season.

Representatives from the Internal Revenue Service and DOGE did not respond to requests for comment from The Associated Press on their plans for Direct File. But one Republican tax expert says the IRS never got congressional authorization to create Direct File. And Republican lawmakers and commercial tax preparation firms complain the program is a waste of money because free filing programs already exist, although they are hard to use.

Direct File was rolled out as a pilot program in 2024 after the IRS was tasked with looking into how to create a "direct file" system as part of the money it received from the Inflation Reduction Act signed into law by President Joe Biden in 2022. Last May, the agency announced that the program would be made permanent.

The IRS accepted 140,803 returns filed by taxpayers using Direct File in the 12 states where it was available last tax season. It's been expanded to include half the country this year. It is unclear how many

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 38 of 75

taxpayers have used Direct File this year.

Merici Vinton, an original architect of Direct File from the U.S. Digital Service, noted the ease and accessibility of the program and called it "a great example of how people should interact with the government in the 21st century."

"We effectively launched a startup in the IRS," she said. "It was built by an in-house product team, in an iterative manner, and we ship updates to the software to improve user experience in real time based on feedback. If we continue to invest in it, both taxpayers and the IRS can benefit."

Musk posted last month on his social media site that he had "deleted" 18F, a government agency that worked on technology projects such as the IRS' Direct File program. This led to some confusion about whether Direct File is still available to taxpayers. However, conversations inside the IRS indicate that no decision has been made on whether to cut the program, two people familiar with these conversations tell the AP.

Former IRS Commissioner Daniel Werfel, who oversaw the rollout of the program, said Treasury officials considering the future of the program should take into account "the voice of the taxpayers."

"My reflection is that taxpayers are in very different situations and have very different preferences for how they want to file," he said. "Those whose preference is to file electronically direct with the IRS for free, it's a good option to have on the menu. But it should not replace other options."

Derrick Plummer, a spokesperson for Intuit, one of the country's largest commercial tax preparation firms, said free tax preparation had been available for years before Direct File came along.

"IRS Direct File is a solution in search of a problem, a waste of taxpayer dollars and a drain on critical IRS resources," he said. A June 2024 Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration report estimates that the annual costs of Direct File may range from \$64 million to \$249 million.

"The IRS should focus on its core mission including data privacy and customer service while policymakers in Washington focus on simplifying the tax code," Plummer said.

However, other taxpayers, like 31 year-old Aquiel Warner in Austin, Texas, say they want to avoid using commercial tax preparation software.

Warner filed her taxes with Direct File in 10 minutes using her phone and a chatbot that the IRS provides. She likes the program's convenience, that it prepopulated her tax forms and that it allowed for free filing. Although she has some concerns about data privacy in the government — DOGE is reported to have access to some of the IRS' internal systems — she feels more secure going through the IRS than commercial tax preparation services.

"I don't want to be a product. I don't want my information sold when I file my taxes," she said. "I have to file my taxes, and I don't want to be put in a situation where, in order to file my taxes, I have to pay to get the help I need because I'm not a professional tax preparer."

Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform, said the IRS never got explicit permission from Congress to create the Direct File system.

"It really doesn't matter if it's a good idea. It was done illegally," he said, calling on Congress and the Justice Department to look into what he says is unauthorized spending that went into the creation of Direct File.

Democratic lawmakers in January asked Bessent and IRS commissioner nominee Billy Long to preserve the program. They wrote in a letter that "ending Direct File would hurt everyday Americans." Long has not yet received a nomination hearing.

In the meantime, Musk and his cadre of computer programmers could decide to wield their tech skills to boost the program — or use the very same digital savvy to delete it.

For his part, Werfel hopes that the agency will keep the program. "It's a big country with a lot of taxpayers with a lot of different preferences," he said.

Francis, the Boston barista, hopes so, too.

"There are a lot of young people like me who are working and figuring out how to file their taxes — this just makes it faster and easier," she said.

FEMA launches review of migrant shelter aid, suggesting smuggling laws were violated

By VALERIE GONZALEZ Associated Press

McALLEN, Texas (AP) — The Trump administration has launched a review of organizations that provide temporary housing and other aid to migrants, suggesting they may have violated a law used to prosecute smugglers.

The Department of Homeland Security has “significant concerns” that federal grants used to address a surge of migration under former President Joe Biden were used for illegal activities, wrote Cameron Hamilton, acting administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

His letter, dated Tuesday and obtained by The Associated Press, asks recipients of grants from FEMA’s Shelter and Services Program to provide names and contact information for migrants served and “a detailed and descriptive list of specific services provided” within 30 days. The letter says funding will be withheld during the review.

While it doesn’t explicitly threaten criminal prosecution, it raises concerns that recipients may have violated U.S. Criminal Code Section 1324, a felony offense against bringing people across the border illegally or transporting them within the United States. It also says executive officers must sign sworn statements that they have no knowledge or suspicions of anyone in their organizations violating the smuggling law.

FEMA did not immediately respond to a request for comment late Wednesday.

The demand appears to be a new salvo against organizations that provide food, housing and travel aid to people who cross the border. Migrants often arrive exhausted, low on money and unsure how to navigate on their own through bus stations and airports.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, a Republican who was at odds with the Biden administration over immigration and is closely aligned with the Trump White House, took a similar tack against migrant aid groups but was blocked in court.

FEMA’s Shelter and Services Program awarded \$641 million to dozens of state and local governments and organizations across the country in the 2024 fiscal year to help them deal with large numbers of migrants who crossed the border from Mexico. They include the cities of New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and Denver, as well as the United Way of Miami, the San Antonio Food Bank and several branches of Catholic Charities.

It was unclear if any any governments received the letters, but the Trump administration has fiercely criticized states, counties and cities that limit cooperation with federal immigration authorities. Last month, it sued Chicago over laws that it said thwarted federal law enforcement.

Immigrants fuel growth in major US urban counties

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

Immigrants kept the largest urban counties in the U.S. growing last year.

Core counties in the Houston, Miami and Phoenix metropolitan areas grew more than any others in the country primarily because of people moving in from outside the United States, according to population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau released Thursday.

Without the international migration, Harris County, Texas, Miami-Dade County, Florida, and Maricopa County, Arizona, would have had nobody moving there last year. That’s because more people already living in the country moved out of than into those counties. Miami-Dade County would have lost population without the immigrants, since the number of births outpacing deaths wasn’t enough to overcome the tens of thousands of residents who moved out.

Immigration in 2024 drove the overall U.S. population growth to its fastest rate in 23 years as the nation surpassed 340 million residents. The Census Bureau changed how it counted immigrants last year by including more people who were admitted to the U.S. for humanitarian, and often temporary, reasons.

“A substantial excess of births over deaths has long been the primary driver of U.S. population growth, but as this surplus dwindled in the last four years immigration provided the bulk of the nation’s population

increase," Kenneth Johnson, a senior demographer at the University of New Hampshire, said in an email.

Domestic vs. international migrants

The 2024 estimates reflect a continued dissonance this decade between where current U.S. residents and immigrants choose to live. Immigrants last year moved to the urban cores of metro areas, while those already living in the country preferred counties in the far suburban reaches of metro areas.

The most popular counties for international migrants last year were Miami-Dade and Harris counties, followed by Los Angeles County and Cook County, Illinois, which is home to Chicago.

The most popular counties for domestic residents last year were Montgomery County, Texas, north of Houston; Pinal County, Arizona, southwest of Phoenix; and Pasco County, Florida, northeast of Tampa. Also at the top ranks were Polk County, Florida, located between Orlando and Tampa, and Collin County, Texas, in the far northern suburbs of metro Dallas.

New York is on the rebound

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the U.S. in 2020, the New York metro area and others with some of the densest populations in the U.S. lost tens of thousands of residents to relocation.

But the region has been on the rebound since the pandemic subsided. The New York metro area — the largest in the U.S. with 19.9 million people — added more people than any other metropolitan area in the country last year. As 147,000 residents moved out, nearly 288,000 immigrants moved in, including tens of thousands who arrived on buses provided by the state of Texas. San Francisco and Washington, D.C., are other metro areas that have gained population through international migration, after initially losing them during the pandemic.

The New York metro area also had the nation's largest natural growth last year, with nearly 214,000 births outpacing 141,000 deaths.

South Florida last year jumped two spots over metro Washington and metro Atlanta to become the sixth most populous metropolitan area in the United States. Metropolitan Charlotte, North Carolina, bypassed metro Baltimore for the 21st spot. Among counties, Tarrant County, Texas, home to Fort Worth, leapfrogged over San Bernardino County in South California as the nation's 15th most populous county.

Deaths outpace births in two-thirds of U.S. counties

Nearly two-thirds of the United States' 3,144 counties grew last year. At the same, deaths outpaced births in two-thirds of U.S. counties, reflecting the reliance on immigration for growth throughout the United States in the years since the start of the pandemic. Nationwide, last year's natural growth was less than half the average gain of 1.2 million people that the country experienced in the five years before the pandemic, Johnson said.

"These recent levels of natural decrease are unprecedented," Johnson said.

SpaceX delays flight to replace NASA's stuck astronauts after launch pad problem

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A launch pad problem prompted SpaceX to delay a flight to the International Space Station on Wednesday to replace NASA's two stuck astronauts.

The new crew needs to get to the International Space Station before Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams can head home after nine months in orbit.

Concerns over a critical hydraulic system arose less than four hours before the Falcon rocket's planned evening liftoff from NASA's Kennedy Space Center. As the countdown clocks ticked down, engineers evaluated the hydraulics used to release one of the two arms clamping the rocket to its support structure. This structure needs to tilt back right before liftoff.

Already strapped into their capsule, the four astronauts awaited a final decision, which came down with less than an hour remaining in the countdown. SpaceX canceled for the day. Officials later said the launch was off until at least Friday.

Once at the space station, the U.S., Japanese and Russian crew will replace Wilmore and Williams, who have been up there since June. The two test pilots had to move into the space station for an extended stay after Boeing's new Starliner capsule encountered major breakdowns in transit.

Starliner's debut crew flight was supposed to last just a week, but NASA ordered the capsule to return empty and transferred Wilmore and Williams to SpaceX for the return leg.

Columbia grad student's detention will stretch on as lawyers spar over Trump's plan to deport him

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Mahmoud Khalil will remain detained in Louisiana until at least next week but can finally speak to lawyers while they fight the Trump administration's plans to deport the Columbia University graduate student for his role in campus protests against Israel, a judge decided at a hearing Wednesday.

The brief hearing, which focused on thorny jurisdictional issues, drew hundreds of demonstrators to the federal courthouse in lower Manhattan to denounce the Saturday arrest of Khalil, a permanent U.S. resident who is married to an American citizen.

Khalil, 30, was not brought to the hearing from an immigration detention center in Louisiana, where he has remained after a brief stop at a New Jersey lockup.

After Khalil's Manhattan arrest, Judge Jesse M. Furman ordered Monday that the 30-year-old not be deported while the court considers a legal challenge brought by his lawyers, who want Khalil returned to New York and released under supervision. For now Furman is letting Khalil remain in Louisiana.

During Wednesday's hearing, attorney Brandon Waterman argued for the Justice Department that the venue for the deportation fight should be moved from New York City to Louisiana or New Jersey because those are the locations where Khalil has been held.

One of Khalil's lawyers, Ramzi Kassem, told the judge that Khalil was "identified, targeted and detained" because of his advocacy for Palestinian rights and his protected speech. He said Khalil has no criminal convictions, but "for some reason, is being detained."

Kassem also told Furman that Khalil's legal team hasn't been able to have a single attorney-client-protected phone call with him.

Furman ordered that the lawyers be allowed to speak with him by phone at least once on Wednesday and Thursday. Calling the legal issues "important and weighty," the judge also directed the two sides to submit a joint letter on Friday describing when they propose to submit written arguments over the legal issues raised by Khalil's detention.

Kassem said Khalil's lawyers would update their lawsuit on Thursday.

Khalil's arrest has sparked protests in New York and other U.S. cities. Actor Susan Sarandon emerged from the courthouse and told reporters that "no matter where you stand on genocide, freedom of speech ... is a right that we all have." She added: "And this is a turning point in the history and the freedom of this country."

Some of Khalil's supporters, many of them wearing a keffiyeh and mask, attended the hearing. Hundreds more demonstrated outside the courthouse, beating drums, waving Palestinian flags and chanting for Khalil's release. The raucous crowd grew quiet, though, to hear Kassem speak.

"As we tried to make clear in court today, what happened to Mahmoud Khalil is nothing short of extraordinary and shocking and outrageous," Kassem told the crowd. "It should outrage anybody who believes that speech should be free in the United States of America."

Kassem said the legal grounds cited by the government to detain Khalil were "vague" and "rarely used," masking the true intent: "retaliation and punishment for the exercise of free speech."

Columbia became the center of a U.S. pro-Palestinian protest movement that swept across college campuses nationwide last year and led to more than 2,000 arrests.

Khalil, whose wife is pregnant with their first child, finished his requirements for a Columbia master's degree in December. Born in Syria, he is a grandson of Palestinians who were forced to leave their home-

land, his lawyers said in a legal filing.

President Donald Trump heralded Khalil's arrest as the first "of many to come," vowing on social media to deport students he said engage in "pro-terrorist, anti-Semitic, anti-American activity."

His Border czar, Tom Homan, said in Albany during a news conference on sanctuary policies that the administration considers Khalil "a national security threat."

"Can you stand in a movie theater and yell fire? Can you slander somebody verbally? Free speech has limitations," he said Wednesday at the conference with Republican state lawmakers.

During a stopover in Ireland while headed from Saudi Arabia to a meeting of the G7 foreign ministers in Canada, Secretary of State Marco Rubio told reporters that Khalil's case is "not about free speech."

"This is about people that don't have a right to be in the United States to begin with. No one has a right to a student visa. No one has a right to a green card," Rubio said.

Khalil, who acted as a spokesperson for Columbia protesters, hasn't been charged with a crime. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Tuesday that the administration moved to deport him under a section of the Immigration and Nationality Act that gives the secretary of state the power to deport a noncitizen on foreign policy grounds.

Civil rights groups and Khalil's attorneys say the government is unconstitutionally using its immigration control powers to stop him from speaking out.

U.S. Jewish groups and leaders and organizations have been divided in their response to Khalil's detention.

Among those welcoming the move was the Anti-Defamation League, which said it hopes it serves as a "deterrent."

"We appreciate the Trump Administration's broad, bold set of efforts to counter campus antisemitism — and this action further illustrates that resolve by holding alleged perpetrators responsible for their actions," the ADL said on social media.

Amy Spitalnick, CEO of Jewish Council for Public Affairs, decried Khalil's detention.

The Trump administration "is exploiting real concerns about antisemitism to undercut democracy: from gutting education funding to deporting students to attacking diversity, equity, & inclusion," she wrote on Bluesky. "As we've repeatedly said: this makes Jews — & so many others — less safe."

Kuwait frees a group of jailed Americans, including contractors held on drug charges

By ERIC TUCKER and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Kuwait has released a group of American prisoners, including veterans and military contractors jailed for years on drug-related charges, in a move seen as a gesture of goodwill between two allies, a representative for the detainees told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

The release follows a recent visit to the region by Adam Boehler, the Trump administration's top hostage envoy, and comes amid a continued U.S. government push to bring home American citizens jailed in foreign countries.

Six of the newly freed prisoners were accompanied on a flight from Kuwait to New York by Jonathan Franks, a private consultant who works on cases involving American hostages and detainees and who had been in the country to help secure their release.

"My clients and their families are grateful to the Kuwaiti government for this kind humanitarian gesture," Franks said in a statement.

He said that his clients maintain their innocence and that additional Americans he represents also are expected to be released by Kuwait later.

The State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The names of the released prisoners were not immediately made public.

Kuwait did not acknowledge the release on its state-run KUNA news agency and did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The holy Muslim fasting month of Ramadan and its upcoming Eid al-Fitr holiday typically see prisoner releases across Muslim-majority nations.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 43 of 75

Kuwait, a small, oil-rich nation that borders Iraq and Saudi Arabia and is near Iran, is considered a major non-NATO ally of the United States. Secretary of State Marco Rubio paid tribute to that relationship as recently as last month, when he said the U.S. "remains steadfast in its support for Kuwait's sovereignty and the well-being of its people."

The countries have had a close military partnership since America launched the 1991 Gulf War to expel Iraqi troops after Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein invaded the country, with some 13,500 American troops stationed in Kuwait at Camp Arifjan and Ali al-Salem Air Base.

But Kuwait has also detained many American military contractors on drug charges, in some cases, for years. Their families have alleged that their loved ones faced abuse while imprisoned in a country that bans alcohol and has strict laws regarding drugs.

Others have criticized Kuwaiti police for bringing trumped-up charges and manufacturing evidence used against them — allegations never acknowledged by the autocratic nation ruled by a hereditary emir.

The State Department warns travelers that drug charges in Kuwait can carry long prison sentences and the death penalty. Defense cooperation agreements between the U.S. and Kuwait likely include provisions that ensure U.S. troops are subject only to American laws, though that likely doesn't include contractors.

Since President Donald Trump returned to the White House, his Republican administration has secured the release of American schoolteacher Marc Fogel in a prisoner swap with Russia and has announced the release by Belarus of an imprisoned U.S. citizen.

The Americans released Wednesday had not been designated by the U.S. government as wrongfully detained. The status is applied to a subsection of Americans jailed abroad and historically ensures the case is handled by the administration's special presidential envoy for hostage affairs — the office that handles negotiations for a release.

But advocates of those held in foreign countries are hopeful the Trump administration takes a more flexible approach and secures the release of those not deemed wrongfully detained.

"The sad reality is that these Americans were left in prison for years due to a misguided policy that had, before President Trump took office, effectively abandoned Americans abroad who hadn't been designated wrongfully detained," Franks said in a statement.

"These releases," he added, "demonstrate what is achievable when the U.S. government prioritizes bringing Americans home."

Canada and the EU swiftly retaliate against Trump's steel and aluminum tariffs

By LORNE COOK, DAVID McHUGH and ROB GILLIES Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Major trade partners swiftly hit back at President Donald Trump's increased tariffs on aluminum and steel imports, imposing stiff new taxes on U.S. products from textiles and water heaters to beef and bourbon.

Canada, the largest supplier of steel and aluminum to the U.S., said Wednesday it will place 25% reciprocal tariffs on steel products and also raise taxes on a host of items: tools, computers and servers, display monitors, sports equipment, and cast-iron products.

Across the Atlantic, the European Union will raise tariffs on American beef, poultry, bourbon and motorcycles, bourbon, peanut butter and jeans.

Combined, the new tariffs will cost companies billions of dollars, and further escalate the uncertainty in two of the world's major trade partnerships. Companies will either take the losses and earn fewer profits, or, more likely, pass costs along to consumers in the form of higher prices.

Prices will go up, in Europe and the United States, and jobs are at stake, said European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

"We deeply regret this measure. Tariffs are taxes. They are bad for business, and even worse for consumers," von der Leyen said.

The EU duties aim for pressure points in the U.S. while minimizing additional damage to Europe. EU of-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 44 of 75

Officials have made clear that the tariffs — taxes on imports — are aimed at products made in Republican-held states, such as beef and poultry from Kansas and Nebraska and wood products from Alabama and Georgia. The tariffs will also hit blue states such as Illinois, the No. 1 U.S. producer of soybeans, which are also on the list.

Spirits producers have become collateral damage in the dispute over steel and aluminum. The EU move “is deeply disappointing and will severely undercut the successful efforts to rebuild U.S. spirits exports in EU countries,” said Chris Swonger, head of the Distilled Spirits Council. The EU is a major destination for U.S. whiskey, with exports surging 60% in the past three years after an earlier set of tariffs was suspended.

Could there be an agreement that takes increasing tariffs off the table?

Von der Leyen said in a statement that the EU “will always remain open to negotiation.”

Canada’s incoming Prime Minister Mark Carney said Wednesday he’s ready to meet with Trump if he shows “respect for Canadian sovereignty” and is willing to take “a common approach, a much more comprehensive approach for trade.”

Carney, who will be sworn in Friday, said workers in both countries will be better off when “the greatest economic and security partnership in the world is renewed, relaunched. That is possible.”

“We firmly believe that in a world fraught with geopolitical and economic uncertainties, it is not in our common interest to burden our economies with tariffs,” she said.

The American Chamber of Commerce to the EU said the U.S. tariffs and EU countermeasures “will only harm jobs, prosperity and security on both sides of the Atlantic.” “The two sides must de-escalate and find a negotiated outcome urgently,” the chamber said Wednesday.

What will actually happen?

Trump slapped similar tariffs on EU steel and aluminum during his first term in office, which enraged European and other allies. The EU also imposed countermeasures in retaliation at the time, raising tariffs on U.S.-made motorcycles, bourbon, peanut butter and jeans, among other items.

This time, the EU action will involve two steps. First on April 1, the commission will reimpose taxes that were in effect from 2018 and 2020, but which were suspended under the Biden administration. Then on April 13 come the additional duties targeting 18 billion euros (\$19.6 billion) in U.S. exports to the bloc.

EU Trade Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič traveled to Washington last month in an effort to head off the tariffs, meeting with U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and other top trade officials.

He said on Wednesday that it became clear during the trip “that the EU is not the problem.”

“I argued to avoid the unnecessary burden of measures and countermeasures, but you need a partner for that. You need both hands to clap,” Šefčovič told reporters at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France.

Canada is imposing, as of 12:01 a.m. Thursday 25% reciprocal tariffs on steel products worth \$12.6 billion Canadian (US\$8.7 billion) and aluminum products worth \$3 billion Canadian (US\$2 billion) as well as additional imported U.S. goods worth \$14.2 billion Canadian (\$9.9 billion) for a total of \$29.8 billion (US\$20.6 billion.)

The list of additional products affected by counter-tariffs includes tools, computers and servers, display monitors, water heaters, sport equipment, and cast-iron products.

These tariffs are in addition to Canada’s 25% counter tariffs on \$30 billion Canadian (US\$20.8 billion) of imports from the U.S. that were put in place on March 4 in response to other Trump tariffs that he’s delayed by a month.

European steel companies brace for losses

The EU could lose up to 3.7 million tons of steel exports, according to the European steel association Eurofer. The U.S. is the second-biggest export market for EU steel producers, representing 16% of the total EU steel exports.

The EU estimates that annual trade volume between both sides stands at about \$1.5 trillion, representing around 30% of global trade. While the bloc has a substantial export surplus in goods, it says that is partly offset by the U.S. surplus in the trade of services.

US arms flow to Ukraine again as the Kremlin mulls a ceasefire proposal

By SAMYA KULLAB and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — U.S. arms deliveries to Ukraine resumed Wednesday, officials said, a day after the Trump administration lifted its suspension of military aid for Kyiv in its fight against Russia's invasion, and officials awaited the Kremlin's response to a proposed 30-day ceasefire endorsed by Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said it's important not to "get ahead" of the question of responding to the ceasefire, which was proposed by Washington. He told reporters that Moscow is awaiting "detailed information" from the U.S. and suggested that Russia must get that before it can take a position. The Kremlin has previously opposed anything short of a permanent end to the conflict and has not accepted any concessions.

U.S. President Donald Trump wants to end the three-year war and pressured Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to enter talks. The suspension of U.S. assistance happened days after Zelenskyy and Trump argued about the conflict in a tense White House meeting. The administration's decision to resume military aid after talks Tuesday with senior Ukrainian officials in Saudi Arabia marked a sharp shift in its stance.

Trump said "it's up to Russia now" as his administration presses Moscow to agree to the ceasefire.

"And hopefully we can get a ceasefire from Russia," Trump said Wednesday in an extended exchange with reporters during an Oval Office meeting with Micheál Martin, the prime minister of Ireland. "And if we do, I think that would be 80% of the way to getting this horrible bloodbath" ended.

The U.S. president again made veiled threats of hitting Russia with new sanctions.

"We can, but I hope it's not going to be necessary," Trump said.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who led the American delegation to Saudi Arabia, where Ukraine consented to the U.S. ceasefire proposal, said Washington will pursue "multiple points of contacts" with Russia to see if President Vladimir Putin is ready to negotiate an end to the war. He declined to give details or say what steps might be taken if Putin refuses to engage.

The U.S. hopes to see Russia stop attacks on Ukraine within the next few days as a first step, Rubio said at a refueling stop Wednesday in Shannon, Ireland, on his way to talks in Canada with other Group of Seven leading industrialized nations.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told Fox News that national security adviser Mike Waltz spoke Wednesday with his Russian counterpart.

She also confirmed that Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, will head to Moscow for talks with Russian officials. She did not say with whom Witkoff planned to meet. A person familiar with the matter said Witkoff is expected to meet with Putin later this week. The person was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Ukraine says ceasefire would allow time to plan end of war

Zelenskyy said the 30-day ceasefire would allow the sides "to fully prepare a step-by-step plan for ending the war, including security guarantees for Ukraine."

Technical questions over how to effectively monitor a truce along the roughly 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line, where small but deadly drones are common, are "very important," Zelenskyy told reporters Wednesday in Kyiv.

Arms deliveries to Ukraine have already resumed through a Polish logistics center, the foreign ministers of Ukraine and Poland announced Wednesday. The deliveries go through a NATO and U.S. hub in the eastern Polish city of Rzeszow that's been used to ferry Western weapons into neighboring Ukraine about 70 kilometers (45 miles) away.

The American military help is vital for Ukraine's shorthanded and weary army, which is having a tough time keeping Russia's bigger military force at bay. For Russia, the American aid spells potentially more difficulty in achieving war aims, and it could make Washington's peace efforts a tougher sell in Moscow.

The U.S. government has also restored Ukraine's access to unclassified commercial satellite pictures provided by Maxar Technologies through a program Washington runs, Maxar spokesperson Tomi Maxted

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 46 of 75

told The Associated Press. The images help Ukraine plan attacks, assess their success and monitor Russian movements.

In other developments, officials acknowledged Wednesday that Kyiv no longer has any of the longer-range Army Tactical Missile System, or ATACMS, missiles.

According to a U.S. official and a Ukrainian lawmaker on the country's defense committee, Ukraine has run out of the ATACMs. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to provide military weapons details.

The U.S. official said the U.S. provided fewer than 40 of those missiles overall and that Ukraine ran out of them in late January. Senior U.S. defense leaders, including the previous Pentagon chief, Lloyd Austin, had made it clear that only a limited number of the ATACMs would be delivered and that the U.S. and NATO allies considered other weapons to be more valuable in the fight.

Putin visits troops trying to regain control of Kursk region

Putin on Wednesday visited military headquarters in Russia's Kursk region, where Kremlin troops are close to driving out Ukrainian forces. In the last few days, the Russian military entered the town of Sudzha, near the border, that had been occupied by Ukrainian soldiers since they launched a surprise incursion into Kursk in August.

Speaking to commanders, Putin said he expected the military "to completely free the Kursk region from the enemy in the nearest future."

Chief of the Russian military's general staff, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, reported to Putin that Russian troops crossed into Ukraine's northeastern Sumy region in several places and were "destroying the enemy reserves and expanding a security zone" there.

In a signal that Moscow could try to expand its land gains by capturing parts of the Sumy region, Putin said that in the future "it's necessary to think about creating a security zone alongside the state border."

Ukraine's raid into Kursk was the first foreign occupation of Russian territory since World War II. Ukrainian troops held on for months despite intense pressure from tens of thousands of Russian and North Korean troops.

Meanwhile in Ukraine, Russian ballistic missiles killed at least five civilians, officials said Wednesday.

Russian officials are wary about the U.S.-Ukraine talks

Russian lawmakers signaled wariness about the prospect of a ceasefire.

"Any agreements (with the understanding of the need for compromise) should be on our terms, not American," senior Russian senator Konstantin Kosachev noted in a post on the messaging app Telegram.

Lawmaker Mikhail Sheremet told the state news agency Tass that Russia "is not interested in continuing" the war, but at the same time Moscow "will not tolerate being strung along."

The outcome of the Saudi Arabia talks "places the onus on Washington to persuade Moscow to accept and implement the ceasefire," said John Hardie, a defense analyst and deputy director of the Russia program at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a Washington-based research institute.

Russia's foreign intelligence service, known as the SVR, reported Wednesday that the service's chief, Sergei Naryshkin, spoke by phone Tuesday with CIA Director John Ratcliffe.

The two discussed cooperation "in areas of common interest and the resolution of crisis situations," according to a statement by the SVR.

From soup cans to airplanes, steel and aluminum are a fundamental part of American life

By DEE-ANN DURBIN and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writers

Steel and aluminum are ubiquitous in Americans' lives. A stainless steel refrigerator holds aluminum soda cans. A stainless steel drum tumbles inside an aluminum washing machine. They're the metals used in cars and airplanes, phones and frying pans, skyscrapers and zippers.

That's why President Donald Trump's 25% tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports — which went into effect Wednesday — could have widespread impact on manufacturers and consumers.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 47 of 75

Here are some of the industries and products that rely on aluminum and steel:

Construction

The construction industry uses about one-third of all U.S. steel shipments, more than any other industry, according to the Council on Foreign Relations. The industry depends on a global supply chain to build everything from airports to schools to roads, according to Associated Builders and Contractors, a trade group with more than 23,000 members.

The group says some contractors were able to lock in prices on steel or aluminum ahead of the tariffs. But if they are prolonged, the import taxes will ultimately raise prices at a time when the construction industry is already struggling with higher costs for labor and materials. And uncertainty around the tariffs will make it less likely that companies will commit to big building projects, the group said.

Annie Mecias-Murphy is the co-owner and president of JA&M, a contractor for commercial buildings based in Pembroke Pines, Florida. Some of the main materials her company uses are rebar, or reinforced steel, and post-tension cables, which reinforce concrete after it's poured.

"In attempts to get ahead of the tariffs, we do try to lock in our prices and work with our trade partners and clients on different strategies," Mecias-Murphy said. "But ultimately, the rising costs make it difficult for small business owners like myself to contemplate large-scale multi-year projects."

Steel cans

Tin mill steel is used for a wide variety of packaging, from soup cans to hairspray. And the U.S. currently imports 70% of its tin mill steel, according to the Can Manufacturers Institute.

The institute said the more limited tariffs Trump imposed in 2018 resulted in the closure of nine tin mill lines in the U.S. as manufacturers shifted to other types of steel or simply shut down. As a result, only three U.S. tin steel lines remain open.

Mick Beekhuizen, the president and CEO of The Campbell Co., said in an earnings call last week that his company imports tin mill steel from Canada. Beekhuizen said Campbell is working with its suppliers to mitigate the impact of tariffs, but it may need to raise prices.

The Consumer Brands Association, which represents packaged food makers, said it's urging the Trump administration to exempt aluminum and steel products that aren't available in adequate quantities in the U.S. Otherwise, consumers will likely see higher grocery prices.

"We encourage the Trump administration to recognize the different needs of different U.S. manufacturing sectors," said Tom Madrecki, vice president of supply chain resiliency at the Consumer Brands Association.

Autos

Most of Ford, GM and Stellantis' steel and aluminum already comes from the United States, reducing the direct impact the companies would feel from higher duties.

But experts have warned that tariffs might mean the three Detroit automakers have to raise their prices. Domestic steel and aluminum producers will have to increase their capacity to meet demand or risk a short supply in the near term, making these products more expensive and driving up vehicle costs.

Another automaker who could feel the pain from tariffs: Elon Musk's Tesla. During a January earnings call, Tesla Chief Financial Officer Vaibhav Taneja noted the uncertainty around tariffs.

"The imposition of tariffs, which is very likely, ... will have an impact on our business and profitability," Taneja said.

This could be detrimental to an already inflation-sensitive American car buyer. The average transaction price for a new vehicle was just over \$48,000 last month, according to Kelley Blue Book.

And as with the steel and aluminum tariffs of Trump's first term, automakers are likely to have to revisit their financial outlooks for the year as they brace for impact.

Appliances

Makers and sellers of products ranging from microwaves to dishwashers are considering how to navigate cost increases.

Some like Whirlpool, which produces 80% of what it sells in the U.S. domestically, appear to be more insulated from the tariffs. Whirlpool executives told analysts at an investor conference earlier this month that

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 48 of 75

Whirlpool has locked in contracts for a minimum of one year for most of its raw materials, including steel.

But Abt, a family-owned appliance and consumer electronics store in Glenview, Illinois, received notices this week from manufacturers that said they would raise the suggested retail price of countertop products like espresso makers and toasters anywhere from 10% to 15% starting April 1, according to Richie Palmero, the store's small appliance buyer.

Abt sells coffee makers that range from \$100 to \$500, as well as espresso makers priced from \$1,000 to \$5,000. Palmero said that putting another \$250 on the price of a \$2,500 espresso maker is a lot, but she said she doesn't think sales will suffer significantly.

"I think customers would still buy it because it's good quality," she said. "But they might think about it. They might take longer to buy it. It might not be an impulse buy. I don't think they're going to go down to Mr. Coffee or a \$20 coffee maker."

Household goods

The Retail Industry Leaders Association said the compound effect of those import taxes, earlier tariffs on goods from China imposed during Trump's first term and maintained by former President Joe Biden, and a new round slapped on Chinese products last month could be substantial.

The trade group, which represents major U.S. chains, asked its members to come up with a list of popular household items to illustrate how the multiple layers might add to the cost of finished products. The 20 entries included pushpins, trash cans, ladders, grills, paper towel holders, mixing bowls, wine racks, shower caddies, chicken coops and steel wool.

By the association's calculations, the selected imports face a potential duty of 45% to over 70% when they go through U.S. customs. The amounts varied depending on where the products were made and if they already were subject to a base tax or a tariff from Trump's first term. Portable griddles and tabletop grills from China, which had the highest starting duty, would get taxed at almost 75% of its value.

"Stacking tariffs on household goods will also raise costs on American families, millions of whom have struggled through the worst bout of inflation in 40 years," Michael Hanson, a senior executive vice president at the Retail Leaders Industry Association, said in a Wednesday statement.

Aluminum cans

U.S. beverage companies use more than 100 billion aluminum cans each year, according to the Can Manufacturers Institute. Most of the thin rolled sheets of aluminum alloy that are used for cans are made in the U.S., but can makers do import a small percentage, the institute said.

The Brewers Association, which represents 9,500 independent U.S. craft beer makers, estimates that 10% of U.S. cans are made from Canadian aluminum. Aluminum tariffs will force small brewers to pay more for cans, the association said, even as steel tariffs drive up the cost of equipment like kegs and fermentation tanks.

But not all manufacturers are worried about aluminum tariffs. Molson Coors says it shifted production in recent years and now gets "almost all" of its aluminum for U.S. consumption from U.S. sources.

Coca-Cola Chairman and CEO James Quincey said during a recent earnings call that if aluminum cans get more expensive, Coke can shift to other materials like plastic bottles. Quincey told investors he didn't want to exaggerate the cost of aluminum tariffs.

"You should not conclude that this is some huge swing factor in the U.S. business," he said. "It's a cost. It will have to be managed. It would be better not to have it relative to the U.S. business, but we are going to manage our way through."

Aviation

Airplanes have a mixture of metal parts, from aluminum frames, wings and door panels to steel landing gear and engine parts. Many are extremely specialized and sourced from overseas.

The Aerospace Industries Association, which represents nearly 300 aerospace and defense companies, says tariffs put their industry — and national security — at risk.

"We are concerned about additional downward pressure on an already stressed American supply chain," Dak Hardwick, the association's vice president of international affairs, said. "We are investigating mitiga-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 49 of 75

tion strategies that would minimize the impacts of new tariffs on our industry, and we hope to work with the Trump Administration to highlight the critical role we play in America's economic prosperity, national defense and deterrence."

What to know about US student Sudiksha Konanki, who vanished in Dominican Republic on spring break

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic (AP) — Investigators continue to search for a college student from Virginia who vanished earlier this month while visiting the Dominican Republic with five other people during spring break from classes.

Sudiksha Konanki was last seen March 6 during a power outage at the Riu República Hotel in the beach resort town of Punta Cana.

Dominican police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation are involved in the search for Konanki, a 20-year-old student from the University of Pittsburgh.

What are the facts about her disappearance?

Police say she disappeared at a beach by the hotel before dawn, as she and other guests had headed outside amid the power outage.

Her family says her belongings, including a phone and wallet, were left with her friends, although she's known to always carry her phone.

Konanki and five other female students flew to the country on March 3.

Who is Sudiksha Konanki?

Konanki lives in Chantilly, Virginia, a suburb of Washington, D.C., and is a citizen of India and a U.S. permanent resident.

Her parents, Subbarayudu and Sreedevi Konanki, have sought to widen the investigation into her disappearance.

University of Pittsburgh officials say they've been in contact with the Konanki family and authorities in Virginia, and have offered their support in the search.

Where does the investigation stand?

Dominican police say they've been reinterviewing people who were with Konanki before she went missing. Investigators have been using drones, helicopters and detection dogs to search waters off the island's east coast.

Dominican President Luis Abinader said Monday that the last person known to be with her says a wave crashed into them while they were on the beach.

Civil Defense Director Juan Salas says investigators haven't found her clothing.

'In DOGE we trust': House GOP governs by embracing Trump's effort to cut government

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — A familiar scene has played out over and over in the U.S. House: Republicans, unable to approve federal funding legislation on their own, edge toward a risky government shutdown, until Democrats swoop in with the votes needed to prevent catastrophic disruptions.

Until now.

House Speaker Mike Johnson has accomplished the seemingly unexpected, keeping his GOP majority in line to pass a bill to keep the government running, convincing even the most staunch conservatives from the Freedom Caucus to come on board.

It wasn't just President Donald Trump's public badgering of the lawmakers and threats of political retribution against Republicans who refused to fall in line, although his sharp warnings resonated, preventing wide dissent.

What also won over rank-and-file Republicans was what Trump is already doing with the chainsaw-wielding

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 50 of 75

billionaire Elon Musk — slashing the size of federal government and firing thousands of workers through the Department of Government Efficiency — and the White House's promise to do more.

"In DOGE we trust," said Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Calif., a longtime deficit hawk who was among those voting yes.

The result is a newly emboldened House GOP majority that, for the first time in years, is able to capture and utilize the vast power of sticking together, rather than disassembling into chaotic rounds of public infighting.

And it's leaving the Democrats, in the minority in the House and Senate, shifting rapidly to respond.

The story the Democrats have leveraged to their advantage for years — that Republicans simply can't govern — may no longer be as true as it once was.

In fact, the Republicans who control Congress and the White House are governing at lightning speed — over the dismantling of the very government itself.

As if on cue, as the House was acting Tuesday, the Department of Education axed some 1,300 employees, about half its staff, on its way to unwinding the agency.

"The DOGE efforts and the other things that are happening in the administration are very important for the American people," Johnson said in a victory lap, "because ultimately what we're going to be able to do is downsize the size and scope of the federal government."

The bill now heads to the Senate, where Republicans have a 53-47 majority and Democrats are almost powerless to stop the head-spinning series of events.

"This is not what the American people want," Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said Wednesday.

Schumer faces politically difficult options — either provide the Democratic votes needed to advance the bill to the 60-vote threshold needed, or vote to block it, allowing a federal shutdown after midnight Friday.

After conferring privately with Senate Democrats, Schumer announced they would try to force a vote on a shorter, 30-day bill. That would temporarily fund the government while negotiations continue. But it's not at all clear Republicans would agree to that, inching closer to Friday's shutdown deadline.

Lacking leverage to shape the funding package, the Democrats are left to warn what Trump and Musk will do next.

Trump is pushing the GOP-led Congress to next pass what he calls a "big beautiful bill" with some \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts and \$2 trillion in spending reductions, including some \$880 billion to Medicaid the health care program used by some 80 million Americans and another \$220 billion to agriculture programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or food stamps, to hungry adults and kids.

Musk said that Social Security and other mainstay "entitlement" programs also need drastic cuts.

"The Republican majority just voted to hand a blank check to Elon Musk," said Rep. Katherine Clark of Massachusetts, the Democratic whip.

"No wonder Republicans are canceling their town halls," she said. "They know what the American people know: No one voted for this."

For Republicans, particularly in the House, it's a new day.

On Tuesday almost every House Republican — and one Democrat, Rep. Jared Golden of Maine — backed the government funding bill, which will keep federal offices running through the end of the budget year, in September.

The party was also unified last month as Johnson led House Republicans in approving a budget framework for the big tax-and-spending cuts bill, setting the process in motion for action as soon as April.

Johnson said the White House would be sending a rescissions package next — legislative shorthand for a proposal to roll back already-approved funding across the federal government.

Other Republicans are encouraging the Trump administration to impound other federal funds that have been approved by Congress, but not yet spent, setting up a potential legal showdown over the checks and balances of constitutional power.

For rank-and-file Republicans, the DOGE cuts that are steamrolling through the federal government are beyond what they could have imagined.

"Exhilarating," Rep. Richard Hudson of North Carolina, the head of the Republican campaign committee, told The Associated Press.

The most conservative deficit hawks said they are willing to stand down on their usual antics to block funding bills, knowing Trump and Musk are wielding the ax on their own.

Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, who has routinely voted against government spending bills, said what's changed is Trump in the White House. Rep. Andrew Clyde, R-Ga., who has rarely voted for any continuing resolution to fund the government, said the cuts are underway.

As long as DOGE is calling the shots, "I can support this CR," said McClintock, referring the continuing resolution to fund the government.

The speaker said Trump is watching step by step. Trump berated the one Republican holdout on the funding package, Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky, and was calling others.

Massie, the libertarian leaning MIT graduate who wears a homemade debt calculator on his lapel pin, is popular among his colleagues in part because he is so consistent in his views. He refused to bend.

Another holdout, Rep. Rich McCormick, R-Ga., said even though he didn't personally have a call from Trump, he was on the line when the president called another GOP lawmaker.

"I want him to succeed," McCormick said.

Trump vows to take back 'stolen' wealth as tariffs on steel and aluminum imports go into effect

By JOSH BOAK, PAUL WISEMAN and ROB GILLIES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump openly challenged U.S. allies on Wednesday by increasing tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports to 25% as he vowed to take back wealth "stolen" by other countries, drawing quick retaliation from Europe and Canada.

The Republican president's use of tariffs to extract concessions from other nations points toward a possibly destructive trade war and a stark change in America's approach to global leadership. It also has destabilized the stock market and stoked anxiety about an economic downturn.

"The United States of America is going to take back a lot of what was stolen from it by other countries and, frankly, by incompetent U.S. leadership," Trump told reporters on Wednesday. "We're going to take back our wealth, and we're going to take back a lot of the companies that left."

Trump removed all exemptions from his 2018 tariffs on the metals, in addition to increasing the tariffs on aluminum from 10%. His moves, based off a February directive, are part of a broader effort to disrupt and transform global commerce.

He has separate tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China, with plans to also tax imports from the European Union, Brazil and South Korea by charging "reciprocal" rates starting on April 2.

The EU announced its own countermeasures on Wednesday. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that as the United States was "applying tariffs worth 28 billion dollars, we are responding with countermeasures worth 26 billion euros," or about \$28 billion. Those measures, which cover not just steel and aluminum products but also textiles, home appliances and agricultural goods, are due to take effect on April 1.

U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer responded by saying that the EU was punishing America instead of fixing what he viewed as excess capacity in steel and aluminum production.

"The EU's punitive action completely disregards the national security imperatives of the United States — and indeed international security — and is yet another indicator that the EU's trade and economic policies are out of step with reality," he said in a statement.

Meeting on Wednesday with Ireland's Taoiseach Micheál Martin, Trump said "of course" he wants to respond to EU's retaliations and "of course" Ireland is taking advantage of the United States.

"The EU was set up in order to take advantage of the United States," Trump said.

Last year, the United States ran a \$87 billion trade imbalance with Ireland. That's partially because of the tax structure created by Trump's 2017 overhaul, which incentivized U.S. pharmaceutical companies

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 52 of 75

to record their sales abroad, Brad Setser, a senior fellow at the Council of Foreign Relations, said on X.

Canada sees itself as locked in a trade war because of White House claims about fentanyl smuggling and that its natural resources and factories subtract from the U.S. economy instead of supporting it.

"This is going to be a day to day fight. This is now the second round of unjustified tariffs leveled against Canada," said Mélanie Joly, Canada's foreign affairs minister. "The latest excuse is national security despite the fact that Canada's steel and aluminum adds to America's security. All the while there is a threat of further and broader tariffs on April 2 still looming. The excuse for those tariffs shifts every day."

Canada is the largest foreign supplier of steel and aluminum to the United States and plans to impose retaliatory tariffs of Canadian \$29.8 billion (\$20.7 billion) starting Thursday in response to the U.S. taxes on the metals.

Canada's new tariffs would be on steel and aluminum products, as well as U.S. goods including computers, sports equipment and water heaters worth \$14.2 billion Canadian (\$9.9 billion). That's in addition to the 25% counter tariffs on \$30 billion Canadian (US\$20.8 billion) of imports from the U.S. that were put in place on March 4 in response to other Trump import taxes that he's partially delayed by a month.

Trump told CEOs in the Business Roundtable a day earlier that the tariffs were causing companies to invest in U.S. factories. The 7.5% drop in the S&P 500 stock index over the past month on fears of deteriorating growth appears unlikely to dissuade him, as Trump argued that higher tariff rates would be more effective at bringing back factories.

"The higher it goes, the more likely it is they're going to build," Trump told the group. "The biggest win is if they move into our country and produce jobs. That's a bigger win than the tariffs themselves, but the tariffs are going to be throwing off a lot of money to this country."

Trump on Tuesday had threatened to put tariffs of 50% on steel and aluminum from Canada, but he chose to stay with the 25% rate after the province of Ontario suspended plans to put a surcharge on electricity sold to Michigan, Minnesota and New York.

Democratic lawmakers dismissed Trump's claims that his tariffs are about national security and drug smuggling, saying they're actually about generating revenues to help cover the cost of his planned income tax cuts for the wealthy.

"Donald Trump knows his policies could wreck the economy, but he's doing it anyway," said Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer of New York. "Why are they doing all these crazy things that Americans don't like? One reason, and one reason alone: tax breaks for billionaires, the north star of the Republican party's goals.

In many ways, the president is addressing what he perceives as unfinished business from his first term. Trump meaningfully increased tariffs, but the revenues collected by the federal government were too small to significantly increase overall inflationary pressures.

Outside forecasts by the Budget Lab at Yale University, Tax Policy Center and others suggest that U.S. families would have the costs of the taxes passed onto them in the form of higher prices.

With Wednesday's tariffs on steel and aluminum, Trump is seeking to remedy his original 2018 import taxes that were eroded by exemptions.

After Canada and Mexico agreed to his demand for a revamped North American trade deal in 2020, they avoided the import taxes on the metals. Other U.S. trading partners had import quotas supplant the tariffs. And the first Trump administration also allowed U.S. companies to request exemptions from the tariffs if, for instance, they couldn't find the steel they needed from domestic producers.

While Trump's tariffs could help steel and aluminum plants in the United States, they could raise prices for the manufacturers that use the metals as raw materials.

Moreover, economists have found, the gains to the steel and aluminum industries were more than offset by the cost they imposed on "downstream" manufacturers that use their products.

At these downstream companies, production fell by nearly \$3.5 billion because of the tariffs in 2021, a loss that exceeded the \$2.3 billion uptick in production that year by aluminum producers and steelmakers, the U.S. International Trade Commission found in 2023.

Trump sees the tariffs as leading to more domestic factories, and the White House has noted that Volvo,

Volkswagen and Honda are all exploring an increase to their U.S. footprint. But the prospect of higher prices, fewer sales and lower profits might cause some companies to refrain from investing in new facilities.

"If you're an executive in the boardroom, are you really going to tell your board it's the time to expand that assembly line?" said John Murphy, senior vice president at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The top steel exporters to the U.S. are Canada, Mexico, Brazil, South Korea and Japan, with exports from Taiwan and Vietnam growing at a fast pace, according to the International Trade Administration. Imports from China, the world's largest steel producer, account for only a small fraction of what the U.S. buys.

The lion's share of U.S. aluminum imports comes from Canada.

Affordable housing threatened as Trump halts \$1 billion slated for extending life of aging buildings

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press/Report for America

The Trump administration is halting a \$1 billion program that helps preserve affordable housing, threatening projects that keep tens of thousands of units livable for low-income Americans, according to a document obtained by The Associated Press.

The action is part of a slew of cuts and funding freezes at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, largely at the direction of President Donald Trump and Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, that have rattled the affordable-housing industry.

Preserving these units gets less attention than ribbon-cuttings, but it's a centerpiece of efforts to address the nation's housing crisis. Hundreds of thousands of low-rent apartments, many of them aging and in need of urgent repair, are at risk of being yanked out from under poor Americans.

The program has already awarded the money to projects that would upgrade at least 25,000 affordable units across the country, and details of how it will be wound down remain unclear.

A spokesperson for HUD did not respond to repeated requests for comment. But an internal document reviewed by the AP said the program is being "terminated" at the direction of DOGE. Two HUD employees, who have knowledge of the program and spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal, confirmed the directive to shutter it.

On its face, the over \$1 billion Green and Resilient Retrofit Program, passed by Congress in 2022, is intended for energy-efficiency improvements. It is distributed in grants and loans to owners of affordable housing in need of updating, including replacing or repairing heating and cooling systems, leaky roofs, aging insulation or windows, or undertaking floodproofing.

But the money plays a much larger role in preserving affordable units.

Projects that use the funds are required to keep their buildings affordable for up to 25 years. The money is also leveraged to pull in other investments for major repairs and renovations needed to keep the buildings livable.

It's like building a Jenga tower, where one of the program's grants or loans — which range from hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars — is a bottom block and each new block is another investment, housing advocates said.

This money "was essential in order for the project to come together," said Mike Essian, vice president at American Community Developers, Inc., which received funding for several affordable-housing projects. "Projects will fail and these are projects that are already difficult to finance."

The news has been a jolt to Al Hase and Joan Starr, tenants in an apartment building in Vancouver, Washington, full of other low-income seniors with few or no other options — most of whom live on less than \$33,000 a year.

The 170-unit Smith Tower Apartments, built in the 1960s, is in need of updates, including its first building-wide sprinkler system. The \$10 million award was a financial kickstart for its nearly \$100 million project, and is cited in applications for other investments.

The potential loss "seriously jeopardizes our ability to be able to provide an upgrade to the current systems," said Greg Franks, president of the property's management company, adding that the work is

"needed to sustain the livability of this building based on its age, and to keep it viable for another 60 years."

"We are depending on that \$10 million," he said.

So, too, are Hase and Starr, a retired couple in their 70s who have lived there for 16 years.

They fill their balcony with geraniums and petunias, count the eagles at a nearby park and live off meager Social Security incomes. They learned about the potential funding loss in a letter from the apartment's management company.

"It's kinda terrifying, it's almost like getting news from a doctor that something's going to take your life in six months or a year," Hase told the AP in a phone call.

"We're from an era where the wages weren't there, so our Social Security ..." he said, pausing. "Sucks," pitched in Starr.

"If I'd been born a rich man," he said. Starr added: "We're just regular people."

"And we're the lucky ones because we've got two social securities coming in," she said.

But being lucky ones doesn't count for much in today's rental market. "Prices keep going up, I've looked, and there's no way," she said.

"It's the difference between living and not being able to live," he said.

HUD's lack of communication about the program's future sent organizations in search of contingency plans, though roughly two-dozen projects will still get funding, one HUD employee told the AP. The rest are in limbo.

"Each day of funding uncertainty increases the odds that deals will disintegrate," said Linda Couch, a senior vice president at LeadingAge, a group whose members were awarded over \$150 million.

As for Smith Tower, if the money doesn't arrive, "we will certainly seek other funding to fill that gap," said Travis Phillips of the Housing Development Center. "The reality is that will take time and will inevitably make the project more expensive."

It's the position several hundred other projects now find themselves in. The program provides funding for projects across 42 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

"In all honesty," said Michelle Arevalos, Smith Tower's administrator, "if this building were not here, a lot of our folks actually probably would be homeless."

Education Department layoffs gut its civil rights office, leaving discrimination cases in limbo

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Education Department's civil rights branch is losing nearly half its staff in the Trump administration's layoffs, effectively gutting an office that already faced a backlog of thousands of complaints from students and families across the nation.

Among a total of more than 1,300 layoffs announced Tuesday were roughly 240 in the department's Office for Civil Rights, according to a list obtained and verified by The Associated Press. Seven of the civil rights agency's 12 regional offices were entirely laid off, including busy hubs in New York, Chicago and Dallas. Despite assurances that the department's work will continue unaffected, huge numbers of cases appear to be in limbo.

The Trump administration has not said how it will proceed with thousands of cases being handled by staff it's eliminating. The cases involve families trying to get school services for students with disabilities, allegations of bias related to race and religion, and complaints over sexual violence at schools and college campuses.

Some staffers who remain said there's no way to pick up all of their fired colleagues' cases. Many were already struggling to keep pace with their own caseloads. With fewer than 300 workers, families likely will be waiting on resolution for years, they said.

"I fear they won't get their calls answered, their complaints won't move," said Michael Pillera, a senior civil rights attorney for the Office for Civil Rights. "I truly don't understand how a handful of offices could handle the entire country."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 55 of 75

Department officials insisted the cuts will not affect civil rights investigations. The reductions were "strategic decisions," spokesperson Madison Biedermann.

"OCR will be able to deliver the work," Biedermann said. "It will have to look different, and we know that."

The layoffs are part of a dramatic downsizing directed by President Donald Trump as he moves to reduce the footprint of the federal government. Along with the Office of Civil Rights, the top divisions to lose hundreds of staffers in the layoffs included Federal Student Aid, which manages the federal student loan portfolio, and the Institute of Education Sciences, which oversees assessments of whether the education system is working and research into best teaching practices.

Trump has pushed for a full shutdown of the Education Department, calling it a "con job" and saying its power should be turned over to states. On Wednesday he told reporters many agency employees "don't work at all." Responding to the layoffs, he said his administration is "keeping the best ones."

After the cuts, the Office for Civil Rights will only have workers in Washington and five regional offices, which traditionally take the lead on investigating complaints and mediating resolutions with schools and colleges. Buildings are being closed and staff laid off in Dallas, Chicago, New York, Boston, Cleveland, Philadelphia and San Francisco.

Many lawyers at the New York City office were juggling 80 or more cases, said one staffer who spoke on the condition of anonymity out of fear for reprisals. The branch often mediated cases with New York City schools, the nation's largest district, and its lawyers were handling a high-profile antisemitism investigation at Columbia University — a priority for Trump.

The staffer described several pending cases involving students with disabilities who are wrongly being kept out of school because of behavioral issues. With limited oversight from the office, they said, school districts will be less likely to comply with legal requirements.

Pillera, who had said before the cuts that he was leaving the department, said it's unclear how complaints will be investigated in areas that no longer have offices.

"We have to physically go to schools," Pillera said. "We have to look at the playground to see if it's accessible for kids with disabilities. We have to measure doorways and bathrooms to see if everything is accessible for kids with disabilities."

Even before the layoffs, the civil rights office had been losing staff even as complaints rose to record levels. The workforce had fallen below 600 staffers before Trump took office, and they faced nearly 23,000 complaints filed last year, more than ever.

Trump officials ordered a freeze on most cases when they arrived at the department, adding to the backlog. When Education Secretary Linda McMahon lifted the freeze last week, there were more than 20,000 pending cases.

Historically, most of the office's work deals with disability rights cases, but it has fielded growing numbers of complaints alleging discrimination based on sex or race. It has also played a prominent role in investigating complaints of antisemitism and Islamophobia amid the Israel-Hamas war and a wave of campus demonstrations that spread across the country last year.

Craig Trainor, Trump's appointee over the office, directed staff to focus on antisemitism cases as a top priority last week. In a memo, he accused former President Joe Biden of failing to hold colleges accountable and promised tougher action against violators.

At her confirmation hearing, McMahon said the goal is not to defund key programs but to make them operate more efficiently. She vowed to uphold the agency's civil rights work but said it might fit better being moved to the Justice Department.

The civil rights office was not the only division to lose attorneys key to the Education Department's portfolio. Tuesday's layoffs have nearly eliminated all staff working in the department's Office of the General Counsel, say two people familiar with the situation, who didn't want to speak publicly for fear of reprisals.

Attorneys in the division advised the department on the legality of its actions, helped enforce how states and schools spent federal money meant for disadvantaged K-12 students, and watched for conflicts of interest among internal staff and appointees, among other things.

Of the approximately 100 staff members working before Trump took office, only around two dozen remain. The majority of those still employed advise the department on higher education, including financial aid programs.

An email the Education Department sent to all staff after the layoffs said there will need to be significant changes to how they work.

“What we choose to prioritize, and in turn, not prioritize, will be critical in this transition,” the message said.

What is the Immigration Act of 1952 and why do Trump officials keep talking about it?

By TIM SULLIVAN Associated Press

Again and again the Trump White House has turned to a 73-year-old legal statute to defend its immigration crackdown.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt cited the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 on Tuesday to explain the arrest and planned deportation of a Palestinian activist and legal U.S. resident with a green card.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem cited it in late February when announcing that anyone living in the U.S. illegally would have to register with the federal government.

The act has been mentioned in presidential orders, press releases and speeches.

But what is it?

Why do officials keep talking about the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952?

The act comes up so frequently because it is the legal foundation of modern immigration law, encompassing a vast range of regulations and procedures. It has been amended hundreds of times since it was passed, during the Truman administration.

Decades of sweeping changes in immigration law link back to the act.

“These were all massive public laws in their own standing, but they were all amending” the 1952 legislation, said Niels Frenzen, an immigration expert at the University of Southern California Gould School of Law.

The law, also known as the McCarran-Walter Act, came amid the anti-communist fears of the early Cold War. While it eased some race-based immigration restrictions, particularly for Asians, it effectively limited most immigration to Europeans. It also codified rules allowing ideology to be used to deny immigration and allow deportation.

How has the Trump administration used the act and its many provisions?

Most recently, the Trump White House used the act as the basis to arrest Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian activist who helped organize campus protests at Columbia University against the Israel-Hamas war. Khalil, a Palestinian who was born and raised in Syria, became a legal permanent resident, also known as a green card holder, last year. He is married to an American citizen.

But the administration says he still can be expelled.

“Under the Immigration and Nationality Act the secretary of state has the right to revoke a green card or a visa for individuals who are adversarial to the foreign policy and national security interests” of the U.S., Leavitt told reporters Tuesday.

The reality is more complicated, legal scholars say. The provision the White House is using – Section 237 (a)(4)(C) - is rarely invoked, requires extensive judicial review and is intended for unusual cases when someone’s presence in the U.S. could cause diplomatic turmoil.

“The deportation has to have some seriousness to it,” said Richard Boswell, a University of California San Francisco law professor whose work often focuses on immigration. “The burden is on the government” to show the person should be deported.

Scholars often point back to the Clinton administration for a recent, high-profile example.

Mario Ruiz Massieu was a former deputy attorney general in Mexico when he was arrested in 1995 for trying to leave the U.S. with \$26,000 in undeclared cash. Then-Secretary of State Warren Christopher said that not deporting Ruiz-Massieu “would jeopardize our ability to work with Mexico on law enforcement

matters.”

When else has the act been invoked?

-Under Section 212(f) , the president may block entry of “any aliens or class of aliens into the United States” whose presence would be “detrimental to the interests of the United States.” Donald Trump used that broad language to impose a travel ban on people from several Muslim-majority countries during his first term and, on the first day of his second term, laid groundwork for a renewed travel ban. His advisers are expected to make recommendations later this month.

-In late February, Noem said in a statement she would “fully enforce the Immigration and Nationality Act,” and would require anyone living in the U.S. illegally to register with the federal government, with those who don’t facing fines, imprisonment or both.

- Joe Biden used the act’s humanitarian parole provision more than any president to allow temporarily allow people into the U.S. from countries including Ukraine, Afghanistan, Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela. Specifically, it allows the president to admit anyone “on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit.” The Trump administration is facing a lawsuit for ending the long-standing legal tool.

Republicans in Florida’s Capitol restart push to lower the gun-buying age to 18

By KATE PAYNE Associated Press/Report for America

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Gun rights advocates have fought to overturn a Florida law banning gun purchases by people under 21 ever since the day the measure was signed in 2018 following the Parkland school shooting, one of the deadliest mass killings in the U.S.

With new leadership in Florida’s Republican-controlled Capitol, conservative lawmakers appear to have their best chance in years of persuading colleagues to roll back the law. A bill to lower the state’s gun-buying age to 18 would ensure “all adult citizens in Florida are afforded their full Second Amendment rights,” state Rep. Michelle Salzman said Wednesday as the measure she’s sponsoring cleared its first committee stop in the House.

Here’s what to know about the bill:

Why did gun laws change after the Parkland shooting?

The law was passed following an extraordinary lobbying effort by survivors and family members of the 17 people killed in the Parkland shooting, which was carried out by a former student who was 19 years old and legally able to buy guns under the state’s laws at the time.

In the days after the Feb. 14 massacre, survivors and family members of victims descended on the state Capitol to demand action from lawmakers, who were in the middle of their regular session. Some legislative leaders traveled to the crime scene, seeing with their own eyes the carnage in the classrooms.

Weeks after the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, then-Gov. Rick Scott signed a package of gun safety measures surrounded by Parkland families, including the provision raising the gun-buying age from 18 to 21.

Within hours, the National Rifle Association filed suit to challenge the law. That dispute is still playing out in federal court.

Is Florida going to change its gun laws?

Florida has long been on the frontier of expanding gun rights. But gun control advocates — and some key Republicans — have resisted rolling back the restrictions.

The measure has the backing of Florida House Speaker Daniel Perez and Gov. Ron DeSantis. If 18-year-olds are mature enough to risk their lives serving in the military overseas, the governor says, they should have the right to buy guns.

“They come home and they can’t even buy a rifle to go hunt,” DeSantis told reporters. “Are you an adult or not?”

The measure has historically faced more resistance in the state Senate. The chamber’s new president,

Republican Ben Albritton, has aligned with law enforcement officers in opposing the rollback of other gun restrictions, but has said he's considering lowering the gun-buying age.

"I'm thinking through that," Albritton said of the proposal earlier this month. "Certainly the most important thing that I don't want to do is make a mistake."

Who is opposed to lowering the gun buying age?

The Parkland shooting left a lasting impact on schools across the state and galvanized a new generation of Florida activists and elected officials.

"Have we forgotten the pain of Parkland?" asked Fiona Shannon, a volunteer with the League of Women Voters Seminole County who testified against the bill Wednesday.

Democratic Rep. Robin Bartleman, who at the time of the shooting was a school board member in the county that's home to Parkland, called the bill "a slap in the face" to the families who fought for the law.

"We owe it to these families not to go backwards," Bartleman said. "We can't do this. It's wrong."

For the past two years, then-Senate President Kathleen Passidomo, a Republican, made clear that lowering the gun-buying age was a "non-starter" in her chamber. While a bill was passed by the full House during the last two sessions, no companion bills were filed in the Senate.

What are Florida lawmakers proposing now?

Legislators in the House and Senate have filed bills lowering the minimum age for buying a gun to 18.

If the measure passes, Floridians aged 18 and older would be able to purchase a long gun, such as a rifle or shotgun, from a federally licensed seller or in a private sale. Under federal law, those under 21 would still be barred from buying a handgun from a licensed dealer.

In January, a U.S. appeals court ruled against the federal law that young adults must be 21 to buy handguns, finding it violated the Second Amendment.

Wall Street rises after encouraging inflation data, but the trade war keeps knocking stocks around

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stock indexes rose Wednesday after Wall Street got some relief from an encouraging inflation update. But even on a rare up day for the market, President Donald Trump's trade war still knocked stocks around.

The S&P 500 gained 0.5% after skidding between an early gain of 1.3% and a later loss. The unsettled trading came a day after the index briefly fell more than 10% below its all-time high set last month.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average also pinballed sharply, careening between a rise of 287 points and a drop of 423. It ended with a loss of 82 points, or 0.2%, while the Nasdaq composite climbed 1.2%.

The inflation report, which showed overall prices rose less for U.S. consumers last month than economists expected, helped companies in the artificial-intelligence industry lead the way. It's a bounce back after AI stocks got crushed recently by worries their prices had gone too stratospheric in the market's run to record after record in recent years.

Nvidia climbed 6.4% to trim its loss for the year so far to 13.8%. Server-maker Super Micro Computer rose 4%, and GE Vernova, which is helping to power AI data centers, gained 5.1%.

Elon Musk's Tesla, whose price had more than halved since mid-December, rallied 7.6% for its first back-to-back gain in nearly a month.

Even with such gains, though, more stocks in the S&P 500 fell than rose. Among the hardest hit were businesses that could be set to feel pain because of Trump's trade war.

Brown-Forman, the company behind Jack Daniel's whiskey, tumbled 5.1%, and Harley-Davidson sank 5.7%.

U.S. bourbon and motorcycles are just two of the products the European Union is targeting with its own tariffs announced on U.S. products. The moves were in response to Trump's 25% tariffs on steel and aluminum that kicked in earlier in the day.

Canada also hit back with tariffs announced on U.S. tools, sports equipment and other products.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 59 of 75

"We deeply regret this measure," European Union President Ursula von der Leyen said. "Tariffs are taxes. They are bad for business, and worse for consumers."

The question hanging over Wall Street is how much pain Trump will let the economy endure through tariffs and other policies. He's said he wants manufacturing jobs back in the United States, along with a smaller U.S. government workforce, more deportations and other things.

Even if Trump ultimately goes with milder tariffs, damage could still be done. The dizzying barrage of on-again, off-again announcements on tariffs has already begun sapping confidence among U.S. consumers and businesses by ramping up uncertainty. That could cause U.S. households and businesses to pull back on spending, which would hurt the economy.

On Tuesday, for example, Trump said he would double tariffs announced on Canadian steel and aluminum, only to walk it back later in the day after a Canadian province pledged to drop a retaliatory measure that had incensed Trump.

Several U.S. businesses have said they've already begun seeing a change in behavior among their customers.

Delta Air Lines sank 3% to compound its drop of 7.3% from the prior day, when the carrier said it's seeing demand weaken for close-in bookings for its flights.

Casey's General Stores, the Ankeny, Iowa-based company that runs nearly 2,900 convenience stores in 20 states, offered some encouragement. It reported stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected thanks in part to strength for sales of hot sandwiches and fuel. It also kept steady its forecast for upcoming revenue this year.

Casey's stock rose 6.2%.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 27.23 points to 5,599.30. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 82.55 to 41,350.93, and the Nasdaq composite jumped 212.35 to 17,648.45.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rose across much of Europe following mixed sessions in Asia.

In the bond market, Treasury yields edged up to regain more of their losses from recent months sparked by worries about the U.S. economy's strength. The 10-year Treasury rose to 4.31% from 4.28% late Tuesday and from 4.16% at the start of last week.

Wednesday's better-than-expected inflation report gave some encouragement when worries are high that Trump's tariffs could drive prices even higher for U.S. households after U.S. importers pass on the costs to their customers.

It's also helpful for the Federal Reserve, which had been cutting interest rates last year to boost the economy before pausing this year, partly because of concerns about stubbornly high inflation.

Worries had been rising about a worst-case scenario for the economy and for the Fed, where economic growth stagnates but inflation remains high. The Fed has no good tool to fix such "stagflation" because lower interest rates can push inflation higher.

"Trends that would suggest a cold economy and hot inflation are still in the early stages, but uncertainty remains high," according to Phil Segner, senior research analyst at Leuthold.

Or, as Brian Jacobsen, chief economist at Annex Wealth Management, said: "The tariff story is just beginning."

USDA ends program that helped schools serve food from local farmers

By ANNIE MA AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Agriculture Department is ending two pandemic-era programs that provided more than \$1 billion for schools and food banks to purchase food from local farmers and producers.

About \$660 million of that went to schools and childcare centers to buy food for meals through the Local Foods for Schools program. A separate program provided money to food banks.

In Maine, the money allowed the coastal RSU 23 school district to buy food directly from fisherman,

dairy producers and farmers for school meals, said Caroline Trinder, the district's food and nutrition services director.

"I think everyone can say that they want kids at school to receive the healthiest meals possible," Trinder said. "It's the least processed, and we're helping our local economy, we're helping farmers that may be the parents of our students."

The cuts will hurt school districts with "chronically underfunded" school meal budgets, said Shannon Gleave, president of the School Nutrition Association.

"In addition to losing the benefits for our kids, this loss of funds is a huge blow to community farmers and ranchers and is detrimental to school meal programs struggling to manage rising food and labor costs," Gleave said in a statement.

USDA said the programs are a legacy of the pandemic and no longer supported the agency's priorities.

"The COVID era is over — USDA's approach to nutrition programs will reflect that reality moving forward," a USDA spokesperson said in a statement.

Massachusetts received roughly \$12 million in federal funding for school districts and childcare programs to buy food from local producers.

"The signaling that's coming out of Washington in recent weeks, it's obviously deeply disappointing," said Patrick Tutwiler, the state's education secretary. "There's clear misalignment around what is important and what matters. We are seeing this cut of the LFS program as a first step towards deeper cuts."

School nutrition directors are bracing for potential rollbacks to programs that expanded funding for school meals, which for some children can be their only reliable source of food.

Proposed spending cuts to fund Republican's tax bill include raising the poverty level needed for schools to provide universal free meals without an application. Restricting eligibility for food assistance programs and requiring income verification for free or reduced price school meals, two proposals for cutting costs, would also likely cut out eligible families from accessing food, the School Nutrition Association said.

How Mahmoud Khalil became the face of Trump's crackdown on campus protests

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When protests over the Israel-Hamas war took root on Columbia University's campus last spring, Mahmoud Khalil became a familiar, outspoken figure in a student movement that soon spread to other U.S. colleges.

The international-affairs graduate student was a fixture in and around the protest encampment on Columbia's Manhattan campus, serving as a spokesperson and negotiator for demonstrators who deplored Israel's military campaign in Gaza and pressed the Ivy League school to cut financial ties with Israel and companies that supported the war.

"We want to be visible," Khalil said last April.

Now that visibility has helped make him the face of President Donald Trump's drive to punish what he calls antisemitic and "anti-American" campus protests. In the first publicly known arrest of the crackdown, federal immigration agents took Khalil, a legal U.S. resident married to an American citizen, from his apartment Saturday and held him for potential deportation.

To Trump and his administration, Khalil's arrest is an opening move in a campaign to rid the country of foreign students accused of helping to make American campuses intimidating territory for Jewish students. To civil rights advocates and Khalil's lawyers, his detention is an assault on free speech and an attempt to suppress pro-Palestinian views.

And to some who have worked alongside the 30-year-old graduate student at the protests and elsewhere, his arrest is a startling takedown of someone with diplomatic experience that he brought to bear in the charged days of the demonstrations.

"You couldn't meet a kinder or nicer person to work with. He's thoughtful. He's intelligent. He's conscientious," said former British diplomat Andrew Waller, a colleague of Khalil's from the U.K.'s Beirut-based

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 61 of 75

embassy for Syria.

Khalil worked there from about 2018 to 2022, running a scholarship fund and supporting the U.K.'s diplomatic engagement with Syria, Waller said, noting that the role required an extensive background check.

He said the two spoke a few weeks ago, and Khalil was focused on becoming a father — his wife is pregnant — and on strife in Syria, where he was born and raised in a Palestinian family. Khalil also expressed concern that he might be targeted by the new Trump administration, Waller said.

Flight from civil war to the halls of academia

After finishing high school in Syria, Khalil was on track to study aviation engineering there, but his plans were upended by the country's civil war, he wrote in a 2017 essay for an international education charity. He recounted that he left for Beirut, got a job with an education nonprofit that helps Syrian children, and went to a Lebanese university.

"Where would I be if, like countless other Syrian refugees before me, I could not get a scholarship, could not work, or worst of all, could not leave Syria in the depths of the ongoing war?" he wondered in the essay.

Khalil earned a bachelor's degree in computer science and decided to continue his studies at Columbia, according to an online bio for a 2020 international development conference where he was listed as a speaker.

Then, last spring, protests over the war in Gaza erupted at Columbia, where demonstrators set up tents in the middle of campus and took over an administration building. A wave of similar demonstrations spread to some other colleges around the country.

Khalil served as a prominent student mediator on behalf of pro-Palestinian activists and Muslim students concerned for their safety.

But images of his maskless face at protests, along with his willingness to share his name with reporters, quickly made him a target among those who saw antisemitism in the demonstrations.

"I'm an easy scapegoat for them to say, 'Look at this Palestinian who never wore a mask and was active in the school protests,'" Khalil told an Associated Press reporter in an interview last week.

The Columbia Jewish Alumni Association, meanwhile, has called Khalil a "ringleader of the chaos" on campus. A new Columbia disciplinary committee has investigated various allegations against Khalil, most recently whether he violated a university anti-harassment policy by calling a dean "genocidal."

Targeted by the Trump administration

Khalil is now being held in a federal detention complex in Louisiana.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Tuesday that Khalil should be deported because he organized "protests that not only disrupted college campus classes and harassed Jewish American students and made them feel unsafe on their own college campus, but also distributed pro-Hamas propaganda." The U.S. government has designated Hamas, the militant group that controls Gaza, as a terrorist organization.

Those who protested alongside Khalil dispute that account.

"If someone distributed something at a protest that has nothing to do with the group, they attribute it to him for having his face at the action," said Maryan Alwan, a Columbia University senior.

She described Khalil as mild-mannered and gifted at navigating internal disputes among student protesters. Outside of activism, she said he enjoyed cooking and playing drums in Columbia's Arab Music Ensemble.

Columbia protest leaders have insisted they're anti-war, not antisemitic, and the demonstrations include some Jewish students and groups.

Still, a Columbia task force on antisemitism found "serious and pervasive" problems with the climate on campus. The group said in a report that during the demonstrations, Jews and Israelis had been verbally abused, humiliated in classes and ostracized from student groups.

Khalil finished his master's degree studies in December and has been scheduled to receive his degree in May, his lawyers said in a court filing.

Meanwhile, he and his wife are expecting their first child. She is eight months pregnant, according to his attorneys. While not giving her name, they released a statement in which she implored the public "to see Mahmoud through my eyes as a loving husband" and father-to-be.

"I need your help to bring Mahmoud home, so he is here beside me, holding my hand in the delivery room," she wrote.

Pressed to accept a ceasefire in Ukraine, Putin seems likely to seek his own conditions

By The Associated Press undefined

By signaling its openness to a ceasefire, Ukraine has handed the Kremlin a difficult challenge at a time when the Russian military has the upper hand in the war: Should Moscow accept a truce and abandon hopes of making new gains, or should it reject the offer and risk derailing a cautious rapprochement with Washington?

Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly ruled out a temporary break in hostilities, saying it would only benefit Ukraine and its Western allies by letting them replenish their arsenals. He has insisted Moscow wants a comprehensive agreement that would ensure a lasting settlement.

The Kremlin responded cautiously to the news of Ukraine accepting the U.S.-proposed truce during Tuesday's talks in Saudi Arabia, saying that it needs to know details of the discussions before expressing its view.

The careful approach reflects Putin's awareness of the risk that a blunt rejection of the offer could upset tentative efforts to normalize Russia-U.S. ties.

Observers say that instead of an outright rejection, Putin will likely propose linking the truce to certain conditions that would protect Moscow's interests.

Why would the Kremlin oppose a ceasefire?

The Russian military held the battlefield initiative last year, making slow but steady gains along several sections of the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line. The tempo of Russian advances accelerated in the fall, when Moscow's forces captured the most territory since the start of the war.

Ukraine has sought to retake the initiative with a surprise foray into Russia's Kursk region that began in August, seeking to distract Moscow's forces from their offensive in eastern Ukraine and make gains that potentially could be exchanged for Russia-occupied areas in peace talks. The incursion, however, has diverted Ukrainian resources from defending the Donetsk region in the east and it failed to stem Russian advances there. Now Ukrainian forces are on the verge of losing their last remaining bridgehead in Kursk under the brunt of a swift Russian counteroffensive.

Moscow also ravaged Ukrainian energy infrastructure with waves of missiles and drones, destroying much of its power-generating capacity.

Putin has repeatedly said a temporary halt to hostilities at a time when Russian forces firmly hold the initiative would only allow exhausted Ukrainian troops a break to rest and rearm.

"As for the settlement of the situation, I would like to emphasize that it shouldn't be aimed at a brief truce — some sort of a break for regrouping troops and rearmament in order to continue the conflict — but a long-term peace," Putin has said.

Moscow has made it clear it wouldn't accept any troops from NATO members as monitors under a prospective peace deal.

What does Putin want?

Putin key goals remain what he declared when he launched the full-scale invasion on Feb. 24, 2022: Ukraine renounce joining NATO, sharply cut its army, and protect Russian language and culture to keep the country in Moscow's orbit. On top of that, he now wants Kyiv to withdraw its forces from the four regions Moscow has seized but doesn't fully control.

Russian officials also have said that any prospective peace deal should involve unfreezing Russian assets in the West and lifting other U.S. and European Union sanctions. The Trump administration has put a potential sanctions relief on the table.

Along with that, Putin has repeatedly emphasized the need to "remove the root causes of the crisis," a reference to the Kremlin's demand to roll back a NATO military buildup near Russian borders it describes as a major threat to its security.

The Kremlin leader has argued that Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whose term expired last year, lacks the legitimacy to sign a peace deal. Kyiv maintains that elections are impossible to hold amid

a war. U.S. President Donald Trump has spoken of the need for Ukraine to hold an election in comments that echoed Moscow's view.

What more could Moscow demand?

Some observers noted that instead of an outright rejection of the proposed truce, Putin could put forward several conditions.

Pro-Kremlin commentator Sergei Markov suggested Moscow could agree to a truce if Ukraine's allies halt arms supplies to Kyiv. The U.S. said it resumed weapons shipments and intelligence sharing with Kyiv after it agreed to a truce Tuesday in Saudi Arabia.

"Russia could say 'yes, but' to a ceasefire offer, accepting a 30-day truce on condition that an embargo is imposed on arms supplies to Ukraine," Markov wrote.

Another Moscow wish is a presidential election in Ukraine, which would be possible after Ukraine lifts martial law.

"Peace would allow Russia to influence Ukrainian politics and use peaceful means to ensure friendly relations," Markov said.

Moscow-based foreign policy expert Alexei Naumov also predicted that Russia would likely accept the ceasefire offer if it leads to an election in Ukraine.

"There is a paradox in these talks and peace initiatives – Ukraine and Russia are both vying for Donald Trump's attention and seeking to improve their positions with his help," Naumov said in a commentary.

Sam Greene of the Washington-based Center for European Policy Analysis said it would be hard to imagine Putin saying a categorical "no" to the ceasefire proposal, adding that the Kremlin leader "has already achieved in some ways more through this negotiation process ... than he achieved in a long time on the battlefield," describing a brief halt in the U.S. military assistance to Ukraine and the talk about rolling back sanctions as "big wins" for Russia.

Putin's statements against a temporary truce mean simply that Russia is "not likely to agree to a ceasefire without extracting various things along the way," Greene said.

"The sort of ceasefire that it might be interested in is quite clearly not the kind of ceasefire that the Ukrainians or the Europeans might be interested in, although the Americans may be more malleable on that," he added.

"Moscow has every reason to believe that ... if this process lands anywhere, it will land in a place that is more or less on Russia's terms, as long as the process is being driven by Washington," Greene said.

Egg prices continue to hit records as Easter and Passover approach, but some relief may be coming

By MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Egg prices again reached a record high in February, as the bird flu continues to run rampant and Easter and Passover approach.

The latest monthly Consumer Price Index showed a dozen Grade A eggs cost an average of \$5.90 in U.S. cities in February, up 10.4% from a year ago. That eclipsed January's record-high price of \$4.95.

Avian flu has forced farmers to slaughter more than 166 million birds, mostly egg-laying chickens. Just since the start of the year, more than 30 million egg layers have been killed.

If prices remain high, it will be third year in a row consumers have faced sticker shock ahead of Easter on April 20 and Passover, which starts on the evening of April 12, both occasions in which eggs play prominent roles.

The price had consistently been below \$2 a dozen for decades before the disease struck. The U.S. Department of Agriculture expects egg prices to rise 41% this year over last year's average of \$3.17 per dozen.

But there may be light at the end of the tunnel. The USDA reported last week that egg shortages are easing and wholesale prices are dropping, which might provide relief on the retail side before this year's late Easter, which is three weeks later than last year. It said there had been no major bird flu outbreak for two weeks.

"Shoppers have begun to see shell egg offerings in the dairy case becoming more reliable although retail price levels have yet to adjust and remain off-putting to many," the USDA wrote in the March 7 report.

David Anderson, a professor and extension economist for livestock and food marketing at Texas A&M University, said wholesale figures dropping is a good sign that prices could go down as shoppers react to the high prices by buying fewer eggs.

"What that should tell us is things are easing a little bit in terms of prices," he said. "So going forward, the next CPI report may very well indicate falling egg prices."

However, he doesn't expect lasting changes until bird stock can be replenished and production can be replaced.

"Record high prices is a market signal to producers to produce more, but it takes time to be able to produce more, and we just haven't had enough time for that to happen yet," he said. "But I do think it's going to happen. But it's going to take some more months to get there."

Emily Metz, president and CEO of the American Egg Board, said wholesale prices dropping is good news, but noted that increased demand for Easter could drive a temporary increase in prices.

"In addition, egg farmers are closely watching spring migration of wild birds, recognizing that wild birds are a leading cause of the spread of this virus and pose a great and ongoing threat to egg-laying flocks," she said.

Advocacy groups and others have also called for a probe into whether egg producers have used the avian flu to price gouge. But egg producers say the avian flu is solely behind the elevated prices.

Meanwhile, restaurants have added surcharges and made other changes to offset the cost of eggs.

The Trump administration has unveiled a plan to combat bird flu, including a \$500 million investment to help farmers bolster biosecurity measures, \$400 million in additional aid for farmers whose flocks have been impacted by avian flu, and \$100 million to research and potentially develop vaccines and therapeutics for U.S. chicken flocks, among other measures. But it will likely take a while for that plan to make an impact.

Tiger Woods faces another injury and another lost year. Has golf seen the last of him?

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Golf without Tiger Woods was inevitable simply because of age.

He turns 50 at the end of this year and once leaned on the adage that "Father Time remains undefeated." But for Woods, it has been the mother lode of injuries that is keeping him from going out on his own terms.

The latest was revealed in a social media post saying he had ruptured his left Achilles tendon and had surgery Tuesday — the minimally invasive variety, but one that keeps him out of the Masters next month and likely everything else the rest of the year.

"It sucks," Rory McIlroy said Wednesday at The Players Championship. "He doesn't have much luck when it comes to injuries and his body. Hoping he's in good spirits and hoping he's OK. We obviously won't see him play golf this year, and hopefully we see him maybe play in 2026."

Everything is "maybe" with Woods, the player who made golf cool to watch, who caused TV ratings to spike and prize money to soar, who delivered a level of dominance measured not only by his 15 majors and 82 titles on the PGA Tour but the fact that he had no lasting rival — until the injuries and surgeries began to accumulate.

His mother, Kultida, died last month and Woods withdrew from the Genesis Invitational as he coped with the loss. He chose not to be at The Players Championship, the final year of his exemption from winning the 2019 Masters.

"As I began to ramp up my own training and practice at home, I felt a sharp pain in my left Achilles, which was deemed to be ruptured," he said in the post.

Another lost year for a player running out of time. The list of injuries is staggering.

The left knee. The lower back. Two stress fractures in his left tibia while winning the 2008 U.S. Open. An injury to his right Achilles tendon while running. An injury to his left Achilles tendon from hitting a shot

off an awkward lie at the Masters.

Six back surgeries, the most significant to fuse his lower back in 2017. A car crash on a coastal road outside Los Angeles that so badly damaged his right leg and ankle that he said doctors contemplated amputation. Plantar fasciitis. A strained oblique. Surgery to fuse his right ankle.

He kept coming back, and he remained a must-see attraction even though his appearance were largely limited to the majors. He has played eight majors since the 2021 car crash and only twice finished all 72 holes — both at the Masters. He was never in hunt at either one.

There was a time when Woods was on pace to break the gold standard in golf — 18 majors won by Jack Nicklaus — until that looked more unlikely with each injury.

“If he’d have been healthy, I think he would have got it,” Nicklaus said in an interview two weeks ago with Golf Channel. “But he didn’t remain healthy. We all have injuries, we all have different things that change things. Tiger had his problems. I feel bad for him.”

Nicklaus recalled telling Woods: “Nobody wants their records to be broken. But I don’t want it not to be broken because you don’t have the ability to do so. I feel bad for him on that.”

Woods won his last major at the 2019 Masters, an astonishing victory considering it was only two years earlier that he struggled to walk up the stairs to the Masters Club dinner. And then he won later in the year in Japan for his record-tying 82nd title on the PGA Tour.

That was his last win. He hasn’t come close since.

What keeps him going? What is there left to prove? That’s a question all golfers face, whether it’s age or injury. Few other sports offer such longevity.

McIlroy turns 36 in May — this is his 18th year as a pro. He knows the day is coming, and he has mapped out an exit strategy.

“Whenever I feel like the time is right, I’ll have no problem moving aside and letting the next generation do their thing,” McIlroy said. “I’d also like to walk away with a little bit left in the tank. I don’t want to be out there embarrassing myself. I’d like to walk away maybe a little before I should, put it that way.

“I think if you can come to terms with that and walk away on your own terms, then that’s a good thing.”

Nicklaus never wanted to be a ceremonial golfer. He played in all the majors for 12 years after winning his last one at the 1986 Masters.

Has golf seen the last of Woods? He is exempt for life at the Masters and PGA Championship. He can play the British Open for 10 more years. He can walk away on his own terms, but his health will have a big say in that.

McIlroy was asked if he could ever see Woods being competitive again. That’s what so many fans want to see — hope to see — in the absence of any evidence the last five years.

“He’ll try — I know he’ll try,” McIlroy said. “But that’s a question for him, not for me. I obviously don’t know what’s in his head. But judging by prior behavior, he’ll definitely try.”

Archaeologists uncover the oldest known partial face fossil of a human ancestor in western Europe

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A fossil of a partial face from a human ancestor is the oldest in western Europe, archaeologists reported Wednesday.

The incomplete skull — a section of the left cheek bone and upper jaw — was found in northern Spain in 2022. The fossil is between 1.1 million and 1.4 million years old, according to research published in the journal *Nature*.

“The fossil is exciting,” said Eric Delson, a paleontologist at the American Museum of Natural History, who was not involved in the study. “It’s the first time we have significant remains older than 1 million years old in western Europe.”

A collection of older fossils from early human ancestors was previously found in Georgia, near the crossroads of eastern Europe and Asia. Those are estimated to be 1.8 million years old.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 66 of 75

The Spanish fossil is the first evidence that clearly shows human ancestors “were taking excursions into Europe” at that time, said Rick Potts, director of the Smithsonian’s Human Origins Program.

But there is not yet evidence that the earliest arrivals persisted there long, he said. “They may get to a new location and then die out,” said Potts, who had no role in the study.

The partial skull bears many similarities to *Homo erectus*, but there are also some anatomical differences, said study co-author Rosa Huguet, an archaeologist at the Catalan Institute of Human Paleoecology and Social Evolution in Tarragona, Spain.

Homo erectus arose around 2 million years ago and moved from Africa to regions of Asia and Europe, with the last individuals dying out around 100,000 years ago, said Potts.

It can be challenging to identify which group of early humans a fossil find belongs to if there’s only a single fragment versus many bones that show a range of features, said University of Zurich paleoanthropologist Christoph Zollikofer, who was not involved in the study.

The same cave complex in Spain’s Atapuerca Mountains where the new fossil was found also previously yielded other significant clues to the ancient human past. Researchers working in the region have also found more recent fossils from Neanderthals and early *Homo sapiens*.

US inflation cooled last month, though trade war threatens to lift prices

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. inflation slowed last month for the first time since September and a measure of underlying inflation fell to a four-year low, even as widespread tariffs threaten to send prices higher.

The consumer price index increased 2.8% in February from a year ago, Wednesday’s report from the Labor Department showed, down from 3% the previous month. Core prices, which exclude the volatile food and energy categories, rose 3.1% from a year earlier, down from 3.3% in January. The core figure is the lowest since April 2021.

The declines were greater than economists expected, according to a survey by data provider FactSet. Yet inflation remains above the Federal Reserve’s 2% target. And most economists expect inflation will remain elevated this year as Trump’s tariffs kick in.

The report “is encouraging news, though it doesn’t tell us much about where inflation is headed,” said Oren Klachkin, Nationwide Financial Markets economist, in an email. “With tariffs possibly set to push goods prices higher ... we see inflation risks as tilted to the upside.”

On a monthly basis, inflation also came in much lower than expected. Consumer prices rose 0.2% in February from the previous month, down from a big 0.5% jump in January. And core prices rose just 0.2%, below the 0.4% increase in January. Economists watch core prices because they are typically a better guide to inflation’s future path.

A sharp drop in air fares, which fell 4% just in February from the previous month, helped bring down overall inflation. Rental price increases also slowed and the costs of hotel rooms and car insurance rose much more slowly in February than the previous month. The price of new cars fell last month compared with January.

Grocery prices were unchanged last month from January, bringing some relief to consumers grappling with a 25% jump in grocery prices from four years ago. The cost of eggs, however, jumped 10.4% in February from the previous month and are nearly 60% more expensive than a year ago.

Avian flu has forced farmers to slaughter more than 160 million birds, including 30 million in January. Average egg prices hit \$5.90 a dozen nationwide in February, a record high. The price had consistently been below \$2 a dozen for decades before the disease struck.

How big an impact Trump’s tariffs will have on prices remains unclear, for now. The duties have roiled financial markets and could sharply slow the economy, and some analysts see the odds of a recession rising.

On Wednesday, Trump raised U.S. import taxes on all steel and aluminum imports to 25% each. Some companies that use steel are already seeing their costs rise, and depending on how long they stay in

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 67 of 75

place, they could lift prices for cars, appliances, and electronics. The European Union responded in kind almost immediately to the steel and aluminum duties, announcing retaliatory trade action with new tariffs on U.S. industrial and farm products.

The White House has also imposed 25% duties on all imports from Canada and Mexico, with a 10% rate for oil from Canada. Most of those tariffs have been suspended until early April.

However, Canada will announce retaliatory tariffs that add up to \$21 billion in U.S. dollars, according to a senior Canadian government official who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak before the announcement.

Trump has also pledged to impose reciprocal tariffs on any country with duties on U.S. exports on April 2. Economists at the Yale Budget Lab calculate that those duties could boost the average U.S. tariff rate to its highest level since 1937, and cost the average household as much as \$3,400.

That has sent business owners scrambling.

"It does put a lot of businesses like ours in a tough spot," said Ethan Frisch, co-CEO of the New York spice company Burlap & Barrel. "We're going to have to pass along (the cost) to the consumer. We can't afford to eat that cost ourselves as a small business. And we certainly can't pass it back to a farmer in central Mexico. So, it's going to make the product more expensive, which is then in turn going to slow down sales."

Performance expectations for 2025 have already been moderated by some of the largest U.S. retailers.

Walmart CFO John David Rainey said last month that some product categories will have price increases.

Last week, Target CEO Brian Cornell said produce prices, including Mexican avocados, could rise soon industrywide and prices for other goods are likely to follow. Best Buy's CEO Corie Barry said she's expecting higher prices from suppliers, with China and Mexico being primary sources for its products.

Tariffs were a big topic at the recent annual Toy Fair as nearly 80% of the toys sold in the U.S. are sourced from China. Price increases of 15% to 20% are expected on games, dolls, cars, said Greg Ahearn, president and CEO of The Toy Association, said

RFK Jr. is targeting ultraprocessed foods. What are they, and are they bad for you?

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

In the Trump administration's quest to "Make America Healthy Again," there may be no bigger target than ultraprocessed foods.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the nation's new health secretary, has cited "highly chemically processed foods" as a chief culprit behind an epidemic of chronic disease in the U.S., including ailments such as obesity, diabetes and autoimmune disorders.

Such foods are "poisoning" people, particularly children, Kennedy said during Senate confirmation hearings. He has vowed to work to remove such foods from federal programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

"I will do everything in my power to put the health of Americans back on track," he told lawmakers.

Key to that goal, however, could be making sure that consumers understand basic facts about ultraprocessed foods and the role they play in daily meals.

From sugary cereals at breakfast to frozen pizzas at dinner, plus in-between snacks of potato chips, sodas and ice cream, ultraprocessed foods make up about 60% of the U.S. diet. For kids and teens, it's even higher — about two-thirds of what they eat.

That's concerning because ultraprocessed foods have been linked to a host of negative health effects, from obesity and diabetes to heart disease, depression, dementia and more. One recent study suggested that eating these foods may raise the risk of early death.

Nutrition science is tricky, though, and most research so far has found connections, not proof, regarding the health consequences of these foods.

Food manufacturers argue that processing boosts food safety and supplies and offers a cheap, conve-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 68 of 75

nient way to provide a diverse and nutritious diet.

Even if the science were clear, it's hard to know what practical advice to give when ultraprocessed foods account for what one study estimates is more than 70% of the U.S. food supply.

The Associated Press asked several nutrition experts and here's what they said:

What are ultraprocessed foods?

Most foods are processed, whether it's by freezing, grinding, fermentation, pasteurization or other means. In 2009, Brazilian epidemiologist Carlos Monteiro and colleagues first proposed a system that classifies foods according to the amount of processing they undergo, not by nutrient content.

At the top of the four-tier scale are foods created through industrial processes and with ingredients such as additives, colors and preservatives that you couldn't duplicate in a home kitchen, said Kevin Hall, a researcher who focuses on metabolism and diet at the National Institutes of Health.

"These are most, but not all, of the packaged foods you see," Hall said.

Such foods are often made to be both cheap and irresistibly delicious, said Dr. Neena Prasad, director of the Bloomberg Philanthropies' Food Policy Program.

"They have just the right combination of sugar, salt and fat and you just can't stop eating them," Prasad said

However, the level of processing alone doesn't determine whether a food is unhealthy or not, Hall noted. Whole-grain bread, yogurt, tofu and infant formula are all highly processed, for instance, but they're also nutritious.

Are ultraprocessed foods harmful?

Here's the tricky part. Many studies suggest that diets high in such foods are linked to negative health outcomes. But these kinds of studies can't say whether the foods themselves are the cause of the negative effects — or whether there's something else about the people who eat these foods that might be responsible.

Ultraprocessed foods, as a group, tend to have higher amounts of sodium, saturated fat and sugar, and tend to be lower in fiber and protein. It's not clear whether it's just these nutrients that are driving the effects.

Hall and his colleagues were the first to conduct a small but influential experiment that directly compared the results of eating similar diets made of ultraprocessed versus unprocessed foods.

Published in 2019, the research included 20 adults who went to live at an NIH center for a month. They received diets of ultraprocessed and unprocessed foods matched for calories, sugar, fat, fiber and macronutrients for two weeks each and were told to eat as much as they liked.

When participants ate the diet of ultraprocessed foods, they consumed about 500 calories per day more than when they ate unprocessed foods, researchers found — and they gained an average of about 2 pounds (1 kilogram) during the study period. When they ate only unprocessed foods for the same amount of time, they lost about 2 pounds (1 kilogram).

Hall is conducting a more detailed study now, but the process is slow and costly and results aren't expected until late next year. He and others argue that such definitive research is needed to determine exactly how ultraprocessed foods affect consumption.

"It's better to understand the mechanisms by which they drive the deleterious health consequences, if they're driving them," he said.

Should ultraprocessed foods be regulated?

Some advocates, like Prasad, argue that the large body of research linking ultraprocessed foods to poor health should be more than enough to spur government and industry to change policies. She calls for actions such as increased taxes on sugary drinks, stricter sodium restrictions for manufacturers and cracking down on marketing of such foods to children.

"Do we want to risk our kids getting sicker while we wait for this perfect evidence to emerge?" Prasad said.

Last year, former FDA Commissioner Robert Califf broached the subject, telling a conference of food policy experts that ultraprocessed foods are "one of the most complex things I've ever dealt with."

But, he concluded, "We've got to have the scientific basis and then we've got to follow through." How should consumers manage ultraprocessed foods at home?

In countries like the U.S., it's hard to avoid highly processed foods — and it's not clear which ones should be targeted, said Aviva Musicus, science director for the Center for Science in the Public Interest, which advocates for food policies.

"The range of ultraprocessed foods is just so wide," she said.

Instead, it's better to be mindful of the ingredients in foods. Check the labels and make choices that align with the current dietary guidelines, she suggested.

"We have really good evidence that added sugar is not great for us. We have evidence that high-sodium foods are not great for us," she said. "We have great evidence that fruits and vegetables which are minimally processed are really good for us."

It's important not to vilify certain foods, she added. Many consumers don't have the time or money to cook most meals from scratch.

"Foods should be joyous and delicious and shouldn't involve moral judgment," Musicus said.

Inside the government study trying to understand the health effects of ultraprocessed foods

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

BETHESDA, Md. (AP) — Sam Srisatta, a 20-year-old Florida college student, spent a month living inside a government hospital here last fall, playing video games and allowing scientists to document every morsel of food that went into his mouth.

From big bowls of salad to platters of meatballs and spaghetti sauce, Srisatta noshed his way through a nutrition study aimed at understanding the health effects of ultraprocessed foods, the controversial fare that now accounts for more than 70% of the U.S. food supply. He allowed The Associated Press to tag along for a day.

"Today my lunch was chicken nuggets, some chips, some ketchup," said Srisatta, one of three dozen participants paid \$5,000 each to devote 28 days of their lives to science. "It was pretty fulfilling."

Examining exactly what made those nuggets so satisfying is the goal of the widely anticipated research led by National Institutes of Health nutrition researcher Kevin Hall.

"What we hope to do is figure out what those mechanisms are so that we can better understand that process," Hall said.

Hall's study relies on 24/7 measurements of patients, rather than self-reported data, to investigate whether ultraprocessed foods cause people to eat more calories and gain weight, potentially leading to obesity and other well-documented health problems. And, if they do, how?

At a time when Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has made nutrition and chronic disease a key priority, the answers can't come soon enough.

Kennedy has repeatedly targeted processed foods as the primary culprit behind a range of diseases that afflict Americans, particularly children. He vowed in a Senate confirmation hearing to focus on removing such foods from school lunches for kids because they're "making them sick."

Ultraprocessed foods have exploded in the U.S. and elsewhere in recent decades, just as rates of obesity and other diet-related diseases also rise.

The foods, which are often high in fat, sodium and sugar, are typically cheap, mass-produced and contain added colors and chemicals not found in a home kitchen. Think sugary cereals and potato chips, frozen pizzas, sodas and ice cream.

Studies have linked ultraprocessed foods to negative health effects, but whether it's the actual processing of the foods — rather than the nutrients they contain or something else — remains uncertain.

A small 2019 analysis by Hall and his colleagues found that ultraprocessed foods led participants to eat about 500 calories a day more than when they ate a matched diet of unprocessed foods.

The new study aims to replicate and expand that research — and to test new theories about the effects

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 70 of 75

of ultraprocessed foods. One is that some of the foods contain irresistible combinations of ingredients — fat, sugar, sodium and carbohydrates — that trigger people to eat more. The other is that the foods contain more calories per bite, making it possible to consume more without realizing it.

Teasing out those answers requires the willingness of volunteers like Srisatta and the know-how of health and diet experts who identify, gather and analyze the data behind the estimated multimillion-dollar study.

During his month at NIH, Srisatta sported monitors on his wrist, ankle and waist to track his every movement, and regularly gave up to 14 vials of blood. Once a week, he spent 24 hours inside a metabolic chamber, a tiny room outfitted with sensors to measure how his body was using food, water and air. He was allowed to go outside, but only with supervision to prevent any wayward snacks.

"It doesn't really feel that bad," Srisatta said.

He could eat as much or as little as he liked. The meals wheeled to his room three times a day were crafted to meet the precise requirements of the study, said Sara Turner, the NIH dietitian who designed the food plan. In the basement of the NIH building, a team carefully measured, weighed, sliced and cooked foods before sending them to Srisatta and other participants.

"The challenge is getting all the nutrients to work, but it still needs to be appetizing and look good," Turner said.

Results from the trial are expected later this year, but preliminary results are intriguing. At a scientific conference in November, Hall reported that the first 18 trial participants ate about 1,000 calories a day more of an ultraprocessed diet that was particularly hyperpalatable and energy dense than those who ate minimally processed foods, leading to weight gain.

When those qualities were modified, consumption went down, even if the foods were considered ultraprocessed, Hall said. Data is still being collected from remaining participants and must be completed, analyzed and published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Still, the early results suggest that "you can almost normalize" energy intake, "despite the fact that they're still eating a diet that is more than 80% of calories from ultraprocessed food," Hall told the audience.

Not everyone agrees with Hall's methods, or the implications of his research.

Dr. David Ludwig, an endocrinologist and researcher at Boston Children's Hospital, criticized Hall's 2019 study as "fundamentally flawed by its short duration" — about a month. Scientists have long known that it's possible to get people to eat more or less for brief periods of time, but those effects quickly wane, he said.

"If they were persistent, we would have the answer to obesity," said Ludwig, who has argued for years that consumption of highly processed carbohydrates is the "prime dietary culprit" and focusing on the processing of the foods is "distracting."

He called for larger, better-designed studies lasting a minimum of two months, with "washout" periods separating the effects of one diet from the next. Otherwise, "we waste our energy, we mislead the science," Ludwig said.

Concerns about the short length of the studies may be valid, said Marion Nestle, a nutritionist and food policy expert.

"To resolve that, Hall needs funding to conduct longer studies with more people," she said in an email.

The NIH spends about \$2 billion a year, about 5% of its total budget, on nutrition research, according to Senate documents.

At the same time, the agency cut the capacity of the metabolic unit where investigators conduct such studies, reducing the number of beds that must be shared among researchers. The two participants enrolled now at the center and the two planned for next month are the most Hall can study at any one time, adding months to the research process.

Srisatta, the Florida volunteer who hopes to become an emergency room physician, said participating in the trial left him eager to know more about how processed foods affect human health.

"I mean, I think everyone knows it's better to not eat processed foods, right?" he said. "But having the evidence to back that up in ways that the public can easily digest," is important, he said.

HHS officials didn't respond to questions about Kennedy's intentions regarding nutrition research at NIH.

The agency, like many others in the federal government, is being buffeted by the wave of cost cuts being directed by President Donald Trump and his billionaire aide Elon Musk.

Jerold Mande, a former federal food policy advisor in three administrations, said he supports Kennedy's goals of addressing diet-related diseases. He has pushed a proposal for a 50-bed facility where government nutrition scientists could house and feed enough study volunteers like Srisatta to rigorously determine how specific diets affect human health.

"If you're going to make America healthy again and you're going to address chronic disease, we need better science to do it," Mande said.

The US agency that monitors weather will cut another 1,000 jobs, AP sources say

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration is starting another round of job cuts — this one more than 1,000 — at the nation's weather, ocean and fisheries agency, four people familiar with the matter tell The Associated Press.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on Tuesday began plans to lay off 10% of its current workforce, people inside and outside the agency said, with some of them requesting anonymity due to fear of retribution. The numbers were presented to NOAA employees and managers were asked to submit names of positions for layoffs to agency headquarters, which will then go to NOAA's parent agency, the Department of Commerce, on Wednesday, the people said.

Three former senior NOAA officials — two former political appointees from the Biden administration — who speak regularly with managers at their old agency used the same number for upcoming job cuts: 1,029, 10% of the current 10,290. They talked to multiple people still in NOAA and a current agency worker detailed the cuts that a manager explained to employees.

While most people know about NOAA and its daily weather forecasts, the agency also monitors and warns about hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and tsunamis, manages the country's fisheries, runs marine sanctuaries, provides navigation information to ships and observes changes in the climate and oceans. The agency also plays a role in warning about avalanches and space weather that could damage the electrical grid. It helps respond to disasters, including oil spills.

The new cuts come after earlier rounds of Trump administration firings and encouraged retirements at NOAA, plus the elimination of nearly all new employees last month. After this upcoming round of cuts, NOAA will have eliminated about one out of four jobs since President Donald Trump took office in January.

"This is not government efficiency," said former NOAA Administrator Rick Spinrad. "It is the first steps toward eradication. There is no way to make these kinds of cuts without removing or strongly compromising mission capabilities."

The cuts are being ordered without specific guidance from the Trump administration on how or where, which makes it even worse, Spinrad said.

NOAA spokeswoman Monica Allen said the agency's policy is not to discuss internal personnel matters, but said NOAA will "continue to provide weather information, forecasts and warnings pursuant to our public safety mission."

NOAA has already stopped releasing some weather balloons that gather crucial observations for forecasts in two locations — Albany, New York, and Gray, Maine — because of lack of staffing, the agency said last week.

This is all happening as severe storm system is forecast to move through the central and southern parts of the nation late this week in a multi-day outburst with strong tornadoes, hail and damaging winds expected.

Weather forecasts will worsen and "people are going to start seeing this very quickly," warned former NOAA chief scientist Craig McLean. It will also limit how much commercial fishermen will be able to catch, he said.

On top of all the job losses, cuts in research grants to universities will also make it harder for the U.S. to keep improving its weather forecasts and better monitor what's happening to the planet, McLean said. "People are silently watching the United States decline as a technological leader," McLean said. "America got to the moon, but our weather forecasts won't be the greatest."

Most AAPI adults don't support cutting agencies and want a focus on costs: AP-NORC/AAPI Data poll

By TERRY TANG and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Most Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders do not agree with the strategy of putting entire federal agencies on the chopping block, nor are they broadly on board with mass layoffs of federal workers, according to a new poll.

The survey, released Wednesday from AAPI Data and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, shows that AAPI adults want the government to concentrate more on everyday costs. They feel the federal government should do more to address high prices. About 8 in 10 AAPI adults say the federal government should make health care costs "a high priority," while about 7 in 10 say the same about the cost of food, and roughly 6 in 10 feel similarly about housing.

The poll is part of an ongoing project exploring the views of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, whose views are usually not highlighted in other surveys because of small sample sizes and lack of linguistic representation.

The results come as President Donald Trump continues what his administration says are cost-cutting measures under the newly formed Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, led by adviser Elon Musk. This has included layoffs of thousands of government workers and discussion of dismantling entire agencies like the Department of Education.

About 6 in 10 AAPI adults "strongly" or "somewhat" oppose eliminating entire federal agencies, while about 1 in 10 are in favor, which is slightly below the roughly 2 in 10 U.S. adults overall who expressed the same sentiments in a January AP-NORC poll. About 3 in 10 are neutral, saying they neither favor nor oppose this move. Nearly half oppose eliminating a large number of federal jobs, while about one-quarter are in favor.

The recent cuts have left Celeste Hong, a 56-year-old registered Democrat living in Los Angeles, feeling angry about where the cost-saving efforts have focused.

"Understandably, people don't like inefficiency and waste. Well, I kind of feel the Pentagon is the most wasteful area of our federal government," Hong said.

She thinks the government isn't concentrating enough on lowering the costs of health care, child care and food. Hong worries Trump's tariff policies will end up increasing costs.

"You know, I can afford to absorb an extra cost," said Hong, who is semi-retired. "But, what about the family of four whom you know is living paycheck to paycheck?"

The poll found that — amid nationwide problems that often cannot be solved easily — there are about two-thirds of AAPI adults who think the country is "spending too little" on improvements for the nation's education system. Around 6 in 10 say the same about improving the nation's health, protecting the environment and addressing the problem of homelessness.

There is one area where more AAPI adults see spending as excessive: Like Hong, about half of AAPI adults say "too much" is being spent on the military, armaments and defense.

Stacy Armstrong, 61, and a registered Republican in Bay City, Michigan, is an exception — he thinks the government is not spending enough on defense. He thinks more money should also go toward higher education and health care. Spending inefficiencies, in his view, stem from aid to other countries like Ukraine.

"We need to take care of our own," said Armstrong, who is half Japanese. "I think it's an important thing, but I think there's other countries that can help out, too. We need to at least reduce it drastically, if not cut it off altogether."

But Armstrong, who voted for Trump last year, thinks it's wrong to excise federal agencies. To him, it would be better if the Trump administration could instead work to streamline or consolidate operations. However, he added he's not privy to information the administration has and said every president has to make hard choices to get results.

"I know he's going to do some good things," Armstrong said.

Karthick Ramakrishnan, executive director of AAPI Data and researcher at the University of California, Berkeley, said it's not surprising that some conservative AAPI adults would hold nuanced views on government spending, including opposition to dismantling federal agencies or a desire for greater government spending in some areas.

AAPI adults "tend to be focused on solutions and less so on partisanship," Ramakrishnan said.

At the same time, they may be willing to give the Trump administration a chance to keep trying new strategies to save money. AAPI voters, who are more Democratic-leaning than the electorate as a whole, shifted slightly to the right in November.

"A certain chunk of voters were persuaded that the Republican Party would do a better job on the issues and the economy," Ramakrishnan said.

Kobe Bryant's former players remember his words during their first year of college basketball

By DOUG FEINBERG and JAY COHEN AP Sports Writers

EVANSTON, Ill. (AP) — On the fifth anniversary of that day — when the helicopter crashed, and she lost Coach Bryant, his daughter, Gianna, and so much more — Kat Righeimer became a scholarship player at Northwestern.

The former walk-on, who played for Kobe Bryant with the Mamba Academy, soaked in the moment with her jubilant teammates. The timing, she said, felt like a sign.

"I look at it as like a gift from heaven, kind of from them," Righeimer said. "Just like them telling me keep going, keep pushing."

Keep working. Just like Kobe would have wanted.

Righeimer, 18, is one of six women from the Mamba Academy going through their first experience with college basketball. A proud group that learned so much from Bryant — always Coach Bryant to them — forever connected by a club team and a tragedy that shook their world.

They are spread throughout the country — and right beside each other through text messages of love and support. Emily Eadie is at Princeton, and Annika Jiwani plays for Dartmouth. Annabelle Spotts just finished her first season at the University of Chicago. Mackenly Randolph is at Louisville, and Zoie Lamkin plays for Orange Coast College back home in Southern California.

What lessons they learned from Kobe

As they moved through their first season of college ball, their conversations with Kobe were a frequent companion.

For Lamkin, it was all about repetition. Finish your breakfast, that's what Eadie remembers. For Jiwani, it was the value of mistakes. Righeimer and Spotts focused on the mirror, and improving every day.

"At the end of the day, look at yourself in the mirror and ask yourself, did I get better today?" said Spotts, who is interested in working in sports after graduation, possibly on the business side. "And if not, fix that tomorrow. ... That's one thing that always sticks with me."

Bryant wanted Eadie to clean up her opportunities inside. When the 6-foot forward misses a layup or an easy shot with the Tigers, she often returns to what he used to say.

"In terms of finishing layups, because that was just something easy," she said, "he was just like always just you can't leave them on the table. You can't leave your eggs and bacon on the table. ... Always got to finish your breakfast."

When Lamkin first joined the Mamba team, she wasn't very good with her left hand. So Bryant sug-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 74 of 75

gested brushing her teeth and turning on the TV with her left hand.

"He was like, 'If you're struggling with something ... just continue to practice on it,'" said Lamkin, a 5-foot-7 guard who is averaging 13.3 points this season.

Jiwani had the reverse experience. The 6-foot forward was a lefty growing up, so Bryant would tape her left hand behind her back and have her do everything with her right hand. Jiwani remembers Bryant staying after practice to work with her.

She also remembers the value he placed on mistakes as growth opportunities.

"That's just ... that doesn't even apply to basketball. I think that applies to life for me," said Jiwani, who hopes to become a doctor someday.

As college players they have even more appreciation for Kobe

All the players fondly remember the two sides of Gigi — a fierce competitor on the court, and a light-hearted friend off it.

"She was very bubbly, I can hear her laugh in my head," Righeimer said. "She was always smiling, always cracking jokes. But on the court, it's like a light switch. She becomes like a beast."

Eadie called Gigi "just the hardest worker."

A lot like her father.

The players described Kobe Bryant as extremely detailed, focusing on the small things. He rarely raised his voice. He "just wanted to see us figure it out on our own," Lamkin said.

Righeimer said she doesn't think they touched a basketball at her first practice with Bryant. They just played defense and ran the whole time.

"He taught me to play my game, remember what I do best," Mackenly Randolph said.

The icon part of Bryant's life — all the basketball accolades and worldwide notoriety — that rarely surfaced with the players. For them, he was just coach.

"It never felt like he was this huge celebrity. But when we would go to these tournaments and all these people would come up and crowd our court, that's when it felt real," Eadie said. "I was like, 'Wow, this is a big thing.'"

It's only now, when they look back as college players, that they have a better understanding of what they experienced.

"Throughout the whole time that I knew him he was such a global figure, such an influence on the whole game of basketball and everyone who played it," Spotts said. "I feel like I couldn't fully appreciate and understand it at such a young age. Where now I could have. It was just kind of a surreal thing the whole time."

What they remember about being told of the crash

On Jan. 26, 2020, a helicopter carrying Bryant and his 13-year-old daughter, Gianna — along with six other passengers and a pilot — crashed into a hillside in Calabasas, northwest of Los Angeles. They were traveling to a tournament at Bryant's Mamba Sports Academy.

Alyssa Altobelli, 14, and Payton Chester, 13 — two more Mamba teammates — were among the victims. Assistant coach Christina Mauser, Altobelli's parents, Keri and John, and Payton's mother, Sarah, also were on the flight.

At the academy that day, as the players waited for the rest of the team to arrive, there was a growing unease.

Spotts' father, Jon, got everyone together in a meeting room. The helicopter had crashed, he said. There may have been some fatalities, he continued — a word that stayed with the players long after that moment, an almost incomprehensible possibility when connected to their friends.

Fatalities.

"I was only, I think 13 at the time," said Lamkin, who is interested in becoming a nurse after college. "I didn't realize that meant like people might have, you know, passed away. And so I asked my mom, what does that mean? And she told me, and I just remember everybody just like breaking down, crying."

Fatalities.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 261 ~ 75 of 75

"I grew up going to Catholic school," Righeimer said. "I went to church twice a week, and I prayed a lot, but I don't remember ever praying as hard as I did that moment. And I remember telling my dad, 'What does this mean? What are we going to do?'"

The Mamba Academy team was a group of All-Stars in a local league before it turned into the club team. There were players added along the way, often involving a somewhat dazing encounter with Bryant.

The Mamba parents became friends, too. After the helicopter went down, they had to face their own profound grief alongside their children.

"I think it was bigger than it being Kobe Bryant for our team and for my family," Annika Jiwani said.

Today in History: March 13, Francis becomes first non-European pope in over 1,250 years

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, March 13, the 72nd day of 2025. There are 293 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 13, 2013, Jorge Bergoglio of Argentina was elected pope, choosing the papal name Francis. He was the first pontiff from the Americas, and the first from outside Europe since Pope Gregory III's death in the year 741.

Also on this date:

In 1781, the seventh planet of the solar system, Uranus, was discovered by astronomer William Herschel.

In 1925, the Tennessee General Assembly approved the Butler Act, which prohibited public schools from teaching of the theory of evolution. (Gov. Austin Peay signed the measure on March 21; the bill was challenged in court later that year in the famous Scopes Monkey Trial. Tennessee ultimately repealed the law in 1967.)

In 1946, U.S. Army Pfc. Sadao Munemori was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for sacrificing himself to save fellow soldiers from a grenade explosion in Seravezza, Italy; he was the only Japanese American service member so recognized in the immediate aftermath of World War II.

In 1954, the pivotal Battle of Dien Bien Phu began during the First Indochina War as Viet Minh forces attacked French troops, who were defeated nearly two months later.

In 1996, a gunman entered an elementary school in Dunblane, Scotland, and opened fire, killing 16 children and one teacher before killing himself; it remains the deadliest mass shooting in British history.

In 2020, President Donald Trump declared a national emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old Black woman, was fatally shot in her apartment in Louisville, Kentucky, during a botched raid by plainclothes narcotics detectives searching for a suspected drug dealer; no drugs were found, and the "no-knock" warrant used to enter by force was later found to be based on false information.

Today's Birthdays: Songwriter Mike Stoller is 92. Singer-songwriter Neil Sedaka is 86. Actor William H. Macy is 75. Actor Dana Delany is 69. Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D., is 68. Bassist Adam Clayton (U2) is 65. Jazz musician Terence Blanchard is 63. Actor Annabeth Gish is 54. Rapper-actor Common is 53. Actor Emile Hirsch is 40. Olympic skiing gold medalist Mikaela Shiffrin is 30. Rapper Jack Harlow is 27. Tennis star Coco Gauff is 21.