

Groton Daily Independent

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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)

Groton Daily Independent

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Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

Good Morning Happy Friday

**Every morning is a new
beginning, and a chance
to make some new
memories
—let's go.**



Saturday, March 15

State A Girls Tournament, Spearfish (BHSU)

Sunday, March 16

Open Gym: 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 10:30 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.

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1440

Why 1440? The printing press was invented around the year 1440, spreading knowledge to the masses and changing the course of history. More facts: In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. We're here to make each one count.

Fired Workers Reinstated

A federal judge yesterday ordered the Trump administration to reinstate tens of thousands of workers laid off as part of a sweeping reduction in force across the federal government. The decision applies to six agencies—the departments of Agriculture, Energy, Defense, Interior, Veterans Affairs, and Treasury—and pertains to probationary workers.

Judge William Alsup found the government has the right to downsize its workforce but did not follow established legal processes during recent terminations. Alsup accused the government of attempting to obscure who directed the firings, alleging that federal officials avoided cross-examination. It was unclear as of this writing whether fired workers would or should show up at their old offices today.

In related news, the Senate faces a midnight deadline to pass a government funding bill and avoid a partial federal shutdown. The House has passed a six-month continuing resolution with some budgetary changes—as of last night, it appeared Senate Democrats would support the bill.

Heart of Steel Titanium

An Australian man in his 40s lived for a record 105 days with a titanium heart before receiving a donor heart transplant March 6. Though five patients in the US had previously been implanted with BiVACOR's Total Artificial Heart, he is the first to be discharged from the hospital with the device and has the longest survival period between implantation and transplantation.

The device uses magnetic levitation technology—like that used in high-speed trains—to suspend a single moving part, a rotor, which pumps blood through the body. An external system controls the device, adjusting blood flow based on the patient's activity. Experts say it could be a solution for heart failure patients awaiting transplants and may become a permanent option for those ineligible for transplants due to age or other conditions, though further testing is required.

Approximately 6.7 million Americans over age 20 have heart failure, and around 4,600 heart transplants were performed in 2024. The US Food and Drug Administration has approved expanding the trial to include 15 more participants.

Spring Storms

Most of the contiguous US will face severe weather today and tomorrow as a vast low-pressure system moves east across the continent, bringing heavy precipitation, potential tornadoes, and wildfire conditions. The National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center issued a moderate risk (level 4 of 5) for severe thunderstorms alert, a rare call made three days in advance (the first in three years).

Rain and snow swept through much of California yesterday, prompting flash flood warnings in the southern portions of the state and making travel nearly impossible in the north. Thunderstorms are expected today across the Mississippi, Tennessee, and Ohio river valleys, with meteorologists predicting dozens of tornado sightings in the region. Dry conditions combined with 70 mph winds in the Plains pose a heightened risk for wildfires, with snow possible in the Upper Plains states.

A weakened system will reach the lower Eastern Seaboard by Sunday.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Donatella Versace steps down as creative director at Versace after 28 years leading the luxury fashion house.

Oasis movie to be filmed during the band's summer 2025 reunion tour.

National Women's Soccer League season kicks off today; see season preview and storylines.

NBC signs \$3B deal for US rights to broadcast the 2034 and 2036 Olympic Games.

NCAA basketball conference championships wrap up this weekend; see latest March Madness bracket predictions for the women's tournament.

Science & Technology

OpenAI calls for protecting the training of AI models on copyrighted work as fair use; comments were submitted to the White House's AI Action Plan, due out in July.

Engineers turn skin cells directly into neurons, skipping the traditional step of using stem cells; breakthrough may lead to new treatments for neurodegenerative diseases.

Scientists develop genetic technology preventing mosquitoes from transmitting the parasite that causes malaria; technology could save thousands of lives annually in lower-income countries.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -1.4%, Dow -1.3%, Nasdaq -2.0%); S&P 500 enters correction territory, falling more than 10% from all-time high in February as President Donald Trump threatens tariffs on European wine and spirits.

Spirit Airlines exits Chapter 11 bankruptcy after four-month restructuring.

US average 30-year fixed-rate mortgage rises to 6.65%, ending seven-week slide.

US weekly jobless claims drop to 220,000 for week ending March 8.

Politics & World Affairs

White House withdraws nomination of Dave Weldon to lead the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Trump administration asks Supreme Court to narrow nationwide injunctions that have blocked a plan to end birthright citizenship.

Johns Hopkins University to eliminate 2,000 positions following federal budget cuts.

Russia claims it has retaken Sudzha, the biggest town in the Kursk border region controlled by Ukraine, as Russian President Vladimir Putin signals openness to temporary ceasefire but not an immediate end to the war.

Pentagon leaker Jack Teixeira pleads guilty to obstructing justice in a military court-martial; Teixeira receives dishonorable discharge sentence on top of existing 15-year prison sentence for federal charges related to the leak.

LOANS AND GRANTS APPROVED AT MONTHLY MEETINGS

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED) Board of Economic Development and the Economic Development Finance Authority (EDFA) approved projects that will contribute more than \$35 million in capital expenditure and

51 full-time jobs across the state.

"As long as I am Governor, I will continue to keep South Dakota Open for Opportunity. Our economy is the strongest in the nation, and it keeps getting stronger," said

Governor Larry Rhoden. "Today's announcement includes investments in targeted industries, including value-added ag and agriculture as a whole, which will help build a brighter future for generations to come."

The EDFA approved a Beginning Farmer Bond of up to \$510,000 for Cody and Codi Kafka to purchase land and start their own farming operation.

Jameson Peters received approval for a Beginning Farmer Bond of up to \$634,000 to purchase tillable farmland in Marshall County.

Plainview Dairy, LLC was granted approval for a Beginning Farmer Bond of up to \$25 million for solid waste management and disposal at the new dairy.

ESCO Manufacturing received approval for a SD Works Loan of up to \$421,880 to support their expansion in Sioux Falls for Stein Sign Display.

Hidewood Fiber, LLC in Toronto was approved for a SD Works Loan of up to \$250,000 to support working capital needs following the acquisition of the business assets and contracts of R&L Splicing.

Kaylor Agriservices secured a REDI loan of up to \$1 million as well as an SD Works loan of up to \$1 million for a new soybean roasting facility in Parkston. The project will help the company meet market demands in Southeast South Dakota.

Hamlin County was awarded a Local Infrastructure Improvement grant of \$142,500, not to exceed 26% of eligible project costs, to support road improvements for County Line Dairy's new 5,000-head facility.

The Sioux Falls Development Foundation was approved for a Local Infrastructure Improvement grant of \$447,769, not to exceed 50% of eligible project costs, for natural gas infrastructure improvements in Foundation Park North.

"It's exciting to see businesses investing in South Dakota," said GOED Commissioner Joe Fiala. "This growth is good for our whole state."

AGENDA

BROWN COUNTY PLANNING/ZONING COMMISSION REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETINGS

TUESDAY, MARCH 18, 2025 – 7:00 PM
BROWN COUNTY COURTHOUSE ANNEX in the BASEMENT
(STAIRWAY AND ELEVATOR ACCESS TO BASEMENT)

- I. **Call to Order:** for Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission
- II. **Roll Call:** David North - Vice Chair, Dale Kurth, Patrick Keatts, James Meyers, Carrie Weisenburger, County Commissioner Mike Gage, Alternate Paul Johnson, and Stan Beckler-Chairman.
- III. **Approval of March 18, 2025, Agenda:** Motion: 1st _____ 2nd _____
- IV. **Approval of February 18, 2025, Minutes:** Motion: 1st _____ 2nd _____

ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT

- V. **Old Business:**
 1. **Sign-up sheet:** On the table by the door entrance, there is a Sign-up Sheet. Please legibly sign in and mark YES or NO if you want to speak to the Board on any Agenda Item.
 2. **Permits:** Anyone that has submitted a Variance Petition (VP) or a Conditional Use Petition (CUP) to the Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA) is still required to get their required PERMITS from the Zoning Office before starting their project if their Petition gets approved. Penalties may be assessed per Ordinance when starting projects without proper permits in place.
 3. **Postponed Item from February 18, 2025 Meeting:**
Conditional Use Petition (CUP) in a Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG) described as Lot 2, "Fulker's Homestead Subdivision" in the SE1/4 of Section 17-T123N-R64W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (38390 133rd Street; Aberdeen Twp.).
- VI. **New Business:** Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission as Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA).
 1. **Conditional Use Petition (CUP)** in a Highway Commercial District (HC) described as Lot 2, "Don and Eunice Weismantel First Addition" in the NE1/4 of Section 19-T123N-R62W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (13305 395th Avenue; Bath Twp.).
 2. **Variance for Lot Size** in an Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) described as proposed Lot 1, "Young Family First Addition" in the NE1/4 of Section 34-T121N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (14715 392nd Avenue; West Rondell Twp.).
 3. **Variance for Lot Size** in an Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) described as proposed Lot 1, "Young Family Second Addition" in the SW1/4 of Section 26-T121N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (39240 147th Street; West Rondell Twp.).

VII. Other Business:

Completed as Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA) & going to Planning Commission

AGENDA

BROWN COUNTY PLANNING/ZONING COMMISSION REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETINGS

TUESDAY, MARCH 18, 2025 – 7:00 PM

BROWN COUNTY COURTHOUSE ANNEX in the BASEMENT

(STAIRWAY AND ELEVATOR ACCESS TO BASEMENT)

PLANNING COMMISSION

I. Old Business:

II. New Business: Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission as Planning Commission.

10. **Rezone Petition** for a property described as Lot 6, “Greg Hoffman Addition” in the E1/2 of Section 14-T124N-R65W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (126979 West Shore Drive; Ravinia Twp.) to be rezoned from Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG) to Lake Front Residential District (R-3).

11. **Rezone Petition** for a property described as the East 42.5 rods of the South 77.75 rods of the NE1/4 of Section 4-T125N-R60W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (11831 409th Avenue; Claremont Twp.) to be rezoned from Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) to Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG).

12. **Preliminary & Final Plat** for conveyance purposes on a property described as “Young Family First Addition” in the NE1/4 of Section 34-T121N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (14715 392nd Avenue; West Rondell Twp.).

13. **Preliminary & Final Plat** for conveyance purposes on a property described as “Young Family Second Addition” in the SW1/4 of Section 26-T121N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (39240 147th Street; West Rondell Twp.).

14. **Other Business:** Executive Session if requested.

15. **Motion to Adjourn:** 1st _____ 2nd _____

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NORTH STAR ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION



PLAYER

KOSE EGRULE



DEFENSE

JOHN WHITE, JR.



NEWCOMER

TYLER CREGEL



FRESHMAN

LANE TIETZ



COACH

DEREK SELVIG



ALL-CONFERENCE & POSTSEASON

2024-25 MEN'S BASKETBALL AWARDS



Tietz earns Freshman of the Year Award

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Star Athletic Association (NSAA) announced its 2024-25 men's basketball All-Conference teams and postseason awards.

Among those earning an award is GHS alumni Lane Tietz of Dakota State (S.D.). He was selected as the NSAA's Freshman-of-the-Year.

Lane Tietz told the Groton Daily Independent about the challenges he had this year.

"Biggest challenge: It was a lot different learning to play for a coach other than Coach (Brian) Dolan. Learning a new playbook, style, and completely different defense. Going from being the oldest in High School last year to the youngest this year playing against some guys who are 23-24 years old was also challenging.

"After going through a full season of college basketball it made me realize how much Coach Dolan's program prepared me for the next level. I am extremely thankful for how much he pushed me in high school and the things we were able to achieve.

"The support throughout the season from Groton people was amazing, I couldn't have had a better hometown community!"



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Queen of Hearts

The 21st Week of the Queen of Hearts was held Thursday at the Groton American Legion. Ticket sales for the week were \$1,180. The jackpot was \$18,846. The name of Luke Leshner was drawn. He picked card number 35 which was the 4 of Hearts. He won the consolation prize of \$118. The game goes on!

Correcting the Record about Social Security Direct Deposit and Telephone Services

Recent reports in the media that Social Security plans to eliminate telephone services are inaccurate. SSA is increasing its protection for America's seniors and other beneficiaries by eliminating the risk of fraud associated with changing bank account information by telephone.

SSA continuously investigates and analyzes potential threats to strengthen and secure our programs and protect people who receive benefits. Approximately 40 percent of Social Security direct deposit fraud is associated with someone calling SSA to change direct deposit bank information. SSA's current protocol of simply asking identifying questions by telephone is no longer enough to prevent fraud.

If someone needs to change their bank account information on SSA's record, they will need to either:
Use two-factor authentication with SSA's "my Social Security" service; or
Visit a local Social Security office to prove their identity.

These methods align with most major banks.

All other SSA telephone services remain unchanged.

Tourism Positively Impacts All Corners of South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. – Each of South Dakota's four tourism regions showed an increase in visitor spending in 2024, according to a recent detailed analysis of visitor spending in South Dakota. Conducted by Tourism Economics, the latest report shows that visitor spending continues to grow, positively affecting every county in South Dakota through taxable sales, job creation, and wages.

The Black Hills and Badlands (2.4%) and Southeast (4.5%) regions both saw significant growth in visitor spending last year. Both the Glacial Lakes & Prairies and the Missouri River regions saw positive (0.2%) growth in this category in 2024.

Total visitor spending in South Dakota reached a record high of \$5.09 billion, a 2.8% increase compared to 2023.

"South Dakota's breathtaking landscapes, rich history, and vibrant communities captivate visitors from across the world," said Governor Larry Rhoden. "In 2024, tourism supported more than 58,000 jobs for South Dakotans and provided \$2.2 billion in household income to those families."

The top 10 counties with annual growth were evenly distributed across the state, including Potter (12.3%), Ziebach (12%), Turner (11.1%), Mellette (9.5%), Deuel (7.1%), Clark (6.8%), Custer (6.2%), Day (6%), Douglas (5.9%), and Roberts (5.7%). This regionally diverse growth highlights how tourism benefits counties of all sizes, including rural areas and larger travel hubs.

"Our industry has so much to be proud of," said James Hagen, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Tourism. "The widespread growth across counties and regions, both large and small, demonstrates just how eager visitors are to experience every corner of our state. The tourism industry is strong, united and continues to work hard to cross promote attractions, parks and businesses from one end of the state to the other. That unity is providing an essential economic boost to our state and local communities."

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URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE

National Weather Service Aberdeen SD
307 AM CDT Fri Mar 14 2025

Traverse-Big Stone-Brown-Marshall-Roberts-Day-Spink-Clark-Codington-Grant-Hamlin-Deuel-
Including the cities of Ortonville, Aberdeen, Sisseton, Redfield, Britton, Clark, Webster, Milbank, Water-
town, Hayti, Clear Lake, and Wheaton

...WINTER STORM WATCH IN EFFECT FROM LATE FRIDAY NIGHT THROUGH SATURDAY EVENING...

* WHAT...Blizzard conditions possible. Total snow and sleet accumulations up to 7 inches and ice accumulations around a light glaze possible. Winds could gust as high as 55 mph.

* WHERE...Portions of west central Minnesota and northeast South Dakota.

* WHEN...From late Friday night through Saturday evening.

* IMPACTS...Visibilities may drop below 1/4 mile due to falling and blowing snow. Whiteout conditions are possible and may make travel treacherous and potentially life-threatening. Travel could be very difficult. Widespread blowing snow could significantly reduce visibility. Strong winds could cause tree damage.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

Prepare for possible blizzard conditions. Continue to monitor the latest forecasts for updates on this situation.

Persons should consider delaying all travel. If travel is absolutely necessary, drive with extreme caution. Consider taking a winter storm kit along with you, including such items as tire chains, booster cables, flashlight, shovel, blankets and extra clothing. Also take water, a first aid kit, and anything else that would help you survive in case you become stranded.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Rhoden signs property tax relief bill with eye toward another solution

Governor foreshadows plan to find alternative funding source for local governments

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MARCH 13, 2025 4:53 PM

As South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden signed his property tax relief bill into law Thursday, he was already planning another proposal to ease the burden across the state.

The new law, which will take effect July 1, limits the increase in owner-occupied residential assessments to 3% county-wide for five years; sets a five-year, 3% cap on the amount taxing districts and school capital outlay budgets can increase as a result of new construction; exempts some home improvements worth less than 40% of a home's value from affecting assessments; and expands eligibility among disabled and elderly people for property tax assessment freeze programs, including an increase in the multi-person household income limit from \$45,000 to \$65,000, and an increase in the maximum value of an eligible home from \$300,000 to \$500,000.

The legislation was the only major property tax reform bill approved during the annual legislative session, among three such bills that survived until the session's last week.

The possibility of citizen-initiated property tax relief ballot measures was mentioned several times during the legislative session, and a potential ballot question is listed on the Secretary of State's website that would roll back nonagricultural property tax assessments and cap annual valuation increases.

Rhoden is hopeful his plan will assuage South Dakotans' concerns. But "there's more work to do," he said during a press conference at the Capitol in Pierre.

The Legislature passed a resolution to create a summer task force to "identify impactful, substantive measures" to provide significant and lasting property tax relief for homeowners. The task force will include 16 lawmakers, a representative from the Bureau of Finance and Management, and a representative from the Governor's Office.

Legislative leaders say the task force will primarily analyze local government spending and funding. The state does not receive property tax revenue, relying instead on the sales tax. Cities receive revenue from sales taxes and property taxes, while counties and schools are reliant on property taxes.

Proposals to cut local government funding historically have not fared well in the Capitol, Rhoden noted.



South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden speaks to the media during a press conference on March 13, 2025, at the Capitol in Pierre. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

"We need to deliver meaningful property tax relief and actual property tax cuts for South Dakotans," he said. "We need to find a way to do it without making the state or counties or school districts go broke."

Rhoden is keeping his new plan under wraps until his administration nails down details. He plans to reveal the plan in the coming days.

He told members of the press it'll provide an alternative funding source for local governments, targeted to the areas struggling the most with residential property taxes — which could indicate areas such as the Black Hills and the Sioux Falls metro area — rather than taking a statewide approach to the issue.

"Additional funding should be the last resource," Rhoden said, "not the first."

Senate President Pro Tempore Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, said the governor hasn't shared details of his proposal with the Legislature yet. He said the governor's proposal sounds "tangential" to the task force's purpose.

"The task force is meant to set everything on the table: whether that's a new source of revenue or lifting property tax or sales tax exemptions," Karr told South Dakota Searchlight. "Everything needs to be on the table to look at how we're funding schools and counties, and hopefully provide relief."

Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan who regularly reports on the intersection of politics and policy with health, education, social services and Indigenous affairs. Her work with South Dakota Searchlight earned her the title of South Dakota's Outstanding Young Journalist in 2024, and she was a 2024 finalist for the national Livingston Awards.

South Dakota lawmakers navigate financial pressures to produce a \$7.3 billion budget

Legislators pass spending measure as final week of annual session concludes

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 13, 2025 4:31 PM

PIERRE — South Dakota lawmakers approved a \$7.3 billion state budget on Thursday at the Capitol, down about \$5 million from the budget they adopted last year.

Rep. Mike Derby, R-Rapid City, is the co-chair of the Legislature's main budget panel, the Joint Appropriations Committee.

"We had one job, one bill to take care of, the general appropriations bill," he said of his committee's work. "We delivered it on time. And we're going to have a balanced budget for the 136th year in a row."

The budget includes \$3.1 billion in federal funding and the equivalent of 14,095 full-time employees, an increase of 24 from last winter's budget bill.

Thursday was the final day of the annual legislative session,



State Sen. Ernie Otten, R-Tea, speaks in the South Dakota Senate chamber on Feb. 3, 2025. Otten was the lead co-chair of the Legislature's main budget committee during the 2025 legislative session. (Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)

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except for a day on March 31 to consider vetoes from the governor.

The final spending plan closes an approximately \$50 million shortfall between ongoing revenue and expenses through a mix of cuts and fee increases to maintain a balanced budget.

The so-called "big three" — education, state employee pay, and health care providers who treat Medicaid patients — received 1.25% increases, consistent with the original budget proposal.

The state continues to receive an influx of funds from unclaimed property, which consists of an array of private assets that have been abandoned for more than three years, including money from bank accounts, stocks, life insurance payouts, uncashed checks, and even the contents of safe deposit boxes. The latest estimate shows \$237 million in revenue for the budget after payouts to the few people who come forward to claim their property.

Lawmakers passed a bill this year to gradually transition unclaimed property money into a trust fund, including \$22.8 million this year, and eventually take only the interest earned from the fund as revenue. Voters will see a ballot question in 2026 asking permission for the state Investment Council to manage that fund.

Falling sales tax revenue put pressure on the budget this year, as did a \$34 million rise in the state's share of Medicaid costs. Medicaid is government health insurance for people with low incomes, and for adults and children with disabilities, funded by a formula that determines the state and federal shares. The state's portion of the costs increased due to a rise in the state's per capita income.

Lawmakers expressed pride in delivering a balanced budget, as required by the state constitution, and acknowledged some of the difficult decisions that were made along the way.

"We all have our golden cow we don't want to be slaughtered," said Senate President Pro Tempore Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls.

Former Gov. Kristi Noem proposed numerous cuts, but also some new spending, before she departed to accept a position in the Trump administration.

Noem's proposed \$52,000 cut for veterans' burial assistance was revoked. So was her proposed \$3.6 million funding cut to South Dakota Public Broadcasting. She also sought to cut \$1 million from the State Library, but lawmakers reduced that to an \$825,000 cut and reinstated the Department of Education's ability to seek \$1.4 million in federal funding for the library.

Noem's \$10 million proposal for school safety grants and \$4 million proposal for education savings accounts failed as well. The ESAs would have provided public funds for students attending private schools, homeschools or other forms of alternative instruction.

Funding for the Board of Regents, which oversees the six state universities, was cut by \$2 million, as proposed. Lawmakers also approved Noem's proposed cost-sharing shift for the dual enrollment program, which allows high school students to earn college credits. The state will now cover 50% of costs, down from two-thirds, saving the state (and costing students and their families) about \$1.2 million annually.

Lawmakers additionally approved phasing out a five-year, \$1,000 annual stipend for teachers to attain national certification.

Noem proposed allocating \$182 million to complete funding for a proposed \$825 million prison. Lawmakers rejected that plan, causing new Gov. Larry Rhoden to appoint a task force to study the issue. The budget directs that money into reserves.

Lawmakers avoided a cut to the maintenance and repair of state buildings in the current fiscal year's revised budget by using one-time funding sources. They weren't able to avoid a \$17 million cut in the 2026 fiscal year budget. Legislators typically try to use one-time funding sources — such as unclaimed property or federal stimulus funds — on one-time needs. Ongoing revenue, such as sales tax collections, is used to fund the everyday operations of state government.

A Noem proposal to appropriate \$13 million to replace the state-owned Richmond Lake dam near Aberdeen was approved.

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Current budget revisions

The budget adopted by lawmakers Thursday is for the 2026 fiscal year, which begins July 1.

The Legislature also approved a bill Thursday that revises the state's current-year budget down by \$74.6 million.

"This bill allows us to continue operating efficiently while meeting the needs of our citizens," said Rep. Chris Kassin, R-Vermilion, who serves on the budget committee.

The adjustments reflect declining sales tax revenue following years of strong collections, and the depletion of federal pandemic aid and stimulus funding.

A significant portion of the reductions come from lower-than-projected Medicaid utilization. The Departments of Social Services and Human Services will see a combined \$34.1 million decrease to align funding with anticipated needs.

The state also captured \$25.1 million in savings from Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program enrollment changes. An additional \$31.6 million in general funds, set aside in prior years to prepare for the full cost of Medicaid expansion, was also cut due to lower-than-project enrollments. In 2022, South Dakota voters expanded Medicaid eligibility to adults with incomes up to 138% of the poverty level, to capitalize on a 90% federal funding match included in the Obama-era Affordable Care Act.

Despite the reductions, the revision to the current budget include new spending in key areas:

An increase of \$704,938 for medical care at the State Veterans' Home.

\$427,046 to upgrade a Spearfish radio tower for improved state radio coverage.

\$130,000 to assist counties with post-election audit costs from the 2024 election.

\$123,200 for legislative broadcasting equipment to enhance public access.

\$110,000 to fund a tribal-focused law enforcement training program.

\$5 million for the state information technology modernization fund.

Some lawmakers acknowledge the state's 2026 fiscal year budget may need significant revising with President Trump cutting federal funding for programs utilized in South Dakota, sales tax revenue down 0.9% compared to this time last year, and Trump's tariff and trade wars fueling fears of a recession.

"We are going to face a lot of lean cuts in the next few years," said Rep. Erik Muckey, D-Sioux Falls, who serves as the lone Democrat on the budget committee. "We face a lot of economic uncertainty as we head into the next few years."

The Legislature lowered the state sales tax rate in 2023 to 4.2%, but made the reduction temporary and scheduled a return to 4.5% in 2027. The state would have \$107 million more in annual revenue for the budget if the sales tax rate was restored to 4.5% this year.

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.

State House fails to override child care subsidy veto from governor

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 13, 2025 1:51 PM

The South Dakota House of Representatives failed to override the first veto of Gov. Larry Rhoden's administration on Thursday morning at the Capitol in Pierre.

Lawmakers in the House spent around half an hour debating the possibility of reviving House Bill 1132's attempt to expand child care subsidies for child care workers and overruling the governor's Wednesday veto.

In the end, the vote to overturn the veto failed 27-43. Because of its failure in the House, there was no need for the Senate to consider it. Thursday was the final day of the annual legislative session, except for a day on March 31 to consider any further vetoes from Rhoden, who is still considering bills.

HB 1132's backers took issue with Rhoden's characterization of the bill as an unfair expansion of a social safety net program to people in a specific field.



South Dakota House Minority Leader Erin Healy, D-Sioux Falls, speaks to members of the press on March 6, 2025, at the Capitol in Pierre. Healy sponsored a child care assistance bill that was vetoed by the governor. (Makenzie Huber/

South Dakota Searchlight)

Parents in South Dakota with incomes at 209% or less of the federal poverty level are eligible for child care tuition assistance. The bill vetoed on Wednesday would have bumped that eligibility figure up to 300% for full-time child care workers.

Child care workers who can't afford their own child care bills, the reasoning goes, cannot stay on the job and watch the kids of parents who can't work without child care.

The hope would be for South Dakota to keep more child care workers on the job.

"When child care workers leave the workforce, the crisis deepens," said the bill's sponsor, Rep. Erin Healy, D-Sioux Falls.

Opponents said they agreed with the governor. They didn't see the subsidy as fair to other families, worried about a permanent subsidy the state couldn't afford, and suggested that

the bill would tip the scales in favor of one approach to child care.

Rep. John Hughes, R-Sioux Falls, argued that lawmakers can't simultaneously be conservative and supportive of subsidies for a specific type of worker.

"That's why I respect the governor. I think he's well-stated the answer," Hughes said. "Don't buy into this. Don't buy into this idea that we're going to start subsidizing a group of, God bless them, child care workers. It's just a bad precedent."

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

COMMENTARY

South Dakota's public servants should spend more time with the public

Some state and federal officeholders have a poor record of town hall appearances

by RUTH GRINAGER

I'm concerned that some of our elected South Dakota public servants have disappeared. The nonpartisan South Dakota League of Women Voters in Sioux Falls once again volunteered to host three legislative coffees during the 2025 legislative session. Two were canceled as our elected public servants failed to commit to meeting with the public. Another was canceled to accommodate the previously unscheduled inauguration of Gov. Larry Rhoden. One was later added, and one was rescheduled, giving us a total of two this legislative season.

At the first of those two legislative coffees, three of our Sioux Falls area Democratic legislators showed up to answer constituents' questions, while zero Republican legislators appeared. The second coffee

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A crowd gathers for a Feb. 12, 2025, hearing at the South Dakota Capitol in Pierre on a bill to fund a new prison in Lincoln County. (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

had similar results, with one Republican legislator and two Democratic legislators answering questions. Meeting with a broad swath of constituents and hearing their opinions (not just guessing about them or listening to friends, relatives and personal echo chambers) is part of the elected official's job. I'm grateful to the six area legislators who understand their job and prioritized the public. However, I feel a showing of six out of 21 Sioux Falls-area legislators meeting their constituents in public meetings is not brag-worthy. That bar is incredibly low.

This trend is happening on the national level also, where South Dakota has only three elected public servants. I can't remember the last time Sen. Mike Rounds, Sen. John Thune or Rep. Dusty Johnson had an open town hall meeting where a broad swath of their constituents was welcome to attend and see and hear their

elected public servants, and ask them questions.

I knew the House was in recess recently and Rep. Johnson was home in South Dakota. I called his office to find out when he'd scheduled a town hall meeting. No one in the office knew, but I was informed that the representative only does telephone town hall meetings. They couldn't tell me when the next phone meeting was scheduled, but if I got on a list, I'd get a two-hour notification before the meeting began. Questions for that phone meeting could be submitted ahead of time but not all questions would be answered.

This type of "meeting" isn't transparent or easily accessible to some voters. It also isn't well advertised, and I get Rep. Johnson's weekly updates. When I contact our three national public servants by email, the general canned responses I get back often do not even address the concerns I originally shared. If given the option, I now ask for "no response necessary" because the responses are an embarrassingly poor showing for the legislator's staff.

Every South Dakotan should be concerned. Who are these elected public servants serving? The voters hire them, and we can fire them. Those of us who pay taxes provide their salaries; and for our national officials, we provide incredible benefits packages, too. As the "hirers" and "firers," our responsibility is to be aware of their job performances (voting records) and determine if they are worthy of being rehired. Their responsibility, as elected public servants, is to listen and be responsive to the public's needs, questions and concerns — to inform us and be transparent. Public meetings are one good way of doing that and provide elected officials with a wide cross-section of constituents' views.

What's up with our state and federally elected public servants, and why are so many of them MIA?

After teaching middle school science in South Dakota public schools for 25 years, Ruth Grinager is now retired and living in Sioux Falls.

After teaching middle school science in South Dakota public schools for 25 years, Ruth Grinager is now retired and living in Sioux Falls.

Schumer support for GOP spending bill appears to possibly stave off government shutdown

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 13, 2025 7:54 PM

WASHINGTON — Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer announced during a floor speech Thursday evening that he will vote to advance the stopgap spending bill that must become law before Friday at midnight to avoid a partial government shutdown.

"While the CR bill is very bad, the potential for a shutdown has consequences for America that are much, much worse," Schumer said, referring to the stopgap bill, formally known as a continuing resolution.

"For sure, the Republican bill is a terrible option. It is not a clean CR. It is deeply partisan. It doesn't address far too many of this country's needs," he added. "But I believe allowing Donald Trump to take even much more power via a government shutdown is a far worse option."

The Senate is scheduled to take its first procedural vote on the bill Friday, but both parties will need to reach a time agreement to hold a final passage vote before the deadline.

Schumer's comments came just one day after he declared that Republicans didn't have the 60 votes needed to move beyond procedural votes and onto final passage, setting the stage for a funding lapse that would affect nearly every corner of the federal government.

The reversal by the party's leader indicates that enough Democrats likely will vote with Republicans to cut off debate on the House-passed bill and send it to President Donald Trump, despite intense objections from some in the Democratic Party who want to protest Trump's actions and obtain commitments that Trump will spend the money Congress appropriates.



Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer talks to reporters at the U.S. Capitol on Feb. 7, 2024. (Photo by Jennifer Shutt/States Newsroom)

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No pay during shutdown

During a partial government shutdown, federal departments and agencies have broad authority to determine which federal employees keep working and which are sent home. Neither group would get paid until after Congress and Trump reach agreement on a way to fund the government.

Schumer argued that entering a partial government shutdown would give Trump and members of his administration even more authority than they have now to limit federal operations.

"The decision on what is essential would be solely left to the executive branch, with nobody left at the agencies to check them," Schumer said. "In short, a shutdown would give Donald Trump, Elon Musk and DOGE and (Office of Management and Budget Director Russ) Vought the keys to the city, state and country."

Democrats, he said, also want to ensure that any negative repercussions from firing federal workers en masse are solely the responsibility of the Trump administration.

"Right now, Donald Trump owns the chaos in the government. He owns the chaos in the stock market. He owns the damage happening to our economy from one end of the country to the other," Schumer said. "Donald Trump is hoping for a shutdown, because it will distract from his true agenda — delivering massive cuts to the rich, paid for on the backs of American families."

Democratic votes needed

Republicans hold 53 seats in the Senate, but Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul has said he'll vote against advancing the continuing resolution, meaning at least eight Democrats must vote with the GOP for the resolution to move forward.

Schumer and Pennsylvania Democratic Sen. John Fetterman, who previously announced support for the stopgap spending bill, will need at least six of their colleagues to vote with them on Friday.

It wasn't immediately clear Thursday which Democratic senators would cast those votes.

The House voted mostly along party lines Tuesday to send the stopgap spending bill to the Senate.

Congress was supposed to complete work on the dozen annual government funding bills before Oct. 1, but has instead used continuing resolutions to fund the government through Friday.

Appropriators from both political parties and both chambers had spent weeks trying to reach agreement on how much to spend on the bills during the current fiscal year, but were unable to in time.

To avoid a funding lapse, Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., released a continuing resolution over the weekend that would fund the government through September, essentially cutting off efforts to get agreement on the full-year bills nearly six months into the fiscal year.

The continuing resolution will free up time and energy for Republicans, who won unified control of government during the November elections, to negotiate a deal among themselves on extending the 2017 tax law, and finding ways to pay for the deficit increase that is expected to cause.

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.

Judge orders rehiring of thousands of fired probationary federal employees

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MARCH 13, 2025 1:03 PM

WASHINGTON — A federal judge in California ordered the Trump administration to immediately reinstate thousands of jobs for probationary federal workers fired as part of billionaire Elon Musk's campaign to slash the federal workforce.

Judge William Alsup ruled Thursday morning that tens of thousands of workers must be rehired across numerous federal agencies, including the departments of Agriculture, Defense, Energy, Interior, Treasury and Veterans Affairs, extending his previous temporary emergency order issued Feb. 28.

Alsup, appointed in 1999 by former President Bill Clinton to the Northern District of California, ruled in

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favor of numerous plaintiffs that brought the suit against the Trump administration's Office of Personnel Management.

Alsup's order also prohibits OPM from advising any federal agency on which employees to fire. Additionally, Alsup is requiring the agencies to provide documentation of compliance to the court, according to the plaintiffs who were present in the courtroom.

The Trump administration appealed the decision just hours later.

Unions bring suit

The plaintiffs, which include the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO and other unions representing thousands of federal workers, sued in February over OPM's "illegal program" terminating employees who are within the first year of their positions or recently promoted to new ones.

Everett Kelley, AFGE's national president, said in statement Thursday that the union is "pleased with Judge Alsup's order to immediately reinstate tens of thousands of probationary federal employees who were illegally fired from their jobs by an administration hellbent on crippling federal agencies and their work on behalf of the American public."

"We are grateful for these employees and the critical work they do, and AFGE will keep fighting until all federal employees who were unjustly and illegally fired are given their jobs back," Everett said.

The AFGE was among more than a dozen organizations who sued the government. The plaintiffs were represented by the legal advocacy group State Democracy Defenders Fund and the San Francisco-based law firm Altshuler Berzon LLP. Washington state also joined the case and was represented by state Attorney General Nick Brown.

Trump administration 'will immediately fight'

The White House said prior to filing the appeal that "a single judge is attempting to unconstitutionally seize the power of hiring and firing from the Executive Branch."

"The President has the authority to exercise the power of the entire executive branch – singular district court judges cannot abuse the power of the entire judiciary to thwart the President's agenda. If a federal district court judge would like executive powers, they can try and run for President themselves. The Trump Administration will immediately fight back against this absurd and unconstitutional order," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a statement.



Demonstrators outside the U.S. Senate buildings on Capitol Hill protest billionaire Elon Musk's dismantling of the U.S. Agency for International Development on Feb. 5, 2025. (Photo by Ashley Murray/States

Newsroom)

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The unions argued in a Feb. 19 complaint that Congress “controls and authorizes” federal employment and spending, and that lawmakers have empowered federal agencies, not OPM, to manage their own employees.

OPM, which administers employee benefits and essentially serves as the government’s human resources arm, “lacks the constitutional, statutory, or regulatory authority to order federal agencies to terminate employees in this fashion that Congress has authorized those agencies to hire and manage,” according to the complaint.

“[A]nd OPM certainly has no authority to require agencies to perpetrate a massive fraud on the federal workforce by lying about federal workers’ ‘performance,’ to detriment of those workers, their families, and all those in the public and private sectors who rely upon those workers for important services,” the complaint continues.

Musk role

Musk, a Trump special adviser, has publicly and repeatedly touted the terminations as a means to cut federal spending.

Mass firings began in early to mid-February and continued as recently as Tuesday when the Department of Education announced it would cut about 50% of its workforce.

The terminations sparked numerous lawsuits and public outcry.

Musk, who the White House claims has no decision-making authority, has posted on his social media platform X about emails sent to federal workers offering buyouts and demanding they justify their jobs.

Musk has also published dozens of posts attacking federal judges who’ve ruled against his workforce downsizing as “evil” and “corrupt.”

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

Former Greenpeace leader disputes allegations by Dakota Access Pipeline developer

BY: MARY STEURER - MARCH 13, 2025 9:09 AM

MANDAN, N.D. — A former executive director of Greenpeace’s U.S. affiliate on Wednesday refuted accusations from the developer of the Dakota Access Pipeline that the environmental group was a major force driving protests against the pipeline in 2016 and 2017.

Energy Transfer has taken Greenpeace to trial over claims that the environmental group incited illegal acts by protesters in North Dakota that cost the company millions of dollars in alleged property damages and lost revenue. It also claims Greenpeace conspired to defame Energy Transfer in order to harm its relationship with banks financing the construction loan for the pipeline.

Annie Leonard, who led Greenpeace USA from 2014 to 2023, told jurors that Greenpeace only got involved in the protests because the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe asked. Tribal citizens started the demonstrations against the pipeline out of concerns that it poses a pollution threat to the tribe’s drinking water. The tribe also sees the pipeline as an infringement on tribal sovereignty because it crosses unceded Sioux Nation land.

Leonard said that at some point during the protests, a Navajo activist named Tom Goldtooth — a long-time friend of hers — asked if there was anything Greenpeace could do to help the cause. Leonard said that while Goldtooth was not a spokesperson for the protests, he helped relay messages from Standing Rock leaders.

She said Goldtooth shared with her that the demonstration camps had nowhere for people to charge their phones. This made it difficult for organizers to communicate with one another and spread word about the protests, she said. According to Leonard, Goldtooth also said that Standing Rock wanted help keeping the protests peaceful.

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Greenpeace Senior Legal Adviser Deepa Padmanabha is pictured outside the Morton County Courthouse in North Dakota on March 3, 2025. (Michael Achterling/North Dakota Monitor)

In response, Greenpeace sent a truck equipped with solar panels to the camps, Leonard said. It also set aside money to pay for Native organizers to go to the camps and teach people nonviolent protest strategies, including deescalation tactics, she said.

Records shown in court on Wednesday indicated Greenpeace's U.S. affiliate approved a grant for roughly \$20,000 to send trainers to North Dakota. Leonard privately fundraised another \$90,000 in donations for the same purpose, the documents showed.

Leonard said one reason she raised the money privately was because Greenpeace didn't have any enough funds to award another grant. She also said she wanted to help be a "match-maker" to directly connect donors with Native organizations working

at Standing Rock.

Greenpeace never tried to make its involvement in the demonstrations secret, though it also didn't want to bring too much attention to itself, Leonard said. She said that since Greenpeace is a household name, it has the tendency to overshadow local organizers when it gets involved in a cause.

"We didn't want to make the story be about us," she said.

Trey Cox, an attorney representing Energy Transfer, asked whether her testimony conflicted with an internal email Leonard sent during the protests describing Greenpeace's support for Standing Rock as "massive."

Leonard on Wednesday said she had exaggerated. She said she had written the email out of "exuberance" for the amount of money and resources Greenpeace was able to contribute to the cause.

She said that even though she went out of her way to help support Standing Rock activists, she spent most of her time focused on other tasks.

"It was not major compared to the universe of things I was doing for Greenpeace," Leonard said. She said she never went to the protests in person.

Brent Maness, a former Greenpeace employee, also testified about Greenpeace's role in the protests on Wednesday. Maness never went to the protests, but was in charge of some employees Greenpeace sent to the camps.

During his questioning of Maness, Cox displayed an agenda for one Greenpeace nonviolent direct action training that occurred in 2015. The agenda indicates that the training discussed the use of lockboxes and other technical blockades.

Energy Transfer has repeatedly brought up lockboxes and blockades as evidence Greenpeace wanted protesters to obstruct work on the pipeline. Pipeline opponents used the lockboxes, also known as "sleeping dragons," to attach themselves to construction equipment.

One bullet point on the agenda also referenced "shaming police."

Maness said he didn't remember why that was listed on the program. He said that the trainings had a lot more "content and context" that is not in the agenda.

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"I can tell you unequivocally Greenpeace doesn't teach people to shame police," he said.

Maness also testified Wednesday that while Greenpeace provided funding to send trainers there, the organization did not control the trainers' curriculum.

Greenpeace witnesses have acknowledged they brought lockboxes to the protests but maintain that the trainers didn't encourage or instruct protesters to use them.

Leonard said that it was her understanding that Greenpeace provided the lockboxes because organizers on the ground at the protests had asked for the devices.

Cox brought up a text message exchange between Leonard and Goldtooth in 2016 in which he sent a photo of a Dakota Access Pipeline protester using a lockbox on construction equipment. Leonard replied that the action "ups the ante."

Cox asked what she meant by this.

Leonard said that lockboxes can be tools for nonviolent civil disobedience, which she views as a "tried and true" component of American protest movements.

"When Rosa Parks refused to leave that seat, that upped the ante," she said.

Cox said Parks wasn't a fair comparison because she wasn't trespassing on private land.

"She had permission to be on that bus, did she not?" he asked Leonard.

"She didn't have permission to be on that seat," Leonard replied.

Cox countered that Parks' action did not disrupt business for Montgomery's public transit in the same way that the Dakota Access Pipeline protests disrupted construction.

Leonard pointed out that Parks' act of civil disobedience, and her subsequent arrest, was the catalyst for the Montgomery bus boycott — which did disrupt profits for the bus system. That boycott led to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that declared segregation on public buses unconstitutional.

Greenpeace attorneys said they anticipate wrapping up their case on 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.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention nominee pulled by White House

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 13, 2025 8:59 AM

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration has withdrawn its nominee to lead the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, according to a White House official who was not authorized to speak publicly.

President Donald Trump nominated former Florida U.S. Rep. Dave Weldon in late November and he was scheduled to testify at a confirmation hearing in front of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, or HELP, Committee on Thursday morning.

The hearing, which was canceled shortly before it was set to begin, was expected to include questions about reports the CDC is planning to fund a study revisiting whether there might be links between autism and vaccines.

Numerous scientific studies have shown that vaccines do not cause autism.

Chairman Bill Cassidy, R-La., as well as members of the HELP Committee from both political parties, have pressed some of Trump's nominees to recognize that fact during confirmation hearings.

Axios was the first to report the news.

Next nominee unclear

The White House official declined to answer questions about when Trump might nominate another person to lead the CDC, based in Atlanta, Georgia.

Washington state Democratic Sen. Patty Murray, who used to lead the HELP Committee, wrote in a statement that "a vaccine skeptic who spent years spreading lies about safe and proven vaccines should

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never have even been under consideration to lead the foremost agency charged with protecting public health."

"RFK Jr. is already doing incalculable damage by spreading lies and disinformation as the top health official in America," Murray wrote, referring to Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. "While I have little to no confidence in the Trump administration to do so, they should immediately nominate someone for this position who at bare minimum believes in basic science and will help lead CDC's important work to monitor and prevent deadly outbreaks."



The Trump administration has withdrawn its nomination of former U.S. Rep. Dave Weldon to head the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, shown here. (Photo courtesy of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Weldon targets Collins, Cassidy

A four-page statement from Weldon, obtained by the New York Times, assumes that at least two Republicans on the HELP Committee were considering voting against his nomination and might have blocked him from advancing to the floor — Cassidy and Maine Sen. Susan Collins.

"Twelve hours before my scheduled confirmation hearing in The Senate, I received a phone call from an assistant at the White House informing me that my nomination to be Director of CDC was being withdrawn because there were not enough votes to get me confirmed," Weldon wrote.

The statement said that HHS Secretary Kennedy "was very upset" by the Trump administration's decision. But it doesn't say that Weldon, or Kennedy, or anyone was actually told that Cassidy and Collins would vote against the nomination in the HELP Committee.

Weldon wrote that Collins "had reservations" and that he "can assume" that Cassidy would have opposed his nomination advancing out of committee.

Cassidy said in a statement that he was "looking forward to the hearing."

"I was surprised when Dr. Weldon's nomination was withdrawn," Cassidy said. "His poor response to this situation shows that the pressures of being CDC director would have been too much."

A staffer for Cassidy, speaking on background, told States Newsroom the Trump administration's decision to pull Weldon's nomination was not in response to any requests from the senator.

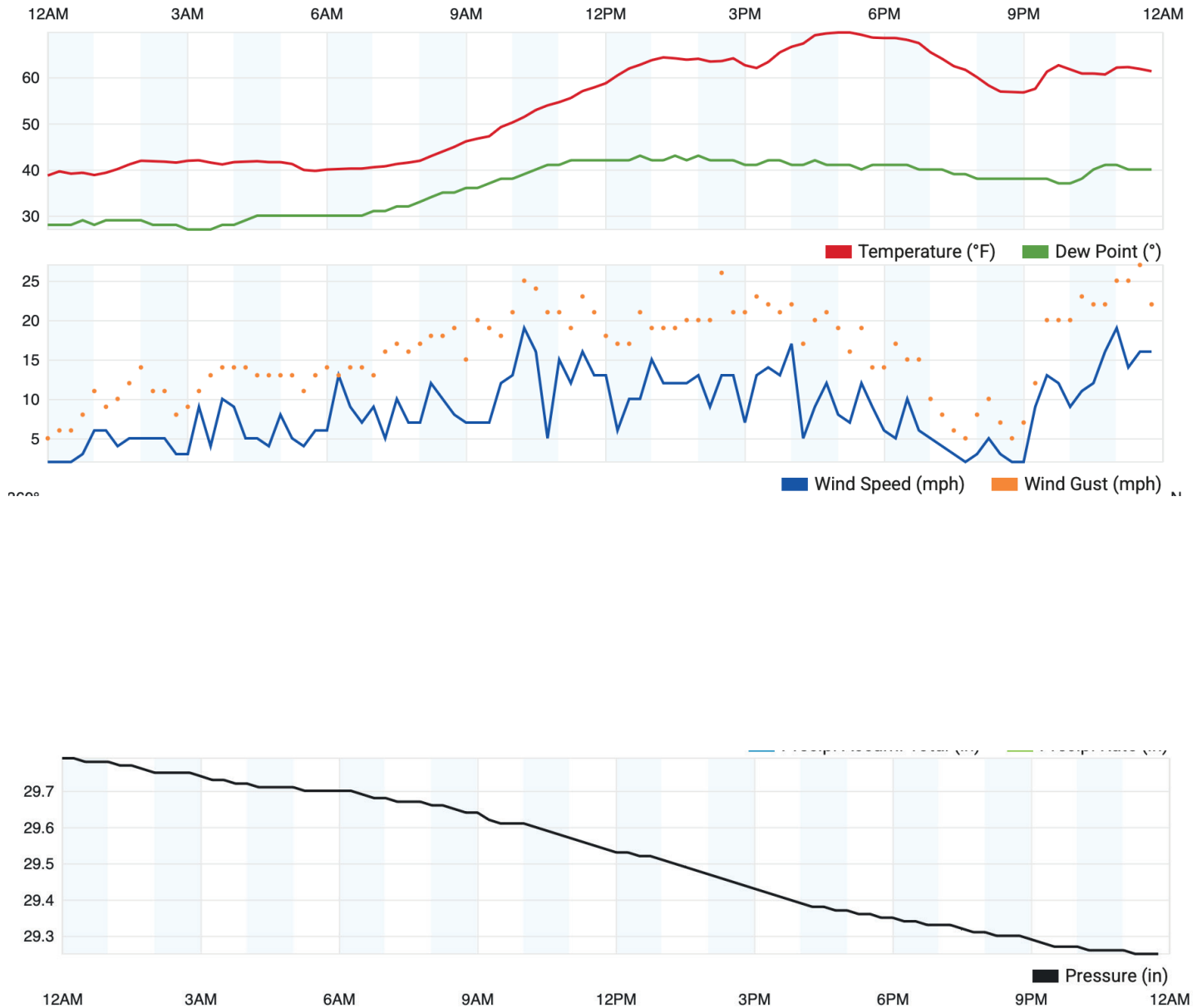
Also speaking on background, a staffer for Collins refuted that anyone from the office was "hostile in any capacity. They were asking questions, which is their job."

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

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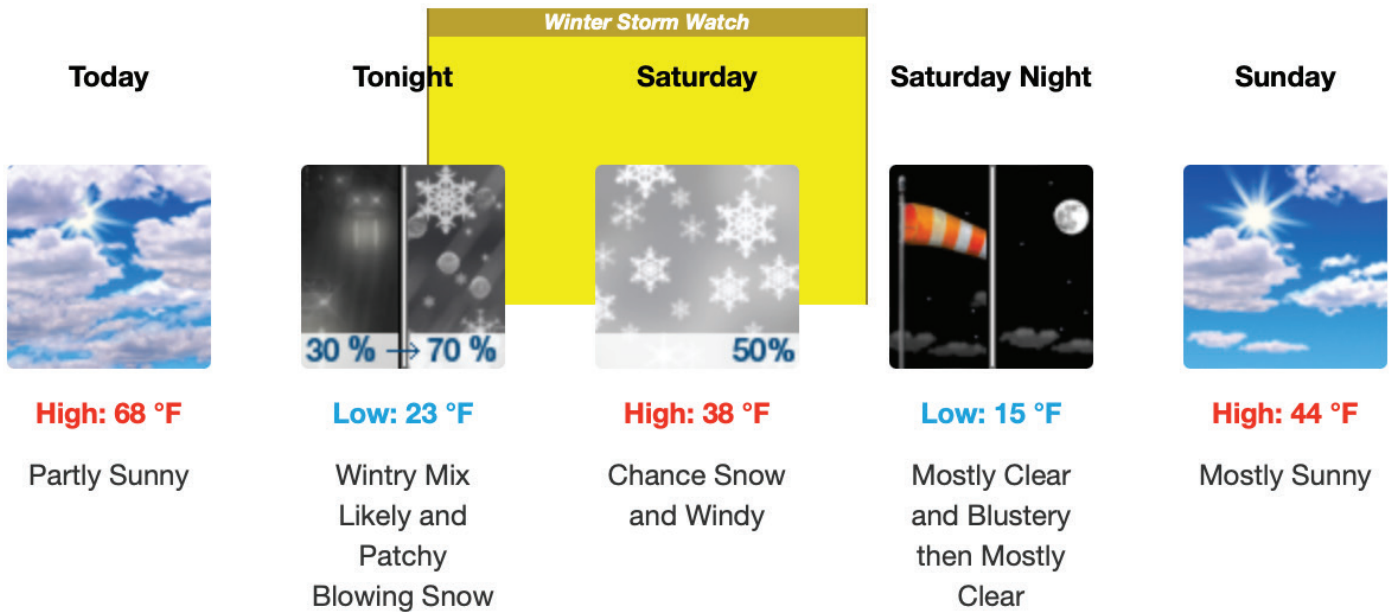
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Winter Storm Friday Night - Saturday

March 13, 2025
4:30 PM

Winter Storm Watch Area

Key Messages

- A late season winter storm will bring a mix of rain and snow to the region, perhaps even mixed with a period of freezing rain.
- Heaviest snow amounts will be over northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota late Friday - Saturday.
- Strong and gusty northwest winds will occur.
- Rain, freezing rain and the start of snow overnight Friday into Saturday morning may create slick road conditions. Snow combined with winds on Saturday will create reduced visibility and hazardous travel.

NEW

Important Updates

- **A winter storm watch has been issued for eastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota.**

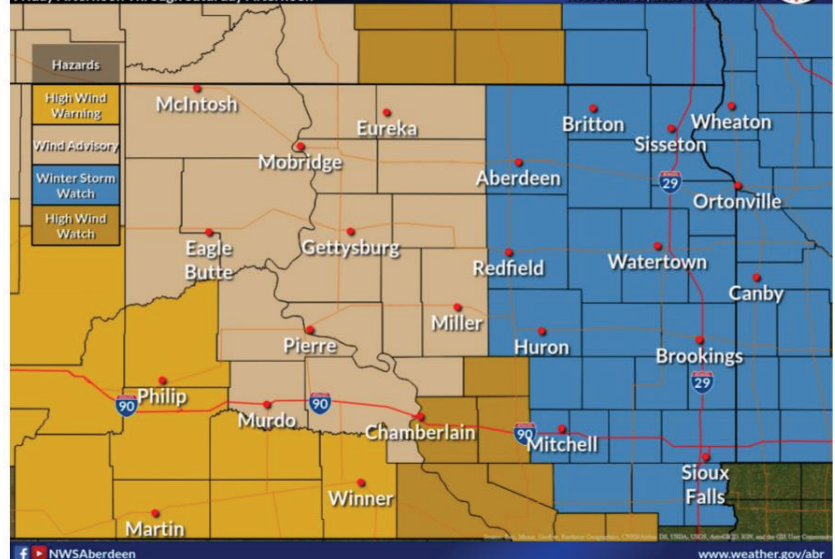
Weather Headlines

Friday Afternoon Through Saturday Afternoon

Weather Forecast Office

Aberdeen, SD

Issued Mar 13, 2025 4:01 PM CDT



National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A system will bring moisture and winds to the region Friday and Saturday. Look for rain to change to snow Friday night and Saturday, with a band of wet heavy snow across northeast/eastern South Dakota during the day. The combination of strong winds and snow will also lead to reduced visibility and hazardous travel.

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Snowfall Amount Considerations

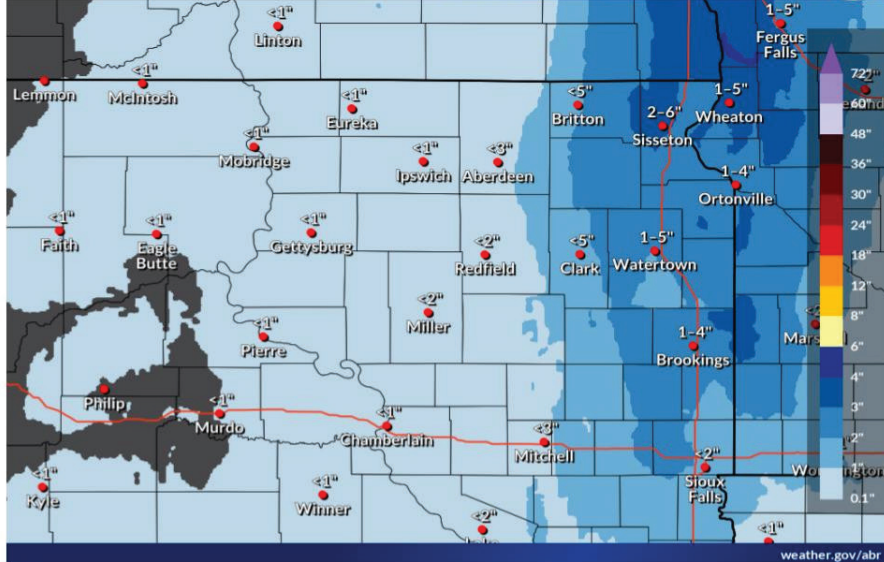
March 13, 2025

4:40 PM

Expected Snowfall: Official NWS Forecast

Valid 1 PM Thu Mar 13, 2025 through 7 AM Sun Mar 16, 2025

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Mar 13, 2025 3:16 PM CDT



Factors Favoring Lower End Amounts

- If the transition from **rain to snow** occurs more **slowly**, the **lower end amounts** are more likely to occur
- An **eastern shift** of the storm system would place **less snow** in our region and more in MN.

Factors Favoring Higher End Amounts

- If the transition from **rain to snow** occurs more **quickly**, the **higher end amounts** are more likely to occur
- A **western shift** in the storm track would put **more snow** over more of the region.



National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Snowfall ranges are still pretty large, as models try to identify where this band will set up. Just be aware that any slight shift, or if the system comes in with warmer air or the colder air is slightly faster, that will have an oversized impact on snow amounts. Additionally, with the high winds there will be quite a bit of blowing and drifting



Timing of Change from Rain to Snow

March 13, 2025

4:47 PM

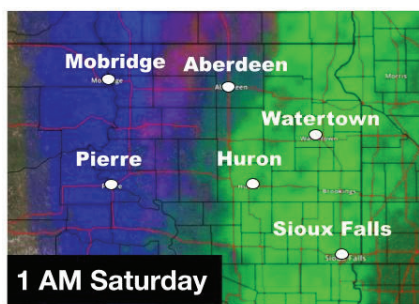
This will be a huge factor in snowfall accumulations!

• Precipitation Type

- There will be a transition from rain to snow across the region.
- Brief periods of freezing rain are possible.

• What's Uncertain?

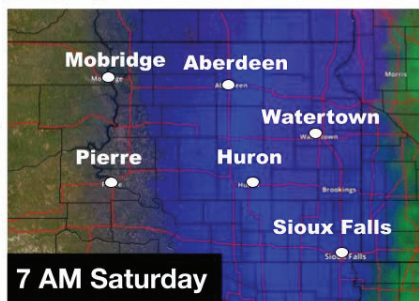
- How quickly the precipitation changes from rain to snow will have a huge impact on snowfall accumulations.



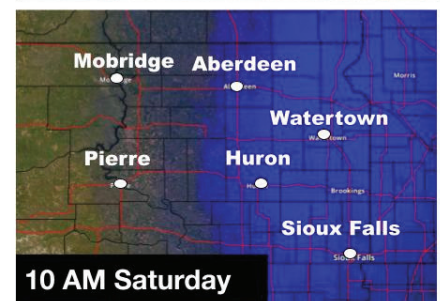
1 AM Saturday



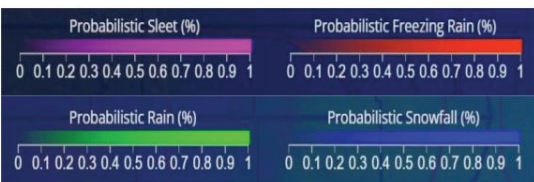
4 AM Saturday



7 AM Saturday



10 AM Saturday

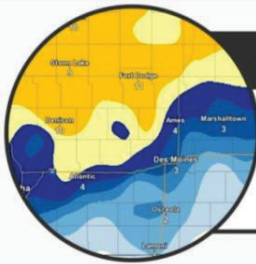


National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

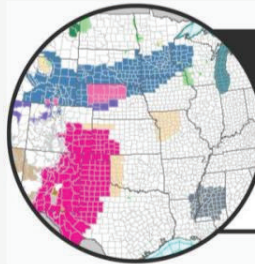
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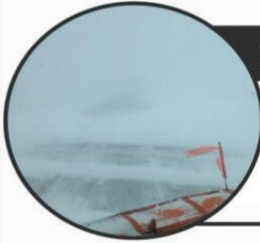
1) Snow Totals Vary

Snow totals can vary over short distances and in some occasions only a few miles such as a small county.



2) Forecasts Change

Winter forecasts may change as new model data becomes available. Always check [weather.gov](https://www.weather.gov) for the latest forecast update.



3) Storm's Impact

Focus on the impacts of the storm and not the precise totals. Falling snow (no matter the amount) combined with strong winds has a significant impact.



4) Watch vs Warning

Knowing when Winter Storm Watches and Warnings are issued will help you and your family prepare for an upcoming winter storm.

5 Things To Know About

Winter Weather Forecasts



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION



5) Reliable Source

Find and choose your weather information sources wisely. Follow a reliable name or organization you know and trust.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 70 °F at 5:00 PM

Low Temp: 39 °F at 12:51 AM

Wind: 26 mph at 2:26 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 54 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 71 in 1981

Record Low: -31 in 1897

Average High: 41

Average Low: 18

Average Precip in March.: 0.35

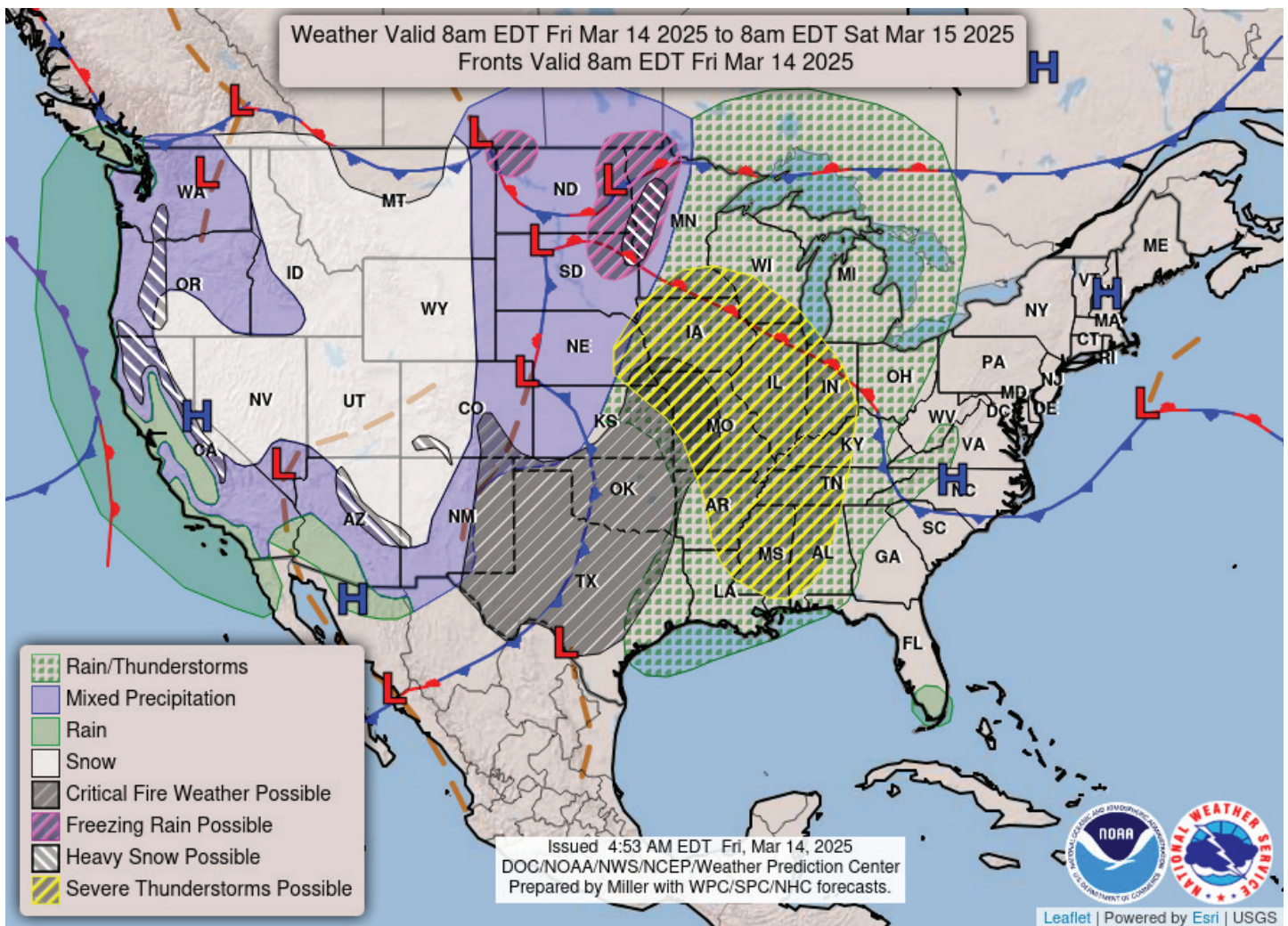
Precip to date in March.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.52

Precip Year to Date: 0.45

Sunset Tonight: 7:38:43 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:42:14 am



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Today in Weather History

March 14, 1989: A fast-moving winter storm produced freezing rain and heavy snow across most of South Dakota. The visibility was reduced to 100 ft within areas of blowing snow. Driving conditions were treacherous, resulting in abandoned vehicles, several accidents, and the temporary closing of I-29 from Sioux Falls to the North Dakota border.

March 14, 1990: Heavy Snow fell across parts of the southwest, central, and north-central South Dakota from the late afternoon on the 13th into the morning hours of the 14th. The highest accumulations were recorded in the north-central part of the state, including 9 inches at Gettysburg, 8 inches at Pollock, and 5 inches at Pine Ridge.

March 14, 2002: Heavy snow of 6 to 16 inches fell across parts of central and northeast South Dakota from the early morning to the evening hours. Some freezing rain fell across parts of the area before changing over to snow. Also, the winds increased from the north resulting in blowing snow and reduced visibilities. The combination of ice, heavy snow, and blowing snow resulted in challenging travel conditions. There were several accidents across the area, along with many vehicles sliding off the road. Schools either started late or were closed. Some snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Blunt, 7 inches at Murdo, 8 inches at Stephan and Clark, 9 inches at Gann Valley and Miller, and 11 inches at Highmore and Watertown. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included, 12 inches at Hayti and Milbank, 14 inches at Castlewood and Presho, 15 inches at Clear Lake, and 16 inches at Kennebec.

1870 - The term blizzard was first applied to a storm which produced heavy snow and high winds in Minnesota and Iowa. (David Ludlum)

1933: A deadly tornado outbreak affected the Middle Tennessee region, including Nashville, on this day. The outbreak, which produced five or more tornadoes, killed 44 people and injured at least 461 others. The strongest tornado, F3, cut a path through the center of Nashville. About 1,400 homes were damaged or destroyed. Windows were blown out of the State Capitol Building.

1935: Suffocating dust storms frequently occurred in southeast Colorado between the 12th and the 25th of the month. Six people died, and many livestock starved or suffocated. Up to six feet of dust covered the ground. Schools were closed, and tenants deserted many rural homes.

1944 - A single storm brought a record 21.6 inches of snow to Salt Lake City UT. (The Weather Channel)

1960 - Northern Georgia was between snowstorms. Gainesville GA received 17 inches of snow during the month, and reported at least a trace of snow on the ground 22 days in March. Snow was on roofs in Hartwell GA from the 2nd to the 29th. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A powerful storm in the western U.S. produced 15 inches of snow in the Lake Tahoe Basin of Nevada, and wind gusts to 50 mph at Las Vegas NV. Thunderstorms in the Sacramento Valley of California spawned a tornado which hit a turkey farm near Corning. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Squalls in the Great Lakes Region continued to produce heavy snow in northwest Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, and produced up to 14 inches of snow in northeast Ohio. Poplar WI reported 27 inches of snow in two days. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - High winds in Colorado and Wyoming gusted above 120 mph at Horsetooth Heights CO. High winds in the Central Plains sharply reduced visibilities in blowing dust as far east as Kansas City MO. Winds gusting to 72 mph at Hill City KS reduced the visibility to a city block in blowing dust. Soil erosion in north-west Kansas damaged nearly five million acres of wheat. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Fifty-three cities reported record high temperatures for the date as readings warmed into the 70s and 80s from the Gulf coast to the Great Lakes Region. Charleston WV was the hot spot in the nation with a record high of 89 degrees. It was the fourth of five consecutive days with record warm temperatures for many cities in the eastern U.S. There were 283 daily record highs reported in the central and eastern U.S. during between the 11th and the 15th of March. (The National Weather Summary)

2007 - The temperature in Concord, NH, reaches a record high of 74 degrees less than one week after a record low temperature of 7 degrees below zero on March 8, an 81 degree temperature swing in six days.

2008: An EF2 tornado moved through downtown Atlanta, Georgia, shortly before 10 pm, damaging the Georgia Dome where the SEC men's basketball tournament was underway.



GIVE THANKS IN ALL THINGS

When four-year-old Sammy awoke after surgery, the nurse explained that it would be necessary for him to be fed intravenously for the next few days.

After assuring him that everything would be fine, she began the process to administer the glucose. Always in the habit of giving thanks before each meal, Sammy asked in a brave and cheerful voice, "Aren't you going to give thanks?"

It is not easy to give thanks in painful situations. Nor is it natural to see God's goodness in all of life's trials and troubles. But the Apostle Paul reminds us to "Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

When we give thanks, we acknowledge our confidence in the Lord, knowing that He cares for us. When we give thanks, we express our closeness to God, realizing that He is with us in every situation. When we give thanks, we declare that we are willing to accept the counsel of God knowing that His will is being done.

Prayer: Dear Lord, may I learn the grace of giving thanks to You in all of life's situations. Help me to realize that You are always with me, watching, protecting, providing and guiding me in every area of life. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Scripture For Today: Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-23

We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.11.25

1 19 26 38 69 15

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$277,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 19 Mins 6 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: 1 Days 16 Hrs 34 Mins 6 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.13.25

19 24 27 32 38 12

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 49 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.12.25

7 9 11 12 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$64,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 49 Mins 6 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.12.25

30 31 45 56 69 25

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 18 Mins 6 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: 1 Days 17 Hrs 18 Mins 6 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

01/05/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
01/26/2025 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed at the Community Center 10am-1pm
01/26/2025 87th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
02/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
02/05/2025 FB Live Electronic Hwy 12 Sign Drawing City Hall 12pm
03/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
03/22/2025 Spring Vendor Fair at the GHS Gym 10am-2pm
04/05/2025 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39, 6-11:30pm
04/06/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp
05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
05/12/2025 High School Girls Golf Meet at Olive Grove
05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm
06/07/2025 Day of Play
06/13/2025 SDSU 4 Person Scramble at Olive Grove
06/21/2025 Groton Triathlon
06/23/2025 Ladies 2 Person Scramble at Olive Grove
07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm
07/16/2025 Men's Pro Am Golf at Olive Grove
07/25/2025 Ferney Open Scramble Golf at Olive Grove
08/01/2025 Wine on Nine Fundraiser at Olive Grove
08/09/2025 2nd Annual Celebration in the Park/Rib Cook-Off 1-9:30pm
08/23/2025 Glacial Tournament at Olive Grove
09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
09/07/2025 Sunflower Classic Couples Scramble at Olive Grove
10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1:30pm
12/06/2025 Olive Grove Holiday Party and Silent Live Auction Fundraiser

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

SDHSAA Class A State Playoffs

First Round

Dakota Valley 65, Sioux Valley 57

Hamlin 65, Mobridge-Pollock 53

Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 76, Wagner 39

Sioux Falls Christian 58, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 39

SDHSAA Class AA State Playoffs

First Round

Brandon Valley 69, T F Riggs High School 36

Rapid City Stevens 54, Spearfish 41

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 69, Sioux Falls Jefferson 42

Sioux Falls Washington 55, Mitchell 38

SDHSAA Class B State Playoffs

First Round

Bennett County 51, Parkston 49

Centerville 51, Deubrook 46

Dell Rapids St Mary 61, Harding County 50

Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 53, Lyman 40, OT

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

Why is an Elon Musk-backed PAC running an ad against Republican state legislators?

By JACK DURA Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A group backed by Elon Musk is running ads targeting conservative Republican legislators in several states over their support of a federal drug pricing program. No one seems as surprised about the effort as the lawmakers themselves.

The video ad by Building America's Future is titled "Trump Underminers." It focuses on the federal 340B program, saying it "is now a disaster" and to "let Trump fix 340B."

The ad groups together five lawmakers in Kentucky, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Tennessee whom it accuses of trying to mandate expansion of the program. It is one of the first signs since Trump returned to the White House of a group linked to Musk going after Republicans in individual states.

The legislators say they want to help rural hospitals and don't understand what is behind the criticism or why the group, of which Musk is a major donor, is singling them out.

Here's a look at the ad's claims and the mystery behind them:

What is the 340B program?

Under the program, drug manufacturers are required to provide discounts to hospitals caring for uninsured and low-income patients, according to the American Hospital Association. The program was expanded to rural hospitals in 2010.

The ad airing on local television says, "Some Republicans in your state are undermining Trump and trying to mandate expansion of 340B."

The message goes on to say the program "helps fund gender transitions for kids, abortion procedures

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and health care for illegals.”

Nebraska state Sen. Brian Hardin, who is named in the ad, said there is no truth to those claims.

The program has been at a center of a yearslong lobbying battle between hospitals and pharmaceutical companies, with each side attempting to enlist lawmakers in maintaining or reforming the benefit.

What do the lawmakers think?

The claims in the ad lead Hardin to wonder whether pharmaceutical companies might be behind the effort.

“It only fuels my speculation that somebody brought a modicum of actual information to Musk and said, ‘Please throw your money behind us,’” Hardin said.

North Dakota Republican Rep. Jon Nelson said the only truthful statement in the ad is the spelling of his name. Nelson said he introduced a bill this session with a goal of continuing the 340B program as it exists.

Nelson said the pharmaceutical industry wants to get rid of the program because “long story short, they don’t want to sell their drugs at a discount.”

It’s all puzzling, Nelson said, because he doesn’t know of any organized effort to end the program.

“There’s absolutely no undermining that’s taking place here because there’s been no action from Washington to change 340B that I’m aware of,” Nelson said. “We’re not undermining anything that’s taking place in Washington.”

Kentucky Republican state Sen. Stephen Meredith said his legislation is not about the 340B program.

“My bill is about the fact Kentucky healthcare providers who serve a disproportionate number of economically disadvantaged people; predominately in rural communities, are being discriminated against by pharmaceutical manufacturers who are arbitrarily and capriciously withholding 340B drugs and 340B discounts which are legally due to these qualifying healthcare providers,” Meredith said in a statement.

Like the others, Hardin said he is being targeted for his bill that would preserve Nebraska hospitals’ access to the program.

Hardin said the ad has been running in Nebraska for about three weeks, but has done nothing to hurt his bill. It advanced last week from the first of three rounds of debate 41-0.

Why is this group doing this?

That’s unclear. Building America’s Future didn’t respond to an email seeking information about their effort. A spokesperson for another Musk-funded political group acknowledged a phone message but did not respond to questions. Building America’s Future’s X profile could not be messaged.

A spokesperson for the PhRMA pharmaceutical trade group did not immediately respond to an email requesting comment about the ad.

The ad has aired in broadcast markets in Nashville, North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska, according to media tracking firm AdImpact.

Building America’s Future is also behind misleading ads and text messages to voters in a consequential upcoming Wisconsin Supreme Court election. The group also was the single funder of a political group that pushed opposing ads last year in Michigan and Pennsylvania on then-Vice President Kamala Harris’ position on Israel.

Building America’s Future posted a photo to X in February of a large truck outside the North Dakota Capitol in Bismarck, bearing the messages “Tell North Dakota Republicans: Stop subsidized gender transitions for kids,” and “340B is subsidizing gender transitions for kids.”

In 2023, then-Gov. Doug Burgum signed a law banning gender-affirming surgeries and treatments for transgender kids.

Kentucky lawmakers add specific medical exceptions to the state’s near-total abortion ban

By BRUCE SCHREINER Associated Press

FRANKFORT, Ky. (AP) — Republican lawmakers inserted several medical exceptions into Kentucky’s near-total abortion ban on Thursday, seeking to offer clarity to doctors fearful of breaking the law for terminating pregnancies while treating expectant mothers with grave complications.

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Delving into potential life-or-death situations, the bill provides clear guidelines for doctors in such emergencies while maintaining Kentucky's strict prohibitions against abortion, its GOP supporters said.

"It ensures women facing life-threatening situations receive timely, appropriate medical care, and gives providers the legal certainty they need to act decisively," said Republican state Rep. Jason Nemes.

Some abortion-rights supporters said the bill reflected fundamental flaws in the abortion laws and had not been fully vetted. They noted it cleared a committee and both legislative chambers in less than 24 hours.

Kentucky's near-total abortion ban has been in place since a so-called trigger law took effect when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022. The Bluegrass State bans abortions except when carried out to save a mother's life. Efforts to add exceptions for cases of rape or incest or when pregnancies are nonviable have made no headway in Kentucky's Republican-supermajority legislature.

"We are in this mess ... because the current Kentucky state laws are so restrictive that we actually need clarity to save the life of a pregnant mother," said Democratic state Rep. Rachel Roarx. "That's where we're at. And it is terrifying to be someone who can become pregnant in this state."

With only a handful of days left in this year's 30-day legislative session, a Senate committee attached the abortion-related language to a bill dealing with birthing centers Wednesday night.

The bill cleared both the Senate and House on Thursday and now goes to Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear, an abortion-rights supporter who told reporters he had questions about its impact on one of the country's "the most restrictive, draconian abortion laws."

"Is it more or less restrictive than the current understanding in the medical community that we have right now?" said Beshear, who is seen as a potential contender for the White House in 2028.

Since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* and allowed states to enforce abortion bans, exceptions have been a legal and political battleground.

The Texas Supreme Court last year rejected a challenge by a group of women who said that the state's law was too vague regarding what medically necessary exceptions are allowed. But this year, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick said the state should amend the ban to clarify that question.

South Dakota lawmakers last year sought to clear up confusion surrounding emergency exceptions by approving a taxpayer-funded video explaining the law to physicians. But some doctors said it didn't help.

In Kentucky, abortion law has created barriers to treating women faced with complicated pregnancies, a doctor told the Senate panel Wednesday evening. The new legislation deals with the "most glaring barriers to care," said Jeffrey Goldberg, a gynecologic oncologist from Louisville.

"We're hopeful to get at least some initial changes ... that will remove the conflicts that physicians are facing between, on the one hand, trying to do what they know is right for their patient, based on what the medical evidence dictates, and at the same time their fear of being accused of a felony," he said.

The bill says doctors exercising reasonable medical judgment may take action "separating a pregnant woman from her unborn child" in such cases as: lifesaving miscarriage management; emergency intervention for sepsis and hemorrhaging; procedures necessary to prevent the death or substantial risk of death of the pregnant woman; removal of an ectopic pregnancy; treatment of a molar pregnancy.

"It's not meant to be an exhaustive list but it is the most common issues that physicians and mothers, who are facing a crisis pregnancy, are facing," said Republican state Rep. Kimberly Poore Moser.

Addia Wuchner, executive director of Kentucky Right to Life, was among the bill's advocates, telling the Senate panel: "This is medical care that needs to take place in the commonwealth."

The abortion-rights group Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates said lawmakers had "snuck narrow and confusing 'exceptions'" into something that should be regarded as basic health care, all the while keeping Kentucky's existing abortion ban firmly in place.

"Rather than offering meaningful medical care to patients with fatal fetal diagnoses or life-threatening pregnancy complications, this language forces doctors to wait until patients are near death before intervening," said Tamarra Wieder, the group's Kentucky state director, in a statement Thursday.

China, Russia and Iran call for end to US sanctions on Iran and the restart of nuclear talks

By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Representatives of China, Russia and Iran called Friday for an end to U.S. sanctions on Iran over its rapidly advancing nuclear program and a restart to multinational talks on the issue.

The talks are the latest attempt to broach the matter and come after U.S. President Donald Trump wrote to Iran's supreme leader in an attempt to jumpstart talks.

The letter, which hasn't been published, was offered as Trump levied new sanctions on Iran as part of his "maximum pressure" campaign that holds out the possibility of military action while emphasizing he still believed a new deal could be reached.

The three nations who met Friday morning "emphasized the necessity of terminating all unlawful unilateral sanctions," China's Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu read from a joint statement, flanked by Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov Sergey Alexeevich and Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi.

"The three countries reiterated that political and diplomatic engagement and dialogue based on the principle of mutual respect remains the only viable and practical option in this regard," Ma read.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was due to meet with the representatives later in the day.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has mocked Trump, saying he wasn't interested in talks with a "bullying government," although Iranian officials have offered conflicting signals over the possibility of negotiations. Trump sent a letter to Khamenei in 2019 with no apparent effect on rising tensions.

China and Russia are both permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, along with France and Britain, that took part in the original 2015 Iran nuclear deal preliminary framework agreement alongside Germany and the European Union. Trump withdrew America from the accord in 2018, setting in motion years of attacks and tensions in the wider Middle East.

China and Russia have particularly close relations with Iran through energy deals and Iran has provided Russia with bomb-carrying drones in its war against Ukraine.

They are also seen as sharing a joint interest in diminishing the role of the U.S. and other liberal democracies in determining world events in favor of their own highly authoritarian systems.

Iran insists its nuclear program is peaceful. However, its officials increasingly threaten to pursue a nuclear weapon. Iran now enriches uranium to near weapons-grade levels of 60%, the only country in the world without a nuclear weapons program to do so.

Under the original 2015 nuclear deal, Iran was allowed to enrich uranium only up to 3.67% purity and to maintain a uranium stockpile of 300 kilograms (661 pounds). The last report by the International Atomic Energy Agency on Iran's program put its stockpile at 8,294.4 kilograms (18,286 pounds) as it enriches a fraction of it to 60% purity.

While Iran has maintained it won't negotiate under duress, its economy has been savaged by the U.S. sanctions. Protests over women's rights, the economy and Iran's theocracy in recent years have shaken its government.

China has sought to become more involved in Middle Eastern affairs and a year ago hosted talks leading to the full restoration of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Iran increasingly electronically surveils women looking for headscarf violations, UN report warns

By JAMEY KEATEN and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Iran increasingly relies on electronic surveillance and the public to inform on women refusing to wear the country's mandatory headscarf in public, even as hard-liners push for harsher penalties for those protesting the law, a United Nations report released Friday found.

The findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran come after it determined last year that the country's theocracy was responsible for the "physical violence" that

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led to the death of Mahsa Amini. Her death led to nationwide protests against the country's mandatory hijab laws and the public disobedience against them that continues even today, despite the threat of violent arrest and imprisonment.

"Two and a half years after the protests began in September 2022, women and girls in Iran continue to face systematic discrimination, in law and in practice, that permeates all aspects of their lives, particularly with respect to the enforcement of the mandatory hijab," the report said.

"The state is increasingly reliant on state-sponsored vigilantism in an apparent effort to enlist businesses and private individuals in hijab compliance, portraying it as a civic responsibility."

Iran's mission to the U.N. in New York did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the findings of the 20-page report.

Drones, surveillance cameras monitor women

In it, U.N. investigators outline how Iran increasingly relies on electronic surveillance. Among the efforts include Iranian officials deploying "aerial drone surveillance" to monitor women in public places. At Tehran's Amirkabir University, authorities installed facial recognition software at its entrance gate to also find women not wearing the hijab, it said.

Surveillance cameras on Iran's major roadways also are believed to be involved in searching for uncovered women. U.N. investigators said they obtained the "Nazer" mobile phone app offered by Iranian police, which allows the public to report on uncovered women in vehicles, including ambulances, buses, metro cars and taxis.

"Users may add the location, date, time and the license plate number of the vehicle in which the alleged mandatory hijab infraction occurred, which then 'flags' the vehicle online, alerting the police," the report said. "It then triggers a text message (in real-time) to the registered owner of the vehicle, warning them that they had been found in violation of the mandatory hijab laws, and that their vehicles would be impounded for ignoring these warnings."

Those text messages have led to dangerous situations. In July 2024, police officers shot and paralyzed a woman who activists say had received such a message and was fleeing a checkpoint near the Caspian Sea.

Tensions remain after 2022 death of Mahsa Amini

Amini's death sparked months of protests and a security crackdown that killed more than 500 people and led to the detention of more than 22,000. After the mass demonstrations, police dialed down enforcement of hijab laws, but it ramped up again in April 2024 under what authorities called the Noor — or "Light" — Plan. At least 618 women have been arrested under the Noor Plan, the U.N. investigators said, citing a local human rights activist group in Iran.

Meanwhile, Iran executed at least 938 people last year, a threefold increase from 2021, the U.N. said. While many were convicted of drug charges, the report said the executions "indicate a nexus with the overall repression of dissent in this period."

As Iran continues its crackdown over the hijab, it also faces an economic crisis over U.S. sanctions due to its rapidly advancing nuclear program. While U.S. President Donald Trump has called for new negotiations, Iran has yet to respond to a letter he sent to its 85-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Social unrest, coupled with the economic woes, remain a concern for Iran's theocracy.

Philippine ex-President Duterte set to appear in Hague courtroom to face 'war on drugs' charges

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte is scheduled to make his first appearance before judges of the International Criminal Court on Friday, days after his stunning arrest in Manila on murder charges linked to the deadly "war on drugs" he oversaw while in office.

The 79-year-old Duterte, the first Asian former leader arrested on an ICC warrant, will be read his rights and formally informed of the charges of crimes against humanity that the court's prosecutors filed against

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him after a lengthy investigation.

Estimates of the death toll during Duterte's presidential term vary, from the more than 6,000 that the national police have reported up to the 30,000 claimed by human rights groups.

The court will also seek to set a date for a key pre-trial hearing — likely months from now — at which judges will assess whether there is enough evidence to proceed to a full trial, which could take years. If Duterte is convicted, he faces a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

Duterte was arrested Tuesday amid chaotic scenes in the Philippine capital after returning from a visit to Hong Kong. He was swiftly put on a chartered jet and flown to the Netherlands. After a series of medical checks on arrival, he was taken to the court's detention center, located behind the high brick walls of a Dutch prison complex close to the North Sea coastline.

Prosecutors accuse him of involvement as an "indirect co-perpetrator" in multiple murders, amounting to a crime against humanity for allegedly overseeing killings from November 2011 until March 2019, first while he was mayor of the southern city of Davao and later as president of the Philippines.

Duterte will not be required to formally enter a plea at Friday's hearing.

According to the prosecution request for his arrest, as Davao mayor Duterte issued orders to police and other "hitmen" who formed so-called "Davao Death Squads" or DDS.

He told them "that their mission was to kill criminals, including drug dealers, and provided clearance for specific DDS killings," prosecutors allege, adding that he recruited, paid and rewarded the killers and "provided them with the necessary weapons and resources, and promised to shield them from prosecution."

The document seeking an ICC warrant for Duterte said that prosecutors built their case using evidence including witness testimony, speeches by Duterte himself, government documents and video footage.

Human rights groups and victims' families have hailed Duterte's arrest as a historic triumph against state impunity, while the former president's supporters have slammed what they call the government's surrender of a rival to a court whose jurisdiction they dispute.

"We are happy and we feel relieved," said 55-year-old Melinda Abion Lafuente, mother of 22-year-old Angelo Lafuente, who she said was tortured and killed in 2016.

"Duterte's appearance before the ICC is a testament to the courage and determination of the victims, their families, and Filipino activists and journalists to pursue justice no matter how long it takes," said Bryony Lau, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "Other leaders facing ICC arrest warrants, like Vladimir Putin and Benjamin Netanyahu, should take note that even those who seem untouchable today can end up in The Hague."

Duterte's legal team said President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s administration should not have allowed the global court to take custody of the former leader because the Philippines is no longer a party to the ICC.

"Our own government has surrendered a Filipino citizen — even a former president at that — to foreign powers," Vice President Sara Duterte, the ex-president's daughter and a political rival of the current president, said Tuesday before her father was flown out of Manila.

Judges who approved Duterte's arrest warrant said the court has jurisdiction because the crimes alleged in the warrant were committed before Duterte withdrew the Philippines from the court in 2019.

Columbia's Mahmoud Khalil felt he was being kidnapped as detention unfolded, lawyers say

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Handcuffed and shackled, Mahmoud Khalil was rushed from New York to Louisiana last weekend in a manner that left the outspoken Columbia University graduate student feeling like he was being kidnapped, his lawyers wrote in an updated lawsuit seeking his immediate release.

The lawyers described in detail what happened to the Palestinian activist as he was flown to Louisiana by agents he said never identified themselves. Once there, he was left to sleep in a bunker with no pillow or blanket as top U.S. officials cheered the effort to deport a man his lawyers say sometimes became the "public face" of student protests on Columbia's campus against Israel's military actions in Gaza.

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The filing late Thursday in Manhattan federal court was the result of a federal judge's Wednesday order that they finally be allowed to speak with Khalil.

The lawyers said his treatment by federal authorities from Saturday, when he was first arrested, to Monday reminded Khalil of when he left Syria shortly after the forced disappearance of his friends there during a period of arbitrary detention in 2013.

"Throughout this process, Mr. Khalil felt as though he was being kidnapped," the lawyers wrote of his treatment.

Earlier this week, 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."

In court papers, lawyers for the Justice Department said Khalil was detained under a law allowing Secretary of State Marco Rubio to remove someone from the country if he has reasonable grounds to believe their presence or activities would have potentially serious adverse foreign policy consequences.

Trump and Rubio were added as defendants in the civil lawsuit seeking to free Khalil.

The government attorneys asked a judge to toss out the lawsuit or transfer it to New Jersey or Louisiana, saying jurisdiction belongs in the locations where Khalil has been held since his detention.

According to the lawsuit, Khalil repeatedly asked to speak to a lawyer after the U.S. permanent resident with no criminal history was snatched by federal agents as he and his wife were returning to Columbia's residential housing, where they lived, after dinner at a friend's home.

Confronted by agents for the Department of Homeland Security, Khalil briefly telephoned his lawyer before he was taken to FBI headquarters in lower Manhattan, the lawsuit said.

It was there that Khalil saw an agent approach another agent and say, "the White House is requesting an update," the lawyers wrote.

At some point early Sunday, Khalil was taken, handcuffed and shackled, to the Elizabeth Detention Center in Elizabeth, New Jersey, a privately-run facility where he spent the night in a cold waiting room for processing, his request for a blanket denied, the lawsuit said.

When he reached the front of the line for processing, he was told his processing would not occur after all because he was being transported by immigration authorities, it said.

Put in a van, Khalil noticed that one of the agents received a text message instructing that Khalil was not to use his phone, the lawsuit said.

At 2:45 p.m. Sunday, he was put on an American Airlines flight from Kennedy International Airport to Dallas, where he was put on a second flight to Alexandria, Louisiana. He arrived at 1 a.m. Monday and a police car took him to the Louisiana Detention Facility in Jena, Louisiana, it said.

At the facility, he now worries about his pregnant wife and is "also very concerned about missing the birth of his first child," the lawsuit said.

In April, Khalil was to begin a job and receive health benefits that the couple was counting on to cover costs related to the birth and care of the child, it added.

"It is very important to Mr. Khalil to be able to continue his protected political speech, advocating and protesting for the rights of Palestinians — both domestically and abroad," the lawsuit said, noting that Khalil was planning to speak on a panel at the upcoming premiere in Copenhagen, Denmark, of a documentary in which he is featured.

At a hearing Wednesday, Khalil's attorneys said they had not been allowed any attorney-client-protected communications with Khalil since his arrest and had been told they could speak to him in 10 days. Judge Jesse M. Furman ordered that at least one conversation be permitted on Wednesday and Thursday.

US and Israel look to Africa for resettling Palestinians uprooted from Gaza

By JOSEF FEDERMAN, MATTHEW LEE and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The U.S. and Israel have reached out to officials of three East African governments to discuss using their territories as potential destinations for resettling Palestinians uprooted from the Gaza

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Strip under President Donald Trump's proposed postwar plan, American and Israeli officials say.

The contacts with Sudan, Somalia and the breakaway region of Somalia known as Somaliland reflect the determination by the U.S. and Israel to press ahead with a plan that has been widely condemned and raised serious legal and moral issues. Because all three places are poor, and in some cases wracked by violence, the proposal also casts doubt on Trump's stated goal of resettling Gaza's Palestinians in a "beautiful area."

Officials from Sudan said they have rejected overtures from the U.S., while officials from Somalia and Somaliland told The Associated Press that they were not aware of any contacts.

Under Trump's plan, Gaza's more than 2 million people would be permanently sent elsewhere. He has proposed the U.S. would take ownership of the territory, oversee a lengthy cleanup process and develop it as a real estate project.

The idea of a mass transfer of Palestinians was once considered a fantasy of Israel's ultranationalist fringe. But since Trump presented the idea at a White House meeting last month, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has hailed it as a "bold vision."

Palestinians in Gaza have rejected the proposal and dismiss Israeli claims that the departures would be voluntary. Arab nations have expressed vehement opposition and offered an alternative reconstruction plan that would leave the Palestinians in place. Rights groups have said forcing or pressuring the Palestinians to leave could be a potential war crime.

Still, the White House says Trump "stands by his vision."

Speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss a secret diplomatic initiative, U.S. and Israeli officials confirmed the contacts with Somalia and Somaliland, while the Americans confirmed Sudan as well. They said it was unclear how much progress the efforts made or at what level the discussions took place.

Separate outreach from the U.S. and Israel to the three potential destinations began last month, days after Trump floated the Gaza plan alongside Netanyahu, according to the U.S. officials, who said that Israel was taking the lead in the discussions.

Israel and the U.S. have a variety of incentives — financial, diplomatic and security — to offer these potential partners. It is a formula that Trump used five years ago when he brokered the Abraham Accords — a series of mutually beneficial diplomatic accords between Israel and four Arab countries.

The White House declined to comment on the outreach efforts.

The offices of Netanyahu and Ron Dermer, the Israeli Cabinet minister and Netanyahu confidant who has been leading Israel's postwar planning, also had no comment.

But Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a longtime advocate of what he calls "voluntary" emigration of Palestinians, said this week that Israel is working to identify countries to take in Palestinians. He also said Israel is preparing a "very large emigration department" within its Defense Ministry.

Here is a closer look at the places the officials say have been approached.

Sudan

The North African country was among the four Abraham Accord nations that agreed to normalize diplomatic relations with Israel in 2020.

As part of the deal, the U.S. removed Sudan from its list of state supporters of terrorism, a move that gave the country access to international loans and global legitimacy. But relations with Israel never took off as Sudan plunged into civil war between government forces and the RSF paramilitary group.

The conflict has been marked by atrocities, including ethnically motivated killing and rape, according to the U.N. and rights groups. The International Criminal Court is investigating alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, and then-President Joe Biden's administration in January said the RSF and its proxies were committing genocide.

The U.S. and Israel would be hard-pressed to persuade Palestinians to leave Gaza, particularly to such a troubled country. But they could offer incentives to the Khartoum government, including debt relief, weapons, technology and diplomatic support.

Two Sudanese officials, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive diplomatic matter, confirmed that the Trump administration has approached the military-led government about accepting Palestinians.

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One of them said the contacts began even before Trump's inauguration with offers of military assistance against the RSF, assistance with postwar reconstruction and other incentives.

Both officials said the Sudanese government rejected the idea. "This suggestion was immediately rebuffed," said one official. "No one opened this matter again."

Military chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan told an Arab leaders' summit last week in Cairo that his country "categorically rejects" any plan that aims to transfer "the brotherly Palestinians from their land under whatever justification or name."

Somaliland

Somaliland, a territory of over 3 million people in the Horn of Africa, seceded from Somalia over 30 years ago, but it is not internationally recognized as an independent state. Somalia considers Somaliland part of its territory.

Somaliland's new president, Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, has made international recognition a priority.

An American official involved in the efforts confirmed that the U.S. was "having a quiet conversation with Somaliland about a range of areas where they can be helpful to the U.S. in exchange for recognition."

The possibility of U.S. recognition could provide an incentive for Abdullahi to back away from the territory's solidarity with the Palestinians.

The United Arab Emirates, another Abraham Accord country that has developed strong ties with Israel, once had a military base in Somaliland and maintains commercial interests there, including a port. The territory's strategic location, in the Gulf of Aden waterway near Yemen, home to the Houthi rebel group, could also make it a valuable ally.

Over the years, Somaliland has been lauded for its relatively stable political environment, contrasting sharply with Somalia's ongoing struggles amid deadly attacks by al-Qaida-linked militant group al-Shabab. Since 1991, Somaliland has maintained its own government, currency and security structures. Still, it has one of the lowest income levels in the world.

An official in Somaliland, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media, said his government has not been approached and is not in talks about taking in Palestinians.

Somalia

Somalia has been a vocal supporter of the Palestinians, often hosting peaceful protests on its streets in support of them. The country joined the recent Arab summit that rejected Trump's plan and seems like an unlikely destination for Palestinians, even if they did agree to move.

Sambu Chepkorir, a lawyer and conflict researcher in Nairobi, Kenya, said it is difficult to understand why Somalia would want to host Palestinians given the country's strong support for Palestinian self-rule.

"The realignments keep changing, and so maybe there is a hidden agenda in why Somalia," Chepkorir said.

A Somali official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media, said the country had not been approached about taking in Palestinians from Gaza and there had been no discussions about it.

12 people with minor injuries after American Airlines plane catches fire at Denver airport

DENVER (AP) — Twelve people were taken to hospitals after an American Airlines plane landed at Denver International Airport on Thursday and caught fire, prompting slides to be deployed so passengers could evacuate quickly.

All of the people transported to hospitals had minor injuries, according to a post on the social platform X by Denver International Airport.

Flight 1006, which was headed from the Colorado Springs Airport to Dallas Fort Worth, diverted to Denver and landed safely around 5:15 p.m. after the crew reported engine vibrations, the Federal Aviation Administration said in a statement.

While taxiing to the gate, an engine on the Boeing 737-800 caught fire, the FAA added.

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Photos and videos posted by news outlets showed passengers standing on a plane's wing as smoke surrounded the aircraft. The FAA said passengers exited using the slides.

American said in a statement that the flight experienced an engine-related issue after taxiing to the gate. There was no immediate clarification on exactly when the plane caught fire.

The 172 passengers and six crew members were taken to the terminal, airline officials said.

"We thank our crew members, DEN team and first responders for their quick and decisive action with the safety of everyone on board and on the ground as the priority," American said.

Firefighters put out the blaze by the evening, an airport spokesperson told media outlets.

The FAA said it will investigate.

The country has seen a recent spate of aviation disasters and close calls stoking fears about air travel, though flying remains a very safe mode of transport.

Recent on-the-ground incidents have included a plane that crashed and flipped over upon landing in Toronto and a Japan Airlines plane that clipped a parked Delta plane while it was taxiing at the Seattle airport.

Europe's military personnel shortfalls exposed as Trump warns US security priorities lie elsewhere

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — In the year after Russia launched outright war on Ukraine, NATO leaders approved a set of military plans designed to repel an invasion of Europe. It was the biggest shake-up of the alliance's defense readiness preparations since the Cold War.

The secret plans set out how Western allies would defend NATO territory from the Atlantic to the Arctic, through the Baltic region and Central Europe, down to the Mediterranean Sea. Up to 300,000 troops would move to its eastern flank within 30 days, many of them American. That would climb to 800,000 within six months.

But the Trump administration warned last month that U.S. priorities lie elsewhere. Europe must take care of its own security, and those goals now seem questionable. Mustering just 30,000 European troops to police any future peace in Ukraine is proving a challenge.

Billions of euros are being shifted to military budgets, but only slowly, and the Europeans are struggling to fire up production in their defense industries.

Beyond funding, tens of thousands more European citizens might have to complete military service, and time is of the essence. NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte has warned that Russian forces could be capable of launching an attack on European territory in 2030.

Concerned about Russia's intentions, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk wants to introduce large-scale military training for every adult male, and double the size of Poland's army to around 500,000 soldiers.

"If Ukraine loses the war or if it accepts the terms of peace, armistice or capitulation ... then, without a doubt — and we can all agree on that — Poland will find itself in a much more difficult geopolitical situation," Tusk warned lawmakers last week.

The scale of Europe's military personnel shortage

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimates that Europe, including the U.K., has almost 1.5 million active duty personnel. But many can't be deployed on a battlefield, and those who can are hard to use effectively without a centralized command system.

The number of Russian troops in Ukraine at the end of 2024 was estimated to be around 700,000.

NATO troops are controlled by a U.S. general, using American air transport and logistics.

Analysts say that in the event of a Russian attack, NATO's top military officer would probably dispatch around 200,000 U.S. troops to Europe to build on the 100,000 U.S. military personnel already based there.

With the Americans out of the picture, "a realistic estimate may therefore be that an increase in European capacities equivalent to the fighting capacity of 300,000 U.S. troops is needed," the Brussels-based Bruegel think tank estimates.

"Europe faces a choice: either increase troop numbers significantly by more than 300,000 to make up

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for the fragmented nature of national militaries, or find ways to rapidly enhance military coordination,” Bruegel said.

The question is how.

Making up the numbers

NATO is encouraging countries to build up personnel numbers, but the trans-Atlantic alliance isn't telling them how to do it. Maintaining public support for the armed forces and for Ukraine is too important to risk by dictating choices.

“The way they go about it is intensely political, so we wouldn't prescribe any way of changing this — whether to go for conscription, elective conscription, bigger reserves,” a senior NATO official said on the condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to brief journalists unless he remained unnamed.

“We do stress the point that fighting with those regional plans means that we are in collective defense and likely in an attrition war that requires way more manpower than we currently have, or we designed our force models to deliver,” he added.

Eleven European countries have compulsory military service: Austria, Cyprus, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, and non-European Union nation Norway. The length of service ranges from as little as two months in Croatia to 19 months in Norway.

Poland isn't considering a return to universal military service, but rather a reserve system based on the model in Switzerland, where every man is obliged to serve in the armed forces or an alternative civilian service. Women can volunteer.

Belgium's new defense minister plans to write a letter in November to around 120,000 citizens who are age 18 to try to persuade at least 500 of them to sign up for voluntary military service. Debate about the issue goes on in the U.K. and Germany.

Confronting the challenges

Germany's professional armed forces had 181,174 active service personnel at the end of last year — slightly lower than in 2023, according to a parliamentary report released Tuesday. That means it's no closer to reaching a Defense Ministry target of 203,000 by 2031.

Last year, 20,290 people started serving in the German military, or Bundeswehr, an 8% increase, the report said. But of the 18,810 who joined in 2023, more than a quarter — 5,100 or 27% of the total — left again, most at their own request during the six-month trial period.

The German parliament's commissioner for the armed forces, Eva Högl, said that army life is a hard sell.

“The biggest problem is boredom,” Högl said. “If young people have nothing to do, if there isn't enough equipment and there aren't enough trainers, if the rooms aren't reasonably clean and orderly, that deters people and it makes the Bundeswehr unattractive.”

At the other end of the scale, tiny Luxembourg has unique demographic challenges. Of its roughly 630,000 passport holders, only 315,000 are Luxembourgers. The number of people of military service age — 18 to 40 — is smaller still.

Around 1,000 people are enlisted. That's small compared to some European powers, but bigger per capita than the U.K. armed forces. Recently, Luxembourg — where unemployment is low and salaries are high — has struggled to find just 200-300 military personnel.

Military service comes with many challenges too, not least convincing someone to sign up when they might be sent to the front, and hastily trained conscripts can't replace a professional army. The draft also costs money. Extra staff, accommodation and trainers are needed throughout a conscript's term.

Hundreds of federal offices could begin closing this summer at DOGE's behest, internal records show

By RYAN J. FOLEY, JOSHUA GOODMAN and CHRISTOPHER L. KELLER Associated Press

Federal agencies will begin to vacate hundreds of offices across the country this summer under a frenetic and error-riddled push by Elon Musk's budget-cutting advisers to terminate leases that they say waste

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money.

Musk's Department of Government Efficiency maintains a list of canceled real estate leases on its website, but internal documents obtained by The Associated Press contain a crucial detail: when those cancellations are expected to take effect. The documents from inside the General Services Administration, the U.S. government's real estate manager, list dozens of federal office and building leases expected to end by June 30, with hundreds more slated over the coming months.

The rapid pace of cancellations has raised alarms, with some agencies and lawmakers appealing to DOGE to exempt specific buildings. Several agencies are facing 20 or more lease cancellations in all, including the IRS, the Social Security Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Geological Survey.

Many of the terminations would affect agencies that aren't as well-known but oversee services critical to many Americans.

They span from a Boise, Idaho, office of the Bureau of Reclamation — which oversees water supply and deals with disputes across the often-parched American West — to a Joliet, Illinois, outpost of the Railroad Retirement Board, which provides benefits for railroad workers and their survivors.

The lease terminations do not mean all the locations will close. In some cases, agencies may negotiate new leases to stay in place, downsize their existing space or relocate elsewhere.

"Some agencies are saying: 'I'm not leaving. We can't leave,'" said Chad Becker, a former GSA real estate official who now represents building owners with government leases at Arco Real Estate Solutions. "I think there's going to be a period of pushback, a period of disbelief. And then, if necessary, they may start working on the actual execution of a move."

Errors add to confusion

DOGE says GSA has notified landlords in recent weeks that it plans to terminate 793 leases, focusing mostly on those that can be ended within months without penalty. The group estimates those moves will save roughly \$500 million over the terms of the leases, which in some cases were slated to continue into the 2030s. The Bureau of Reclamation cancellation in Boise, for instance, would take effect Aug. 31 and is expected to save a total of \$18.7 million through 2035.

But DOGE's savings estimates — a fraction of Musk's \$1 trillion cost-cutting goal — have not been verified and do not take into account the costs of moves and closures. The group has released no information about what they will mean for agencies.

"My initial reaction is this is just going to cause more chaos," said Jim Simpson, an accountant in Arizona who helps low-income people file taxes and serves on an IRS panel that advocates for taxpayers. "There's a lot of room to help with government efficiency, but it should be done surgically and not with a chainsaw."

Simpson said he was surprised to learn that dozens of IRS offices, including local taxpayer assistance centers, were facing upcoming lease cancellations. He refers clients there to get paperwork to file returns and answer IRS inquiries, and he said losing services would "cause a lot of anxiety" and delay refunds.

Plans to cancel the leases at several of the IRS centers and other sites were in error and have been rescinded, according to a person with direct knowledge of the changes who spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity in order to avoid retaliation. Those changes are not yet reflected on DOGE's list, which only removed one and added dozens more in its latest update published Thursday.

The GSA walked back the cancellation of a Geological Survey office in Anchorage, Alaska, for instance, after learning it did not have termination rights, according to the person familiar with the matter.

Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., said Monday that he'd convinced DOGE to back off lease terminations planned for the National Weather Center in Norman, a Social Security office in Lawton and the Indian Health Services office in Oklahoma City. But all three leases remained on DOGE's list of cancellations as of Thursday.

GSA's press office didn't respond to inquiries.

The real estate market is blindsided

While there was already a bipartisan push to reduce the government's real estate footprint, the mass cancellations blindsided an industry known for its stability.

Landlords who had been expecting government agencies to remain tenants, for several more years in some cases under their existing leases, were stunned. Some agencies learned from building managers,

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not their federal partners, that their leases were being canceled, according to real estate managers.

Becker, whose firm is tracking the DOGE lease cancellations, and other observers said they expect some agencies will be unable to move their personnel and property out of their spaces within such tight timelines. That may force some agencies to pay additional rent during what's known as a holdover period, undermining DOGE's stated goal of saving taxpayer money.

The Building Owners and Managers Association, which represents the commercial real estate industry, told landlords in a recent advocacy alert to be prepared to seek payment from any federal government tenants who stay beyond their leases.

Many affected agencies aren't speaking up

Asked about plans for buildings with leases that will soon expire, the IRS did not respond. A Social Security Administration spokesperson downplayed the impact of its offices losing leases, saying many were "small remote hearing sites," did not serve the public, were already being consolidated elsewhere or planned for closure.

Several other agencies provided little clarity — saying they were working with GSA to consider their options, in statements that were nearly identical in some cases.

But a spokesperson for the Railroad Retirement Board expressed concern over the upcoming lease cancellations of its offices in Joliet, Illinois, and eight other states, saying it was working to "maintain a public-facing office presence for the local railroad community."

Government Accountability Office official David Marroni told a congressional hearing last week that the push to unload unnecessary federal real estate was "long overdue," saying agencies have for too long held on to unnecessary space. But he warned the downsizing must be deliberate and carefully planned to "generate substantial savings and mitigate the risk of mistakes and unexpected mission impacts."

That process had already started before Musk's team arrived, with the federal government's real estate portfolio steadily declining over the last decade. Indeed, critics of DOGE say if it were truly interested in cost-cutting it could learn from GSA, whose mission even before Trump took office was to deliver "effective and efficient" services to the American public.

A law signed by former President Joe Biden before he left office in January directed agencies to measure the true occupancy rates of leased spaces by this summer. Those that did not meet a target of 60% use rate over time would be directed to dispose of their excess space.

"There is a logical and orderly way to do this," Rep. Greg Stanton, an Arizona Democrat, said at last week's hearing. Instead, he said, DOGE is pursuing a reckless approach that threatens to harm the delivery of public services.

Industry observers cautioned that each situation is different, and it will take months or years to understand the full impact of the lease cancellations.

"It really depends on the terms. But it is a shock, there is no question, that all of a sudden, boom, in six weeks all these things have happened," said J. Reid Cummings, a professor of finance and real estate at the University of South Alabama. "It's like a blitzkrieg."

Big March storm system threatens US with tornadoes, blizzards and wildfire risk

By The Associated Press undefined

A huge storm system crossing the U.S. threatens to unleash tornadoes Friday in the Mississippi Valley, blizzards in the northern Plains and dry, gusty conditions in Texas and Oklahoma that pose an extreme risk of wildfires.

The National Weather Service predicted extreme weather across a vast swath of the U.S. with a population exceeding 100 million people. Powerful winds gusting up to 80 mph (130 kph) were forecast from the Canadian line to the Rio Grande border with Mexico.

Forecasters say the severe storm threat will continue into the weekend, with a moderate chance of

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tornadoes and damaging winds pushing farther south Saturday to areas including New Orleans and Birmingham, Alabama. Heavy rain could bring flash flooding to some parts of the East Coast on Sunday.

Experts say it's not unusual to see such weather extremes in March, when emerging spring warmth and lingering winter cold create big temperature differences for storms to thrive.

"If there's a time of the year where a storm like this can deliver these coast-to-coast impacts, we are in it," said Benjamin Reppert, a meteorologist at Penn State University.

Tornadoes likely amid storm outbreak

A regional outbreak of severe storms was expected Friday afternoon with some risk of thunderstorms extending from the Great Lakes to the Gulf Coast.

Forecasters said tornadoes, damaging winds and hail up to baseball-size were likely, with the greatest risk in eastern Missouri, much of Illinois and portions of Iowa, Kentucky, Tennessee and Arkansas. The weather service's Storm Prediction Center said 17 million people faced an enhanced to moderate severe storm threat from Des Moines, Iowa, to Jackson, Mississippi.

The tornado threat pushes farther south on Saturday into the Gulf Coast states, including New Orleans and other parts of eastern Louisiana and much of Mississippi and Alabama.

Blizzards expected in Northern Plains

Forecasters warned that heavy snow whipped by powerful winds are likely to make travel treacherous in parts of the Rockies and Northern Plains. Blizzard conditions were possible in the Dakotas and Minnesota.

Winter storm warnings issued Thursday lingered into Friday morning in mountainous regions of Arizona and Utah, where more than a foot (30 centimeters) of snowfall was possible. Forecasters warned of poor visibility and icy road conditions, urging motorists to travel with extra food and water in case they became stranded.

The winter blast continued after snowfall of up to 3 feet (90 centimeters) blanketed the Sierra Nevada earlier in the week.

Dry, gusty conditions bring 'extreme' threat of wildfires

Warm, dry weather and sustained winds of up to 45 mph (72 kph) brought what the weather service called "near historic" conditions for sparking wildfires Friday to the Southern Plains and parts of the Southwest. Wind gusts exceeding 80 mph (128 kph) were possible.

Forecasters shared a bit of advice during a special briefing: For those stuck on the roads, keep a firm grip on the steering wheel and watch for fallen trees, power lines and other debris. They said the strong winds would be kicking up plenty of dust and that brownout conditions were possible.

"This is likely to be the worst dust storm so far this year," said Randall Hergert, a lead forecaster with the weather service in Albuquerque.

Forecasters also warned about an extreme risk of fires in parts of northern Texas, much of Oklahoma and southeast Kansas. A broader area where the fire threat was designated as critical stretched from eastern New Mexico into Texas and north to a portion of southern Iowa.

The weather service said a potential for dry thunderstorms in parts of Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri and Arkansas carry the added risk of fires being started by lightning with minimal rainfall to stop them from spreading.

Senate works to avert partial government shutdown ahead of midnight deadline

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate finds itself on Friday in a familiar position, working to avoid a partial government shutdown with just hours to spare as Democrats confront two painful options: allowing passage of a bill they believe gives President Donald Trump vast discretion on spending decisions or voting no and letting a funding lapse ensue.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer gave members of his caucus days to vent their frustration

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about the options before them, but late Thursday made clear he will not allow a government shutdown. His move gives Democrats room to side with Republicans and allow the continuing resolution, often described as a CR, to come up for a vote as soon as Friday.

A procedural vote Friday will provide a first test of whether the package has the 60 votes needed to advance, ahead of final voting likely later in the day. At least eight Democrats will need to join with Republicans to move the funding package forward.

"While the CR still is very bad, the potential for a shutdown has consequences for America that are much, much worse," Schumer said.

Congress has been unable to pass the annual appropriations bills designed to fund the government, so they've resorted to passing short-term extensions instead. The legislation before the Senate marks the third such continuing resolution for the current fiscal year, now nearly half over.

The legislation would fund the federal government through the end of September. It would trim non-defense spending by about \$13 billion from the previous year and increase defense spending by about \$6 billion, which are marginal changes when talking about a topline spending level of nearly \$1.7 trillion.

The Republican-led House passed the spending bill on Tuesday and then adjourned. The move left senators with a decision to either take it or leave it. And while Democrats have been pushing for a vote on a fourth short-term extension, GOP leadership made clear that option was a non-starter.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., and others used their floor time Thursday to make the case that any blame for a shutdown would fall squarely on Democrats.

"Democrats need to decide if they're going to support funding legislation that came over from the House, or if they're going to shut down the government," Thune said when opening the chamber.

Progressive groups urged Democratic lawmakers to insist on the 30-day extension and oppose the spending bill, saying "business as usual must not continue" while Trump and ally Elon Musk dismantle critical agencies and programs.

But Schumer said Trump would seize more power during a shutdown, because it would give the administration the ability to deem whole agencies, programs and personnel non-essential, furloughing staff with no promise they would ever be rehired.

"A shutdown would give Donald Trump the keys to the city, the state and the country," Schumer said.

Democrats have been critical of the funding levels in the bill. They note that both defense and non-defense spending is lower than what was agreed to nearly two years ago when Congress passed legislation lifting the debt ceiling in return for spending restraints.

But they are even more worried about the discretion the bill gives the Trump administration on spending decisions. Many Democrats are referring to the measure as a "blank check" for Trump.

Spending bills typically come with specific funding directives for key programs, but hundreds of those directives fall away under the continuing resolution passed by the House. So the administration will have more leeway to decide where the money goes.

For example, a Democratic memo said the bill would allow the administration to steer money away from combating fentanyl and instead use it on mass deportation initiatives. At the Army Corps of Engineers, funding levels for more than 1,000 projects to enhance commerce, flood control and healthy ecosystems would be determined by the administration rather than Congress.

Democrats also object to the treatment of the District of Columbia, as the bill effectively repeals its current year budget and forces it to go back to the prior year's levels, even though the district raises most of its own money. Mayor Muriel Bowser said the district would have to cut spending by \$1.1 billion over just a few months.

Democrats also object to clawing back \$20 billion in special IRS funding, on top of the \$20 billion rescission approved the year before. The changes essentially cut in half the funding boost that Congress intended to give the agency through legislation passed by Democrats during Joe Biden's presidency.

The spending bill before the Senate is separate from the GOP effort to extend tax cuts for individuals passed in Trump's first term and to pay for those with spending cuts elsewhere in the budget.

That second package will be developed in the months ahead, but it was clearly part of the political

calculus Democrats were considering as they argued against the six-month extension. Both efforts are designed to help the well-off at the expense of other Americans, they said.

"You're looking at a one-two punch, a very bad CR, then a reconciliation bill coming down, which will be the final kick in the teeth for the American people," said Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt.

Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., said the Democratic arguments were hypocritical because they were essentially calling for shutting down the government to protect the government.

"Democrats are fighting to withhold the paychecks of air traffic controllers, our troops, federal custodial staff," Cotton said. "They can't be serious."

Once-routine immigration check-ins become high-stakes calculation as some are detained

By VALERIE GONZALEZ, CEDAR ATTANASIO and SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

When a couple from Colombia who was planning their wedding showed up for a check-in with U.S. immigration authorities, one was given his next appointment date. The other was detained and deported.

Jhojan doesn't know why Felipe was detained at the Feb. 5 appointment with Immigrations and Customs Enforcement in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. But Jhojan was so worried after Felipe's deportation that he didn't show up for his next check-in a month later. Jhojan insisted The Associated Press withhold the couple's last names, fearing retribution.

He is among many people who now fear that once-routine immigration check-ins will be used as an opportunity to detain them. The appointments have become a source of anxiety as President Donald Trump presses ahead with a campaign of mass deportations and the number of people in ICE custody has reached its highest level since November 2019.

The check-ins are how ICE keeps track of some people who are released by the government to pursue asylum or other immigration cases as they make their way through a backlogged court system. The government has not said how many people ICE has detained at such appointments or whether that's now standard practice, but immigration advocates and attorneys are concerned people might stop showing up, putting themselves further at risk of deportation.

"If you show up, they'll deport you. If you don't, they'll deport you, too," Jhojan, 23, told the AP this week.

The U.S. government is saying little

ICE and its parent agency, the Department of Homeland Security, did not respond to repeated requests for comment about immigrants being detained at check-ins.

With the federal government releasing little information, it's hard to sort out facts from rumors as fears run rampant in many immigrant communities. However, Trump has made it a priority to deport anyone who is in the U.S. illegally, a sharp shift from his predecessor, Joe Biden, who focused only on immigrants who were deemed public safety or national security threats and people stopped at the border.

ICE has arrested 32,809 people since Trump took office, a senior Immigration and Customs Enforcement official said Wednesday during a call with reporters. About 47,600 people are in ICE detention, according to the ICE official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with guidance set by the administration.

It's the first time in four years that ICE has arrested more people than Customs and Border Protection, indicating that more immigrants are being detained inside the U.S. than along its borders.

Immigration check-ins

ICE calls people in for appointments for several reasons, including issuing a court date. If an immigrant breaks the law during that time or a judge declines their appeal to stay in the U.S., ICE can detain and deport them.

In Louisiana, ICE detained an immigrant last month who was asked to show up under the guise of being eligible for another program with less supervision, according to the American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana, which declined to offer further details.

ICE also has locked up some people it just recently deemed as likely to qualify for asylum and unlikely to flee authorities.

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John Torres, a former ICE acting director, said it's hard to comment in detail without more information about each case. But, he added, "the major reason those things take place is because something has changed in their status or something's been discovered about their background."

Some asylum-seekers have been targeted

An immigrant from Ecuador who is in his 20s is among the asylum-seekers who have been detained, according to attorney Rosa Barreca.

It happened at the man's first check-in, on Feb. 3. The man had turned himself in to border agents after entering the U.S. illegally three weeks earlier. ICE officials at that time interviewed him and released him from custody, concluding he had a reasonable fear of persecution if he returned to his home country, according to Barreca.

Releasing him suggested that ICE wasn't concerned he would flee. The fact that he didn't made it easier for ICE to jail him.

"The family called me surprised and in a panic," said Barreca, who runs a private practice in Philadelphia, where the man's family lives. "When I asked the reason, he just said it is based on the executive orders and didn't specify anything further."

He had no criminal convictions and no contact with police during his few weeks in the U.S., Barreca said, ruling out every red flag she can imagine.

Lawyers are telling immigrants to prepare

Lawyers cannot advise clients to simply skip the meetings, which would lead to deportation orders. Instead, advocates and lawyers urge immigrants to prepare for appointments and the possibility of detention. They're cautioning immigrants to note sudden changes in how their check-ins are conducted — such as appointments that were always virtual instead being done in person.

They are also encouraging immigrants to make emergency child care arrangements and to provide details of their cases with friends and family. That includes sharing a unique identification number that ICE uses to track people.

Immigrant rights groups say people should bring someone, preferably an attorney, to ICE appointments.

Advocates are also returning to a tactic from the first Trump administration by telling people to have a group of supporters walk them to their check-ins and wait outside.

"When people feel unsafe going to report, it's setting everything up for failure," said Heidi Altman, vice president of policy at the National Immigration Law Center. "It undermines the trust that people need to have."

Gene Hackman's estate asks court to block release of death investigation records

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — A representative for the estate of actor Gene Hackman is seeking to block the public release of autopsy and investigative reports, especially photographs and police body-camera video, related to the recent deaths of Hackman and wife Betsy Arakawa after their partially mummified bodies were discovered at their New Mexico home in February.

Authorities last week announced Hackman died at age 95 of heart disease with complications from Alzheimer's disease as much as a week after a rare, rodent-borne disease — hantavirus pulmonary syndrome — took the life of his 65-year-old wife.

Hackman's pacemaker last showed signs of activity on Feb. 18, indicating an abnormal heart rhythm on the day he likely died. The couple's bodies weren't discovered until Feb. 26 when maintenance and security workers showed up at the Santa Fe home and alerted police, leaving a mystery for law enforcement and medical investigators to unravel.

Julia Peters, a representative for the estate of Hackman and Arakawa, urged a state district court in Santa Fe to seal records in the cases to protect the family's right to privacy in grief under the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, emphasizing the possibly shocking nature of photographs and video in the

investigation and potential for their dissemination by media.

The request, filed Tuesday, also described the couple's discrete lifestyle in Santa Fe since Hackman's retirement. The state capital city is known as a refuge for celebrities, artists and authors.

The couple "lived an exemplary private life for over thirty years in Santa Fe, New Mexico and did not showcase their lifestyle," the petition said.

New Mexico's open records law blocks public access to sensitive images, including depictions of people who are deceased, said Amanda Lavin, legal director at the nonprofit New Mexico Foundation for Open Government. Some medical information also is not considered public record under the state Inspection of Public Records Act.

At the same time, the bulk of death investigations by law enforcement and autopsy reports by medical investigators are typically considered public records under state law in the spirit of ensuring government transparency and accountability, she said.

"I do think it does infringe on transparency if the court were to prohibit release of all the investigation records, including the autopsies," Lavin said Thursday. "The whole idea of those records being available is to ensure accountability in the way those investigations are done."

"There is also a public health concern given that hantavirus was involved," Lavin said.

She said the preemptive request to prevent the release of government records on constitutional grounds is unusual.

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

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

Two judges in mass firings cases order Trump administration to rehire probationary workers for now

By JANIE HAR, BRIAN WITTE and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Two federal judges handed down orders requiring President Donald Trump's administration to rehire thousands, if not tens of thousands, of probationary workers let go in mass firings across multiple agencies Thursday, slowing down for now the president's dramatic downsizing of the federal government.

Both judges separately found legal problems with the way the mass terminations were carried out and ordered the employees at least temporarily brought back on the job.

The Trump administration has already appealed the first ruling. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt cast it as an attempt to encroach on the president's power to hire and fire employees. "The Trump Administration will immediately fight back against this absurd and unconstitutional order," she said in a statement.

In San Francisco, U.S. District Judge William Alsup found Thursday morning that terminations across six agencies were directed by the Office of Personnel Management and an acting director, Charles Ezell, who lacked the authority to do so.

In Baltimore, U.S. District Judge James Bredar found that the administration did not follow laws set out for large-scale layoffs, including 60 days' advance notice. Bredar, who was appointed by President Barack Obama, ordered the firings temporarily halted and the workforce returned to the status quo before the layoffs began.

He sided with nearly two dozen states that filed a lawsuit alleging the mass firings are illegal and already having an impact on state governments as they try to help the suddenly jobless.

At least 24,000 probationary employees have been terminated since Trump took office, the lawsuit alleges, though the government has not confirmed that number. including advance notice required for affected states.

The Trump administration argues that the states have no right to try and influence the federal govern-

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ment's relationship with its own workers. Justice Department attorneys argued the firings were for performance issues, not large-scale layoffs subject to specific regulations.

The White House did not immediately return an email seeking comment on Bredar's ruling.

Probationary workers have been targeted for layoffs across the federal government because they're usually new to the job and lack full civil service protection. Multiple lawsuits have been filed over the mass firings.

Alsup's order tells the departments of Veterans Affairs, Agriculture, Defense, Energy, the Interior and the Treasury to immediately offer job reinstatement to employees terminated on or about Feb. 13 and 14. He also directed the departments to report back within seven days with a list of probationary employees and an explanation of how the agencies complied with his order as to each person.

The temporary restraining order came in a lawsuit filed by a coalition of labor unions and organizations as the Republican administration moves to reduce the federal workforce.

"These mass-firings of federal workers were not just an attack on government agencies and their ability to function, they were also a direct assault on public lands, wildlife, and the rule of law," said Erik Molvar, executive director of Western Watersheds Project, one of the plaintiffs.

Alsup expressed frustration with what he called the government's attempt to sidestep laws and regulations governing a reduction in its workforce — which it is allowed to do — by firing probationary workers who lack protections and cannot appeal.

He was appalled that employees were told they were being fired for poor performance despite receiving glowing evaluations just months earlier.

"It is sad, a sad day, when our government would fire some good employee and say it was based on performance when they know good and well that's a lie," he said. "That should not have been done in our country."

Lawyers for the government maintain the mass firings were lawful because individual agencies reviewed and determined whether employees on probation were fit for continued employment.

But Alsup, who was appointed by President Bill Clinton, a Democrat, has found that difficult to believe. He planned to hold an evidentiary hearing Thursday, but Ezell, the OPM acting director, did not appear to testify in court or even sit for a deposition, and the government retracted his written testimony.

"I know how we get at the truth, and you're not helping me get at the truth," Alsup said to Kelsey Heland, an assistant U.S. attorney.

There are an estimated 200,000 probationary workers across federal agencies. They include entry-level employees but also workers who recently received a promotion.

About 15,000 are employed in California, providing services ranging from fire prevention to veterans' care, according to the lawsuit filed by the coalition of labor unions and nonprofit organizations that represent parks, veterans and small businesses.

The plaintiffs said in their complaint that numerous agencies informed workers that the personnel office had ordered the terminations, with an order to use a template email informing workers their firing was for performance reasons.

USPS agrees to work with DOGE on reform, planning to cut 10,000 workers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Postmaster General Louis DeJoy plans to cut 10,000 workers and billions of dollars from the U.S. Postal Service budget and he'll do that working with Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, according to a letter sent to members of Congress on Thursday.

DOGE will assist USPS with addressing "big problems" at the \$78 billion-a-year agency, which has sometimes struggled in recent years to stay afloat. The agreement also includes the General Services Administration in an effort to help the Postal Service identify and achieve "further efficiencies."

USPS listed such issues as mismanagement of the agency's retirement assets and Workers' Compensation Program, as well as an array of regulatory requirements that the letter described as "restricting normal business practice."

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"This is an effort aligned with our efforts, as while we have accomplished a great deal, there is much more to be done," DeJoy wrote.

Critics of the agreement fear negative effects of the cuts will be felt across America. Democratic U.S. Rep. Gerald Connolly of Virginia, who was sent the letter, said turning over the Postal Service to DOGE would result in it being undermined and privatized.

"This capitulation will have catastrophic consequences for all Americans — especially those in rural and hard to reach areas — who rely on the Postal Service every day to deliver mail, medications, ballots, and more," he said in a statement.

USPS currently employs about 640,000 workers tasked with making deliveries from inner cities to rural areas and even far-flung islands.

The service plans to cut 10,000 employees in the next 30 days through a voluntary early retirement program, according to the letter.

Neither the USPS nor the Trump administration immediately responded to emails from The Associated Press requesting comment.

The agency previously announced plans to cut its operating costs by more than \$3.5 billion annually. And this isn't the first time thousands of employees have been cut. In 2021, the agency cut 30,000 workers.

As the service that has operated as an independent entity since 1970 has struggled to balance the books with the decline of first-class mail, it has fought calls from President Donald Trump and others that it be privatized. Last month, Trump said he may put USPS under the control of the Commerce Department in what would be an executive branch takeover.

The National Association of Letter Carriers President Brian L. Renfroe said in a statement in response to Thursday's letter that they welcome anyone's help with addressing some of the agency's biggest problems but stood firmly against any move to privatize the Postal Service.

"Common sense solutions are what the Postal Service needs, not privatization efforts that will threaten 640,000 postal employees' jobs, 7.9 million jobs tied to our work, and the universal service every American relies on daily," he said.

DeJoy, a Republican donor who owned a logistics business, was appointed to lead USPS during Trump's first term in 2020. He has faced repeated challenges during his tenure, including the COVID-19 pandemic, surges in mail-in election ballots and efforts to stem losses through cost and service cuts.

'A legacy that is unmatched': Tributes pour in for longtime Arizona congressman Raúl Grijalva

PHOENIX (AP) — U.S. Sen. Ruben Gallego, Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren and a slew of members of Congress were among those paying tribute to Arizona Democratic U.S. Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva on Thursday after the announcement of his death at age 77.

"Congressman Grijalva was not just my colleague, but my friend. As another Latino working in public service, I can say from experience that he served as a role model to many young people across the Grand Canyon State. He spent his life as a voice for equality. In Congress, I was proud to see firsthand his leadership as chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee as he stood up for Arizona's water rights, natural beauty, and Tribes." — U.S. Sen. Ruben Gallego, a Democrat from Arizona, posted on X.

"There are truly no words that can capture the deep gratitude I feel for his tireless efforts on behalf of the tribal communities across Arizona. He was a champion who answered the call of those who had often been overlooked and unheard. In a world where such calls can be easy to ignore, Rep. Grijalva was always there to lift those voices." — Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren on X.

"AZ lost a giant today. Congressman Raul Grijalva dedicated his life to fighting for the people of Arizona. From standing up for working families, Indigenous communities, and clean air and water — Raul leaves a legacy that is unmatched." — Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes, a Democrat, on X.

"Representative Grijalva was a dedicated public servant who served his community and country for

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decades. He fought hard for fair immigration policies and to tackle the climate crisis our generation is facing. His passing leaves a huge void in Southern Arizona and beyond." — Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego, a Democrat, in a statement.

"The Congressman was always very kind to me — he had a great sense of humor. As a fellow animal lover, we often found ourselves working together on animal protection issues. To his daughters Adelita, Raquel, and Marisa, and his wife, Ramona, I send my deepest condolences." — U.S. Rep. David Schweikert, a Republican from Arizona, on X.

"I am heartbroken by the news of Congressman Raul Grijalva's passing. For climate justice, economic justice, health justice — Raul fought fearlessly for change. We served a decade together on the Natural Resources Committee, and I will forever be grateful for his leadership and partnership." — U.S. Sen. Ed Markey, a Democrat from Massachusetts, on X.

"I had the privilege of working alongside him on matters impacting Puerto Rico, and while we often approached issues from different perspectives, his passion for service and his respect for dialogue were undeniable." — Jenniffer González, governor of Puerto Rico, on X.

"Deeply saddened by the passing of my friend Raúl Grijalva. A true champion for Arizona, our environment, and working people. His leadership, kindness, and fight for justice will be deeply missed by many." — U.S. Rep. Jim McGovern, a Democrat from Massachusetts, on X.

"I'm devastated to hear of the passing of my colleague Raul Grijalva. He was a fighter for Arizonans and a champion for Indigenous communities and our planet. We will all miss him dearly. My thoughts are with his family, friends, loved ones, and constituents." — U.S. Rep. Yassamin Ansari, a Democrat from Arizona, in a statement.

"Whether he was speaking at a neighborhood event, marching for civil rights, speaking against the erosion of our democratic values or joking with us in the backyard, he led with his principles and courage." — Tucson Mayor Regina Romero, a Democrat, in a statement.

"I am devastated by the loss of Representative Raúl Grijalva and my heart is with his family and loved ones. To his last day, he remained a servant leader who put everyday people first while in office. I join every Arizonan in mourning his passing." — Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs, a Democrat, on X.

"Congressman Grijalva was a kind man and a leader who listened. He received social justice advocates in his offices with open arms and treated us with the familiarity of a grandpa...commending us for our efforts, giving us advice and encouraging our advocacy. This is a sad day. We have lost an elder but gained an ancestor. May he rest in power." — Chispa Arizona Executive Director Vianey Olivarría in a statement.

"House members are saddened to hear of the passing of Congressman Raul Grijalva, who served his constituents faithfully in Congress for more than two decades. Our prayers are with Raul's wife, Ramona, his three children, and the people of Arizona's 7th district." — U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Republican from Louisiana, on X.

"His leadership was singular. He mentored generously and was an incredible friend. I will always be grateful for his lifelong courage and commitment." — U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a Democrat from New York, on X.

"One of Raúl's favorite songs was 'El Rey,' and in particular the line that says 'no hay que llegar primero, pero hay que saber llegar' — 'it's not only about getting there first, but about how you get there.' I think this phrase perfectly describes his tenacity in everything he did." — U.S. Rep. Jesús G. "Chuy" García, a Democrat from Illinois, on X.

"Grijalva's legacy includes his critical work with the late Representative Donald McEachin to draft the groundbreaking Environmental Justice for All Act, an instrumental bill confronting the legacy of environmental racism that disproportionately impacts communities of color and low wealth. We are forever grateful for Representative Grijalva's historic leadership." — League of Conservation Voters President Gene Karpinski in a statement.

John Feinstein, bestselling author and one of the country's foremost sports writers, dies at 69

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP National Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — John Feinstein, one of the country's foremost sports writers and the author of numerous bestselling books, including the groundbreaking "A Season on the Brink" about college basketball coach Bob Knight, died unexpectedly Thursday. Feinstein was 69.

He died of natural causes at his brother's home in McLean, Virginia, according to Robert Feinstein, who said he discovered John's body.

John Feinstein was a full-time reporter for The Washington Post from 1977 to 1991, a commentator for outlets such as ESPN — where he made regular appearances on "The Sports Reporters" — and the Golf Channel, and a voter for more than 20 years in the AP Top 25 men's college basketball poll. He remained with the Post as a contributing columnist, and he also hosted satellite radio programs on SiriusXM.

"He was very passionate about things," Robert Feinstein said in a telephone interview. "People either loved him or hated him — and equally strongly."

John Feinstein — always a storyteller, whether via the written word or when chatting with other journalists in an arena's media room or press box — was working until the time of his death. He was in the Washington area this week to cover the Atlantic 10 Tournament ahead of March Madness, and he filed a column for the Post about Michigan State coach Tom Izzo that appeared online Thursday.

"He was strong with his opinions," Izzo said Thursday, "but very interesting to talk to."

Feinstein was comfortable writing fiction and nonfiction, and took on an array of sports, including golf and tennis, but he was known most for his connection to college basketball because of "A Season on the Brink." He took a leave of absence from the Post in 1985 to embed with Knight's Indiana team.

Knight's reputation for having a hot temper was well-established by then, and Feinstein relayed behind-the-scenes evidence in a way that was uncommon in sports writing at the time. Feinstein also effectively portrayed the personal relationships Knight had with his players, which alternated between warm and abusive.

"I can't possibly overstate how important Knight was in my life," Feinstein wrote in the Post after the coach's death in 2023.

"Not once did Knight back away from the access, even during some difficult moments for his team," Feinstein wrote. "Although he didn't speak to me for eight years after the book's publication — upset, of all things, with seeing profanity in the book — he eventually decided to 'forgive' me, and we had a distant though cordial relationship for the rest of his life."

Praise for Feinstein's work — and the sort of access and skilled reporting that were its hallmarks — was all over social media on Thursday, including from others in the business of writing or speaking about college basketball.

And, of course, the news reverberated around college basketball as its season approaches its crescendo. Feinstein seemed to know every coach in the sport — and they all seemed to know him.

Marquette coach Shaka Smart learned about Feinstein's death from a reporter at Madison Square Garden after the Golden Eagles beat Xavier in the Big East Tournament.

"Oh, wow," Smart said. "I've known him for a long time. He's one of the best sports writers ever. I got to know him as a writer before I got to know him as a person, reading some of his stuff when I was in high school. He cared about the teams and he cared about the players and he cared about the coaches — which is not as common these days."

Feinstein wrote more than 40 books, including "A Good Walk Spoiled" (1995), about professional golf, and "A Civil War" (1996), about the Army-Navy football game. After that book's publication, he worked for many years as a radio commentator for Navy football.

"The Ancient Eight," about Ivy League football, was published last year. Feinstein also wrote sports novels aimed at younger readers.

Feinstein graduated from Duke University and later taught there. He began teaching — and was a writer-

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in-residence — at Longwood University in Virginia during this school year.

Barry Svrluga, a Washington Post columnist who said he took Feinstein's sports journalism course as a senior at Duke, recalled the experience Thursday.

"He got whoever he could to talk to the class — Gary Williams on a game day when Maryland was in town, Billy Packer, Bud Collins. Bob Woodward called in," Svrluga said. "And you could just tell that part of his reporting prowess — how he got into locker rooms and front offices and onto the range and in clubhouses at PGA Tour events — is because he could really develop relationships, and people just liked to talk to him. Part of that had to be because he didn't pander. You knew exactly where he stood. And that gained respect."

Another Post colleague, Dan Steinberg, Feinstein's editor in recent years, said: "He would tell me, 'Oh, yeah, I'm going downtown to meet Steve Kerr for lunch today,' or 'Oh, yeah, Jim Larrañaga called me a few months ago and asked me how we could fix basketball.' He loved sports, adored them, watched them constantly even when he wasn't writing about them, had an opinion about everything and everyone. ... He loved Wimbledon, swimming, the Olympics, college basketball, the Naval Academy, West Point, the Mets, and people who returned his calls."

In addition to Robert, John Feinstein is survived by his wife, Christine, daughters Brigid and Jayne, and son Danny, as well as a sister, Margaret.

Schumer to advance GOP funding bill, unwilling to risk government shutdown as deadline nears

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer relented Thursday rather than risk a government shutdown, announcing he's ready to start the process of considering a Republican-led government funding bill that has fiercely divided Democrats under pressure to impose limits on the Trump administration.

Schumer told Democrats privately during a spirited closed-door lunch and then made public remarks ahead of voting Friday, which will be hours before the midnight deadline to keep government running. The New York senator said as bad as the GOP bill is, a shutdown would be worse, giving President Donald Trump and billionaire Elon Musk "carte blanche" as they tear through the government.

"Trump has taken a blowtorch to our country and wielded chaos like a weapon," Schumer said. "For Donald Trump, a shutdown would be a gift. It would be the best distraction he could ask for from his awful agenda."

The move by Schumer brings a potential resolution to what has been a dayslong standoff. Senate Democrats have mounted a last-ditch protest over the package, which already passed the House but without slapping any limits they were demanding on Trump and billionaire Musk's efforts to gut federal operations.

The Democrats are under intense pressure to do whatever they can to stop the Trump administration's Department of Government Efficiency, which is taking a wrecking ball to long-established government agencies and purging thousands of federal workers from jobs.

Trump himself offered to wade in Thursday to negotiate: "If they need me, I'm there 100%."

But the president also began casting blame on Democrats for any potential disruptions, saying during an Oval Office meeting, "If it shuts down, it's not the Republicans' fault."

Democrats are pushing a stopgap 30-day funding bill as an alternative. But Schumer said Republicans rejected that offer. And while Democrats were split over strategy, they worried about the further chaos they say Trump and Musk could cause if government was shutdown.

Schumer told Democrats at a spirited closed-door lunch that he would be voting to proceed to the bill. His comments first reported by The New York Times, were confirmed by two people familiar with the matter and granted anonymity to discuss it.

"People have strong views on both sides," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., who is opposed to the package.

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As the Senate opened Thursday, with one day to go before Friday's midnight deadline, Republican Senate Majority Leader John Thune said, "It's time for Democrats to fish or cut bait."

Debates over funding the federal government routinely erupt in deadline moments, but this year it's showing the political leverage of Republicans, newly in majority control of the White House and Congress, and the shortcomings of Democrats, who are finding themselves unable to stop the Trump administration's march across federal operations.

In a rare turn of events, House Republicans stuck together to pass their bill, with many conservatives cheering the DOGE cuts leaving Democrats sidelined as they stood opposed. The House then left town, sending it to the Senate for final action.

Options for Schumer have been limited, and final passage before the deadline is not guaranteed.

Republicans hold a 53-47 majority and would need Democrats to support the package to reach the 60-vote threshold, which is required to overcome a filibuster.

"I'm in the camp of like, don't ever, ever shut the government down," said Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa.

Over the next 24 hours, Democrats face this choice: Provide the votes needed to advance the package, which funds government operations through the end of September, or risk a shutdown when money expires midnight Friday.

"They'll cave," predicted Texas GOP Sen. John Cornyn.

Cornyn said the Democrats "have been railing against Elon Musk and the Trump administration over reductions in force of the federal employees, and now they basically want to put all of them out of work by shutting down the government." He added, "I don't know how you reconcile those two positions."

But progressive Democrats, including allies in the House, are pushing Democrats to draw the line against Trump — even if it courts a federal shutdown.

Rep. Greg Casar, D-Texas, the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, said on social media that the House GOP bill will "supercharge Musk's theft from working people to pay for billionaire tax cuts. Senate Democrats must stop it."

In an highly unusual turn, the House package also required the District of Columbia, which already approved its own balanced budget, to revert back to 2024 levels, drawing outcry from the mayor and city leaders. They warn of steep reductions to city services.

Schumer said he would "work with them to fix it."

Democratic senators are assessing next steps as they prepare for voting.

"Both choices that we are being offered are full of despair," said Sen. John Hickenlooper, D-Colo.

Close calls at Washington DC airport raise questions about why changes weren't made before crash

By JOHN HANNA and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

When Congress pushed ahead last year with adding 10 new daily flights to Washington D.C.'s Reagan National Airport, the Federal Aviation Administration had data showing an unnerving number of near misses in the already-crowded skies — something lawmakers apparently did not know.

The FAA, which manages the nation's airspace and oversees aviation safety, had data on dozens of incidents that experts said documented a safety concern. That data didn't prompt any action before January's deadly midair collision between an American Airlines jetliner and a military helicopter that killed 67 people.

"Why someone was not paying attention to those numbers and those events are questions yet to be answered," said James Hall, a former National Transportation Safety Board chair during the Clinton administration. "What not to do is to ignore that many incidents."

Data collected by the FAA shows close calls were far more frequent than travelers and outside aviation experts knew at Reagan National, which was built to handle 15 million passengers a year, not the 25 million traveling through it annually.

Now, safety experts and family members who lost loved ones in the Jan. 29 crash are asking why action wasn't taken earlier.

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The NTSB said airplane pilots were alerted to take evasive action to avoid hitting helicopters at least once a month from 2011 through 2024, citing data compiled by the FAA, and that there were 85 near misses when aircraft were within a few hundred feet (meters) of each other during recent years.

"How does that happen in this day and age and somebody doesn't do something about it?" asked Doug Lane, whose wife, Christine Conrad Lane, and their 16-year-old son, Spencer, died in the crash.

Pilots have long worried about the congested and complex airspace around Reagan National, near the heart of the capital, where flights must maneuver around military aircraft and restricted areas. It was no secret there had been previous close calls, but the numbers found by the NTSB were alarming.

FAA officials have not yet addressed who inside the agency saw the data and whether it prompted discussions about possible changes. Messages seeking comment were not immediately returned Thursday.

Current NTSB Chairwoman Jennifer Homendy and Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, who oversees the FAA, both said they were angry that the number of close calls were not recognized earlier by the FAA.

"If someone was paying attention, someone was on the job, they would have seen this," Duffy said. He also announced he will move forward with banning some helicopter flights around the airport, a move that was temporarily made after the crash.

Safety advocate Mary Schiavo, a former inspector general of the U.S. Transportation Department, said that while there was plenty of blame to go around for the midair collision, the FAA was shockingly complacent.

"They literally wait for a disaster," she said. "I can't even fathom how the families of those lost in this crash can even deal with this. I mean this would be so maddening to hear."

In Kansas, some officials also argue the FAA's data should have been readily accessible to the public. State Rep. John Carmichael, from Wichita, where the airliner's flight started, said Thursday that it's not enough for people to get data through Freedom of Information Act requests when that can take months.

"The public absolutely needs to know about statistics like that because we all put our lives in the hands of pilots and air traffic controllers every time we get on a plane," said Kris Kobach, the state's attorney general. "I'm hopeful that the Trump administration will make this kind of information available to the traveling public."

Commercial passenger airlines are authorized to make a total of 864 landings and departures from Reagan National from 6 a.m. to midnight each day, or 48 an hour, according to the airport's website. Of those, 64 have been added by Congress since 2000. Local airport authorities have objected to the increases.

The crowded airspace around Washington drew attention last year when Congress debated an aviation safety bill that allowed 10 more flights a day at Reagan National, despite strong objections from Virginia's Democratic senators, Tim Kaine and Mark Warner.

Squeezing in more flights would only increase the risks, they warned, calling a near miss between two planes on a runway last April a "flashing red warning light."

While Congress did OK the extra flights, they had not started as of the deadly January collision.

Kaine told reporters Thursday he was troubled by the number of near misses and the lack of action by the FAA. "What were they doing with the information if they weren't making the changes that needed to be made?" he said.

The FAA limits arrival and departure slots at three of the nation's busiest airports where demand exceeds the airport's capacity: Reagan National and New York City's LaGuardia and John F. Kennedy International airports.

But Congress has a history of directing the FAA to add slots at Reagan, even though Washington's other international airport, Dulles, has capacity to handle them. Reagan is closer to the capital and most federal departments and therefore more convenient, particularly for lawmakers.

Mike McCormick, coordinator of the Air Traffic Management program at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, said the congestion at Reagan National clearly contributed to the midair collision because the American Airlines jetliner, which was on a newly added route from Wichita, Kansas, was diverted to a different runway closer to the helicopter flights.

"In this instance, the sole reason for doing it was because they were too busy," McCormick said. "This

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is something that controller has probably done thousands of times.”

The flight from Wichita to Washington began operating in early 2024, the first direct flight from Kansas’ largest city to Reagan National. It was not among the 10 added last year, but announced by American Airlines and Kansas Republican Sen. Jerry Moran separate of any congressional action in July 2023. Moran said it was “vital” to link the nation’s capital with the city, which has a long history as an aircraft manufacturing hub.

U.S. Rep. Sharice Davids, a Kansas Democrat who serves on an aviation subcommittee, said the cause of the accident and the congestion at Reagan National are for now, “two different conversations.”

“I understand, the desire for us all to be able to connect these dots,” she said. “Right now that is not a connection that has been made by the NTSB.”

Columbia University says it expelled some students who seized building last year

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Columbia University has expelled or suspended some students who took over a campus building during pro-Palestinian protests last spring and temporarily revoked the diplomas of others who have since graduated, officials said Thursday.

The university said in a campus-wide email that a judicial board brought a range of sanctions against students who occupied Hamilton Hall last spring to protest the war in Gaza.

Columbia did not provide a breakdown of how many students were expelled, were suspended or had their degrees revoked, but it said the outcomes were based on an “evaluation of the severity of behaviors.”

The culmination of the monthslong investigative process comes as the university is reeling from the arrest of a well-known Palestinian campus activist, Mahmoud Khalil, by federal immigration authorities last Saturday. President Donald Trump has said the arrest would be the “first of many” such detentions.

At the same time, the Trump administration has stripped the university of more than \$400 million in federal funds over what it calls a failure to combat campus antisemitism. Congressional Republicans have pointed specifically to a failure to discipline students involved in the Hamilton Hall seizure as proof of inaction by the university.

The building occupation followed a tent encampment that inspired a wave of similar demonstrations at college campuses across the country.

On April 30, 2024, a smaller group of students and their allies barricaded themselves inside Hamilton Hall with furniture and padlocks in a major escalation of campus protests.

At the request of university leaders, hundreds of New York police stormed onto campus the following night, arresting dozens of people involved in both the occupation and the encampment.

At a court hearing in June, the Manhattan district attorney’s office said it would not pursue criminal charges for 31 of the 46 people initially arrested on trespassing charges inside the administration building.

But the students still faced disciplinary hearings and possible expulsion from the university.

The final sanctions announced Thursday followed a lengthy process that involved hearings for each student led by the long-running University Judicial Board.

Some students who joined the encampment but did not participate in the building takeover learned that they would not face further discipline beyond their previous suspensions.

“With respect to other events taking place last spring, the UJB’s determinations recognized previously imposed disciplinary action,” the university said in a statement.

The disciplinary process drew scrutiny from House Republicans, who demanded university administrators turn over disciplinary records of students involved in campus protests or risk billions of dollars in federal funding.

On Thursday, Khalil and seven students identified by pseudonyms filed a lawsuit seeking to block a Congressional committee from obtaining such records for students at Columbia and Barnard College, a women’s institution affiliated with Columbia.

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Filed in federal court in Manhattan against the two schools; the Republican-led House Committee on Education and the Workforce; and its chairman, Republican Rep. Tim Walberg of Michigan; the lawsuit seeks a permanent injunction barring Congress from forcing the schools to provide the records and the universities from complying.

Last month the committee sent a letter demanding that Columbia and Barnard provide the records or risk federal funding. The plaintiffs argue in the complaint that the committee is abusing its power in an attempt "to chill and suppress speech and association based on the viewpoint expressed" and the investigation "threatens to significantly infringe on First Amendment rights."

In a statement emailed by a committee spokesperson, Walberg said, "This lawsuit changes nothing."

The information requested "is critical to its consideration of legislation on this issue" and necessary to "hold schools accountable for their failures to address rampant antisemitism on our college campuses," he added.

Barnard spokespeople did not immediately respond to emails seeking comment, and Columbia declined to discuss the pending litigation.

Separately, a newly-created disciplinary board has brought a flurry of new cases against students — including Khalil — who have expressed criticism of Israel, triggering alarm among free speech advocates. Khalil was not among the protesters accused of seizing Hamilton Hall.

The expulsion announcement drew praise from some faculty members, including Gil Zussman, chair of the electrical engineering department and member of Columbia's Task Force on Antisemitism.

"Finally demonstrating that breaking university rules has consequences is an important first step towards going back to the core missions of research and teaching," he said in a post on the social platform X.

Pentagon leaker pleads guilty to obstructing justice, attacks Biden in defending his actions

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BEDFORD, Mass. (AP) — Jack Teixeira, the Massachusetts Air National Guard member who caused an international uproar when he leaked highly classified documents about the war in Ukraine, used his court-martial Thursday to describe himself as a "proud patriot" who was only "exposing and correcting the lies perpetuated by the Biden administration."

After pleading guilty to military charges of obstructing justice, the 23-year-old acknowledged he knew his actions were illegal but felt he needed to share the truth about how the Biden administration was misleading the American public about the war in Ukraine.

"If I saved even one American, Russian or Ukrainian life against this senseless money-grab war, my punishment was worth it," he said, his politicized comments a stark contrast to the contrite apology he issued at his federal sentencing.

Teixeira suggested that he, like President Donald Trump, was a victim of a weaponized Department of Justice. Teixeira, who said he acted alone when he shared the documents in a geopolitical chat room on Discord, a social media platform popular with online gamers. He then called on Trump and members of his administration to "review my double prosecution and punishments with an eye towards reversing deep-state actions and showing truth no matter how embarrassing to the Biden administration."

"I am comfortable in how history will remember my actions," he added.

Military wanted to send a message

Judge Vicki Marcus agreed to the plea deal and sentenced Teixeira to a dishonorable discharge and no jail time. She rejected a prosecution request for a written reprimand and a demotion in rank for him.

Teixeira, of North Dighton, Massachusetts, was already sentenced last year to 15 years in prison after pleading guilty in federal court to six counts of willful retention and transmission of national defense information under the Espionage Act, following his arrest in the most consequential national security breach in years.

Military prosecutors said before the court-martial at Hanscom Air Force Base in Massachusetts that

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charges of disobeying orders and obstructing justice were appropriate given that obeying orders is the "absolute core" of the military.

In pressing for a harsher sentence, prosecutors Thursday said Teixeira was intent on obstructing the FBI from finding the truth and was scared because he knew he had done something wrong. Defense attorneys argued for leniency, saying a toxic culture at his base, poor training and a lack of supervision contributed to his actions.

But after the sentence, prosecutors said they felt the dishonorable discharge still sent a powerful message.

"The dishonorable discharge was the important issue for us because I think it accurately reflects what his actions were, what his crimes were," Lt. Col. Peter Havern said after the court-martial. Havern talked about how they worked closely with the Department of Justice on the case.

"There was a piece of it where we said we need a military punishment as well, and that is why the dishonorable discharge was important to us as an institution to tell our airmen, to tell our the civilians and Americans we take this very seriously," he said. "We are going to make sure your military record reflects it for these actions. We are not just going to rely on a civil conviction."

A plea agreement was accepted by both sides that drops the disobeying orders charge. Teixeira pleaded guilty to the obstruction charge, admitting that he used a hammer to destroy a cellphone, a computer hard drive and an iPad after seeing news reports of the leaked documents. He also admitted to telling his friend to destroy messages exchanged on a communication app.

"I was scared about a potential law enforcement investigation into me and my friends," he said in court Thursday.

Parents still support their son

As the sentencing phase began, Teixeira's father Jack Teixeira, who goes by the same name but with a different middle initial, described his son as "a good kid, energetic, intelligent and quirky."

When his son decided to join the military, "I was excited about it," the elder Teixeira said. "It was a good option for Jack." Asked about whether the conviction changed his feelings for Teixeira, his father said: "I love my son. I would do anything for him."

His mother, Dawn Dufault, described how they were a military family and how her son was passionate about all things military from an early age.

She admitted basic training for Teixeira was a disappointment since it happened during the pandemic and how an ever-changing schedule for Teixeira, who as part of the 102nd Intelligence Wing at Otis Air National Guard Base in Massachusetts, left him "discombobulated."

But she also said the conviction hadn't changed her feelings for her son. "He made a mistake," she said. "Everyone makes mistakes. He's my son, I love him. He deserves a second chance."

Leaks revealed secret assessments of Ukraine war

The leaks exposed to the world unvarnished secret assessments of Russia's war in Ukraine, including information about troop movements in Ukraine, and the provision of supplies and equipment to Ukrainian troops. The documents also revealed assessments of the defense capabilities of Taiwan and internal arguments in Britain, Egypt, Israel, South Korea and Japan. Teixeira also admitted to posting information about a U.S. adversary's plans to harm U.S. forces serving overseas.

Teixeira worked as an information technology specialist responsible for military communications networks. His lawyers described Teixeira as an autistic, isolated individual who spent most of his time online, especially with his Discord community, and never meant to harm the U.S.

The security breach forced the Biden administration to scramble to try to contain diplomatic and military fallout. The leaks also embarrassed the Pentagon, which tightened controls to safeguard classified information and disciplined members found to have intentionally failed to take required action about Teixeira's suspicious behavior.

The Trump administration pushes again to restrict birthright citizenship. What does that mean?

By TIM SULLIVAN Associated Press

The Trump administration is pushing for the the U.S. Supreme Court to allow some restrictions on birthright citizenship even as legal battles continue over President Donald Trump's orders to end what has long been seen as a constitutional promise.

On Thursday, the administration filed emergency applications with the high court that would allow citizenship to be denied to people born in the U.S. after Feb. 19 if their parents are in the country illegally.

District judges in Maryland, Massachusetts and Washington have blocked the order, which Trump signed shortly after taking office in January. It is currently blocked nationwide.

Birthright citizenship automatically makes anyone born in the United States an American citizen, including children born to mothers in the country illegally. The right was enshrined soon after the Civil War in the Constitution's 14th Amendment.

Trump and his supporters have argued that there should be tougher standards for becoming an American citizen, which he called "a priceless and profound gift" in his executive order.

Legal scholars, though, have said its the 14th Amendment's constitutional protections would make it it extremely difficult to overturn.

Here is a look at birthright citizenship, what Trump has said about it and the prospects for ending it:

What Trump has said about birthright citizenship

Trump has said for years that he wants to end birthright citizenship.

"It's ridiculous. We are the only country in the world that does this with the birthright, as you know, and it's just absolutely ridiculous," he said in January. Dozens of countries, mostly in the Americas, have birthright citizenship.

Opponents say the practice encourages people to come to the U.S. illegally so their children can have citizenship. Others argue that ending birthright citizenship would profoundly damage the country.

Its elimination "could eventually place every single person in America in the precarious position of having to prove American citizenship," Alex Nowrasteh, vice president for economic and social policy studies at the pro-immigration Cato Institute, wrote after Trump's order.

In 2019, the Migration Policy Institute estimated that 5.5 million children under age 18 lived with at least one parent in the country illegally in 2019, representing 7% of the U.S. child population. The vast majority of those children were U.S. citizens.

What does the law say?

Congress ratified the 14th Amendment in July 1868, soon after the Civil War.

"All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States," the amendment says.

But it didn't always apply to everyone. It wasn't until 1924, for example, that Congress granted citizenship to all Native Americans born in the U.S.

Supporters of immigration restrictions, including Trump, have argued the words "subject to the jurisdiction thereof" allow the U.S. to deny citizenship to babies born to women in the country illegally.

What is the basis of this legal appeal?

The emergency appeal does not focus directly on whether the presidential order is legally valid. Instead, it is aimed at the broad reach of orders issued by federal judges.

The Justice Department argues individual judges lack the power to make their rulings go into affect nationwide. Five of the Supreme Court's conservative justices have raised concerns in the past about these nationwide injunctions. The high court, though, has never ruled on the matter.

Putin agrees in principle with proposal for Ukraine ceasefire and says more discussions are needed

By The Associated Press undefined

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday that he agrees in principle with a U.S. proposal for a 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine, but he emphasized that the terms are yet to be worked out and added that any truce should pave the way to lasting peace.

"The idea itself is correct, and we certainly support it," Putin told a news conference in Moscow. "But there are issues that we need to discuss, and I think that we need to talk about it with our American colleagues and partners and, perhaps, have a call with President Trump and discuss it with him."

President Donald Trump said there have been "good signals" coming out of Russia and offered guarded optimism about Putin's statement. He reiterated that he's ready to speak with Putin and underscored that it was time to end the war.

Putin "put out a very promising statement, but it wasn't complete," Trump said Thursday at a start of a meeting at the White House with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte. "Now we're going to see whether or not Russia's there. And if they're not, it'll be a very disappointing moment for the world."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Putin is "essentially preparing to reject" the ceasefire.

Putin "is afraid to tell President Trump directly that he wants to continue this war, that he wants to kill Ukrainians," Zelenskyy said in his nightly address to the nation. "That is why, in Moscow, they are surrounding the idea of a ceasefire with such preconditions that nothing will come of it — or at least, it will be delayed as long as possible."

The Russian president, he added, "often acts this way. He doesn't say 'no' outright but ensures that everything drags on and that normal solutions become impossible."

Putin, who launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine more than three years ago, noted the need to control possible breaches of the truce and signaled that Russia would seek guarantees that Ukraine would not use the break in hostilities to rearm and continue mobilization.

"We agree with the proposals to halt the fighting, but we proceed from the assumption that the ceasefire should lead to lasting peace and remove the root causes of the crisis," Putin said.

The Russian leader made the remarks just hours after the arrival of Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, in Moscow for talks on the ceasefire, which Ukraine has accepted. A Kremlin adviser said Putin planned to meet with Witkoff later Thursday.

The diplomatic effort coincided with a Russian claim that its troops have driven the Ukrainian army out of a key town in Russia's Kursk border region, where Moscow has been trying for seven months to dislodge Ukrainian troops from their foothold.

Russia questions details of truce offer

Putin said it appeared that the U.S. persuaded Ukraine to accept a ceasefire and that Ukraine is interested because of the battlefield situation, particularly in Kursk.

Referring to the Ukrainian troops in Kursk, he questioned what will happen to them if the ceasefire takes hold: "Will all those who are there come out without a fight? Or will the Ukrainian leadership order them to lay down arms and surrender?"

Putin thanked Trump "for paying so much attention to the settlement in Ukraine."

He also thanked the leaders of China, India, Brazil and South Africa for their "noble mission to end the fighting," a statement that suggested those countries could be involved in a ceasefire deal. Russia has said it will not accept peacekeepers from any NATO members to monitor a prospective truce.

Putin's seemingly friendly tone toward the White House reflected the astonishing shift in U.S. relations with Russia and Ukraine since Trump returned to office in January.

Under the administration of former President Joe Biden, the United States was Ukraine's staunchest and most powerful ally and a force for isolating the Kremlin. But Trump's election threw that policy into reverse.

Trump briefly cut off critical military aid and intelligence sharing in an apparent effort to push Kyiv to enter talks to end the war, and Zelenskyy had a testy meeting at the White House on Feb. 28 in which

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Trump questioned whether Ukraine wanted to halt the war.

The Trump administration has also repeatedly embraced Kremlin positions on the conflict, including indicating that Ukraine's hopes of joining NATO are unlikely to be realized and that it probably will not get back the land that Russia's army occupies, which amounts to nearly 20% of the country.

The Russian Defense Ministry's claim that it recaptured the town of Sudzha, a Ukrainian operations hub in Kursk, came hours after Putin visited his commanders in the Kursk region. The claim could not be independently verified. Ukrainian officials made no immediate comment.

Administration repeats threat of new sanctions

As Trump seeks a diplomatic end to the war, he has made veiled threats to hit Russia with new sanctions if it does not engage with peace efforts.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told CNBC Thursday that Trump is "willing to apply maximum pressure on both sides," including sanctions that reach the highest scale on Russia.

The U.S. still has about \$3.85 billion in congressionally authorized funding for future arms shipments to Ukraine, but the Trump administration has shown no interest so far in using that authority to send additional weapons as it awaits the outcome of peace overtures.

By signaling its openness to a ceasefire at a time when the Russian military has the upper hand in the war, Ukraine has presented the Kremlin with a dilemma — whether to accept a truce and abandon hopes of making new gains, or reject the offer and risk derailing a cautious rapprochement with Washington.

The Ukrainian army's foothold inside Russia has been under intense pressure for months from the renewed effort by Russian forces, backed by North Korean troops. Ukraine's daring incursion last August led to the first occupation of Russian soil by foreign troops since World War II and embarrassed the Kremlin.

Ukraine launched the raid in a bid to counter the unceasingly grim news from the front line, as well as to draw Russian troops away from the battlefield inside Ukraine and to gain a bargaining chip in any peace talks. But the incursion did not significantly change the dynamic of the war.

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, assessed late Wednesday that Russian forces were in control of Sudzha, a town close to the border that previously was home to about 5,000 people.

Ukraine's top military commander, Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, said Russian aircraft conducted so many strikes on Kursk that Sudzha had been almost completely destroyed. He did not comment on whether Ukraine still controlled the settlement but said his country was "maneuvering (troops) to more advantageous lines."

March megastorm may bring blizzards, tornadoes, flooding and even fires across much of US

By ISABELLA O'MALLEY Associated Press

More than 100 million people in the U.S. will be in the path of an intense March storm starting Friday as the sprawling multi-day system threatens fires, blizzards, tornadoes, and flooding as it tracks eastward across the Great Plains.

Scientists said the storm's strength and potential for far-reaching impacts is notable, but its timing isn't particularly unusual. Extreme weather can pop up in spring because storms feed on big temperature differences between the warmth that's starting to show up and the lingering chill of winter.

"If there's a time of the year where a storm like this can deliver these coast-to-coast impacts, we are in it," said Benjamin Reppert, meteorologist at Penn State University.

The National Weather Service forecast strong winds stretching Friday from the Canadian border to the Rio Grande, with gusts up to 80 mph (130 kph), which creates a significant fire risk in Texas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma. Meanwhile, a winter blast was expected farther north in parts of the Rockies and Northern Plains, with possible blizzard conditions in the Dakotas and Minnesota.

The central region from the Gulf Coast to Wisconsin is at risk of severe thunderstorms that could spawn tornadoes and hail. On Saturday, severe storms are forecast to move toward Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee and then into Florida. Potential flooding was a concern from the Central Gulf Coast

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through the upper Ohio Valley.

The turbulent weather is expected to arrive on the East Coast Sunday with strong winds and a flash flooding risk in localized areas. Heavy rain was forecast along the Interstate 95 corridor south to Jacksonville, Florida.

Reppert noted that temperatures in the upper atmosphere in much of the central and eastern U.S. are close to record levels for this time of year, while a cool air mass behind the storm in the western states is one of the coolest on record for that region and this time of year. He said that combination could be behind part of this storm's expected strength.

Russ Schumacher, a climatologist at Colorado State University, said the storm could become a bomb cyclone Friday afternoon or evening — a designation given when a storm intensifies so rapidly that atmospheric pressure drops a certain amount in a 24-hour period. That would mean higher winds and more intense rainfall.

In addition to fuel from big temperature swings, the storm will be shaped by the jet stream. In a fairly typical position for this time of year, it's diving south across the U.S. and will help lift air and moisture into the atmosphere to fall back as rain.

The storm also will tap into heat and moisture from the Gulf of Mexico, also referred to as the Gulf of America as declared by President Donald Trump, which is 2 to 4 degrees Fahrenheit (1.1 to 2.2 degrees Celsius) warmer than historic averages.

"You kind of have this Goldilocks situation," said Ryan Torn, professor of atmospheric and environmental sciences at the University at Albany, referring to the mix of ingredients in the atmosphere that will add to the storm's strength.

RFK Jr.'s first month as health secretary: Touting French fries and casting doubts on vaccines

By AMANDA SEITZ and JONEL ALECCIA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — There sat Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the nation's top health official, at a Steak 'n Shake with Fox News host Sean Hannity, raving about the fries.

"Steak 'n Shake has been great, we're very grateful for them," Kennedy said, in between nibbles of fries that the Midwestern franchise recently announced would be cooked in beef tallow instead of common cooking oils that Kennedy claims — contrary to advice from nutritionists — are bad for Americans' diet.

It's the kind of endorsement that doctors have implored him to make about the childhood vaccines used to prevent deadly diseases, like measles as outbreaks worsened in Texas and New Mexico during his first month in office.

The secretary of Health and Human Services has, instead, raised doubts about vaccines, most recently saying in his interview with Hannity that the shots cause "deaths every year," although he later added that vaccinations should be encouraged.

In his first month in office, Kennedy, who vowed to "Make America Healthy Again," has delivered an inconsistent message that has the nation's top infectious diseases specialists worried that his tepid recommendations will undermine access to long-proven, life-saving vaccines.

Public health agencies cancel vaccine meetings, research under Kennedy's watch

During his first address to thousands of workers at the federal public health agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as well as the Food and Drug Administration, Kennedy promised to "investigate" the childhood vaccine schedule. Days later, the CDC canceled a public meeting of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Panel, a group of doctors and scientists who make recommendations on vaccines. That meeting has not been rescheduled.

In another case, a canceled public meeting of vaccine advisers who make recommendations on the flu vaccine every year for the FDA also has not been given a new date. This week, the National Institutes for Health, also under Kennedy's purview, began canceling funding for some research on vaccines.

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The CDC also is preparing to research autism and vaccines, planning to "leave no stone unturned in its mission to figure out what exactly is happening," HHS spokesman Andrew Nixon said in a statement. Agency officials did not comment further for this article.

Numerous studies have concluded that there is no link between the two, a fact the agency states on its website. And studying it again could take money from other research including into finding the true cause of autism, noted Sen. Bill Cassidy, a Louisiana Republican, as he questioned National Institutes of Health director nominee Dr. Jay Bhattacharya.

When Bhattacharya suggested more studies could be worthwhile because some may believe there's a link, Cassidy retorted: "There's people who disagree the world is round."

"What (Kennedy) is trying to do is scare about the safety of vaccines," Dr. Paul Offit, an FDA vaccine adviser and infectious disease doctor at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, said of Kennedy's first month in office. "It shouldn't surprise anybody. His agenda has always been to get vaccines off the market, or to make them less available."

Offit worries that the cancellation of the FDA's flu vaccine meeting, held every March for at least 30 years, is just the beginning. The committee's June meeting to recommend the COVID-19 vaccine's formulation has also not been scheduled, he said.

Democrats and Republicans pushed back when Dr. Marty Makary, the FDA nominee, wouldn't commit to rescheduling the committee's flu meeting .

"What is lost is the transparency," said Cassidy, the Louisiana Republican who chairs the Senate health committee and is also a physician.

Kennedy rejects 'anti-vaccine' label but still echoes the movement

During his senate confirmation hearings earlier this year, Kennedy seemed to say he would not undermine vaccines. "I support vaccines. I support the childhood schedule," he said. He promised Cassidy, who was unsettled about Kennedy's anti-vaccine work, that he would not change existing vaccine recommendations.

But in the hearings he also repeatedly refused to acknowledge scientific consensus that childhood vaccines don't cause autism and that COVID-19 vaccines saved millions of lives, and he falsely asserted the government has no good vaccine safety monitoring.

And since his confirmation, Kennedy has repeated his skeptical views of vaccines in interviews and other public statements.

He's sent "mixed messages" on vaccine safety, even though the U.S. has "the most elaborate vaccine adverse event surveillance system in the world," said Dr. William Schaffner, an infectious disease expert at Vanderbilt University. Serious problems, including death, are very rare and the benefits of vaccination far outweigh the risks, he said.

"A simple way to describe this to the average person is the serious adverse events generally occur at a rate of 1 to a few cases per million doses of vaccine," he said. "That's a needle in a haystack."

In an opinion piece on FoxNews.com earlier this month, Kennedy said the measles outbreak in West Texas that left a six-year old child dead was a "call to action" but stopped short of recommending that people receive the vaccine that prevents 97% of cases. Despite the U.S. registering its first measles death in a decade, Kennedy has repeatedly downplayed this year's outbreaks, noting that when he was a child "everybody got measles."

This year's cases — reported at 250 — are on track to far outpace last year's reports of 286 measles infections.

Pediatricians are fielding more questions from confused parents in their exam rooms, said Dr. Susan Kressly. Worried about reports of cancelled vaccine meetings, they're wondering about their access to next year's flu vaccines. Others are asking if they should get doses of the Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine earlier. Kressly said there's a clear message the government can send to help stop the rising case count.

"The only way to stop an outbreak is increased coordinated positive messaging around vaccinating," Kressly said.

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The CDC has assisted with vaccination efforts in West Texas. But Kennedy himself has publicly advocated for an alternative treatment for measles: Vitamin A. Under his watch, the CDC's guidance was updated to say that Vitamin A should be given to children with severe measles and prescribed in doses under a doctor's supervision.

Vitamin A supplementation has been recommended for decades to reduce pneumonia and death in malnourished children in developing countries, but the benefits in well-nourished children in countries like the U.S. are less clear.

"We need to use Vitamin A for those kids who are unlucky enough to get measles," said Dr. Andy Pavia, a pediatric infectious disease expert at the University of Utah. "But it can't prevent measles and it can only provide some help in reducing the severity."

When administered correctly, using Vitamin A in kids with severe measles will "do no harm," Pavia said. But if improperly done, high doses of Vitamin A can be toxic and deadly.

Kennedy's supporters celebrate success on the food front during first month

Abrupt staffing changes have also dominated Kennedy's first weeks in office, with CDC pick Dave Weldon withdrawing from the nomination mere minutes before his hearing, Kennedy's top HHS spokesman quitting two weeks into the job and the Food and Drug Administration's newly minted chief counsel departing 48 hours into the position.

Trump and Kennedy's supporters, however, have dismissed concerns about the rocky start.

His newfound platform as health secretary and talk of healthier foods is already affecting change in the American diet, advisers close to Kennedy and Trump have claimed on social media.

They credit Kennedy with prompting Republican legislators to introduce bills in Utah and Texas that would seek to ban soda in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, for example. And then there's Steak 'n Shake's new fries.

"RFK Jr. just ate Steak 'n Shake on live TV, the fast food joint that's bravely frying everything in beef tallow," conservative podcaster Charlie Kirk said this week in a tweet. "This is the way."

In fact, nutrition science experts say that decades of research show that consuming plant-based oils lowers the risk of heart disease and that there is no evidence to indicate that beef tallow is healthier than seed oils.

On Wednesday, after a meeting with a handful of executives from the nation's largest food manufacturers, Kennedy released a slickly-produced video that promised more change would be on the way, saying companies were taking his "MAHA" movement seriously.

"They understand they have a new sheriff in town," Kennedy said.

He did not share any details about what was discussed at the meeting.

Trump administration asks Supreme Court to partly allow birthright citizenship restrictions

By MARK SHERMAN and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration is asking the Supreme Court to allow restrictions on birthright citizenship to partly take effect while legal fights play out.

In emergency applications filed at the high court on Thursday, the administration asked the justices to narrow court orders entered by district judges in Maryland, Massachusetts and Washington that blocked the order President Donald Trump signed shortly after beginning his second term.

The order currently is blocked nationwide. Three federal appeals courts have rejected the administration's pleas, including one in Massachusetts on Tuesday.

The order would deny citizenship to those born after Feb. 19 whose parents are in the country illegally. It also forbids U.S. agencies from issuing any document or accepting any state document recognizing citizenship for such children.

Roughly two dozen states, as well as several individuals and groups, have sued over the executive order, which they say violates the Constitution's 14th Amendment promise of citizenship to anyone born inside

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the United States.

The Justice Department argues that individual judges lack the power to give nationwide effect to their rulings.

The administration instead wants the justices to allow the Trump's plan to go into effect for everyone except the handful of people and group that sued, arguing that the states lack the legal right, or standing, to challenge the executive order.

As a fallback, the administration asked "at a minimum" to be allowed to make public announcements about how they plan to carry out the policy if it eventually is allowed to take effect.

Acting Solicitor General Sarah Harris contends in her filing that Trump's order is constitutional because the 14th amendment's citizenship clause, properly read, "does not extend citizenship universally to everyone born in the United States."

But the emergency appeal is not directly focused on the validity of the order. Instead, it raises an issue that has previously drawn criticism from some members of the court, the broad reach of orders issued by individual federal judges.

In all, five conservative justices, a majority of the court, have raised concerns in the past about nationwide, or universal, injunctions.

But the court has never ruled on the matter.

The administration made a similar argument in Trump's first term, including in the Supreme Court fight over his ban on travel to the U.S. from several Muslim majority countries.

The court eventually upheld Trump's policy, but did not take up the issue of nationwide injunctions.

The problem has only gotten worse, Harris told the court on Thursday. Courts issued 15 orders blocking administration actions nationwide in February alone, compared to 14 such orders in the first three years of President Joe Biden's term, she wrote.

The heightened pace of activity also reflects how quickly Trump has moved, less than two months in office, to fire thousands of federal workers, upend tens of billions of dollars in foreign and domestic aid, roll back the rights of transgender people and restrict birthright citizenship.

Wall Street tumbles 10% below its record for first 'correction' since 2023 on Trump's trade war

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Wall Street's sell-off hit a new low Thursday after President Donald Trump's escalating trade war dragged the S&P 500 more than 10% below its record, which was set just last month.

A 10% drop is a big enough deal that professional investors have a name for it — a "correction" — and the S&P 500's 1.4% slide on Thursday sent the index to its first since 2023. The losses came after Trump upped the stakes in his trade war by threatening huge taxes on European wines and alcohol. Not even a double-shot of good news on the U.S. economy could stop the bleeding.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 537 points, or 1.3% Thursday, and the Nasdaq composite fell 2%.

The dizzying, battering swings for stocks have been coming not just day to day but also hour to hour, and the Dow hurtled between a slight gain and a drop of 689 points on Thursday.

The turbulence is a result of uncertainty about how much pain Trump will let the economy endure through tariffs and other policies in order to reshape the country and world as he wants. The president has said he wants manufacturing jobs back in the United States, along with a smaller U.S. government workforce and other fundamental changes.

Trump's latest escalation came Thursday when he threatened 200% tariffs on Champagne and other European wines, unless the European Union rolls back a "nasty" tariff announced on U.S. whiskey. The European Union unveiled that move on Wednesday, in response to U.S. tariffs on European steel and aluminum.

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U.S. households and businesses have already reported drops in confidence because of all the uncertainty about which tariffs will stick from Trump's barrage of on -again, off -again announcements. That's raised fears about a pullback in spending that could sap energy from the economy. Some U.S. businesses say they've already begun to see a change in their customers' behavior because of the uncertainty.

A particularly feared scenario for the economy is one where its growth stagnates but inflation stays high because of tariffs. Few tools are available in Washington to fix what's called "stagflation." If the Federal Reserve were to cut interest rates to boost the economy, for example, that could also push inflation higher.

Good news came on both those economic fronts Thursday.

One report showed inflation at the wholesale level last month was milder than economists expected. It followed a similarly encouraging report from the prior day on inflation that U.S. consumers are feeling.

But "the question for markets is whether good news on the inflation front can make itself heard above the noise of the ever-changing tariff story," said Chris Larkin, managing director, trading and investing, at E-Trade from Morgan Stanley.

A separate report, meanwhile, said fewer U.S. workers applied for unemployment benefits last week than economists expected. It's the latest signal that the job market remains relatively solid overall. If that can continue, it could allow U.S. consumers to keep spending, and that's the main engine of the economy.

On Wall Street, some stocks connected to the artificial-intelligence industry resumed their slide and weighed on stock indexes. Palantir Technologies, which offers an AI platform for customers, sank 4.8%. Super Micro Computer, which makes servers, lost 8%. Nvidia swung between gains and losses before finishing with a dip of 0.1%.

Such stocks have been under the most pressure in the U.S. stock market's recent sell-off after critics said their prices shot too high in the frenzy around AI.

Other areas of the market that had also been riding big earlier momentum have seen their fortunes swing drastically. Elon Musk's Tesla fell 3% following a rare back-to-back gain, and it's down more than 40% so far in 2025.

American Eagle Outfitters dropped 4.1% after the retailer said "less robust demand and colder weather" have held back its performance recently. It forecasted a dip in revenue for the upcoming year, though it also delivered a stronger profit report for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

On the winning side of Wall Street was Intel, which jumped 14.6% after naming former board member and semiconductor industry veteran Lip-Bu Tan as its CEO. Tan, 65, will take over the daunting job next week, more than three months after Intel's previous CEO, Pat Gelsinger, abruptly retired amid a deepening downturn at the once-dominant chipmaker.

All told, the S&P 500 lost 77.78 points to 5,521.52. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 537.36 to 40,813.57, and the Nasdaq composite sank 345.44 to 17,303.01.

In the bond market, Treasury yields lost an early gain to sink lower. The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.27% from 4.32%. The yield has been mostly dropping since January, when it was approaching 4.80%, as traders and economists have ratcheted back their expectations for U.S. economic growth.

While few are predicting a recession, particularly with the job market remaining relatively solid, recent reports have shown a souring of confidence among U.S. consumers and companies.

In stock markets abroad, indexes fell across much of Europe and Asia, but the moves were relatively modest.

A 10% drop for stocks is scary, but isn't that rare

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. stock market has just dropped 10% from its high set last month, hurt by worries about the economy and a global trade war.

The fall for the S&P 500 is steep enough that Wall Street has a name for it: a "correction." Such drops have happened regularly for more than a century, and market pros often view them as potentially healthy wipeouts of overdone euphoria, which could send stock prices too high if unchecked.

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But corrections are frightening in the moment, particularly for every new generation of investors that gets into the market at a time when it seems like stocks only go up.

The S&P 500 is coming off two straight years with gains of more than 20%. Such stellar gains left the market looking too expensive to critics, who pointed to how prices rose faster than corporate profits.

Culling too-high enthusiasm among day traders is one thing. The larger fear always accompanying a correction is that it could be a warning sign of a coming "bear market," which is what Wall Street calls a drop of at least 20%.

Here's a look at what history shows about past corrections, and what market watchers are expecting going forward.

What's behind this correction?

The U.S. stock market initially jumped after President Donald Trump's election in November on hopes he'd bring lower taxes, less regulation for businesses and other policies that would drive corporate profits higher. All those gains have since disappeared, as Wall Street faces the potential downsides of Trump's White House for the economy.

The president has been making announcements on tariffs at a dizzying pace, first placing them on trading partners, then exempting some and then doing it all over again. The tariffs could hit every country that trades with the United States, which would raise prices for U.S. households and businesses when high inflation has already proven stubborn to fully subdue.

The fear is that tariffs could slow or even halt the solid growth the U.S. economy was showing when it ended 2024. Even if Trump ultimately goes forward with less painful tariffs, all the uncertainty around the will-he-or-won't-he rollout could prove damaging by freezing economic activity. Such concerns have shown up in the latest readings on consumer confidence, as well as companies' forecasts for future profits.

Trump himself has acknowledged his plans could affect the U.S. economy's growth.

All the uncertainty is also making things more complicated for the Federal Reserve, which had been cutting interest rates after getting inflation nearly all the way down to its 2% target. Cutting rates further would help the economy, but it could also put upward pressure on inflation.

The brunt of this sell-off has also hit stocks that critics were saying looked the most expensive after running wild through the frenzy around artificial intelligence. Nvidia, for example, has already dropped roughly 14% in 2025 so far after surging more than 800% through 2023 and 2024.

Most of the other big stocks in the "Magnificent Seven" that have dominated the market recently have also been lagging the rest of the S&P 500. Those seven stocks alone had accounted for more than half the S&P 500's total return last year.

How often do corrections occur?

Every couple years, on average. Even during the historic, nearly 11-year-long bull run for U.S. stocks from March 2009 to February 2020, the S&P 500 stumbled to five corrections, according to CFRA. Worries about everything from interest rates to trade wars to a European debt crisis caused the pullbacks.

The U.S. market's last correction was in 2023, when the S&P 500 dropped 10.3% from the end of July into October. At the time, high Treasury yields were undercutting stock prices as traders accepted a new normal where the Fed would keep rates high for a while. But stocks would quickly turn higher as optimism revived that cuts to rates were on the horizon.

The last correction that did graduate into a bear market was in 2022. That's when the Fed first began cranking up interest rates to combat the worst inflation in generations. Worries rose that high rates would slow the economy enough to create a recession, one that ultimately never came.

Through the 2022 bear market, the S&P 500 fell 25.4% from Jan. 3 to Oct. 12.

What typically happens after a drop like this?

Looking only at corrections since 1946 that managed to right themselves before turning into a bear market, the S&P 500 has taken an average of 133 days to hit bottom and lost an average of nearly 14% along the way, according to CFRA. The index has taken an average of 113 days to recoup its losses.

For declines that become bear markets, the damage is much worse. Going back to 1929, the average bear market has taken an average of nearly 19 months to hit bottom and caused a loss of 38.5% for the

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S&P 500, according to S&P Dow Jones Indices.

How bad can a bear market be?

On paper, an investor can lose most of their money. From late 1929 into the middle of 1932, the stock market fell a little more than 86%, for example.

A bear market can also feel interminable: One lasted more than five years, from 1937 into 1942, where U.S. stocks lost 60%, according to S&P Dow Jones Indices.

In Japan, after the Nikkei 225 index set a record at the end of 1989, it sank and then took decades to fully recover. It wasn't until 2024 that it got back to that peak.

The Japanese example is an outlier, though. In almost every case, investors would have made back all their losses from a downturn for U.S. stocks if they simply held on and didn't sell. That includes the 2000 dot-com bust, the 2008 financial crisis and the 2020 coronavirus collapse.

What should we expect this time?

No one knows. Some investors on Wall Street say they expect Trump to pull back on some policies if they prove to be too damaging, while others say the uncertainty alone is creating enough pain.

The economy has given signals that it's still relatively solid at the moment, including last month's jobs report, but the outlook looks cloudier than usual given all the unknowns.

NATO secretary-general tells Trump he's motivating alliance members to spend more on defense

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte laid on the praise for President Donald Trump on Thursday as the two met in the Oval Office at a time when the president's comments have raised doubts about his commitment to the transatlantic alliance and its mutual defense treaty.

Rutte welcomed Trump's efforts to get fellow members of the alliance to step up their defense spending and told the president, "I think they want to work together with you in the run-up to the next summit to make sure that we will have a NATO, which is newly invigorated under your leadership."

Rutte played up the European Commission's call this month for 800 billion euros (\$874 billion) in new defense spending by the 27-member bloc, and mentioned recent commitments from the United Kingdom and Germany to surge spending on security in those countries.

"What's happened the last couple of weeks is really staggering," said Rutte, while acknowledging there is still more the alliance can do.

Rutte comments come after Trump last week lashed out at members for not meeting a spending target of 2% of their gross domestic product on defense.

The U.S. president even raised doubt about the United States' commitment to the mutual defense statute in the NATO's founding treaty that states an attack on one NATO member is considered an attack on all.

Last year, NATO's outgoing Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said a record 23 of NATO's 32 member nations had hit the military alliance's defense spending target.

Trump on Thursday once again claimed credit for more countries meeting the spending target because of threats he made during his first term, while stressing that the 2% of GDP threshold is too low. Stoltenberg himself has said Trump was responsible for getting other nations to increase their spending.

"I just said, we're not going to be involved with you if you're not going to pay," Trump recalled Thursday. "And the money started pouring in and they all became much stronger because of my actions."

The two leaders were also discussing a U.S. proposal to reach a 30-day ceasefire in Russia's grinding invasion of Ukraine.

Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, was in Moscow on Thursday meeting with senior officials to discuss the proposal.

Trump offered guarded optimism about Russian President Vladimir Putin's statement earlier Thursday that he was, in principle, open to a ceasefire if certain conditions were met.

Trump reiterated that he stood ready to speak with Putin, but underscored that it was time to end the war.

"He (Putin) put out a very promising statement but it wasn't complete," Trump said. "Now we're going to see whether or not Russia's there. And if they're not, it'll be a very disappointing moment for the world."

Trump administration withdraws CDC director nomination just before Senate hearing

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The White House withdrew the nomination of former Florida congressman Dr. David Weldon to lead the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention because he wasn't assured of getting enough Republican support to be confirmed.

The Republican-controlled Senate health committee announced Thursday morning that it was canceling a planned hearing on Weldon's nomination — less than an hour before it was scheduled to begin.

A White House assistant told Weldon on Wednesday night that his nomination was being withdrawn because "there were not enough votes to get me confirmed," the ex-congressman said in a statement.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, an Alaska Republican and committee member, told reporters she had relayed her concerns about Weldon's vaccine skepticism both to him directly and to the White House. Two other Republicans who have voiced concerns about the administration's direction on vaccines, Sens. Bill Cassidy and Susan Collins, said they had not decided whether to support or oppose his confirmation.

Weldon was considered to be closely aligned with Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the U.S. health secretary who for years has been one of the nation's leading anti-vaccine activists.

Weldon, 71, is an Army veteran and internal medicine doctor whose main claim to fame was representing a central Florida district in Congress from 1995 to 2009.

He was a leader of a Congressional push for research into autism's causes, which began around 2000. But Weldon rejected studies that found no causal link between childhood vaccines and autism, and accused the CDC of short-circuiting research that might show otherwise.

"My big sin was that as a congressman 25 years ago I had the temerity to take on the CDC and big Pharma" on childhood vaccine safety issues, Weldon wrote in his four-page statement.

Weldon said Kennedy told him that Collins, a Maine Republican, had expressed reservations about the nomination. He also believes that Cassidy, the Louisiana Republican who chairs the health committee, was against his nomination.

Collins said: "I had some reservations, but I certainly had not reached a final judgment."

Cassidy said he didn't ask for Weldon's withdrawal and was surprised by it.

"I was looking forward to the hearing," Cassidy said in a statement. "His poor response to this situation shows that the pressures of being CDC director would have been too much."

Sen. Patty Murray, who is also on the health committee, said she had serious concerns about Weldon after meeting with him.

"I was deeply disturbed to hear Dr. Weldon repeat debunked claims about vaccines," the Washington Democrat said in a statement. "It's dangerous to put someone in charge at CDC who believes the lie that our rigorously tested childhood vaccine schedule is somehow exposing kids to toxic levels of mercury or causing autism."

The White House did not issue a statement explaining the withdrawal, and Trump did not address it during a Thursday afternoon press availability. The Department of Health and Human Services did not respond to a request for comment.

With a \$9.2 billion core budget, the Atlanta-based CDC is charged with protecting Americans from outbreaks and other public health threats.

For decades it enjoyed a sterling reputation as a global leader on disease control and a reliable source of health information, boasting some of the top experts in the world. But the agency came under attack during the COVID-19 pandemic, repeatedly faulted for how it handled communications, masking guidance and others aspects of its pandemic response.

This week, Cassidy and other Republican leaders launched a working group to examine potential legis-

lative reforms for the agency, which has been swept up in the government-wide job-cutting push led by the president and his billionaire adviser Elon Musk.

Weldon was to be the first CDC director nominee to have to go through Senate confirmation — the result of a provision in a law passed during the Biden administration. The agency's 20 previous directors were all appointed.

He becomes the third Trump administration nominee who didn't make it to a confirmation hearing. Previously, former U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz withdrew from consideration for attorney general and Chad Chronister for the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Susan Monarez has been the CDC's acting director since late January and is poised to stay on at the agency after a director is confirmed.

Two other nominees for high-profile federal health positions are on track for confirmation.

On Thursday, the Senate health panel voted to advance Dr. Marty Makary's nomination to become the next commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration. Democratic Sens. Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire and John Hickenlooper of Colorado joined Republicans in backing the surgeon and researcher. The same committee also voted along party lines to advance the nomination of Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, a health economist and Stanford University professor, to lead the National Institutes of Health.

Belgian prosecutors arrest suspects in Huawei bribery probe targeting EU Parliament

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN and SYLVAIN PLAZY Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Belgian federal prosecutors on Thursday announced the arrests of several people in a corruption probe linked to the European Parliament and the Chinese company Huawei, which is suspected of bribing EU lawmakers.

The arrests came as an investigation by Le Soir newspaper and other media said lobbyists working for the Chinese telecoms giant were suspected of bribing current or former European Parliament members to promote the company's commercial policies in Europe.

The prosecutor's office confirmed in a statement that the alleged bribery "is said to have benefited Huawei."

About 100 federal police officers carried out 21 searches in Brussels, the Flanders and Wallonia regions, and Portugal. The investigating magistrate in charge of the case also asked for seals to be placed on offices inside the EU Parliament allocated to two parliamentary assistants allegedly involved.

Prosecutors said one person was arrested in France.

The suspects would be questioned over "alleged involvement in active corruption within the European Parliament, as well as for forgery and use of forgeries," prosecutors said. "The offences were allegedly committed by a criminal organization."

The company said in a statement that "Huawei takes these allegations seriously and will urgently communicate with the investigation to further understand the situation."

"Huawei has a zero tolerance policy towards corruption or other wrongdoing, and we are committed to complying with all applicable laws and regulations at all times," it added.

The European Parliament said only that the assembly "takes note of the information" and "always co-operates fully with the judicial authorities."

Huawei, which makes cellphones and is the biggest maker of networking gear for phone and internet carriers, has been caught in tensions between the United States and China over technology and trade.

Some European nations have followed Washington's lead and banned Huawei's equipment from next-generation mobile networks over allegations that it poses a security risk that could help facilitate Chinese spying. The company has repeatedly denied this.

European Commission spokesman Thomas Regnier said the EU's executive branch had no comment regarding the investigation but underlined the commission's security concerns about Huawei and Europe's fifth-generation mobile phone networks.

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"The security of our 5G networks is obviously crucial for our economy," Regnier told reporters. "Huawei represents materially higher risks than other 5G suppliers."

EU member states should swiftly "adopt decisions to restrict or to exclude Huawei from their 5G networks," Regnier said. "A lack of swift action would expose the EU as a whole to a clear risk."

The prosecutor's office said it believes there was corruption "from 2021 to the present day" in various forms, "such as remuneration for taking political positions or excessive gifts such as food and travel expenses or regular invitations to football matches."

Prosecutors also believe payments might have been disguised as business expenses and in some cases may have been directed to third parties. They said they would also look to "detect any evidence of money laundering."

Police seized several documents and objects during the searches. Staff at Huawei's offices in Brussels declined to comment and turned the lights off inside to avoid photographs taken through the window.

This is the second corruption case targeting the EU Parliament in less than three years.

In December 2022, the legislature was shaken by a corruption scandal in which Qatari officials were accused of bribing EU officials to play down labor rights concerns ahead of the soccer World Cup.

The scandal scarred the reputation of the EU's only institution comprised of officials elected directly in the 27 member countries. It undermined the assembly's claim to the moral high ground in its own investigations, such as into allegations of corruption in member country Hungary.

EU Greens lawmaker Daniel Freund — who supervised the work of the assembly's ethics body during the scandal, dubbed Qatargate — said Thursday the parliament's reputation is again under threat.

"The risk of corruption in Brussels is high because the EU is so influential," he said. "We need a complete investigation quickly, and finally reforms that will make the Parliament more resistant to corruption."

According to Follow The Money, an investigative journalism platform, one of the main suspects in the probe is 41-year-old Valerio Ottati, a Belgian-Italian lobbyist who joined Huawei in 2019.

Before becoming Huawei's EU public affairs director, Ottati was an assistant to two Italian MEPs who were both members of a European Parliament group dealing with China policy, Follow the Money reported.

NBC and IOC sign \$3B Olympic media rights deal through 2036 including Salt Lake City Winter Games

LAUSANNE, Switzerland (AP) — NBC will now be the champion of Olympic broadcasting in the United States through at least 2036.

The IOC said Thursday it signed its long-time United States broadcast partner to a \$3 billion renewed deal for the 2034 Salt Lake City Olympics and the 2036 Summer Games.

The International Olympic Committee's statement said the agreement elevates Comcast NBCUniversal to being a strategic partner instead of just a media rights holder, promising "innovative joint strategic initiatives and projects" and involving the streaming platform Peacock.

The IOC said it would benefit from "Comcast's investment in relevant and innovative start-ups" in a deal that was surprisingly announced in the final weeks of Thomas Bach's leadership of the Olympic body.

The 2036 host has yet to be decided with interest shown by Olympic officials in countries including India, Qatar, Turkey, Hungary and Indonesia.

NBC signed its most recent Olympic rights deal in 2014 covering each Summer Games and Winter Games through 2032. That was valued at \$7.75 billion and includes the next Summer Games in 2028 in Los Angeles.

NBC was widely seen to have a good and profitable 2024 Paris Olympics, with roving correspondent Snoop Dogg proving to be a huge hit with audiences at home and fans in the city.

The broadcaster said its coverage from Paris reached 67 million total viewers on average daily across all platforms.

That NBC deal done 11 years ago was a major decision early in Bach's IOC presidency that secured the financial future of the Olympic body.

The new U.S. rights deal has been sealed just one week before Bach's successor is to be elected at an

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IOC meeting in Greece, on March 20.

"The media landscape is evolving rapidly and, by partnering with one of the world's leading media and technology companies, we will ensure that fans in the United States are able to experience the Olympic Games like never before," Bach said in the statement.

NBC has broadcast every Summer Olympics since 1988 and every Winter Games since 2002 in Salt Lake City — all the games since the 2000 Sydney Olympics. A previous renewal in 2011 secured each games from 2014 through 2020 for \$4.38 billion.

"It is our honor to continue to bring the full power of our company's expertise in creating and distributing content that connects with Americans," Comcast Chairman and CEO Brian Roberts said, "as well as to begin to provide even more innovative technological support and solutions to the IOC and its stakeholders in areas that benefit athletes and the many people dedicated to organizing the Olympic Games around the world."

IRS swaps its chief counsel for a lawyer friendly with DOGE, AP sources say

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Internal Revenue Service's acting chief counsel, William Paul, has been removed from his role at the agency and replaced by Andrew De Mello, an attorney in the chief counsel's office who is deemed supportive of Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, according to two people familiar with the plans who were not authorized to speak publicly.

The people said Paul was demoted from his position because he clashed with the DOGE's alleged push to share tax information with multiple agencies. The news also comes as the IRS plans to institute massive cuts to its workforce.

The IRS is drafting plans to cut its workforce by as much as half through a mix of layoffs, attrition and incentivized buyouts as part of the President Donald Trump's efforts to shrink the size of the federal workforce. The administration is closing agencies, laying off nearly all probationary employees who have not yet gained civil service protection and offering buyouts to almost all federal employees through a "deferred resignation program" to quickly reduce the government workforce.

Already, roughly 7,000 probationary IRS employees with roughly one year or less of service were laid off from the organization in February.

Paul was named acting chief counsel to the IRS in January, replacing Marjorie A. Rollinson, and has served in various roles at the IRS since the late 1980's.

Paul is not the first government official to be demoted after voicing concern about access to sensitive systems and taxpayer data.

Government officials across the Treasury Department, the Social Security Administration and other agencies have seen a wave of retirements, resignations and demotions for voicing concern about DOGE access to sensitive systems and taxpayer data.

After 30 years of service, Michelle King, the SSA's acting commissioner, stepped down from her role in February after refusing to provide DOGE access Social Security recipient information, according to two people familiar with the official's departure who were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

"The series of IRS officials who have put the law above their personal job security join a line of public servants, stretching back to Treasury and IRS leaders during the Nixon era, who have resisted unlawful attempts by elected officials to weaponize taxpayer data and systems," Chye-Ching Huang, executive director of the Tax Law Center at New York University School of Law, said in a statement.

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 sharing 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."

Aches, pains and joy for 40-year-old man savoring his second chance to play college volleyball

By ERIC OLSON AP Sports Writer

Damon LaSalle keeps the athletic trainers busy at New Jersey City University.

As he gets out of bed, his hamstrings, knees and back give him daily reminders that playing college volleyball can take a toll on the body. He has standing appointments with a chiropractor and acupuncturist in addition to the frequent visits to the training room.

"I have like a professional team taping me and sewing me together," he said, laughing.

Those aches and pains are magnified for LaSalle.

He is, after all, 40 years old.

LaSalle plays middle blocker for the Knights, and most of his teammates weren't born 20 years ago when he was one of the biggest stars in Division III. His first go in college ended because he was ruled academically ineligible before what would have been his senior season.

With his wife's encouragement, the stay-at-home dad went back to school so he could honor his late mother's wish that he earn a degree and to set an example for his three children. He also wanted to put a proper bow on his volleyball career.

The academic part has been no problem. LaSalle is a fire science major who is on the dean's list with a 3.8 grade-point average on a 4.0 scale, and he is on track to graduate this spring.

The volleyball part has been an adventure. He has been limited to 10 of the Knights' first 18 matches because of his assortment of injuries. Not all were volleyball-related. He missed two matches with a classic dad injury — he tweaked his hamstring shoveling snow and the pain migrated to his back.

40 going on 20

LaSalle doesn't jump as high or move as quickly as he once did. The way he describes it, he once could dunk a basketball and now can grab the rim with both hands. The guy can still play a little volleyball, though.

Knights coach Carlo Edra, who played with LaSalle at NJCU from 2004-06, said he's shown two opposing coaches a photo array of the team and asked them to identify the 40-year-old. Both pointed to someone other than LaSalle.

LaSalle can keep up with his younger teammates, but he's not the intimidating middle he once was. In 2006, he was national player of the week once and division player of the year in the old North East Collegiate Volleyball Association, which was Division III's top league. He is NJCU's career leader in block assists, and in wrapping his fourth season he is on the cusp of becoming the program's all-time leader in total blocks.

"His resume was right on hall of fame level at this college," said Ira Thor, the school's former sports information director.

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A sudden ending

LaSalle's first stint at NJCU ended suddenly. He was in preseason training during the fall of 2006 when an assistant athletic director pulled him out of practice and told him he was ineligible. His grade-point average was 1.4, the equivalent of a D-plus.

"I was more of an athlete-student instead of a student-athlete," he said. "That happens to a lot of kids, and I let it get too far. I got to a point where when the athlete part wasn't available to me, it wasn't as interesting to be a student."

So he quit school and, needing a job, asked Edra for help. Edra had graduated the year before and worked at a kitchen cabinet company. Edra recommended LaSalle, and he spent six or seven years there and became warehouse manager. LaSalle ended up marrying the woman who interviewed him for the job, and when Christina and he began a family, he was able to stay home.

The LaSalle's live about a 35-minute drive from NJCU's Jersey City campus and have daughters ages 4 and 6 and a son who's 8.

When he asked Christina if she would be OK with him going to school and playing volleyball again, she told him it would make her proud if he did.

"That gave me goosebumps," he said. "It made me feel like I could really do this."

His biggest regret

LaSalle said his biggest regret was dropping out of school, and his desire to go back grew stronger several years ago when he came across his wife's diploma from Rutgers.

"I looked at it and I was, 'I want one of these,'" he said. "Carlo and I had a conversation, 'What if my kids ask me why I don't have one, what would my answer be to them about why I didn't finish?'"

LaSalle, Edra and their former teammates have remained close over the years, and during their get-togethers or in their group texts somebody occasionally would suggest LaSalle finish what he started academically and athletically.

In Division III, an athlete gets 10 semesters as a full-time student to play four seasons. There is no running eligibility clock as in Division I, so an athlete could leave school and return in, say, 20 years and pick up where he left off.

In LaSalle's case, he had played three seasons over seven semesters. To get his grades up and preserve his one remaining season of eligibility, LaSalle could only enroll as a part-time student and take a couple classes per semester.

The slog to eligibility ended last summer. He became a full-time student in the fall and joined the team.

'Coming off the scrap heap'

The only volleyball LaSalle had played since 2006 was with Edra in a summer sand volleyball league at a bar.

"I'm not coming off the club court or anything," LaSalle said. "I was coming off the scrap heap, as they say, off the couch."

Actually, LaSalle had stayed fit over the years and that picked up once he decided to pursue college volleyball again. LaSalle knew he would have to earn his playing time and that Edra wouldn't give him special treatment because of their two-decade friendship.

"So if one of your kids is throwing a temper tantrum and you're late to practice, I've got to make you run, dude," Edra said he told LaSalle.

Sure enough, LaSalle stopped for coffee on his way to practice one day, had trouble finding a parking spot on campus and showed up late. He had to run laps, do 100 squat lifts, 30 pushups, a three-minute wall sit (a grueling quadriceps exercise) and a three-minute plank.

"There's been plenty of days when I get home from these practices and I'll tell my wife, 'Should I be doing this? Am I going to be OK tomorrow?'" LaSalle said. "Every day I wake up and here I am."

Embraced by teammates

His teammates have embraced him, first calling him "Unc," as in uncle. The nickname morphed to "Big 40" and stuck. Alex Casais, the team captain, said he treated LaSalle like any other teammate when prac-

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tice started.

"I was not giving him the props," he said. "I couldn't. I had to make sure to he was earning it on the court. He hit one ball and I knew it was over. I knew we were good."

LaSalle said his approach was to blend in with his new teammates. That meant being quiet and doing what everybody else was doing. He said he never expected his teammates to know what he had accomplished 20 years ago, calling it immaterial.

"He came in with a sense of dignity," Casais said. "He stepped on the court, and his head was down and he was going to work. I felt like a lot of the younger guys looked up to him, and that's where 'Big 40' came from. He was someone working as hard as everyone else, if not harder."

Savoring every moment

LaSalle said the game has become faster, players jump higher, systems are more sophisticated and the disparity between the top and bottom teams is smaller.

But if anyone thought LaSalle would embarrass himself, he proved them wrong.

"It was kind of a surprise to everybody that once we all got in the gym in the fall season that he started to compete for the starting spot," Edra said. "The fact he's keeping up with guys that are 21 years old and 20, 18 — it's kind of crazy."

For LaSalle, it's crazy fun. He said he savors every moment because he realizes he got an almost unimaginable second chance. Recalling 2006, he said, "I played my last game, and I didn't know it was my last game."

And now?

"Every practice we finish, it's one less practice that I have before it's over," he said. "So I don't take that for granted. I don't take any day for granted at all."

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 parts 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

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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 proved more effective at limiting the spread of the virus and reining 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 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 California, Iowa, Ohio 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.

Ducks were once a conservation bright spot. Now they're declining in the US, new report shows

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — At least 112 North American bird species have lost more than half their populations in the past 50 years, according to a new report published Thursday.

Among the birds showing the steepest declines are Allen's hummingbirds, Florida scrub jays, golden-cheeked warblers, tricolored blackbirds and yellow-billed magpies.

"These are the very real consequences if we are unable to conserve and protect the crucial habitats

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that birds need,” said study co-author Mike Brasher, a senior scientist at the nonprofit Ducks Unlimited.

For several decades, waterfowl stood out as a conservation bright spot with duck populations growing nationwide even as many other groups of birds declined in the U.S. But that trend has reversed, the new data shows.

The total number of dabbling and diving ducks is down about 30% from 2017, said Brasher. Loss of grasslands habitat and a prolonged drought affecting the wetlands of the Great Plains’ prairie pothole region have taken a toll. Among all waterfowl, numbers are down 20% since 2014, the report found.

The latest report is a collaboration between several groups including Cornell University, Ducks Unlimited, American Bird Conservancy, National Audubon Society and the American Ornithological Society.

The work draws on survey data from the U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and citizen projects such as Cornell’s eBird. There are some 2,000 bird species in North America. A third of the species examined are rated as high or moderate concern for conservation due to declining numbers, habitat loss or other threats.

These birds “need urgent conservation attention,” said Amanda Rodewald, a study co-author from Cornell, adding that bird survey trends also reveal the health of their habitats.

The report focuses on birds that must breed and feed in specific habitats such as forests, grasslands and coastal regions. Grassland birds including the Bobolink are most at risk.

“For each species that we’re in danger of losing, it’s like pulling an individual thread out of the complex tapestry of life,” said Georgetown University biologist Peter Marra, who was not involved in the new report.

Marra pointed to key past conservation successes in the U.S. – such as the comebacks of bald eagles, egrets and osprey.

“We know that we can bend the curve back with targeted conservation plans. But we can’t just close our eyes and hope,” he said.

One Tech Tip: Wasting too much time on social media apps? Tips and tricks to curb smartphone use

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — If you’ve got a smartphone, you probably spend too much time on it — checking Instagram, watching silly TikTok videos, messaging on WhatsApp or doomsscrolling on X.

It can be hard to curb excessive use of smartphones and social media, which are addictive by design. Reducing your screen time is often more than just a matter of willpower, especially for younger people whose brains and impulse control are still developing.

If you’re a phone addict who wants to cut down on the hours a day spent looking at your device, here are some techniques you can try to free up more IRL time:

Delete apps

An easy first step is getting rid of any apps you’ve been wasting time on.

Over the past year, I’ve deleted Facebook, Instagram and Twitter from my phone because I wanted to use them less. Now and then I’ll have to go the app store and reinstall one because I need to do something like post a photo I took on my phone. (Sometimes I’ll transfer the photo to my laptop and then post it to the web from there, but usually, it’s too much hassle.)

The danger with this approach is that if you do reinstall the app, you won’t bother deleting it again.

Use built-in controls

Both iPhones and Android devices have onboard controls to help regulate screen time. They can also be used by parents to regulate children’s phone usage.

Apple’s Screen Time controls are found in the iPhone’s settings menu. Users can set overall Downtime, which shuts off all phone activity during a set period. If you want a phone-free evening, then you could set it to kick in from, say, 7 p.m. until 7 a.m.

The controls also let users put a blanket restriction on certain categories of apps, such as social, games

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or entertainment or zero in on a specific app, by limiting the time that can be spent on it. Too distracted by Instagram? Then set it so that you can only use it for a daily total of 20 minutes.

The downside is that the limits aren't hard to get around. It's more of a nudge than a red line that you can't cross. If you try to open an app with a limit, you'll get a screen menu offering one more minute, a reminder after 15 minutes, or to completely ignore it.

Android users can use turn to their Digital Wellbeing settings, which include widgets to remind users how much screen time they've had. There's also the option to create separate work and personal profiles, so you can hide your social media apps and their notifications when you're at the office.

Don't be distracted

There are other little tricks to make your phone less distracting. I use the Focus mode on my iPhone to silence notifications. For example, If I'm in a meeting somewhere, I mute it until I leave that location. Android also has a Focus mode to pause distracting apps.

Change your phone display to grayscale from color so that it doesn't look so exciting. On iPhones, adjust the color filter in your settings. For Android, turn on Bedtime Mode, or tweak the color correction setting.

Android phones can also nag users not to look at their phones while walking, by activating the Heads Up feature in Digital Wellbeing.

Block those apps

If the built-in controls aren't enough, there are many third-party apps, like Jomo, Opal, Forest, Roots and LockMeOut that are designed to cut down screen time.

Many of these apps have both free and premium versions with more features, and strongly push you toward signing up for a subscription by minimizing the option to "skip for now" on the payment screen. I tested out a few on my iPhone for this story.

To try out Opal, I reinstalled Facebook so I could block it. Whenever I tapped the Facebook icon, Opal intervened to give me various inspirational messages, like "Gain Wisdom, Lose Facebook," and tallied how many times I tried to open it. To get around the block, I had to open Opal and wait through a six-second timeout before requesting up to 15 minutes to look at Facebook. There's an option to up the difficulty by increasing the delay before you can look again.

Jomo, which I used to restrict my phone's Reddit app, worked in a similar way: tap the Unlock button, which took me to the Jomo app, where I had to wait 20 seconds before I could tap the button to unlock Reddit for up to 10 minutes.

The OneSec app takes a different approach by reminding users to first take a pause. The installation, which involves setting up an automation on the iPhone's Shortcuts, can be confusing. When I eventually installed it for my Bluesky app, it gave me a prompt to run a shortcut that wiped my screen with a soothing purple-blue and reminded me to take a deep breath before letting me choose to open the app — but in practice it was too easy to just skip the prompt.

The Android-only LockMeOut can freeze you out of designated apps based on criteria like your location, how many times you've opened an app, or how long you've used it.

The obvious way to defeat these apps is simply to delete them, although some advise users to follow the proper uninstall procedure or else apps could remain blocked.

Use external hardware

Digital blockers might not be for everyone. Some startups, figuring that people might prefer a tangible barrier, offer hardware solutions that introduce physical friction between you and an app.

Unplug is a yellow tag that you have to hold up to your phone in order to access blocked apps. Brick and Blok are two different products that work along the same lines — they're squarish pieces of plastic that you have to tap or scan with your phone to unlock an app.

The makers of these devices say that software solutions are too easy to bypass, but a physical object that you can put somewhere out of reach or leave behind if you're going somewhere is a more effective way to get rid of distractions.

What about stashing the phone away entirely? There are various phone lockboxes and cases available,

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some of them designed so parents can lock up their teenagers' phones when they're supposed to be sleeping. Yondr, which makes portable phone locking pouches used at concerts or in schools, also sells a home phone box.

See a therapist

Perhaps there are deeper reasons for your smartphone compulsion. Maybe it's a symptom of underlying problems like anxiety, stress, loneliness, depression or low self-esteem. If you think that's the case, it could be worth exploring therapy that is becoming more widely available.

One London hospital treats "technology addiction" with a plan that includes dealing with "discomfort in face-to-face time" with other people, and exploring your relationship with technology.

Another clinic boasts that its social media addiction treatment also includes working on a patient's technology management skills, such as "setting boundaries for device usage, finding alternative activities to fill the void of reduced online interaction, and learning how to engage more with the physical world."

Downgrade your phone

Why not trade your smartphone for a more basic one? It's an extreme option but there's a thriving subculture of cellphones with only basic features, catering to both retro enthusiasts and people, including parents, worried about screen time. They range from cheap old-school brick-and-flip phones by faded brands like Nokia to stylish but pricier devices from boutique manufacturers like Punkt.

The tradeoff, of course, is that you'll also have to do without essential apps like Google Maps or your bank.

Today in History: March 14, Albert Einstein is born

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, March 14, the 73rd day of 2025. There are 292 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 14, 1879, Albert Einstein, who would revolutionize physics and the human understanding of the universe, was born in Ulm, Germany.

Also on this date:

In 1794, Eli Whitney received a patent for his cotton gin, an invention that revolutionized the American cotton industry.

In 1964, a jury in Dallas found Jack Ruby guilty of murdering Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin of President John F. Kennedy, and sentenced Ruby to death. (Both the conviction and death sentence were overturned, but Ruby died before he could be retried.)

In 1967, the body of President John F. Kennedy was moved from a temporary grave to a permanent memorial site at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

In 1973, future U.S. senator and presidential candidate John McCain was released from North Vietnamese captivity after being held as a prisoner of war for over five years.

In 1980, a LOT Polish Airlines jet crashed while attempting to land in Warsaw, killing all 87 people aboard, including 22 athletes and staff members of the U.S. boxing team.

In 2015, Robert Durst, a wealthy eccentric linked to two killings and his wife's disappearance, was arrested by the FBI in New Orleans on a murder warrant a day before HBO aired the final episode of a serial documentary about his life. (Durst would be convicted in the shooting death of his friend, Susan Berman; he died in January 2022 while serving a life sentence in California.)

In 2018, Stephen Hawking, the best-known theoretical physicist of his time, died at his home in Cambridge, England, at the age of 76 after living with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) for 55 years.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Michael Caine is 92. Country musician Michael Martin Murphey is 80. Actor-comedian Billy Crystal is 77. Country singer Kristian Bush is 55. Actor Betsy Brandt is 52. Actor Grace Park is 51. Actor Corey Stoll is 49. Actor Chris Klein is 46. Actor Jamie Bell is 39. NBA star Stephen Curry is 37. Actor Ansel Elgort is 31. Olympic gymnastics gold medalist Simone Biles is 28.

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South Dakota **AMBER ALERT**

(Issued 2:25 am (CDT), Friday, March 14, 2025)

Child Description:

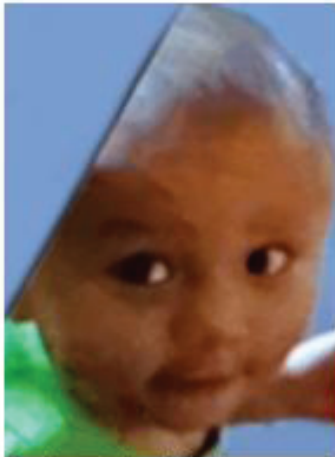
Javion Bluebird, 1 yr. of age
Native American, male, 2 feet 1 inches tall, 25 pounds, brown eyes, black hair
last seen wearing a gray nylon shirt, Pampers diaper and white crew socks

Suspect Description:

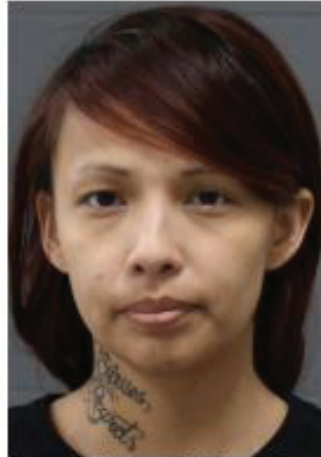
Lelana Sitting Up, 29 years old
Native American female, 5 feet 3 inches tall, 120 pounds, brown eyes, brown hair worn in a ponytail, tattoo of "No Excuses No Regrets" in script on the right side of neck
Wearing a black shirt and sweatpants

Suspect Vehicle Description:

White, early 2000's Chevrolet Impala with loud exhaust



Javion Bluebird
Abducted child



Lelana Sitting Up
Suspected Abductor

Details of the abduction

On Thursday, March 13th at 9:27 pm
Javion Bluebird was forcibly abducted from his grandmother's home in Sioux Falls, SD. A weapon was displayed during the abduction.

Javion was taken by Lelana Sitting Up. A 17 year old juvenile female was in the company of Lelana at the time of the abduction.

Lelana is in a relationship with the child's non-custodial father, Jade White.

If **YOU** have seen this Child, Suspect or Vehicle,
Call 605-367-7000 Immediately

Do **NOT** take action to rescue the child, CALL IMMEDIATELY

This poster is available on the state Amber Alert webpage at <http://sd.gov/amberalert/>