

Groton Daily Independent

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Thursday, March 20

Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, corn, apple crisp, garlic toast.

State A Boys Basketball Tournament, Sioux Falls: Groton Area vs. Sioux Falls Christian at noon.

Spring Break - No School

Emmanuel Lutheran: WELCA, 1:30 p.m. (Program - Nigeria, Host-Sarah)

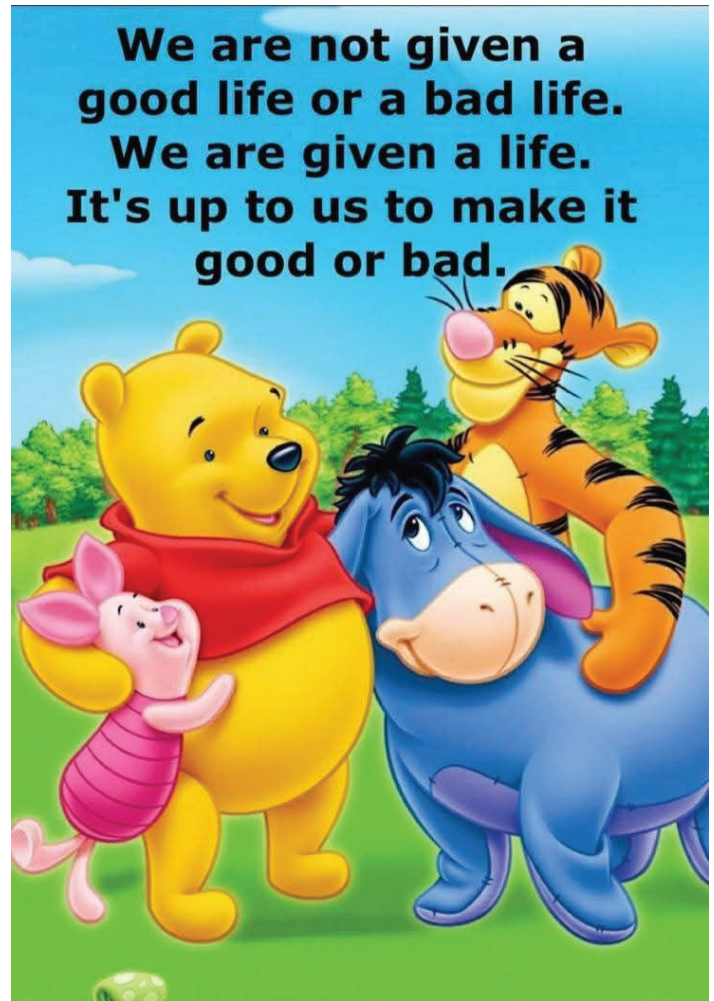
Friday, March 21

Senior Menu: Vegetable soup, egg salad sandwich, tomato spoon salad, fruit.

State A Boys Basketball Tournament, Sioux Falls
Spring Break - No School

Saturday, March 22

State A Boys Basketball Tournament, Sioux Falls
Spring Vendor Fair, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., GHS Gym



Sunday, March 23

Welcome home for Boys Basketball Team, 1 p.m., Groton Area Arena.

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; No Sunday School; Coffee hour, 10:30 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.; No Sunday School

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; No Sunday School, Choir, 6 p.m.

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

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

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

Groton Daily Independent
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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.

Fed Holds Steady

The Federal Reserve will hold interest rates steady at 4.25%-4.5% following a much-anticipated meeting yesterday, a decision that comes amid economic uncertainty driven by trade standoffs in recent weeks. The board also signaled it would still target two cuts this year, potentially lowering rates to 3.75%-4.0%.

The group also lowered its projections for growth of the US economy in 2025, projecting a gross domestic product increase of 1.7%—down from 2.1% following a December meeting—and upped its estimate of core price inflation to 2.8%. Reports from the meeting also suggested the Fed would slow the drawdown of nearly \$6.8T in assets, a portfolio largely stockpiled during stimulus efforts over the past decade and a half. See an overview of how the Federal Reserve works here.

Stocks were buoyed on news that two rate cuts were likely coming at some point this year (S&P 500 +1.1%, Dow +0.9%, Nasdaq +1.4%).

Netflix Director Arrested

Writer-director Carl Rinsch was arrested this week in Hollywood on federal charges that he misused millions of dollars slated for a Netflix TV production to fund personal investments in securities and cryptocurrency. Rinsch's best-known work is the 2013 historical fantasy box office flop "47 Ronin" starring Keanu Reeves.

Netflix picked up production of "White Horse" in 2018 with an initial investment of \$44M. After cost overruns, Rinsch received another \$11M for the show. The indictment alleges Rinsch lost more than half that amount on risky securities—including investments in a biopharma company and an S&P 500-linked exchange-traded fund—before shifting the remainder to cryptocurrency, where he profited significantly. He faces counts of wire fraud, money laundering, and use of illicit funds.

He then spent more than \$10M on luxury cars, hotels, credit cards, and lawyers; no episodes of the show, later renamed "Conquest," were produced. An arbitrator ordered Rinsch to pay Netflix nearly \$12M in August.

Istanbul Mayor Detained

Turkish police arrested Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu yesterday, accusing the leader of corruption and links to terrorism. The detainment occurred days before İmamoğlu was set to be selected as his party's presidential candidate and comes amid ongoing crackdowns on opposition voices in Turkey.

İmamoğlu is a key rival of populist Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has led the country for 22 years, first as prime minister and then as president—he faces term limits in 2028. Parliament could potentially call for early elections, presenting an opportunity for Erdoğan to run again due to a constitutional technicality. İmamoğlu's popularity has posed a threat to Erdoğan, who faces negative public opinion. Erdoğan and the ruling party have denied claims that the arrest is politically motivated.

Prosecutors issued related warrants for about 100 other opposition figures. Protests have erupted in Istanbul—Turkey's largest city—despite authorities closing roads and banning demonstrations for four days.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

March Madness kicks off in earnest today with the first round of the men's tournament; see complete tourney preview ... and the women's "First Four" matchups wrap up tonight.

Trump administration suspends \$175M in federal funding for the University of Pennsylvania over the participation of a transgender athlete on Penn's swim team.

Columbia University faces deadline today to make a wide range of policy changes or lose \$400M in federal funding.

Global music streaming revenue topped \$20B in 2024, a 7% increase over 2023; Taylor Swift was biggest-selling global artist for third straight year.

Science & Technology

Federal appeals court rules copyright can only be granted to artworks originally created by humans; case centered on a dispute over AI-generated, "Star Trek"-themed poetry.

Humans and parrots share common brain circuitry for complex vocalizations, new study finds; species known as budgerigars are the only animals known to share the trait.

Genetic study suggests modern humans descended from two separate populations that split around 1.5 million years ago, but intermixed again roughly 300,000 years ago.

Business & Markets

European regulators announce antitrust charges against Google, warn Apple of violations under the Digital Markets Act.

Yum Brands partners with chipmaker Nvidia to accelerate its use of AI in operations; parent company is owner of Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, and KFC, among others.

Nissan to cut 20% of top managerial positions; timing coincides with arrival of new CEO Ivan Espinosa.

Politics & World Affairs

US Institute of Peace sues to block efforts by Department of Government Efficiency; DOGE staff required local police to enter property earlier this week, IOP officials argue the group is an independent nonprofit.

President Donald Trump, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy hold hourlong call on plan toward ending Russia's war in Ukraine; discussion comes one day after a separate call between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

> Historians begin to examine new trove of roughly 63,000 pages of documents related to the assassination of former President John F. Kennedy, released by President Donald Trump Tuesday (More)

Monitor your water usage!

With the current system the City of Groton has, you can be notified if you have a water leak. Also, with the Eye on Water app, you can monitor your water usage. And the best thing is that it's a free service.

How do you sign up?

In the lower left of your utility bill you will see your account number.

First - download the EyeOnWater App on your phone.

Once you have it downloaded, it will ask you for your account number.

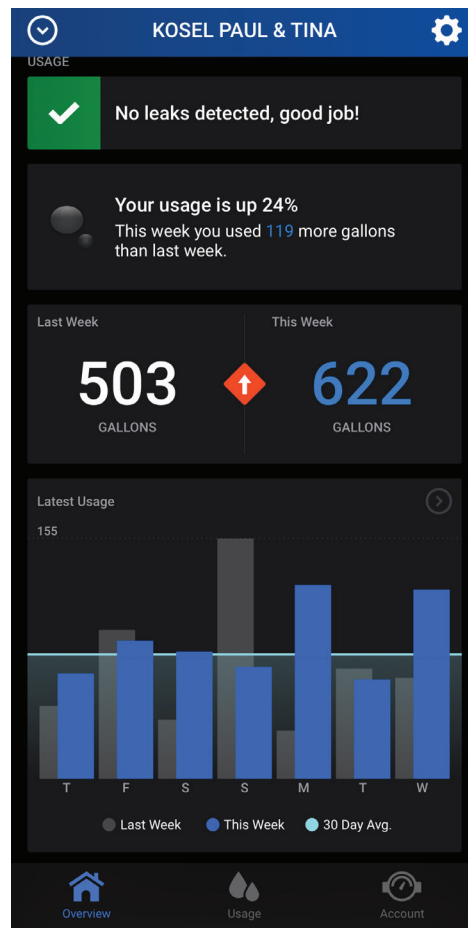
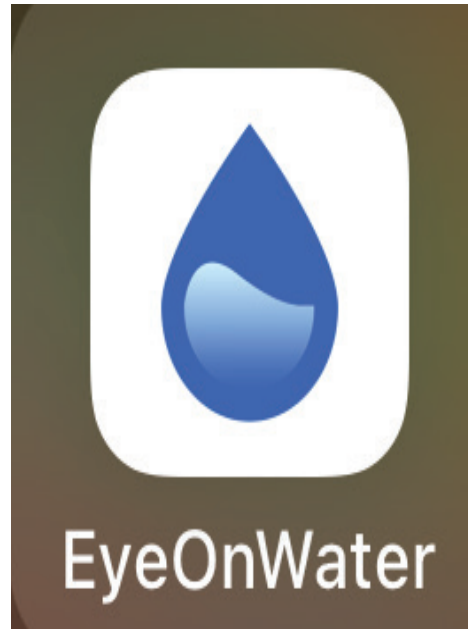
Enter the first 12 digits of your account number and then add 201 at the end.

When it asks you for the zip code, enter 57445.

And just like that, you have access to your water usage!

You can add a second account. In the bottom left hand corner, click on Overview, then click on the down arrow in the top left corner. Then on the next screen click on "Link More Accounts." Then enter your information.

If you have problems getting on, just text Paul at 605-397-7460 and he can help you through the process.



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The boys basketball team had an escort out of Groton as they made their trek to Sioux Falls for the State A Basketball Tournament. (Photo by Tina Kosel)

GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

School Board Meeting

March 24, 2025 – 7:00 PM – GHS Conference Room

AGENDA:

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

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Program Overview Presentations
 - a. Middle and High School English Language Arts and Reading
3. Buildings, Grounds, and Transportation Committee Report
4. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Approve custodial account for BAGS Backpack program.
2. Approve participation in South Dakota Department of Education Statewide Title III Consortium.
3. Approve volunteer track coaches:
 - a. Carla Tracy
 - b. Bruce Babcock
4. Executive Session pursuant to SDCL1-25-2(4) Negotiations.

ADJOURN

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Tina's Baskets - for Easter 605-397-7285

Cow basket - \$20



Includes - green drink cup, light up football, play dough, dinosaur bubble, bubbles, and 4 filled eggs

Paw patrol basket -\$25



Includes- two bubbles, 7 filled eggs, a chase car, mini figures, a mystery toy, two characters clips, and a paw patrol movie

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Rainbow basket - \$25



Teenager or adult Easter basket - \$25



Includes- cross word, sudoku book, word find, color pencils, three color books, pack of pens, Reese's pieces candy, solid chocolate bunny, neopolition flavored Lindt candy, and Dunkin chocolate brownie batter crème filled eggs

Includes- two color books 7 filled eggs, pink drink cup crayons, Reese's candy, egg chalk, playdough, bubbles fan bubbles and a rabbit bubble

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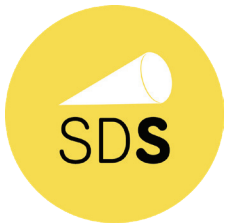
Blue basket - \$20

Pink basket - \$20



Blue bunny includes bubble machine, bluey and his friend bingo, small Pail for the sand , bubbles, 6 filled eggs

Includes a pink bear with hugs in it , bubble machine, bubbles, side chalk bunny book, 6 eggs filled Reeses pieces candy



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Ethanol leaders see irony in governor's 'Open for Opportunity' visit after eminent domain ban

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 19, 2025 5:56 PM

Some ethanol leaders think it's ironic that Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden brought his "Open for Opportunity" tour to an ethanol plant this week, after he signed a bill that negatively impacted a proposed multi-billion-dollar project for the industry.

"The whole industry is very disappointed with how things went in South Dakota," Walt Wendland, president of the Ringneck Energy ethanol plant in Onida, told South Dakota Searchlight.

Rhoden visited the plant Tuesday, after launching his tour highlighting economic development on Monday in Sioux Falls.

Wendland wants to connect the Onida plant to Summit Carbon Solutions' proposed \$9 billion, five-state pipeline that would capture carbon dioxide from more than 50 ethanol plants and transport it to an underground storage site in North Dakota. The project would be eligible for federal tax credits incentivizing the prevention of heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere.

Rhoden signed legislation March 6 barring carbon pipeline companies from using eminent domain. That's the right to access private property for projects that benefit the public, with just compensation for landowners determined by a court.

Summit has voluntary access agreements, called easements, with some landowners on the route. Other landowners have refused to sign the agreements, citing concerns about private property rights and potential leaks of toxic carbon dioxide plumes. They've also alleged unethical behavior by some land agents for Summit.

Without eminent domain, gaining access to the remaining land needed for the project in South Dakota could be difficult or impossible. Wendland said Summit spent millions on easements, "and suddenly, the state pulls the rug out from you, and tells you to go home."

"That's not the way we should be doing business," he said.

Last week, Summit asked South Dakota regulators to pause proceedings in the company's permit application. The company has permits in North Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa, although some permits are under litigation, while Nebraska lacks a permitting process.

South Dakota ethanol advocates say the project would be a \$1.86 billion investment in the state. They also say it would increase demand from markets seeking fuel with lower greenhouse gas emissions.

Rhoden, a longtime advocate for property rights, said the bill does not end the proposed project.

"I encourage Summit and others to view it as an opportunity for a needed reset," Rhoden said in a statement on March 6. "Voluntary easements for this proposed project will still be able to move forward. In fact, without the threat of eminent domain, the opportunity might finally be available for trust to be rebuilt and for more productive conversations to occur between Summit and South Dakota landowners."

Wendland said his Tuesday conversation with Rhoden was productive, and he believes the governor tried to find a compromise before signing the eminent domain ban. That proved impossible after several years of political strife caused by the project, including a voter-rejected compromise bill last year and the primary election losses of more than a dozen incumbent Republican legislators after the passage of that bill.

"He said the issue was taking up too much time for everybody, and by signing the bill, that all went away," Wendland said. "But at our expense, at agriculture's expense."

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Rhoden and Lt. Gov. Tony Venhuizen discussed their support of the eminent domain ban when they kicked off their "Open for Opportunity" tour Monday in Sioux Falls. Venhuizen referenced the divisiveness of the issue.

"I hope that these legislators in our state politics can kind of move beyond it," he said. "Because it was having a very corrosive effect on our state politics."

Rhoden said the debate "made me just sick to my stomach because there wasn't a good answer." He said the narrative about supporters of the project became too negative.

"If you believed in the carbon pipeline, then you were just a tree-hugging, green energy, Green New Deal, Biden Democrat," Rhoden said.

Eric Baukol is the CEO of Redfield Energy, another ethanol plant hoping to connect to the Summit pipeline. He said he understands the politics of it all, but that doesn't make it any less disappointing.

"If I were them and I wanted to be elected, it makes total sense," he said. "But it's short-sighted. The shift toward carbon sequestration in agriculture is coming, and this will likely be a burden."

Redfield Energy Board Chairman Jim Klebsch said that while some politicians at the Capitol in Pierre told him they got elected to oppose eminent domain for the project, "they knew in their heart and in their mind that the project was good for South Dakota."

"It was easier just to shut it down and walk away than it was to fight the real fight," Klebsch said. "We can't sustain current corn prices. Land prices will suffer, and local tax revenues along with them. Something will have to happen, and the pipeline project was one solution."

Lawmakers who supported the eminent domain ban hailed it as a victory for property rights.

Sen. Tom Pischke, R-Dell Rapids, voted for the bill when it passed the Senate on March 4.

"Private companies should not be able to take South Dakotans' land against their will," he said at the time.

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.

Jury finds Greenpeace at fault for protest damages, awards pipeline developer more than \$660 million

BY: MARY STEURER - MARCH 19, 2025 4:17 PM

MANDAN, N.D. — A Morton County jury on Wednesday ordered Greenpeace to pay hundreds of millions of dollars to the developer of the Dakota Access Pipeline, finding that the environmental group incited illegal behavior by anti-pipeline protesters and defamed the company.

The nine-person jury delivered a verdict in favor of Energy Transfer on most counts, awarding more than \$660 million in damages to Energy Transfer and Dakota Access LLC.

The case centers on Greenpeace's involvement in protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016 and 2017. The demonstrations were started by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, which views the project as a pollution threat and imposition onto Native land. Thousands of protesters camped for months north of the Standing Rock Reservation, near where the pipeline crosses underneath the Missouri River in Morton County.

Energy Transfer filed the colossal lawsuit in 2019, accusing Greenpeace of providing resources, including supplies, intel and training, to encourage Dakota Access Pipeline protesters to commit criminal acts to stop construction of the project. The company also claims that Greenpeace intentionally spread misinformation about the pipeline to tarnish its reputation with banks.

"These are the facts, not the fake news of the Greenpeace propaganda machine," Trey Cox, the lead attorney representing Energy Transfer, said in a press conference outside the Morton County Courthouse after the verdict.

Energy Transfer representatives believe protesting is an "inherent American right" but that Greenpeace's

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actions were "unacceptable," Cox continued.

The company sued three Greenpeace entities — Greenpeace USA, Greenpeace International and Greenpeace Fund.

The jury found Greenpeace USA liable for almost all claims. The jury did not find Greenpeace International and Greenpeace Fund responsible for the alleged on-the-ground harms committed by protesters, but did find those entities liable for defamation and interfering with Energy Transfer's business. The jury found Greenpeace USA and Greenpeace International liable for conspiracy.

Attorneys representing Greenpeace International and Greenpeace Fund told the jury that they never had any employees visit the demonstration camps or provide money to support the protests.

Both the plaintiffs and the defense have called the case one of the largest and most complex civil suits in state history.

Greenpeace USA, which the jury ordered to pay more than \$400 million of the damages, has previously said the lawsuit threatened to bankrupt the organization. When asked whether that was still the case Wednesday afternoon, Greenpeace Senior Legal Adviser Deepa Padmanabha said "the work of Greenpeace is never gonna stop."

Greenpeace didn't say immediately whether the organization would appeal the decision.

"We have not had a chance to even circle up as a group yet, but the fight is not over," Padmanabha said.

During closing arguments on Monday, Cox told jurors that Greenpeace's actions caused between \$265 million and \$340 million in damages to the company. He asked the jury to award Energy Transfer that amount plus additional punitive damages.

The verdict brought to a close a more than three-week trial in Mandan. The jury began deliberating Monday afternoon after hearing testimony from dozens of witnesses, including current and former Greenpeace employees, Indigenous activists, Energy Transfer representatives and law enforcement.

Among the witnesses was former Greenpeace executive director Annie Leonard and Energy Transfer Executive Chairman Kelcy Warren, who appeared by video deposition.

Greenpeace denies the allegations and says the lawsuit is a ploy to punish activist groups.

Some observers of the trial who participated in the anti-pipeline demonstration expressed anger after the verdict was announced Wednesday.

"Standing Rock was not heard," Waniya Locke, a Standing Rock citizen who attended much of the trial, said. She said that she will continue opposing the pipeline.

Kandi White, a member of the Mandan Hidatsa and Arikara Nation who also observed the trial, said she is "ashamed" of the decision. She said she found the implication that Greenpeace orchestrated the Dakota Access Pipeline protests insulting to Standing Rock and the other Native nations that were at the center of the movement.

"An appeal should be easy for any court," White said.

Greenpeace maintains that the protests were Indigenous-led and that it only provided support to demonstrators because it was asked.

Some witnesses, Native organizers and law enforcement who attended the protests also testified that Greenpeace was not seen as a leader at the camps.

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Chair Janet Alkire in a statement earlier this month called the lawsuit "frivolous." Alkire did not testify in the case.

Free speech and environmental advocates have also spoken out against the trial, arguing that the suit should have been dismissed outright and that the Morton County jury would not be able to render a fair verdict.

"It is our collective assessment that the jury verdict against Greenpeace in North Dakota reflects a deeply flawed trial with multiple due process violations that denied Greenpeace the ability to present anything close to a full defense," a group of attorneys that monitored the proceedings said in a joint statement Wednesday afternoon.

Greenpeace more than once petitioned to move the case to a different North Dakota court, but was denied.

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U.S. Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., applauded the verdict Wednesday.

"Today, justice has been done with Greenpeace and its radical environmentalist buddies who encouraged this destructive behavior during the Dakota Access Pipeline protests with their defamatory and false claims about the pipeline," Cramer said in a statement. "They can think twice now about doing it again."

Greenpeace recently filed suit against Energy Transfer in the Netherlands, asking a court to find that the company's legal challenge in Morton County violated the environmental group's rights and to award it damages.

That case is believed to be the first lawsuit filed under a new European Union directive intended to shield organizations against free speech attacks.

Other major lawsuits involving the Dakota Access Pipeline protests are ongoing.

North Dakota in 2019 sued the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for \$38 million, alleging that the federal agency mishandled its response to the demonstrations. The Army Corps has jurisdiction over the portion of the pipeline that passes underneath Lake Oahe, and owns the land that became site of the largest protest camp during the demonstrations. A judge has yet to rule on the case.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in October filed a separate case against the Army Corps for allowing the pipeline to continue operating without an easement. The tribe is asking a federal judge to shut the pipeline down.

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.

Flu deaths rise as anti-vaccine disinformation takes root

South Dakota has one of nation's highest fatality rates

BY: TIM HENDERSON, STATELINE - MARCH 19, 2025 9:07 AM

As vaccine skepticism gains a greater foothold in the Trump administration and some statehouses, some Americans may already be paying the price, with deaths from influenza on the rise.

Flu-related deaths hit a seven-year high in January and February, the two months that usually account for the height of flu season, according to a Stateline analysis of preliminary federal statistics. There were about 9,800 deaths across the country, up from 5,000 in the same period last year and the most since 2018, when there were about 10,800.

Despite that, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has canceled or postponed meetings to prepare for next fall's flu vaccine, when experts talk about what influenza strains they expect they'll be battling.

The cancellations raised protests from medical professionals and state and federal officials. U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, a New York Democrat, said in a statement that her state is having its worst flu season in at least 15 years, with more deaths from flu and other causes as the state's health care system struggles under the strain of flu patients.

Some experts say putting off vaccine planning will only feed false narratives that discourage lifesaving vaccinations.

"These delays not only weaken pandemic preparedness but also undermine public confidence in vaccination efforts," said Dr. Akram Khan, an Oregon pulmonologist and associate professor at Oregon Health & Science University who has studied attitudes toward vaccines.

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert Kennedy Jr. has expressed doubt about the need for vaccines, including flu vaccines, despite evidence that they reduce deaths and hospitalizations.

Deaths fluctuate naturally from year to year depending on the severity of current flu strains and the effectiveness of that year's vaccines. But some see a hesitancy to use any vaccine, fed by misinformation and political mistrust of government, already taking a toll on lives.

"It's been a bad winter for viral respiratory infections, not just in the United States but across the Northern Hemisphere," said Mark Doherty, a vaccine scholar and former manager for GlaxoSmithKline Biologicals,

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a vaccine manufacturer.

"The U.S. does appear to be hit a bit harder, and it's possible lower vaccination coverage is contributing to that," Doherty said.

Flu vaccine distribution in the United States has been declining in recent years, and as of the first week of 2025 was down 16% from 2022, according to federal statistics.

The flu was a factor in 9,800 deaths in January and February, according to the analysis, using provisional data collected by states and compiled by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The highest death rates were in Oklahoma, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, South Dakota and Kentucky, all at about four deaths per 100,000 population so far this year. Some counties in Florida, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, as well as Oklahoma and Kentucky, were even higher — at about six deaths per 100,000.

Statistics from the South Dakota Department of Health show influenza vaccinations have decreased each of the past three years in the state, from a recent high of 283,318 vaccinations during the 2021-22 flu season to 234,770 this season, a decline of 17%. Influenza cases are up 192% over the five-year average, and the state's 50 flu deaths so far this season are the most since 2017-18, when there were 73 deaths.

The highest death rates nationally have been among older people. Statistics show the deaths hit white people and American Indians especially hard.

Tragedies are happening across the country to people of all ages and races, however. A 43-year-old Indiana father died after a brief bout of the flu, according to family members. After two 10-year-olds died in Prince George's County, Maryland, area schools drew crowds to vaccine clinics.

Doug Sides, a pastor at Yulee Baptist Church in northern Florida, has held funerals for three congregation members who died from flu — all within one month, all of them over 70 years old. That compares with only one victim of COVID-19 from his congregation during the pandemic, he said.

"Flu death is a reality," Sides told Stateline on a phone call from a Jacksonville hospital, where he was visiting another 84-year-old congregation member who was rescued from her home with severe pneumonia from an unknown cause.

"I encourage my church members to keep their hands clean, use hand sanitizer and to stay home if they're feeling sick," he said. He said he hasn't personally gotten a flu vaccine recently because he gets conflicting advice about it — some doctors tell him to avoid them because he and some family members have cancer, while another "rides me all the time about getting a flu shot."

"We're all getting conflicting advice. We're living in strange-o times," he said. (The American Cancer Society says vaccination for people with cancer may or may not be recommended depending on individual circumstances.)

Many states are relaxing vaccine requirements as public skepticism rises. But many are taking action to warn residents and reassure them that vaccinations are safe and can help prevent deaths, despite misinformation to the contrary.

Burlington County, New Jersey, has had the highest flu-associated death rate of any county this year, according to the analysis, with 31 deaths among fewer than 500,000 people. The county held 30 free vaccine clinics from September to January, then extended them into February because of the severity of the flu season, said Dave Levinsky, a spokesperson for the county health department.

In Oklahoma, death rates are highest in the eastern part of the state where the Cherokee Nation is centered. A state publicity campaign stresses that flu shots are safe, effective and free at many community health centers. However, vaccination rates in the state are low compared with other states as of December, according to federal statistics: Only about 16% of Oklahoma residents had gotten flu vaccinations by then. Rates were even lower in Louisiana (just under 16%), Mississippi (12%) and Texas (10%).

States with the highest flu vaccination rates by December were Maine (37%), Connecticut and Vermont (33%), and Wisconsin and Minnesota (31%). But even those were down since 2022.

People have become less likely to get vaccinated in recent years, a phenomenon researchers call "vaccine hesitancy."

A report published last year in the medical journal *Cureus* found three-quarters of patients in a rural

New York state community refused flu vaccine with comments such as "I do not trust vaccines" or "I do not believe in vaccines." The most common reasons cited were that earlier vaccinations made them feel sick, that they got the flu anyway, or that they thought they shouldn't need a new shot every year. (Doctors recommend flu vaccinations annually and note that even vaccinated patients who get the flu usually face less severe forms.)

And in a paper published in February in the journal *Vaccine*, researchers found that people refuse flu vaccinations for many of the same reasons they refused COVID-19 shots: a feeling of "social vulnerability" that leads to distrust of government and medical guidance. One hopeful sign, the report noted, is that vaccine recommendations from trusted health care professionals can turn around such attitudes.

"Unfortunately, vaccine hesitancy is deeply entangled with misinformation, political rhetoric and public distrust," said Khan, the Oregon pulmonologist and the study's author. "Scientific data alone may not be enough to shift public perceptions, as many vaccine decisions are driven by gut feelings and external influences rather than evidence."

Tim Henderson covers demographics for Stateline. He has been a reporter at the Miami Herald, the Cincinnati Enquirer and The Journal News in suburban New York. Henderson became fascinated with census data in the early 1990s, when AOL offered the first computerized reports. Since then he has broken stories about population trends in South Florida, including a housing affordability analysis included in the 2007 Pulitzer-winning series "House of Lies" for the Miami Herald, and a prize-winning analysis of public pension irregularities for The Journal News. He has been a member and trainer for the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting since its inception 20 years ago, specializing in online data access and visualization along with demographics.

How Trump carved a pathway for his mass deportations through executive orders

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - MARCH 19, 2025 6:15 PM

WASHINGTON — Among the flurry of executive orders President Donald Trump signed on the first day he returned to the White House are five that lay out the use of military forces within the U.S. borders and extend other executive powers to speed up the president's immigration crackdown.

The administration has engendered huge controversy in recent days by employing the orders and a presidential proclamation to use the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 to deport Venezuelan migrants. Administration officials described the Venezuelans as gang members, put them on flights and sent them to a huge prison in El Salvador.

The wartime Alien Enemies Act, used only three times before, allows the president to detain and deport anyone 14 and older who is a national from a country the United States deems an enemy.

Together, the interlocking executive orders and proclamation could provide the resources and legal footing needed for the Trump administration's plans to deploy the military to deport and detain millions of people who are living in the United States without permanent legal status.

National security and military experts interviewed by States Newsroom raised concerns about this domestic deployment of armed forces that could result in violations of civil liberties, as well as the detainment and deportation of immigrants without due process.

Additionally, the broad actions by the executive branch would test the courts on what guardrails, if any, could be placed on the president. Trump earlier this week in a social media post called for the impeachment of the judge who questioned his use of the Alien Enemies Act in the case of the Venezuelans, bringing a stunning rebuke by Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts.

Besides the Alien Enemies Act, a second archaic law Trump is gearing up to invoke is the Insurrection Act of 1807. It gives the president the power to call on the military during an emergency to curb civilian unrest or enforce federal law in a crisis.

The Insurrection Act is also a statutory exception in the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, which generally

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bars the use of the military for domestic law enforcement purposes.

Trump vowed to use both the Insurrection Act and the Alien Enemies Act while he campaigned for a second term.

"Invoking the Insurrection Act for immigration enforcement ... would be unprecedented," said Joseph Nunn, a counsel in the Brennan Center's Liberty and National Security Program. "It would be an abuse, both because it's not necessary, under the circumstances, and also because this is not what the Insurrection Act is for."

Nonetheless, one Trump executive order directs the heads of the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Defense to issue a report by April 20 to the president with recommendations on whether or not to use the Insurrection Act to aid in mass deportations.

Orders woven together into an agenda

Trump's five executive orders signed on Inauguration Day are:

Securing our Borders;

Declaring a National Emergency at the Southern Border;

Clarifying the Military's Role in Protecting the Territorial Integrity of the United States;

Designating Cartels and Other Organizations as Foreign Terrorist Organizations and Specially Designated Global Terrorists;

Guaranteeing the States Protection Against Invasion.

The administration eyes its next moves while apprehensions at the southern border have plummeted to their lowest level in 25 years, with 8,347 encounters for February, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection data.

The last time the Border Patrol averaged roughly 8,000 apprehensions per month in a fiscal year was in 1968, according to historical data obtained by the Texas Tribune.

In the executive order titled Securing our Borders, the Trump administration lays out its objectives for that U.S.-Mexico border, such as building barriers and barring migrants from entering the U.S. To carry that out, the president signed another executive order that declared a national emergency.

Chris Mirasola, a professor and national security expert at the University of Houston Law Center, said for roughly 20 years, there has been a military presence at the southern border assisting the U.S. Department of Homeland Security with immigration enforcement.

"What made the Trump executive orders interesting was the kind of escalation trajectory that they kind of mapped out for us," Mirasola said, noting the likely use of the Insurrection Act and Alien Enemies Act.

Since Inauguration Day, that executive order has allowed Trump to send nearly 9,200 troops to the southern border.

Emory University School of Law professor Mark Nevitt, a national security expert who also served in the Navy, notes the executive order declaring a national emergency is limited to the geographic location of the U.S.-Mexico border.

"He's not tasking (Homeland Security Secretary Kristi) Noem to come up with a nationwide immigration enforcement. Having said that, of course, he can change (his mind), he's the president," he said.

Sending military to the southern border stretches back to former President George W. Bush in 2006. Over a two-year period, more than 30,000 Army and Air National Guard personnel were sent to the southern border to assist with numerous migrants from Central America.

Northern Command

Continued coordination between Defense and Homeland Security is laid out in another of the executive orders, the one on "clarifying the military's role," that reorganizes the U.S. Northern Command to focus on border security.

Northern Command, established after the 9/11 terrorist attacks to coordinate military and homeland security support with civilian authorities, under the Trump executive order has a new mission "to seal the

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borders and maintain the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security of the United States by repelling forms of invasion including unlawful mass migration, narcotics trafficking, human smuggling and trafficking, and other criminal activities.”

The legal underpinnings for Northern Command to carry this out, Mirasola said, are provisions in the Insurrection Act, which he adds is likely to face its own legal challenge.

“I kind of see this, perhaps surprisingly, long ramp up being a way for them to establish a factual record that they could use in litigation,” he said of the executive order that requests a report from DHS and DOD by April 20.

Trump does not need a report or recommendation to invoke the Insurrection Act. It is an existing presidential authority granting him access to use all federal military forces, more than 1 million members. But his executive orders would undergird his expected use of the act.

“I think it’s no surprise that he’s thinking about using the military for immigration enforcement,” Nevitt said of the president.

The request for a report by April 20, Nevitt said, could be “a way to set up the politics of declaring the Insurrection Act.”

Historically the Insurrection Act, which has only been invoked 30 times, is typically focused on an area of great civil unrest that has overwhelmed law enforcement, Nevitt said.

The last time the Insurrection Act was invoked was 1992, during the Los Angeles riots, after four white police officers were acquitted in the brutal beating of Black motorist Rodney King.

Federal troops were deployed with local law enforcement to a domestic violence situation. Because of the difference in training between the two, it resulted in soldiers opening fire onto a Los Angeles residence. No one was injured, but more than 200 bullets were fired.

“Soldiers are not trained to do law enforcement,” Nunn, with the Brennan Center, said.

He added that this kind of use could also lead to violations of civil liberties, even though the use of the Insurrection Act does not suspend constitutional rights and he argues is not limitless.

“When the military is operating under the Insurrection Act, they are assisting civilian authorities, not taking their place,” Nunn said.

‘The magic word’

Two of the executive orders — one designating cartels as terrorist organizations and another on protection of the states — could lead to the rapid detention and deportation of immigrants by using the Alien Enemies Act.

“In one of those early executive orders is a magic word that you should be sensitive to,” said Stephen Dycus, a professor in national security law at the Vermont Law School. “And the magic word is ‘invasion.’”

The Trump administration designated the Tren de Aragua, a Venezuelan gang, as a terrorist organization in its use in mid-March of the Alien Enemies Act.

A federal judge has already blocked the use of the law. However, civil rights groups charge that the Trump administration continued to use the Alien Enemies Act to deport immigrants, and a federal judge is demanding clear answers from the administration about the deportation flights.

The Trump administration has defended the deportation flights and Trump has cited his duty to protect Americans from an “invasion.”

“The big question, obviously, is, what constitutes an invasion?” Dycus asked. “In the first Trump administration, the influx of immigrants from the southwest were characterized that way. So I think that’s part of the groundwork that’s being laid.”

Ilya Somin, an expert in constitutional law and professor at George Mason University, disagrees with the Trump administration’s argument declaring the Tren de Aragua gang as an “invasion” in order to form the legal basis for using the Alien Enemies Act.

The use of the act can circumvent judicial proceedings, based on an immigrant’s country of origin. It’s been invoked in the War of 1812, World War I and World War II and most recently led to the Japanese internment camps.

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"The attempt to declare them to be terrorist organizations could be part of an effort to sort of get courts to defer and to accept the invasion framing, and possibly also to accept the use of the Alien Enemies Act," Somin said.

Targeting Venezuela

In speeches, rallies and social media posts, Trump has often accused Venezuela of sending criminals and gang members to the U.S., despite during his first administration granting deportation protections for Venezuelans, citing the political and economic instability of the Maduro regime.

The Trump administration has pressured the Venezuela government to begin accepting deportation flights of its nationals. Noem has already moved to end temporary protected status for one group of 350,000 Venezuelans, subjecting them to fast-track deportations. Noem cited gang activity as one of her factors in not extending protections.

Somin said that for the Alien Enemies Act to be used, an "invasion" needs to be undertaken by a foreign government.

"Even if the cartels are terrorist organizations, which I deny, they are not foreign governments," he said.

Katherine Yon Ebright, a counsel in the Brennan Center's Liberty and National Security Program, said that using the act to go after suspected members of the Tren de Aragua gang could ensnare many Venezuelan immigrants, regardless of legal status.

"You're getting the ability, really, to target any Venezuelan, age 14 (and up), who's not a U.S. citizen," she said of the Alien Enemies Act. "And you don't have to explain yourself, you don't have to prove anything."

Guantanamo

Using a memo rather than an executive order, although related, the Trump administration has already ramped up use of the military in immigration duties, using military aircraft to return migrants to their home countries or to send immigrants to the naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The base was used to house suspected terrorists in the 9/11 attacks.

"I think it's actually a bellwether for understanding how far this escalation trajectory the administration plans to go, because the detention that's happening at Guantanamo Bay is a big concern," Mirasola said.

The use of the naval base comes as the Trump administration has tried to increase detention bed space capacity, but U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is only funded to hold roughly 41,500 beds across the country.

Trump has instructed his administration to hold up to 30,000 migrants at Guantanamo. There are currently no immigrants detained at the base, though its use has not been ruled out.

But the actions of signing executive orders or memos or proclamations can only go so far, experts say.

"Implementing his commitment to use the military to round up immigrants is not going to be easy," Dycus, of Vermont Law, said. "Logistically, it's going to really take a lot of effort and a lot of personnel to do it."

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.

Trump ban on transgender troops blocked in court

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MARCH 19, 2025 1:07 PM

WASHINGTON — A federal judge late Tuesday blocked President Donald Trump's ban on transgender troops in the U.S. military, adding to the list of legal setbacks to the administration's agenda.

U.S. District Judge for the District of Columbia Ana Reyes ordered Trump's Department of Defense to revert to military policy in place before he issued an executive order prohibiting openly transgender individuals from joining or continuing their service in the armed forces.

Trump's executive order, signed in the late hours of Jan. 27, alleges the "adoption of a gender identity inconsistent with an individual's sex conflicts with a soldier's commitment to an honorable, truthful, and

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disciplined lifestyle, even in one's personal life." Further, the order asserts that being transgender is "not consistent with the humility and selflessness required of a service member."

The order reversed a 2021 policy that allowed transgender individuals to openly serve in the military.

In a 79-page opinion, Reyes criticized the administration for lack of data proving the claims in Trump's order.

"Transgender persons have served openly since 2021, but Defendants have not analyzed their service. That is unfortunate. Plaintiffs' service records alone are Exhibit A for the proposition that transgender persons can have the warrior ethos, physical and mental health, selflessness, honor, integrity, and discipline to ensure military excellence," Reyes wrote.

Reyes' order goes into effect Friday at 10 a.m. Eastern.

Reyes' ruling is among other recent court orders jamming the Trump administration's legally questionable actions, including mass firings of federal workers and flying immigrants to El Salvador and Honduras under a wartime authority and in defiance of a judge's court order.

Then-President Joe Biden nominated Reyes in 2023, and the Senate confirmed her in a 51-47 vote.

Trump aid blasts ruling

A representative for the Department of Justice said the ruling "is the latest example of an activist judge attempting to seize power at the expense of the American people" who elected Trump.

The DOJ has "vigorously defended" Trump and "will continue to do so," according to the statement provided to States Newsroom attributed to an unnamed spokesperson.

White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller slammed the decision on social media Wednesday, saying federal judges have "assumed the mantle of Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, Secretary of Homeland Security and Commander-in-Chief."

"Each day, they change the foreign policy, economic, staffing and national security policies of the Administration," Miller wrote on the social media platform X. "Each day the nation arises to see what the craziest unelected local federal judge has decided the policies of the government of the United States shall be. It is madness."

Trump's social media attack on a federal judge Tuesday prompted a rare rebuke from U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts.

Eight transgender active-duty service members and transgender individuals who are actively pursuing enlistment in the armed forces brought the case against the administration.

The plaintiffs have a combined 130 years of military service in wide ranging roles and numerous deployments around the world. One is currently deployed in an active combat zone, according to Reyes' opinion.

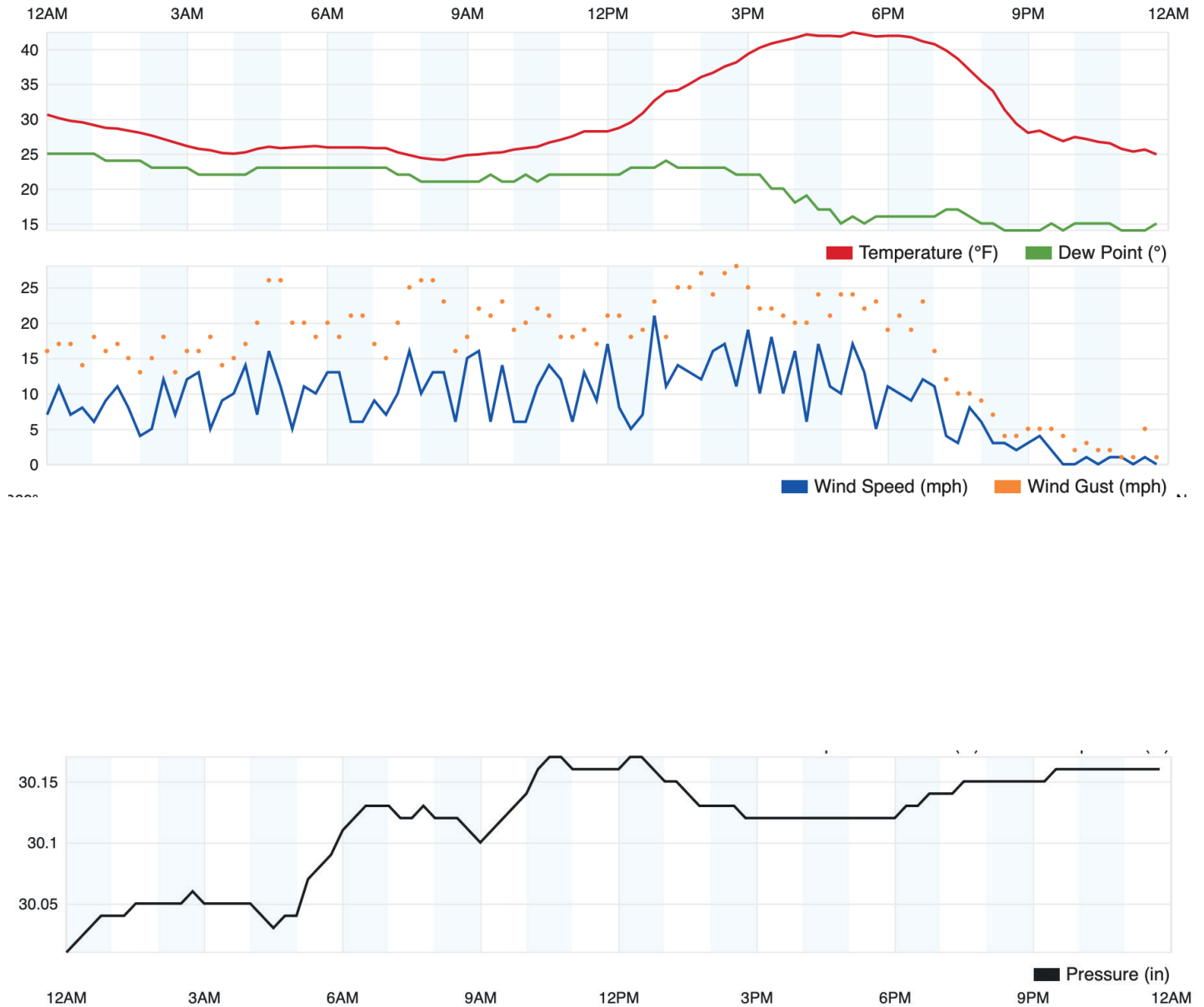
The plaintiffs reside or are stationed in California, Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, the District of Columbia and Wisconsin.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
 				
High: 60 °F	Low: 31 °F	High: 45 °F	Low: 21 °F	High: 62 °F
Mostly Sunny then Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Cloudy	Breezy. Chance Rain/Snow then Chance Snow	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny then Slight Chance Rain



Red Flag Warning Today

March 20, 2025
4:26 AM

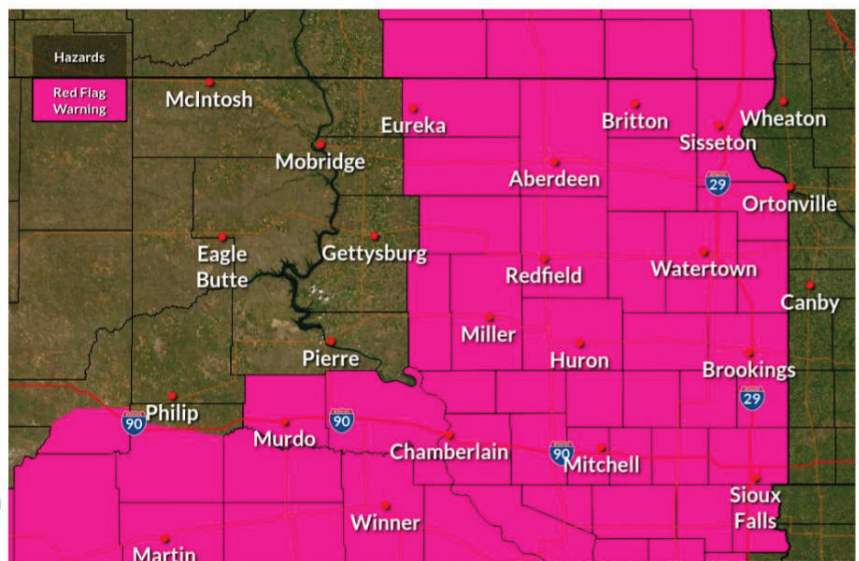
Key Messages

- Increasing southwesterly winds, with **gusts of 20 to 35 mph this afternoon and evening.**
- **Relative humidity dropping between 15 and 25 percent** across central and northeast SD.
- The combination of gusty winds, low relative humidity, and ongoing dry fuels leads to **very high** fire danger.

Important Updates

- **Red Flag Warning** now in effect for the region.
 - ◆ Valid 1PM CDT this afternoon through 7 Pm CDT this evening.

Thursday Afternoon into early Evening



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A Red Flag Warning has been issued for this afternoon into this evening. Southwest gusts of 20 to 35 miles per hour and humidity dropping between 15 and 25 percent cause the elevated fire weather concerns. When combined with dry fuels, these conditions cause a Very High Grassland Fire Danger Index

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 42 °F at 5:13 PM

Low Temp: 24 °F at 8:21 AM

Wind: 28 mph at 2:39 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 13 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 75 in 1910

Record Low: -6 in 1965

Average High: 44

Average Low: 21

Average Precip in March.: 0.52

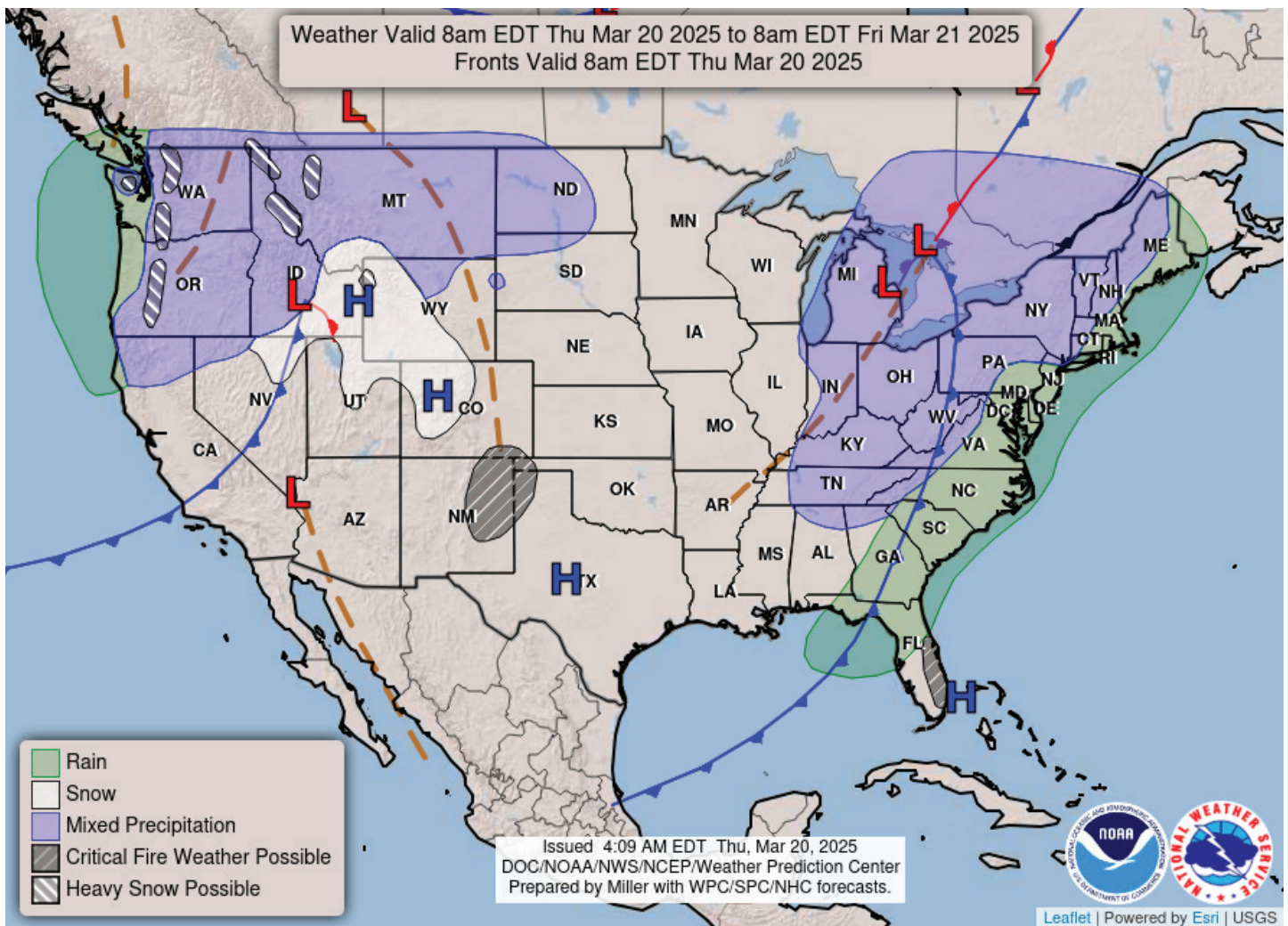
Precip to date in March.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.69

Precip Year to Date: 0.45

Sunset Tonight: 7:46:37 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:30:51 am



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Today in Weather History

March 20, 1982: A winter storm dropped 10-20 inches of heavy wet snow across the northern two-thirds of South Dakota. Five persons were killed and eight others injured in indirect accidents. Downed power lines caused isolated power outages. A half dozen newborn calves died of exposure near Lemmon in Perkins County. Also, 5% of the pheasant population in Brown, Edmunds, and Faulk Counties were killed. The weight of the snow collapsed a canopy of a grocery store in McLaughlin, Corson County, tearing out part of the brick front and breaking windows in the store.

March 20, 2008: An upper-level disturbance coupled with an area of low pressure moving across the Central Plains brought widespread heavy snow from the late afternoon through the early morning hours to north-central and northeast South Dakota. Heavy snow of 6 to as much as 18 inches fell in this area resulting in school delays and cancelations along with treacherous travel conditions. Some snowfall amounts included: 6 inches at Bowdle, South Shore, and Bradley; 7 inches at Eureka, Chelsea, Bristol, and Pollock; 8 inches near Hosmer, Osaka, and Roscoe; 9 inches at Victor; 10 inches at Westport and Ipswich. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included: 12 inches at Columbia, Milbank, and Waubay; 13 inches at Sisseton and Webster; 14 inches at Big Stone City; 15 inches at Summit; 16 inches at Roy Lake; 18 inches at Wilmot and Pickerel Lake State Park.

1924 - A late winter storm in Oklahoma produced nearly a foot of snow at Oklahoma City and at Tulsa. (David Ludlum)

1948: The city of Juneau received 31 inches of snow in 24 hours, a record for the Alaska Capitol. (20th - 21st)

Also, on this day, an F3 tornado tracked through Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City, OK just before 10 pm destroying 54 aircraft, including 17 transport planes valued at \$500,000 apiece. The total damage amounted to more than \$10 million, a record for the state that stood until the massive tornado outbreak of 5/3/1999. Major Ernest W. Fawbush and Captain Robert C. Miller were ordered to see if operationally forecasting tornadoes were possible. The tornado prompted the first attempt at tornado forecasting. Forecasters at Tinker believed conditions were again favorable for tornadoes and issued the first recorded tornado forecast. Five days later, on 3/25 at 6 pm, a forecasted tornado occurred, crossing the prepared base, and the damage was minimized. The successful, albeit somewhat lucky forecast, paved the way for tornado forecasts to be issued by the U.S. Weather Bureau after a lengthy ban.

1984 - A severe three day winter storm came to an end over the Central Plains. The storm produced up to twenty inches of snow in Colorado, Nebraska and Kansas, and left a thick coat of ice from eastern Kansas across northwestern Missouri into Iowa. (Storm Data)

1986: Great Britain recorded its highest wind gust ever as the summit of Scotland's Cairngorm Mountains, at 4,085 feet, had a gust of 172 mph.

1987 - A storm produced blizzard conditions in Wyoming and eastern Nebraska, and severe thunderstorms in central Nebraska. Snowfall totals ranged up to 12 inches at Glenrock WY and Chadron NE. Thunderstorms in central Nebraska produced wind gusts to 69 mph at Valentine, and wind gusts to 76 mph at Bartley. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Squalls in the Great Lakes Region left up to eight inches of new snow on the ground in time for the official start of spring. Unseasonably warm weather prevailed in the western U.S. Seven cities reported new record high temperatures for the date, including Tucson AZ with a reading of 89 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in western Kansas to usher in the official start of the spring season. Thunderstorms produced severe weather from east Texas to Alabama and northwest Florida, with nearly fifty reports of large hail and damaging winds during the afternoon and evening hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - The northeastern U.S. was in the midst of a snowstorm as spring officially began at 4 19 PM. Snowfall totals in the Green Mountains of Vermont ranged up to thirty inches, and up to 15 inches of snow was reported in the Catskills and Adirondacks of eastern New York State. Totals in eastern Pennsylvania ranged up to 12 inches at Armenia Mountain. The storm resulted in one death, and forty-nine injuries. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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1998: A deadly tornado outbreak occurred over portions of the southeastern United States on this day. Particularly hard hit were rural areas outside of Gainesville, Georgia, where at least 12 people were killed during the early morning hours. The entire outbreak killed 14 people and produced 12 tornadoes across three states. The town of Stoneville, North Carolina, hard hit by the storms.

2005 - An F1 tornado hits South San Francisco. Trees are uprooted. At least twenty homes and twenty businesses are damaged, including the city's new fire station.

2006 - Grand Island, NE, receives 17.8 inches of snow in 24 hours, breaking the old local record for the most snowfall in a day by 4.8 inches. 29.7 inches in 48 hours also breaks a record.

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ASKING, SEEKING AND KNOCKING

A little girl was climbing into bed when her mother asked, "Ann, did you remember to say your prayers?"

"Well," she replied, "I got on my knees and started to say them as I do every night. And then all of a sudden I thought, 'I'll bet that God gets tired of hearing me pray about the same old things every night.' So, I decided that I would just lay here in bed and tell Him the story of 'The Three Bears.'"

Persistence in prayer and pursuing God's plan and purpose for our lives is very important. It's equally important, however, to understand how He answers our prayers and when He will answer our prayers. We must never allow ourselves to think that God will not accept our prayers or that He will ever forget our prayers. Prayers and praying are a serious and significant part of the life of the Christian. However, we must always remember that He will answer our prayers at the right time, in the right way, in a way that is in our best interests.

We need to remember that He responds to our requests with His wisdom and His never-ending and always compassionate love. When the answer does not come when we expect it, we must hold fast to the fact that "His grace is sufficient" now and into eternity. The answer will come when we need it most and will fulfill His plan for our well-being. When we give up, give in, and quit praying, God knows we are not sincere and that our request was "a passing fancy."

Prayer: Lord, give us a faith that does not falter, a trust that will not tire and persistence that will prevail. May our hope in Your faithfulness and our best interests prevail. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. Matthew 7:7

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.18.25

27 28 31 32 33 24

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$324,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 40 Mins 52 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.19.25

4 8 26 34 36 6

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$27,060,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 14 Hrs 55 Mins 52 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.19.25

17 21 36 40 45 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 10 Mins 52 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.19.25

7 15 22 25 26

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$71,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 10 Mins 52 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.19.25

7 15 36 40 56 8

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 39 Mins 52 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.19.25

8 11 21 49 59 15

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$444,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 39 Mins 52 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

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Upcoming Groton Events

03/22/2025 Spring Vendor Fair at the GHS Gym 10am-2pm
03/29/2025 Men's Singles Bowling Tournament at the Jungle 10am, 1pm & 4pm
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
04/12/2025 Groton Firemens Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
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
07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm
07/11-13/25 2025 VFW 12U Class B State Baseball Tournament
07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
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
08/14/2025 Family Fun Fest, Downtown Main Street 5:30-7:30pm (2nd Thursday)
08/23/2025 Glacial Tournament at Olive Grove
09/05/2025 Homecoming Parade 1pm
09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
09/07/2025 Sunflower Classic Couples Scramble at Olive Grove
10/10/2025 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
10/11/2025 Pumpkin Fest 10am-3pm City Park
10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1:30pm
12/06/2025 Olive Grove Holiday Party and Silent Live Auction Fundraiser

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Trump will order a plan to shut down the US Education Department

By COLLIN BINKLEY and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump plans to sign an executive order Thursday calling for the shutdown of the U.S. Education Department, according to a White House official, advancing a campaign promise to eliminate an agency that's been a longtime target of conservatives.

The official spoke on the condition of anonymity before an announcement.

Trump has derided the Department of Education as wasteful and polluted by liberal ideology. However, finalizing its dismantling is likely impossible without an act of Congress, which created the department in 1979.

A White House fact sheet said the order would direct Secretary Linda McMahon "to take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure (of) the Department of Education and return education authority to the States, while continuing to ensure the effective and uninterrupted delivery of services, programs, and benefits on which Americans rely."

Trump's Republican administration has already been gutting the agency. Its workforce is being slashed in half, and there have been deep cuts to the Office for Civil Rights and the Institute of Education Sciences, which gathers data on the nation's academic progress.

Advocates for public schools said eliminating the department would leave children behind in an American education system that is fundamentally unequal.

"This isn't fixing education. It's making sure millions of children never get a fair shot. And we're not about to let that happen without a fight," the National Parents Union said in a statement.

The White House has not spelled out formally which department functions could be handed off to other departments, or eliminated altogether. At her confirmation hearing, McMahon said she would preserve core initiatives, including Title I money for low-income schools and Pell grants for low-income college students. The goal of the administration, she said, would be "a better functioning Department of Education."

The department sends billions of dollars a year to schools and oversees \$1.6 trillion in federal student loans.

Currently, much of the agency's work revolves around managing money — both its extensive student loan portfolio and a range of aid programs for colleges and school districts, from school meals to support for homeless students. The agency also plays a significant role in overseeing civil rights enforcement.

Federal funding makes up a relatively small portion of public school budgets — roughly 14%. The money often supports supplemental programs for vulnerable students, such as the McKinney-Vento program for homeless students or Title I for low-income schools.

Colleges and universities are more reliant on money from Washington, through research grants along with federal financial aid that helps students pay their tuition.

Republicans have talked about closing the Education Department for decades, saying it wastes taxpayer money and inserts the federal government into decisions that should fall to states and schools. The idea has gained popularity recently as conservative parents' groups demand more authority over their children's schooling.

In his platform, Trump promised to close the department "and send it back to the states, where it belongs." Trump has cast the department as a hotbed of "radicals, zealots and Marxists" who overextend their reach through guidance and regulation.

At the same time, Trump has leaned on the Education Department to promote elements of his agenda. He has used investigative powers of the Office for Civil Rights and the threat of withdrawing federal education funding to target schools and colleges that run afoul of his orders on transgender athletes participating in women's sports, pro-Palestinian activism and diversity programs.

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Even some of Trump's allies have questioned his power to close the agency without action from Congress, and there are doubts about its political popularity. The House considered an amendment to close the agency in 2023, but 60 Republicans joined Democrats in opposing it.

During Trump's first term, former Education Secretary Betsy DeVos sought to dramatically reduce the agency's budget and asked Congress to bundle all K-12 funding into block grants that give states more flexibility in how they spend federal money. It was rejected, with pushback from some Republicans.

Trump's 200% tariff threat would be 'a real disaster' for Europe's wine industry

By ALEX TURNBULL and SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press

CHAMPAGNE, France (AP) — Across wine country in France, Italy and Spain one number is top of mind: 200%.

That's because last week U.S. President Donald Trump threatened a tariff of that amount on European wine, Champagne and other spirits if the European Union went ahead with retaliatory tariffs on some U.S. products. The top wine producers in Europe could face crippling costs that would hit smaller wineries especially hard.

Europe's wine industry is the latest to find itself in the crosshairs of a possible trade spat with the U.S.

Among those concerned is David Levasseur, a third-generation wine grower and owner of a Champagne house in France's eponymous region.

"It means I'm in trouble, big trouble. We hope it's just, as we say, blah blah," Levasseur said, standing in his Champagne house as he swilled a flute of his vineyard's bubbly. "When someone speaks so loudly," he said of Trump's 200% threat, "it's about the media buzz. But in any case, we think there will be consequences."

Like other wine sellers and exporters, Levasseur said that a 200% tariff on what he exports to the U.S. would essentially grind to a halt his business in that country.

"It could be a real disaster," Levasseur said.

Italy, France and Spain are among the top five exporters of wine to the United States. Trump made his threat to Europe's alcohol industry after the European Union announced a 50% tax on American whiskey expected to take effect on April 1. That duty was unveiled in response to the Trump administration's tariffs on foreign steel and aluminum.

In France, a 4 billion euro market

Gabriel Picard, who heads the French Federation of Exporters of Wines and Spirits, said 200% tariffs would be "a hammer blow" for France's industry, whose wine and spirits exports to the U.S. are worth 4 billion euros (\$4.3 billion) annually.

"With 200% duties, there is no more market," Picard said.

Still, he understood why European leaders responded to Trump's initial tariffs.

"There's no debate about that. We agree that Mr. Trump creates and likes to create contests of strength. We have to adapt to that," he said.

For Italy, it's the wine at high-end restaurants they worry most about losing

In Italy, the wine industry has called for calm, hoping that negotiators in Brussels and Washington can back down from the growing trade spat.

The U.S. is Italy's largest wine market, with sales having tripled in value over the past 20 years. Last year, exports grew by nearly 7% to over 2 billion euros (\$2.2 billion) according to Italy's main farming lobby Coldiretti.

Strong sales at high-end restaurants, in particular, make the U.S. market difficult to replace, said Piero Mastroberardino, vice president of the national winemakers' association Federvini.

Mastroberardino's "Taurasi Radici" red wine, for example, was rated the fifth-best wine in the world in 2023 by Wine Spectator, an American wine and lifestyle magazine. It sells for around \$80 a bottle retail in the U.S., roughly twice how much it costs in Italy, so any tariffs would push it to an "unthinkable price

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point," he said.

In January, Mastroberardino's U.S. import partners increased orders by about 20% in January anticipating possible Trump tariffs. But the increase in orders would not offset the impact of tariffs, particularly that high, he said, for long.

"It is in everyone's interest to maintain a united front at the negotiating table," Mastroberardino said, "especially those who are being targeted."

Smooth reds from Spain, as well as bubbly Cava

Wine producers and industry experts in Spain, whose smooth reds are savored by tens of millions of American tourists who visit the southern European country every year, shared similar concerns about prospective tariffs.

"We don't think they have much logic and we hope it never comes to fruition," said Begoña Olavarría, an economic analyst at the Interprofessional Wine Organization of Spain.

Spain was the fourth-largest exporter of wine to the U.S. last year in sales, and the seventh-largest by volume, according to the trade group. Spanish wine exports to the U.S. grew by 7% last year. And the wine industry represents about 2% of the country's overall economic output, the trade group said.

For Spain's producers of Cava, the threat of U.S. tariffs hit especially hard. The U.S. is the number two market for the Spanish bubbly wine, which like Champagne has a designation of origin meaning it can only be made in Spain.

Mireia Pujol-Busquets is owner of the Alta Alella Bodega located in Cava country just south of Barcelona. Founded by her family in 1991, she said her business and its 40 employees immediately risk losing sales of some 25,000 bottles if the American market slams shut.

"We spent 10 years of effort opening the American market, finding distributors and building a brand," she told the AP.

While the Catalan bodega and its distributors in the U.S. were able to absorb the price increase induced by Trump's 25% tariff on wines during his first term, Pujol-Busquets said that it is "completely irrational" to consider eating a 200% hike.

"The situation is pretty desperate," she said.

Finland is again ranked the happiest country in the world. The US falls to its lowest-ever position

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

Finland is named the happiest country in the world for the eighth year in a row, according to the World Happiness Report 2025 published Thursday.

Other Nordic countries are also once again at the top of the happiness rankings in the annual report published by the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Oxford. Besides Finland, Denmark, Iceland and Sweden remain the top four and in the same order.

Country rankings were based on answers people give when asked to rate their own lives. The study was done in partnership with the analytics firm Gallup and the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

"Happiness isn't just about wealth or growth — it's about trust, connection and knowing people have your back," said Jon Clifton, the CEO of Gallup. "If we want stronger communities and economies, we must invest in what truly matters: each other."

Sharing meals and having somebody to count on

Researchers say that beyond health and wealth, some factors that influence happiness sound deceptively simple: sharing meals with others, having somebody to count on for social support, and household size. In Mexico and Europe, for example, a household size of four to five people predicts the highest levels of happiness, the study said.

Believing in the kindness of others is also much more closely tied to happiness than previously thought, according to the latest findings.

As an example, the report suggests that people who believe that others are willing to return their lost

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wallet is a strong predictor of the overall happiness of a population.

Nordic nations rank among the top places for expected and actual return of lost wallets, the study found.

Overall, researchers said global evidence on the perceived and actual return of lost wallets shows that people are much too pessimistic about the kindness of their communities compared to reality — actual rates of wallet return are around twice as high as people expect.

The U.S. falls to its lowest-ever position in the happiness ranking

While European countries dominate the top 20 in the ranking, there were some exceptions. Despite the war with Hamas, Israel came in at 8th. Costa Rica and Mexico entered the top 10 for the first time, ranking at 6th and 10th respectively.

When it comes to decreasing happiness — or growing unhappiness — the United States has dropped to its lowest-ever position at 24, having previously peaked at 11th place in 2012. The report states that the number of people dining alone in the United States has increased 53% over the past two decades.

The United Kingdom, at position 23, is reporting its lowest average life evaluation since the 2017 report.

Afghanistan is again ranked as the unhappiest country in the world, with Afghan women saying their lives are especially difficult.

Sierra Leone in western Africa is the second unhappiest, followed by Lebanon, ranking the 3rd from the bottom.

Almost one-fifth of young adults globally have no social support

In a concerning development, the study said 19% of young adults across the world reported in 2023 that they have no one they could count on for social support. That is a 39% increase compared to 2006.

All countries are ranked according to their self-assessed life evaluations averaged over 2022 to 2024.

Experts in economics, psychology, sociology and beyond then seek to explain the variations across countries and over time using factors such as GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, having someone to count on, a sense of freedom, generosity and perceptions of corruption.

Israeli strikes across Gaza hit multiple homes, killing at least 58 Palestinians, medics say

By WAFAA SHURAF and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR-AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli strikes killed at least 58 Palestinians across the Gaza Strip overnight and into Thursday, according to three hospitals. The strikes hit multiple homes in the middle of the night, killing men, women and children as they slept.

Hours later, the Israeli military restored a blockade on northern Gaza, including Gaza City, that it had maintained for most of the war. It warned residents against using the main highway to enter or leave the north and said only passage to the south would be allowed on the coastal road.

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians returned to what remains of their homes in the north after a ceasefire took hold in January. Israel resumed heavy strikes across Gaza on Tuesday, shattering the truce that had facilitated the release of more than two dozen hostages. Israel blamed the renewed fighting on Hamas because the militant group rejected a new proposal that departed from their signed agreement.

The Trump administration, which took credit for helping to broker the ceasefire, has voiced full support for Israel. More than 400 Palestinians were killed on Tuesday alone, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

There have been no reports of Hamas firing rockets or carrying out other attacks.

The Israeli military said it intercepted a missile launched by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels early Thursday before it reached Israeli airspace, as air raid sirens and exploding interceptors were heard in Jerusalem. No injuries were reported. It was the second such attack since the United States began a new campaign of airstrikes against the rebels earlier this week.

One of the strikes on Gaza early Thursday hit the Abu Daqa family's home in Abasan al-Kabira, a village just outside of Khan Younis near the border with Israel. It was inside an area the Israeli military ordered evacuated earlier this week, encompassing most of eastern Gaza.

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The strike killed at least 16 people, mostly women and children, according to the nearby European Hospital, which received the dead. Those killed included a father and his seven children, as well as the parents and brother of a month-old baby who survived along with her grandparents.

"Another tough night," said Hani Awad, who was helping rescuers search for more survivors in the rubble. "The house collapsed over the people's heads."

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military on the latest strikes. The military says it only targets militants and blames civilian deaths on Hamas because it is deeply embedded in residential areas.

Israeli ground troops advance

On Wednesday, Israeli ground troops advanced in Gaza for the first time since the ceasefire took hold in January, seizing part of a corridor separating the northern third of the territory from the south. The announcement about passage to the south indicated troops will soon retake full control over what is known as the Netzarim corridor, stretching from the border to the Mediterranean Sea.

Israel, which has also cut off the supply of food, fuel and humanitarian aid to Gaza's roughly 2 million Palestinians, has vowed to intensify its operations until Hamas releases the 59 hostages it holds — 35 of whom are believed dead — and gives up control of the territory. The Trump administration, which took credit for brokering the ceasefire, says it fully supports Israel.

Hamas has said it will only release the remaining hostages in exchange for a lasting ceasefire and a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, as called for in the ceasefire agreement they reached in January after more than a year of mediation by the United States, Egypt and Qatar.

Hamas, which does not accept Israel's existence, says it is willing to hand over power to the Western-backed Palestinian Authority or a committee of political independents but will not lay down its arms until Israel ends its decades-long occupation of lands the Palestinians want for a future state.

A 'bloody night' for hard-hit northern town

The European Hospital in the southern city of Rafah said it received 36 bodies after the overnight strikes, mostly women and children. The Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis received seven and transferred four to European, which were included in its count. In northern Gaza, the Indonesian Hospital said it had received 19 bodies after strikes in the town of Beit Lahiya near the border.

"It was a bloody night for the people of Beit Lahiya," said Fares Awad, head of the Health Ministry's emergency service in northern Gaza, adding that rescuers were still searching the rubble from homes that were hit. "The situation is catastrophic."

Beit Lahiya was heavily destroyed and largely depopulated during the first phase of the war before January's ceasefire. On Wednesday, an Israeli strike on a gathering of mourners killed 17 people there, according to health officials.

No end in sight to the 17-month war

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people and taking 251 hostage. Most of the hostages have been freed in ceasefire agreements or other deals. Israeli forces have rescued eight living hostages and recovered the bodies of dozens more.

Israel's retaliatory offensive, among the deadliest and most destructive in recent history, has killed nearly 49,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. It does not say how many were militants, but says more than half of those killed were women and children. Israel says it has killed around 20,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war at its height displaced around 90% of Gaza's population and has caused vast destruction across the territory. Hundreds of thousands of people returned to their homes during the ceasefire, but many found only fields of rubble and the bombed-out shells of buildings.

Trump's bluntness powered a White House comeback. Now his words are getting him in trouble in court

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's shoot-from-the-lip style kept Americans on the edge of their seats during last year's campaign. But now that he's speaking as a president and not as a candidate, his words are being used against him in court in the blizzard of litigation challenging his agenda.

The spontaneity is complicating his administration's legal positions. Nowhere has this been clearer than in cases involving his adviser Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency, the driving force in his efforts to downsize and overhaul the federal government.

The latest example came earlier this week, when U.S. District Judge Theodore Chuang ruled that Musk had likely violated the Constitution by dismantling the United States Agency for International Development.

The lawsuit turned on the question of whether the billionaire entrepreneur had overstepped his authority. Justice Department lawyers and White House officials insist that Musk is merely a presidential adviser, not the actual leader of DOGE.

But Trump has said otherwise — in speeches, interviews and public remarks — and Chuang quoted him extensively in his decision.

Trump most notably boasted of creating DOGE during his primetime address to a joint session of Congress and said it was "headed by Elon Musk." Republicans gave Musk a standing ovation, who saluted from the gallery above the House chamber.

"Trump's words were essential, central and indispensable," said Norm Eisen, one of the lawyers for USAID employees who filed the lawsuit. "His admissions took what would have been a tough case and made it into a straightforward one."

The looseness with words is a shift from predecessors like President Barack Obama, who used to say that he was careful because anything he said could send troops marching or markets tumbling.

Trump has no such feeling of restraint, and neither do other members of his Republican administration like Musk.

Chuang, who is based in Maryland and was appointed by Obama, also cited social media posts from Musk, who writes frequently on X, the platform that he owns.

For example, Musk posted "we spent the weekend feeding USAID to the woodchipper" on Feb. 3. The agency was being brought to a standstill at that time, with staff furloughed, spending halted and headquarters shut down.

"Musk's public statements and posts ... suggest that he has the ability to cause DOGE to act," Chuang wrote in his ruling.

Harrison Fields, principal deputy press secretary at the White House, said Trump was fulfilling his campaign promise "to make the federal government more efficient and accountable to taxpayers."

"Rogue bureaucrats and activist judges attempting to undermine this effort are only subverting the will of the American people and their obstructionist efforts will fail," he said.

Anthony Coley, who led public affairs at the Justice Department during President Joe Biden's administration, said statements involving civil litigation were always coordinated between his office and the West Wing.

"The words could be used to support what we're doing or undermine what we're doing," he said. "It's a carefully choreographed effort to make sure there was no daylight between what was said in the court of public opinion and what could ultimately play out in the court of law."

In comparison to how things were done in the past, Coley said, Trump has a "ready-fire-aim approach of doing business."

Trump doesn't usually let legal disputes force him to turn down the volume. During a criminal investigation over his decision to keep classified records at Mar-a-Lago after leaving the White House following his first term, Trump spoke extensively about the case in an interview with Fox News.

Longtime defense lawyers were startled — defendants are usually encouraged to keep mum while facing an indictment. But the situation panned out for Trump. His legal team delayed the case, and the special

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counsel's office dropped the charges after he won the election because presidents can't be prosecuted while in office.

DOGE has been the focus of nearly two dozen lawsuits. It's often prevailed so far in cases involving access to government data, where several plaintiffs have struggled to convince judges to block the organization's actions.

But it's also run into challenges, such as a lawsuit over whether DOGE must comply with public records requests. The Trump administration asserted in court that DOGE is part of the White House, meaning it's exempt.

Judge Christopher Cooper, also appointed by Obama, disagreed, siding with a government watchdog group called Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, or CREW.

"Musk and the President's public statements indicate that USDS" — the original acronym for the organization that was renamed as DOGE — "is in fact exercising substantial independent authority," wrote Cooper, who is based in Washington.

Cooper concluded that DOGE can "identify and terminate federal employees, federal programs, and federal contracts. Doing any of those three things would appear to require substantial independent authority; to do all three surely does."

He ordered DOGE to start responding to requests about the team's role in mass firings and disruptions to federal programs. The administration unsuccessfully asked the judge to reconsider, saying the judge "fundamentally misapprehended" the agency's structure.

Just because Musk claims credit online for deep agency cuts, doesn't necessarily translate to DOGE having authority in the eyes of the law, Stanford Law School professor Michael McConnell argued in a recent debate on the issue.

DOGE is recommending changes, he said, but it's the agency heads who are actually putting them into effect.

"And that's all that the courts are going to care about as to what the Supreme Court is going to do," McConnell said at the debate hosted by the National Constitution Center.

Military leaders to discuss peacekeeping force for Ukraine as partial ceasefire plans are worked out

By HANNA ARHIROVA and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Senior officers from countries across Europe and beyond were due to meet Thursday at a military headquarters on the outskirts of London to flesh out plans for an international peacekeeping force for Ukraine as details of a partial ceasefire are worked out.

U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the "coalition of the willing" plan, led by Britain and France, is moving into an "operational phase." But it's unclear how many countries are willing to send troops, or whether there will be any ceasefire to protect.

Ukraine and Russia agreed in principle Wednesday to a limited ceasefire after President Donald Trump spoke with the countries' leaders this week, though it remained to be seen when it might take effect and what possible targets would be off limits to attack.

The tentative deal to partially rein in the three-year war came after Russian President Vladimir Putin rebuffed Trump's push for a full 30-day ceasefire. The difficulty in getting the combatants to agree not to target one another's energy infrastructure highlights the challenges Trump will face in trying to fulfill his campaign pledge to quickly end to the war.

Despite the negotiations, hundreds of drone attacks were launched overnight by both sides, causing several injuries and damage to buildings.

Ukraine said Russia had launched 171 long-range drones and it shot down 75 while another 63 decoy drones disappeared from radar after likely being jammed. Russia said it destroyed 132 Ukrainian drones in six Russian regions and the annexed Crimea.

If peace comes to Ukraine, the size of any force that might help enforce it is vague. Officials have cited

figures of between 10,000 and 30,000 troops.

Only Britain and France have said they are willing to send troops, though countries including Australia, Canada, France and Finland say they are open to being involved in some way.

Around 30 leaders were involved in a video meeting on Saturday including Macron, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, leaders from Australia, Canada and New Zealand and officials from NATO and the European Union.

Russia has said it will not accept any troops from NATO countries being based on Ukrainian soil. And Trump has given no sign the U.S. will guarantee reserve firepower in case of any breaches of a truce. Starmer says the plan won't work without that U.S. "backstop."

Rwanda-backed rebels enter mineral-rich town in Congo, defying ceasefire calls

By JUSTIN KABUMBA Associated Press

GOMA, Congo (AP) — Rwanda-backed M23 rebels entered the strategic town of Walikale in eastern Congo late Wednesday, according to residents and civil society leaders, a day after the Congolese and Rwandan presidents called for an immediate ceasefire.

"The information is confirmed: the rebels are visible at the monument and at the Bakusu group office," Prince Kihangi, a former provincial deputy elected for the Walikale territory told The Associated Press over the phone, referring to locations in the centre of Walikale. "This confirms the presence of the M23 in the territorial capital."

By taking control of Walikale, the M23 rebels seized a road linking four provinces in the east of the country: North Kivu, South Kivu, Tshopo and Maniema, cutting off Congolese army's positions.

Heavy artillery fire could be heard throughout the day but ceased in the evening, giving way to sporadic gunfire, Fiston Misona, a civil society activist in Walikale, told the AP over the phone.

"Our Congolese army is no longer fighting," he said. "It's as if we were being sacrificed."

There was no immediate comment from the M23 or the Congolese government.

The escalation in fighting comes a day after the presidents of Congo and Rwanda held unexpected talks in Qatar and called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire.

The meeting followed a failed attempt to bring Congo's government and M23 leaders together for ceasefire negotiations on Tuesday. The rebels pulled out Monday after the European Union announced sanctions on rebel leaders.

The decades-long conflict in eastern Congo escalated in January when the Rwanda-backed rebels advanced and seized the strategic city of Goma, followed by Bukavu in February.

M23 is one of about 100 armed groups that have been vying for a foothold in mineral-rich eastern Congo near the border with Rwanda, in a conflict that has created one of the world's most significant humanitarian crises. More than 7 million people have been displaced.

The rebels are supported by about 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, according to U.N. experts, and at times have vowed to march as far as Congo's capital, Kinshasa, about 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) to the east.

The U.N. Human Rights Council last month launched a commission to investigate atrocities, including allegations of rape and killing akin to "summary executions" by both sides.

The Walikale area is home to the largest tin deposits in Congo and to several significant gold mines. The Bisie tin mine, around 60 kilometers (35 miles) northwest of the town, accounts for the majority of tin exports from North Kivu province. Last week, its operator Alphamin Resources said it was temporarily halting mining operations due to the rebels' advance.

It's election day for the IOC, choosing a new leader in a hard-to-call, 7-candidate contest

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

COSTA NAVARINO, Greece (AP) — A new president of the IOC will be elected Thursday, just the 10th leader in its 131-year history after one of the most open Olympic elections in decades.

The winner will get an eight-year mandate with key issues including steering the Olympics on a smooth path in politics and sports toward the 2028 Summer Games in Los Angeles and picking a host for the 2036 edition. That could go to India or the Middle East for the first time.

Voting by about 100 eligible International Olympic Committee members is scheduled to start at 4 p.m. local time (1400 GMT). The result should be known within 30 minutes.

Seven IOC members are on the ballot chasing an absolute majority of votes for victory at a resort hotel near the site of Ancient Olympia.

The strongest candidates in a hard-to-call contest seem to be IOC vice president Juan Antonio Samaranch and a pair of two-time Olympic gold medalists, Sebastian Coe and Kirsty Coventry.

Also in the race are Prince Feisal al Hussein of Jordan and three presidents of sports governing bodies: Johan Eliasch of skiing, cycling's David Lappartient and Morinari Watanabe of gymnastics.

Coventry, the 41-year-old sports minister of Zimbabwe, would be the first woman and the first African to lead the IOC.

"Let's create some change, let's make sure that happens," she said Wednesday.

Coventry has long been seen as the preferred successor of outgoing president Thomas Bach, who formally leaves office on Olympic Day, June 23, having reached the maximum 12 years in office.

An emotional Bach was feted Wednesday on the first day of the IOC's annual meeting, getting lavish praise and the title of honorary president for life.

He will hand over a financially secure IOC, on track to earn more than \$8 billion in revenue through the 2028 LA Olympics, and with a slate of future hosts through 2034: in Italy, the United States, France, Australia and the U.S. again, when the Winter Games return to Salt Lake City.

A signature Bach policy also has been gender parity, with equal quotas of men and women athletes at the 2024 Paris Olympics and giving a better balance of female members of the IOC and the executive board he chairs, which now has seven women among its 15 members, including Coventry.

The next president can oversee the IOC making a statement choice for its host for the 2036 Summer Games

"There is one and one only," Samaranch said Wednesday when asked of challenges ahead. "We must concentrate (on) successful and relevant Olympic Games. The rest comes with success in the games."

If the Spanish financier wins, he will follow his father, also Juan Antonio Samaranch, who was the IOC's seventh president from 1980 to 2001.

The voters in the exclusive invited club of IOC members include royal family members, former lawmakers and diplomats, business leaders, sports officials and Olympic athletes. Even an Oscar-winning actress, Michelle Yeoh.

They will vote Thursday without hearing further presentations from the candidates in an election that should swing on a discreet network of friendships and alliances largely forged out of sight.

French citizen Olivier Grondeau freed after over 880 days in prison in Iran amid nuclear tensions

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A French citizen imprisoned in Iran for over 880 days has been freed, French officials said Thursday.

The release of Olivier Grondeau comes as France and the rest of Europe try to pursue negotiations with

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Iran over its rapidly advancing nuclear program.

U.S. President Donald Trump meanwhile has sent his own letter to Iran's 85-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to jumpstart talks. Trump is also pressuring Tehran over its support of Yemen's Houthi rebels as the American military has launched an intense new campaign of airstrikes targeting the group.

In going public with his detention in January, Grondeau alluded to the politics at play in his imprisonment. "You become a human who has been stocked away indefinitely because one government is seeking to exert pressure on another," he said.

French President Emmanuel Macron wrote online that Grondeau had been freed. He offered no immediate details of what led to Grondeau's release, though it came on Nowruz, the Persian New Year, when Iran has released prisoners in the past.

Jean-Noël Barrot, France's minister for Europe and foreign affairs, posted a picture online of Grondeau smiling aboard what appeared to be a private jet.

"We will tirelessly continue our efforts to ensure that all our compatriots still held hostage, including Cécile Kohler and Jacques Paris, are in turn released," Barrot wrote.

Macron also raised their cases.

"Cécile Kohler and Jacques Paris must be freed from Iranian jails," he wrote. "All my thoughts are with them and their families on this day."

Iran does not acknowledge release

The Iranian government did not immediately acknowledge Grondeau's release. Such releases of Westerners in Iran typically come in exchange for something. Earlier this week, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said France had arrested an Iranian woman who supported Palestinians, but said Tehran was still trying to gather more details about her case.

On Grondeau's lap in the image from the private jet was a plastic-wrapped T-shirt bearing a picture of the pop star Britney Spears, something officials did not acknowledge in welcoming Grondeau's release. He put it on before getting off the plane and embracing his family on returning home, in footage aired by French broadcaster TF1.

France's foreign minister was there, too. "Bravo for your courage," he told Grondeau.

His mother had described the former youth Scrabble champion as a fan of Beyoncé and karaoke in interviews with French media after he and his family went public with his detention in January.

Grondeau was detained by Iranian authorities in October 2022 in the city of Shiraz.

Arrest came during Mahsa Amini protests

Though the exact details of what sparked Iran's arrest of Grondeau remain unclear, his detention began in the chaotic aftermath of the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman who died after being detained over not wearing Iran's mandatory headscarf, or hijab, to the liking of authorities. United Nations investigators later said Iran was responsible for the "physical violence" that led to her death, which sparked months of protests and a bloody security force crackdown in the country.

"Most of the questions were, 'Did you take part in a demonstration,' 'List all of the Iranians that you met during your trip,' 'Why did you come to Iran?' 'You're not a tourist,'" Grondeau said in a phone call aired with French broadcaster France 2 in January after going public with his case.

"One day you think you're going to be freed very quickly, the next you think you'll die here," he added.

He described lights being shined on prisoners day and night, as well as being blindfolded each time he was being taken out of his cell while in solitary confinement for 72 days. He later shared a cell with over a dozen prisoners.

Asked if he had suffered ill treatment, he said: "If you look for bruises on my body you won't find any, because they are not that stupid."

An Iranian court later sentenced the backpacker and world traveler to five years in prison on espionage charges that he, his family and the French government vigorously denied.

He had been held at Tehran's notorious Evin prison, which holds Westerners, dual nationals and political prisoners often used by Tehran as bargaining chips in negotiations with the West.

What to know about Greenpeace after the Dakota Access protest case decision

By HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

A North Dakota jury on Wednesday found Greenpeace must pay hundreds of millions of dollars to a pipeline company in connection with protests against the Dakota Access oil pipeline.

The jury found Greenpeace liable for defamation and other claims and awarded Dallas-based Energy Transfer and subsidiary Dakota Access more than \$650 million in damages.

The lawsuit accused Netherlands-based Greenpeace International, Greenpeace USA and funding arm Greenpeace Fund Inc. of defamation, trespass, nuisance, civil conspiracy and other acts.

Greenpeace said earlier that a large award to the pipeline company would threaten to bankrupt the environmental group. Following the nine-person jury's verdict, Greenpeace's senior legal adviser said the organization's work "is never going to stop."

The independent global campaigning network has been fighting for a wide array of environmental issues for more than half a century and has a long history of contentious legal battles.

Here are some things to know:

How was Greenpeace founded?

Environmental activists founded the group in Vancouver, Canada, in 1971.

The network's first action was to work to stop more nuclear weapons tests on Amchitka Island in the Aleutian island chain in southwest Alaska. They took a ship toward the island to "bear witness," which is a Quaker protest tradition, but were intercepted by the U.S. Navy, according to the Greenpeace website.

The U.S. later opted to abandon their nuclear testing grounds on the island, marking Greenpeace's first major victory.

Where did the name Greenpeace come from?

During initial work to stop the nuclear weapons tests on Amchitka, Canadian ecologist Bill Darnell was leaving one of the group's meetings when someone held up two fingers and said "peace!" according to Greenpeace's website.

Darnell, who is considered a founding member of Greenpeace, replied: "Let's make it a Green Peace."

The name was condensed into one word so it could fit on buttons for the group's first fundraiser.

What does Greenpeace do today?

Greenpeace describes itself as the largest environmental campaigning organization in the world. It is made up of dozens of independent national or regional organizations in more than 55 countries, according to its website.

Its work to preserve and restore valuable ecosystems and push back on fossil fuel corporations is centered on nonviolent action. Its protests have ranged from efforts to stop Shell from drilling for oil in the Alaskan Arctic to demonstrations to put an end to France's atmospheric tests in the South Pacific to campaigns to conserve Canada's coastal rainforest.

Greenpeace and its activists have also been the target of charges and lawsuits, including in 2023 when four activists were arrested for scaling the country estate of former U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and draping it in black fabric to protest his plan to expand oil and gas drilling in the North Sea. They were later cleared of criminal charges.

It was also one of the environmental groups that filed a lawsuit seeking to block the Willow oil project in Alaska in recent years.

Who supports Greenpeace?

Greenpeace is an independent network that does not take money from governments, corporations or political parties, according to its website. Its funding comes from individual contributions, along with foundation grants.

In 2023, Greenpeace USA had about \$40 million in revenue and support, and about \$38 million in expenses, according to its online financial statement.

Its website says it does not consider anyone a permanent friend or enemy. "If your government or company is willing to change, we will work with you to achieve your aims," its website states. "Reverse course, and we will be back."

200 years after the creation of braille, blind people in Mali say it has allowed them to fit in

By MOUSTAPHA DIALLO Associated Press

BAMAKO, Mali (AP) — Amadou Ndiaye meticulously ran his fingers across bumps in a piece of paper, making sense of the world he can no longer see.

Two hundred years have passed since the invention of braille, the tactile writing system that has transformed the lives of many blind and partially sighted people by offering a path to literacy and independence.

"Braille helped me live my life," said Ndiaye, a social worker in Mali who lost his eyesight as a child. "Before, people asked themselves the question: Here is someone who can't see, how will he make it? How will he integrate into society?"

The West African country, with a population of over 20 million people, has long struggled to integrate blind and partially sighted people. According to eye care charity Sightsavers, around 170,000 people in Mali are thought to be blind.

The 47-year-old Ndiaye was fortunate to attend the institute for the blind in Mali, where he learned to write in braille, and told himself: "Really, everything that others do, I can do too." He later attended university.

He said braille has allowed him to develop his main passion, playing the guitar, which also emphasizes the importance of touch.

"Each pressure on the strings, each movement of the finger on the neck, becomes a living note, loaded with meaning," Ndiaye said.

The guitar is an integral part of Mali's griot tradition, the cultural practice of storytelling through music. Musicians adapted the guitar to emulate the sounds of traditional string instruments like the kora. Local artists such as Ali Farka Touré have fused Malian melodies with elements of the blues, creating a soulful, hypnotic sound that has gained international acclaim.

Iconic Malian musical duo Amadou and Mariam awakened Ndiaye's passion for the instrument when he was a boy.

"One day, near a photography studio, I heard their music resonating through the window, which pushed me to discover this universe," he said.

Known as "the blind couple from Mali," the duo of Amadou Bagayoko, who lost his vision at age 16, and Mariam Doumbia, who became blind at age 5 as a consequence of untreated measles, rose to international fame in the 1990s with their fusion of traditional Malian music, rock, and blues.

The couple met at Mali's institute for the blind, where Doumbia was studying braille and teaching classes in dance and music.

At such places, braille has allowed students to overcome educational barriers such as taking longer to learn how to read and write. They can then take the same exams as anyone else, which allows them to seek employment, said Ali Moustapha Dicko, who teaches at the institute for the blind in the capital, Bamako.

Dicko is also blind. Using a special typewriter, he can create texts in braille for his students. But he says his students are still at a disadvantage.

"We have a crisis of teaching materials," Dicko said. He has one reading book in braille for his entire class of dozens of students.

But with the development of new technologies, some blind and partially sighted people hope that educational barriers will continue to fall.

"There is software, there are telephones that speak, so there are many things that are vocal," said Bagayoko of the musical duo. "This allows us to move forward."

But Moussa Mbengue, the Senegal-based program officer for inclusive education at Sightsavers, said such advances still don't make the leap that braille did two centuries ago.

"It cannot replace braille. On the contrary, for me, technology complements braille," he said.

A pregnant woman and her young son were killed in Gaza by an Israeli airstrike

By WAFAA SHURAFI Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Afnan al-Ghanam of Gaza had her first child during war, 13 months ago, while the family was still living at home.

She was about to give birth again in the spring — this time, while living in a squalid tent camp. But at least a tenuous ceasefire had brought a relative calm.

Then, before dawn on Tuesday, an Israeli airstrike smashed into the family's tent. Al-Ghanam, who was seven months pregnant, and Mohammed, her young son, were both killed.

They were among more than 400 Palestinians, most of them women and children, killed when Israel launched a surprise bombardment across the Gaza Strip, according to the territory's Health Ministry. Israel said it struck Hamas targets to force the militant group to free hostages and relinquish control of Gaza.

"This is their bank of targets," said al-Ghanam's husband, Alaa Abu Helal, as he held Mohammed's little body, wrapped in cloth, at the morgue of Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Yunis. "He was born during the war in difficult conditions and also martyred in the war."

"Their targets are innocents, pure. They have barely seen life," he said, fighting his tears.

Israel's aerial assault shattered the ceasefire that began in mid-January and stunned Palestinians who had finally had a breather to start trying to rebuild their lives after 15 months of bombardment, ground offensives, dispersal and hunger.

Israel launched its campaign in Gaza in retaliation for Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attacks in southern Israel. It says it does not target civilians, and blames Hamas for their deaths, saying it operates among the population.

Abu Helal said he was visiting the family's home in Gaza's southernmost city Rafah when the strike hit the family's tent in Muwasi, a sprawling camp for displaced families outside Khan Yunis. Their home in Rafah had been damaged during the war, and he had wanted to check in on it to ensure it had not been looted.

The 20-year-old al-Ghanam and Mohammed had stayed behind in Muwasi. "They have gone and left me alone," he said. "The unborn child is dead, too."

Mohammed was born in Rafah. Soon after, the family was forced to flee the city in May, when Israeli troops ordered a mass evacuation and stormed the city. The offensive flattened much of the city as troops battled Hamas fighters.

"You flee during the war to keep your family and children safe. But then, here, he's dead," Abu Helal said. "All of them are dead."

Raids shatter perception of Puerto Rico as a sanctuary for immigrants

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Pastor Nilka Marrero will slam her hand on the table, raise her voice and, if needed, shake her parishioners while playing the role of a federal agent.

Many of her parishioners are undocumented immigrants, and she believes that role-playing with them can help prepare them for the threat of arrest as authorities step up immigration raids to a scale never before seen in Puerto Rico.

"They appear and snatch people," Marrero said.

For decades, undocumented immigrants have lived in the U.S. territory without fear of arrest. They're allowed to open bank accounts and obtain a special driver's license. Many have felt safe enough to open their own businesses.

Then, on Jan. 26, large-scale arrests began.

U.S. Immigration and Custom Enforcement agents raided a well-known Dominican community in a nod to a new policy of U.S. President Donald Trump, who has pledged to deport millions of people who have entered the United States illegally.

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The arrests have angered Puerto Rican officials and civil leaders who have created programs to help the island's undocumented immigrants, many of whom are from the Dominican Republic.

Arrests and questions

An estimated 55,000 Dominicans live in Puerto Rico, although some experts believe the number could be even higher. It's unclear how many are undocumented, although some 20,000 have the special driver's license.

More than 200 people have been arrested since Jan. 26, nearly all men. Of those arrested, 149 are Dominican, according to data ICE provided The Associated Press.

Sandra Colón, spokeswoman for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in Puerto Rico, said the agency is focusing on those with a criminal record or who have received a final court ruling that they must leave the country. But she said she did not immediately have available how many of those arrested have criminal records.

Annette Martínez, Puerto Rico's ACLU director, said it's unknown where those arrested have been taken or if they have been deported. "We're concerned about the different methods ICE is using for detainment," she said.

A park gone silent

On a recent morning in Puerto Rico's capital, speakers at a barbershop played an English tutorial as a couple of Dominican migrants studying to become U.S. citizens listened closely.

The business faces a park where the Dominican community had long gathered. It's now mostly silent and empty. Gone is the lively merengue music, the excited chatter, the slap of dominoes.

An undocumented migrant who asked to be identified only by his nickname, "the fisherman," because he feared jeopardizing his case in federal court, said he was arrested near the park.

He had illegally entered Puerto Rico in 2014 to seek more income because his wife back home had breast cancer and he could not afford her treatment working as a fisherman in the Dominican coastal town of Samaná.

"I needed to make a living," he said.

His wife died, but the man decided to stay in Puerto Rico. His son also came to the island. The fisherman first worked in construction, but after falling off a second-story floor and shattering his pelvis, he resumed fishing once he healed.

He sold fish at the park until Jan. 26. That day, he was sitting in a van while his son bought them lunch.

"Three agents pulled me out," he recalled.

They arrested seven people at that moment, including his son.

The man said they slept on the floor of several jails and were given only bread and water as they were transferred to the Puerto Rican town of Aguadilla, then Miami and finally Texas.

Authorities sent the man back to Puerto Rico for judicial proceedings, where he remains out on bond with an ankle monitor. His son is in a Miami jail.

"We're torn apart," he said as his voice cracked.

A swell of support

Every day, Marrero keeps an eye out for white vans that might be circulating near her church.

Inside, more than a dozen volunteers fold donated clothes and prepare free meals for undocumented immigrants who are too scared to leave their homes.

"They're panicking," said José Rodríguez, president of the Dominican Committee of Human Rights. "They're afraid to go out; they're afraid to take their children to school."

In February, Puerto Rico's Education Department noted that schools with a high number of Dominican students saw absentee rates of up to 70%. Officials have since ordered school principals to keep their gates closed and not open them to federal agents unless they have a warrant.

The mayor of San Juan, Miguel Romero, has said municipal police are not working for or helping federal agents, and that the city is offering legal aid and other assistance.

Meanwhile, Julio Roldán Concepción, mayor of Aguadilla, a northwest coastal town where many undocu-

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mented migrants arrive by boat, called for empathy.

"Any undocumented migrant can come by city hall if they need help," he said. "I am not going to ask to see papers to give it to them. ... We are all brothers here."

Officials in Puerto Rico's health sector also have offered to help undocumented migrants. Carlos Díaz Velez, president of the Association of Medical Surgeons, announced that undocumented migrants would receive online medical care "in light of the raids that have condemned thousands of immigrants to confinement."

Gov. Jenniffer González, a Republican who supports Trump, initially said the president's initiative would not affect immigrants in Puerto Rico. Since then, she has said the island "cannot afford to" ignore Trump's directives on migrant arrests, noting that federal funds are at risk.

Shortly after the January arrests, the Episcopal Church in Puerto Rico announced a new program that offers migrants food as well as legal, psychological and spiritual help. More than 100 people have sought help, said Bishop Rafael Morales Maldonado.

"The church is never going to be against a law, but it will oppose its effects," he said.

'An honorable, dignified return'

Federal agents initially targeted neighborhoods in San Juan, but they have since fanned out across the island and into work sites, Rodríguez said.

A man who declined to be identified because his court case is pending, said he was arrested on Feb. 26. He first arrived in Puerto Rico in 2003 but was arrested upon reaching shore. After being deported, he tried again in February 2007. He got a construction job and then opened his own company.

"I had never felt unsafe," he said.

But one afternoon, a woman whose house he was working on complained about his work. The following day, federal agents arrested him and his employees as soon as they arrived at the work site. That's when he found out the woman had taken a picture of his van and reported him.

"How can people want to hurt someone so much?" he said.

His attorney said he has a court date on April 1. The man said he applied years ago for U.S. residency but never received a response. His wife is a naturalized U.S. citizen and his daughter lives legally in Orlando, Florida.

As the arrests continue, Marrero, the pastor, keeps educating undocumented migrants. If they have children born in Puerto Rico, she urges to make sure to have their children's passports and custody papers in order and on hand.

She says she asks them to repeat the responses they should give agents depending on what they're told to do, noting that many don't know how to read or write or do so poorly.

"We have prepared them for an honorable, dignified return," she said.

Muslims with tattoo regrets flock to a free removal service during Ramadan

By NINIEK KARMINI Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Teguh Islean Septura groans in pain as each staccato rat-a-tat-tat of the laser fires an intense beam at the elaborate tattoos on his arm. But the former musician's determination to "repent" in the holy month of Ramadan is enough to keep him going.

The 30-year-old guitarist got his back, arms and legs tattooed to "look cool" when he was performing in a band. But these days Septura has a newfound zeal for Islam, including the conviction that Muslims should not alter the body that God gave them.

"As humans, sometimes we make mistakes. Now I want to improve myself by moving closer to God," Seputra said, as a health worker aimed the white laser wand at Septura's skin, blasting the red, green and black pigments with its penetrating light. "God gave me clean skin and I ruined it, that's what I regret now."

Septura is among a growing number of people in Indonesia's capital who have signed up for free tattoo removal services offered by Amil Zakat National Agency, an Islamic charity organization, during Ramadan to give practicing Muslims an opportunity to "repent."

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Launched in 2019, the tattoo removal program is now held every Ramadan, a month of fasting, increased worship, religious reflection and good deeds. Some 700 people have signed up for the services this year, and in total nearly 3,000 people have taken part.

"We want to pave the way for people who want to hijrah (to move closer to God), including those who want to remove their tattoos" said Mohammad Asep Wahyudi, a coordinator of the event. He added that many people cannot afford to remove their tattoos or know where and how they can do so safely.

Laser removal, which takes repeated treatment and may not be completely successful, could cost thousands of dollars for tattoos as extensive as Septura's.

Tattooing remains strongly associated with gangs and criminality in some Asian cultures. In addition to the religious prohibitions in Muslim-majority Indonesia, ideas about tattoos also reveal oppressive attitudes toward women, who if tattooed can be labeled as promiscuous or disreputable and not worth marrying.

Sri Indrayati, 52, said she tattooed the name of her first daughter on her hand shortly after she gave birth to her at the age of 22. She said she regretted it when her two grandchildren kept asking her to erase it because it looked like dirty, thick marker writing.

"When I take my grandson to school, (the children) whisper to each other: 'look at that grandma, she has a tattoo!' she said.

Another woman, Evalia Zadora, got a tattoo of a large star on her back and the words "Hope, Love and Rock & Roll" on her upper chest as a teen to gain acceptance into a gang. She wants to remove them now to move closer to God and out of consideration for her family.

"Bad image (against people with tattoos) is not a big deal for me, but it affected my husband and son," said Zadora, 36. "They are not comfortable with my tattoos and I respect their feelings, so I want to remove it.

30 years after deadly Tokyo subway gassing, survivors and victims' families still seeking closure

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Thirty years on from the fatal sarin nerve gas attack in Tokyo's subway network, survivors and families who lost loved ones are still seeking justice.

Thirteen people were killed and thousands were sickened when cult members released sarin nerve gas in the capital's subway trains on March 20, 1995. The attack remains one of the most shocking atrocities in Japan, a country known for its low crime rates.

The cult, Aum Shinrikyo or Supreme Truth, has since disbanded. Its founder, Shoko Asahara, and 12 of his disciples were executed in 2018.

But 1,600 former members still operate under renamed groups and have ignored an order to pay damages to survivors and bereaved families.

Shizue Takahashi lost her husband, a deputy station master, in the attack. The couple was just starting to enjoy time to themselves after raising three children when tragedy struck.

"My life is still being ruined by Aum and its successor groups," said Takahashi, 78. "We need to carry on and not let the memories fade."

People gasped for air and collapsed

At 8 a.m. during the morning rush, five cult members got on separate train cars on three subway lines converging at Kasumigaseki, Japan's government center, each dropping bags of sarin on the train floors. They punctured the bags with umbrellas, releasing the gas inside the train cars.

Within minutes, commuters poured out of the trains onto the platforms, rubbing their eyes and gasping for air. Some collapsed. Others fled onto the streets where ambulances and rescue workers in hazmat suits gave first-aid.

Kazumasa Takahashi didn't know the puddle he was cleaning on the subway car floor was sarin. He collapsed as he removed a bag — a sacrifice some survivors say saved lives — and never woke up.

The attack sickened more than 6,000. A 14th victim died in 2020 after battling severe after-effects.

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The subway gassing happened after a botched police investigation failed to link the cult to earlier crimes, says Yuji Nakamura, a lawyer for the survivors and the bereaved families. "It could have been prevented," he said.

Two days after the gassing, Tokyo police, carrying a caged canary to detect poison, raided Aum's headquarters near Mount Fuji, where the cultists lived together, trained and produced sarin. Asahara was found in a hidden compartment.

Apocalyptic cult

Born Chizuo Matsumoto in 1955, Asahara founded Aum Shinrikyo in 1984. The cult combined Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and yoga, and attracted young people disillusioned with materialism. He taught that death could elevate their spirits and justified killing as a virtue.

Followers paid to drink Asahara's bathwater and wore electrical head gear they believed synchronized their brain waves with the guru's. He prophesized an imminent apocalypse, which only true believers would survive.

Asahara gathered doctors, lawyers and scientists from Japan's top universities as his closest aides.

Using donations from followers and earnings from yoga classes and health food businesses, they bought land and equipment. Asahara's scientists developed and manufactured sarin, VX and other chemical and biological weapons.

In 1989, its members killed Tsutsumi Sakamoto, a lawyer who opposed the cult, his wife and baby boy. Their criminal activities escalated after their defeat in the 1990 parliamentary elections. A 1994 sarin attack in the central Japanese city of Matsumoto killed eight and injured more than 140 others.

In all, Aum killed 27 people in more than a dozen attacks that culminated in the subway gassing. It was part of a plot by Asahara to hasten Armageddon, envisioning overthrowing the government.

Still seeking redress

Shizue Takahashi attended most of the Aum criminal trials. She has lobbied for government support, winning the enactment of a law to support crime victims and government benefits of 3 billion yen (\$20 million) for more than 6,000 survivors and bereaved families of the Aum crimes.

The government has also enacted laws banning sarin production and possession, and restricted the activities of groups linked to mass killings. Police have since established nuclear, biological and chemical weapons units and beefed up training.

Aum's main successor, Aleph, has ignored a court order to pay 1 billion yen (\$6.7 million) in compensation to survivors and bereaved families. The group has allegedly hidden billions of yen of income from yoga and spiritual seminars.

Many of the subway gassing survivors still suffer health problems and trauma, according to support groups.

Takahashi and others last week called on Justice Minister Keisuke Suzuki to do more to accelerate compensation by Aleph and keep them under close watch.

Survivors and their supporters say lessons have not been sufficiently shared with the public.

Shoko Egawa, a journalist and expert on Aum crimes, says attention on the group has largely focused on its crimes rather than teaching people to stay away from dangerous cults. "There is still a lot to learn from (the Aum problems), including how they attracted followers, so that we can prevent people from getting their lives ruined by cults," Egawa said.

Takahashi recently launched a website that compiles articles and comments by survivors, lawyers and writers, including Haruki Murakami's 2007 article about his 1997 book "Underground."

Aum's remnants

At its peak, the cult boasted more than 10,000 followers in Japan and 30,000 in Russia and elsewhere. Aum has disbanded, but about 1,600 people belonging to Aleph and two smaller groups in Japan still practice Asahara's teachings, said the Public Security Intelligence Agency, which monitors the groups.

Minoru Kariya, whose father was killed by Aum members in early 1995 while he was trying to get his sister to quit the cult, said authorities need to do much more to tackle the threat.

"It's scary that they still exist and are operating as organizations and recruiting new followers," he said.

Federal Reserve sees tariffs raising inflation this year, keeps key rate unchanged

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve kept its benchmark interest rate unchanged Wednesday and signaled that it still expects to cut rates twice this year even as it sees inflation staying stubbornly elevated.

The Fed also now expects the economy to grow more slowly this year and next than it did three months ago, according to a set of quarterly economic projections also released Wednesday. It forecasts growth falling to just 1.7% in 2025, down from 2.8% last year, and 1.8% in 2026. Policymakers also expect inflation will pick up slightly, to 2.7% by the end of this year from its current level of 2.5%. Both are above the central bank's 2% target.

Even though the Fed maintained its forecast for two cuts, economists noted that under the surface there were signs that the central bank could stay on hold for some time. That is likely to keep borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans, and credit cards unchanged in the coming months.

Eight of the 19 Fed officials said they see only one or zero rate reductions this year, up from just four in December.

"It will be harder for them to cut rates this year with inflation moving sideways," said Michael Gapen, an economist at Morgan Stanley.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell, at a news conference, said that President Donald Trump's tariffs have started to push up inflation and would likely stall the progress the central bank has seen in reducing inflation since its peak in 2022.

"I think we were getting closer and closer" to price stability, Powell said. "I wouldn't say we were at that. ... I do think with the arrival of the tariff inflation, further progress may be delayed."

On his Truth Social platform late Wednesday, Trump posted: "The Fed would be MUCH better off CUTTING RATES as U.S. Tariffs start to transition (ease!) their way into the economy. Do the right thing."

Powell added that the Fed still expects inflation to get back to nearly 2% by the end of next year. Tariffs could just create a one-time increase in prices, he said, rather than an ongoing boost to inflation. And in some cases, the Fed can simply "look through" a temporary price rise, rather than respond by raising rates, Powell added.

Those comments appeared to please investors, and the S&P 500 stock index rose 1% Wednesday afternoon.

Luke Tilley, chief economist at Wilmington Trust, said Powell appeared less alarmed about the impact of tariffs compared to the Fed's previous meeting in January.

"They're talking about tariffs in a totally different way," he said.

Powell acknowledged that the Fed initially thought inflation coming out of the pandemic would be temporary, which led it to delay raising rates to combat higher prices. But he added that in this case, it could be a "different situation."

"But...we really can't know that," he added, noting that uncertainty is enveloping the economy. "We're going to have to see how things actually work out."

Fed policymakers also expect the unemployment rate to tick higher, to 4.4%, by the end of this year, from 4.1% now.

The economic projections underscore the tight spot the Fed may find itself in this year: Higher inflation typically would lead the Fed to keep its key rate elevated, or even raise rates. On the other hand, slower growth and higher unemployment would often cause the Fed to cut rates to spur more borrowing and spending and lift the economy.

It is the second meeting in a row that the Fed has kept its interest rate at about 4.3% as the central bank has moved to the sidelines as it evaluates the impact of the Trump administration's policies on the economy. Economists forecast that tariffs will likely push up inflation, at least temporarily. But other policies, such as deregulation, could lower costs and cool inflation.

Powell acknowledged that many surveys of businesses and consumers have shown rising concern about

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the economic outlook. Yet he noted that the unemployment rate remains low and the economy is still expanding.

"We do understand that sentiment has fallen off pretty sharply but economic activity has not yet," Powell said. "The economy seems to be healthy."

Powell underscored that uncertainty around the economy's outlook is "unusually elevated" and said that the Fed is prepared to be patient and see how the economy evolves before making further moves.

"We're not going to be in any hurry to move," he said. "We're well positioned to wait for further clarity and not in any hurry."

The Fed also said it would slow the rate at which it is reducing its Treasury holdings, which grew massively during and after the pandemic. Previously it had allowed \$25 billion of Treasuries to mature each month without reinvesting the proceeds. Now it will allow only \$5 billion to mature each month.

In effect, the Fed will be reinvesting more of the expiring bonds into new securities, which should keep interest rates on long-term Treasuries lower than they would have been otherwise. Powell characterized the change as a technical one and not related to its interest-rate policies. Yields fell slightly in Treasury markets.

Federal Reserve governor Christopher Waller voted against the decision to slow the Treasury purchases. The Fed is still allowing \$35 billion of mortgage-backed securities to mature each month.

Fed officials are closely watching measures of Americans' inflation expectations, which spiked in one survey released just last week. Inflation expectations — essentially a measure of how worried people are that inflation will get worse — are important to the Fed because they can be self-fulfilling. If people expect higher inflation, they may take steps, such as accelerating purchases, that can push prices higher.

Yet Powell, in his news conference, downplayed that increase as an "outlier" and said that in the long run, Americans still appear to expect inflation to stay in check.

Retailers of both high-end and lower-cost goods have warned that consumers are turning more cautious as they expect prices to rise because of tariffs. Retail sales rose modestly last month after a sharp fall in January. Homebuilders and contractors expect that home construction and renovations will get more expensive.

Israeli troops advance in Gaza to retake part of a corridor dividing north from south

By WAFAA SHURAF, JULIA FRANKEL and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel said Wednesday its troops retook part of a corridor that bisects Gaza, and its defense minister warned that attacks would intensify until Hamas frees dozens of hostages and gives up control of the territory.

The military said it had retaken part of the Netzarim Corridor that divides northern Gaza from the south, and from where it had previously withdrawn as part of a ceasefire that began in January. That truce was shattered Tuesday by Israeli airstrikes that killed more than 400 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

The advances on the ground by Israel on Wednesday — which included sending more troops to southern Gaza — threatened to drag the sides into all-out war again. The ceasefire had given war-weary Palestinians some respite, allowed a much-needed surge of humanitarian aid into Gaza — and led to the release of dozens of hostages who had been held for more than 15 months.

Early Thursday, a missile launched from Yemen was intercepted before reaching Israeli airspace, the military said. Air raid sirens and several explosions were heard in Jerusalem, apparently the sounds of the interceptors in use. No injuries were reported. Yemen's Houthi rebels did not immediately claim the attack Thursday morning.

Within Israel, the resumption of airstrikes and ground maneuvers in Gaza has raised concerns about the fate of roughly two dozen hostages held by Hamas who are believed to still be alive. Thousands of Israelis took part in anti-government demonstrations in Jerusalem, with many calling for a deal to bring

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the captives home.

A Hamas spokesman, Abdel-Latif al-Qanou, said the moves by ground forces in Gaza was a clear sign that Israel had backed out of the truce and was reimposing a "blockade." There have been no reports of rocket attacks by Hamas since Tuesday's bombardment.

Also Wednesday, the United Nations said one of its employees was killed in Gaza and five others were wounded in an apparent strike on a guesthouse. It was not immediately clear who was behind the strike, the U.N. said.

Israel launches 'limited' ground operations in Gaza

The military said its "limited ground operation" in Gaza would create a "partial buffer between northern and southern Gaza."

It wasn't immediately clear whether the move would entirely block Palestinians from traveling north or south through the Netzarim Corridor.

Israel used the roughly 4-mile (6-kilometer) corridor as a military zone during the war. It ran from the Israeli border to the coast, just south of Gaza City, the territory's largest metropolitan area.

Israel said airstrikes on Wednesday hit dozens of militants and militant sites, including the command center of a Hamas battalion. It denied Palestinian claims that it hit the U.N. guesthouse.

Fares Awad, an official in the Gaza Health Ministry, said an Israeli strike on a gathering of mourners in the northern town of Beit Lahiya killed 17 and wounded 30. The Israeli military had no immediate comment.

Israel says it will order new evacuations for Palestinians in Gaza soon

Until Israel withdrew from Netzarim in January, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who had fled northern Gaza for the south were prevented from returning throughout the war. Many of them have since returned.

But Israel Katz, the Israeli defense minister, said the military would soon order Palestinians to evacuate from combat zones.

Katz said Tuesday's aerial bombardment "was just the first step" in Israel's plan to ratchet up the pressure on Hamas to release the remaining hostages and give up control of Gaza. Until it does, Israel will attack "with an intensity that you have not known."

A UN worker is killed in a strike

Jorge Moreira da Silva, head of the U.N. Office for Project Services, declined to say who carried out the strike in the central city of Deir al-Balah. He said the blast was not accidental or related to demining activity.

He did not provide the nationalities of those killed and wounded.

Moreira da Silva said strikes had hit near the compound on Monday and struck it directly on Tuesday and again on Wednesday. He said the agency had contacted the Israeli military after the first strike. "Israel knew this was a U.N. premise, that people were living, staying and working there," he said.

Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani, a military spokesperson, said the explosion was not caused by Israeli fire.

After the strike Wednesday, the wounded were rushed to Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Hospital in central city of Deir al-Balah. One man was carried inside on a blanket held up by medical workers. Another lay on a hospital bed, his knee bandaged.

In southern Lebanon, a U.N. peacekeeper was wounded after stepping on a mine. U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said the incident took place during "operational activity" by the peacekeeping mission known as UNIFIL in the village of Zibqin, adding that the injuries are not life-threatening.

Hundreds of Palestinians have been killed in Israel's new offensive

The Gaza Health Ministry said at least 436 people, including 183 children and 94 women, have been killed since Israel launched the strikes early Tuesday. It said another 678 people have been wounded.

The military says it only strikes militants and blames civilian deaths on Hamas because it operates in densely populated areas.

The war has killed nearly 49,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and displaced 90% of Gaza's population. The Health Ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and militants but says over half of the dead have been women and children.

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The war erupted when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking 251 hostages. Most have been released in ceasefires or other deals; 59 hostages remain, and more than half are believed to be dead.

Israelis protest against their government

Before this week's attacks, Israel and Hamas were set to negotiate an extension of the first phase of the ceasefire agreement, which lasted six weeks.

But those talks never got off the ground. Hamas has demanded that Israel stick to the terms of the initial ceasefire deal, including a full withdrawal from Gaza and an end to the war. Israel, which has vowed to defeat Hamas, has put forward a new proposal that would extend the truce and free more hostages held by Hamas, without a commitment to end the war.

The breakdown of the ceasefire was met with anger in Israel, where many support the plight of the hostage families to free their loved ones.

Israel's return to a military campaign came as Netanyahu faces mounting domestic pressure, with mass protests taking place over his handling of the hostage crisis and his plan to fire the head of Israel's internal security agency. Demonstrators massed around Israel's parliament on Wednesday and later marched near Netanyahu's residence in Jerusalem, where police sprayed water to try to clear them.

Zelenskyy and Putin have agreed to a limited ceasefire, but implementation is work in progress

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine and Russia agreed in principle to a limited ceasefire after President Donald Trump spoke with the countries' leaders this week, though it remains to be seen when it might take effect and what possible targets would be off limits to attack.

The tentative deal to partially rein in the grinding war came after Russian President Vladimir Putin rebuffed Trump's push for a full 30-day ceasefire. The difficulty in getting the combatants to agree not to target one another's energy infrastructure highlights the challenges Trump will face in trying to fulfill his campaign pledge to quickly end to the war.

After a roughly hourlong call with Trump on Wednesday that both leaders said went well, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told reporters that "technical" talks in Saudi Arabia this weekend would seek to resolve what types of infrastructure would be protected under the agreement.

But it was immediately clear that the three parties had different views about what the pact entailed, with the White House saying "energy and infrastructure" would be covered, the Kremlin saying the agreement referred more narrowly to "energy infrastructure," and Zelenskyy saying he'd also like railways and ports to be protected.

"One of the first steps toward fully ending the war could be ending strikes on energy and other civilian infrastructure," Zelenskyy said on social media following his call with Trump, which came a day after the U.S. president held similar talks with Putin. "I supported this step, and Ukraine confirmed that we are ready to implement it."

During their call, Trump suggested that Zelenskyy should consider giving the U.S. ownership of Ukraine's power plants to ensure their long-term security, according to a White House statement from Secretary of State Marco Rubio and national security adviser Mike Waltz.

Trump told Zelenskyy that the U.S. could be "very helpful in running those plants with its electricity and utility expertise," the statement said.

Trump suggested "American ownership of those plants could be the best protection for that infrastructure," according to White House officials. The idea was floated even as the Trump administration looks to finalize an agreement to gain access to Ukraine's critical minerals as partial repayment for U.S. support for Ukraine during the war.

Zelenskyy, though, said the conversation focused on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant — which is the largest of its kind in Europe and has been under Russian control since early in the war. He said Trump

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posed the idea of “an understanding” in which “the United States can recover” the plant.

The call, which Zelenskyy described as “fruitful,” came just weeks after a disastrous Oval Office meeting between the two leaders that led to Trump temporarily pausing intelligence sharing and military aid to Ukraine.

During the call, Zelenskyy requested additional Patriot defense missile systems. Rubio and Waltz said Trump “agreed to work with him to find what was available, particularly in Europe.”

On Tuesday, Putin told Trump that he would agree not to target Ukraine’s energy infrastructure but refused to back a full 30-day ceasefire that Trump proposed.

According to the Kremlin, Putin made clear to Trump that there must be a cessation of foreign military aid and intelligence sharing as part of any deal. But White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt on Wednesday underscored that U.S. “intelligence sharing in terms of defense for Ukraine” would continue.

The Kremlin says Kyiv isn’t upholding its end of the bargain

Prior to his call with Trump, Zelenskyy said Putin’s limited ceasefire pledge was “very much at odds with reality” after Russia launched an overnight barrage of drone strikes across Ukraine, including some that struck Ukrainian energy facilities.

Russia responded by saying it had halted its targeting of Ukraine’s energy facilities and accused Kyiv of attacking Russian equipment near one of its pipelines.

“Unfortunately, we see that for now there is no reciprocity on the part of the Kyiv regime,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

The White House described Tuesday’s call between Trump and Putin as the first step in a “movement to peace.” But there was no indication that Putin is ready to back away from his conditions for a prospective peace deal, which are fiercely opposed by Kyiv.

Zelenskyy even while agreeing to work on the limited ceasefire said Putin is not seriously pursuing peace talks, and wants to prolong the war until he is in a stronger position.

Technical experts to gather soon in Saudi Arabia

The White House also confirmed that technical experts from the U.S., Ukraine and Russia would gather in Saudi Arabia in the coming days to discuss implementing the partial ceasefire.

It was not immediately clear if the U.S. would meet together or separately with the Ukrainian and Russian officials. Waltz spoke with his Russian counterpart, Yuri Ushakov, on Wednesday to discuss the coming talks.

Ukraine and Russia trade accusations

Shortly after the call between Trump and Putin on Tuesday, air raid sirens sounded in Kyiv, followed by explosions as residents took shelter.

Despite efforts to repel the attack, several strikes hit civilian infrastructure, including two hospitals, a railway and more than 20 houses, Zelenskyy said. Russian drones were reported over Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Sumy, Chernihiv, Poltava, Kharkiv, Kirovohrad, Dnipropetrovsk, and Cherkasy regions.

The Russian Defense Ministry said its military had launched seven drones at power facilities related to the military-industrial complex in Ukraine’s southern Mykolaiv region, but that it shot them down after receiving Putin’s order to not hit energy infrastructure.

Moscow accused Ukraine of targeting its energy facility in the Krasnodar region bordering the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed in 2014, several hours after the Putin and Trump talks. The ministry said three drones targeted oil transfer equipment that feeds the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, causing a fire and leading one oil tank to lose pressure.

“It is absolutely clear that we are talking about yet another provocation deliberately concocted by the Kyiv regime, aimed at derailing the peace initiatives of the U.S. president,” the Russian Defense Ministry said.

Russia said its air defenses intercepted 57 Ukrainian drones over the Azov Sea and several Russian regions — the border provinces of Kursk and Bryansk and the nearby regions of Oryol and Tula.

Zelenskyy said that “words of a ceasefire” weren’t enough.

“If the Russians don’t hit our facilities, we definitely won’t hit theirs,” Zelenskyy said.

Meanwhile, the two combatants said Wednesday that they had each swapped 175 prisoners in one of

the largest exchanges of the war.

Ukraine's red line

Zelenskyy rejected Putin's key condition that Western allies stop providing military aid and intelligence to Ukraine. He said doing so would endanger lives if citizens were blind to incoming air raids and lead to the continuation of the war.

"I don't think anybody should make any concessions in terms of helping Ukraine, but rather, assistance to Ukraine should be increased," Zelenskyy said. "This will be a signal that Ukraine is ready for any surprises from the Russians."

Zelenskyy said one of the most difficult issues in future negotiations would be the issue of territorial concessions.

"For us, the red line is the recognition of the Ukrainian temporarily occupied territories as Russian," he said. "We will not go for it."

Pentagon restores histories of Navajo Code Talkers, other Native veterans after public outcry

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — The Pentagon restored some webpages highlighting the crucial wartime contributions of Navajo Code Talkers and other Native American veterans on Wednesday, days after tribes condemned the action.

The initial removal was part of a sweep of any military content that promoted diversity, equity and inclusion, or commonly referred to as DEI. Following President Donald Trump's broader executive order ending the federal government's DEI programs, the Defense Department deleted thousands of pages honoring contributions by women and minority groups. Department officials say the Navajo Code Talker material was erroneously erased.

"In the rare cases that content is removed — either deliberately or by mistake — that is out of the clearly outlined scope of the directive, we instruct the components and they correct the content so it recognizes our heroes for their dedicated service alongside their fellow Americans, period," Pentagon press secretary John Ulliyot said in a statement.

Several webpages on the Code Talkers landed on a "404 - Page not found" message Tuesday. Some were back up Wednesday — although any that also mention Native American Heritage Month remain down. Thousands of other pages deleted in the DEI purge are still offline.

White House officials informed the Navajo Nation that an artificial intelligence-powered automated review process looking for content with DEI initiatives led to the elimination of anything mentioning "Navajo," according to a statement from Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren.

Nygren, who sent a letter to the Defense Department requesting clarity on the issue, said he's pleased by the resolution.

"I want to assure the Navajo people that we remain in close communication with federal officials to ensure the legacy of our cherished Navajo Code Talkers is never erased from American and Navajo history," Nygren said.

He also pointed out the 574 federally recognized tribes across the U.S. are sovereign nations and not defined by DEI classifications, a stance broadly supported by other Native American leaders who also sent letters to the Trump administration.

The U.S. Marine Corps initially recruited 29 Navajo men to develop a code based on the unwritten Navajo language in World War II. Using Navajo words for red soil, war chief, clan, braided hair, beads, ant and hummingbird, for example, they came up with a glossary of more than 200 terms, later expanded, and an alphabet. To convey the word "send," Code Talkers would say the Navajo words for "sheep, eyes, nose and deer."

Hundreds of Navajos followed in their footsteps, sending thousands of messages without error on Japanese troop movements, battlefield tactics and other communications crucial to the war's ultimate outcome.

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The code stumped Japanese military cryptologists.

The Code Talkers participated in all assaults the Marines led in the Pacific from 1942 to 1945 and are credited with helping the U.S. win the war. Hundreds of Native Americans from more than 20 tribes also served as code talkers during World War I and World War II, according to the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. Among them were Choctaw, Cherokee, Osage, Chippewa and Hopi speakers.

Among those alarmed to hear of the missing Navajo Code Talker webpages was Peter MacDonald, 96. He and Thomas H. Begay are the only two Navajo Code Talkers still living today.

"That code became a very valuable weapon and not only saved hundreds of thousands of soldiers, but it also helped win the war in the Pacific," MacDonald said by phone from his home in Tuba City in the Arizona portion of the Navajo Nation. "And it has absolutely nothing to do with DEI."

A Republican who voted for Trump, MacDonald said he thinks the current administration needs to better walk the line between getting rid of DEI and ignoring history.

"That's why I'm very concerned that communication from the Pentagon down to the various military units should be taught or learn that this information is history, and you don't want to hide history," MacDonald said.

The Defense Department has had to issue reassurances that it is not omitting historic achievements by servicemen and women of color. Besides the Code Talkers, the agency also on Wednesday restored a webpage describing baseball and civil rights icon Jackie Robinson's military service after it was missing earlier in the day. Last week, pages honoring a Black Medal of Honor winner and Japanese American service members were also restored.

"Everyone at the Defense Department loves Jackie Robinson, as well as the Navajo Code Talkers, the Tuskegee airmen, the Marines at Iwo Jima and so many others — we salute them for their strong and in many cases heroic service to our country, full stop," Ulliot said. "We do not view or highlight them through the prism of immutable characteristics, such as race, ethnicity or sex."

Michael Smith, whose father, Samuel "Jesse" Smith Sr., was a Navajo Code Talker, questioned why these pages were removed at all.

"I don't know how taking Navajo Code Talkers off the Department of Defense website is saving the United States any money because that's not consistent with the president's order," said Smith, who helps organize annual celebrations of the Code Talkers.

Gov. Stephen Roe Lewis of the Gila River Indian Community in Arizona also expressed disappointment, claiming there was missing content relating to all Native American veterans, including Ira Hayes. Hayes was an enrolled member of the tribe and one of six Marines featured in an iconic 1945 Associated Press photograph of U.S. forces raising an American flag during the Battle of Iwo Jima.

Even with some being reposted, he remains worried web content removal is "the tip of the iceberg."

"The way it looks in the (executive) order, this language is skewed and made to sound like the diversity programs are the ones that are unethical," Smith said.

American believed to be last person to see missing US student left the Dominican Republic

By MARTÍN ADAMES ALCÁNTARA Associated Press

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic (AP) — Joshua Riibe, a senior at St. Cloud University in Minnesota who is believed to be the last person to see missing University of Pittsburgh student Sudiksha Konanki in the Dominican Republic, left the Caribbean country on Wednesday, his lawyers said.

Following a trial exceeding five hours, Judge Edwin Rijo ruled Wednesday that Riibe, classified as a witness in a disappearance case, should have full rights under Dominican law and unrestricted freedom of movement.

It was not immediately clear where Riibe traveled after leaving the Dominican Republic.

According to a statement from Guzmán Ariza, Abogados Consultores, the law firm representing the Riibe family, the La Altagracia prosecutor's office offered to return Joshua's passport. "While appreciating

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the offer, Joshua opted to obtain a new passport from the U.S. consulate for privacy reasons, which was expedited," the law firm said.

Riibe had been detained by Dominican police, but on Tuesday judge Rijo ordered his release, saying he could cooperate with authorities without being detained. He was not named as a suspect.

According to the transcript of an interview with prosecutors, reported by Dominican media as well as NBC and Telemundo, Riibe told police he was drinking with Konanki on the beach and they were kissing in the ocean when they got caught in a current. Riibe said he was a former lifeguard and helped bring her ashore.

He told investigators he vomited upon reaching the beach and that Konanki said she was going to fetch her things. When he looked up, she was gone. He said he was later surprised to hear of her disappearance.

On Monday, Konanki's parents asked Dominican authorities to declare their daughter legally dead.

Subbarayudu and Sreedevi Konanki said in a letter that after an extensive search, local authorities believe that Sudiksha, 20, drowned.

"Initiating this process will allow our family to begin the grieving process and address matters related to her absence," they wrote. "While no declaration can truly ease our grief, we trust that this step will bring some closure and enable us to honor her memory."

Michael Chapman, sheriff of Loudoun County in Virginia, where the Konankis live, said in a statement Tuesday that officials have been working with Dominican authorities and continue to review evidence in the case.

"The disappearance of Sudiksha Konanki is tragic, and we cannot imagine the grief her family has been feeling," he said. "Sudiksha's family has expressed their belief that she drowned. While a final decision to make such a declaration rests with authorities in the Dominican Republic, we will support the Konanki family in every way possible."

Sudiksha Konanki and five female friends had traveled to the Caribbean nation on March 3 for spring break. Police said she disappeared at a beach by her hotel before dawn on March 6.

Konanki was born in India and later became a U.S. permanent resident.

Brothers and roommate of Laken Riley's killer to be deported after fake green card convictions

ATHENS, Ga. (AP) — Two brothers of the Venezuelan man who killed Georgia nursing student Laken Riley will be deported along with their former roommate after they pleaded guilty to possessing fake green cards, federal authorities say.

Jose Ibarra, 27, was convicted in November of murder and other crimes in Riley's killing and was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole in a case that became a flashpoint over immigration. His brother Diego Ibarra, 29, was taken into custody after he gave a counterfeit green card to a police officer investigating the February 2024 killing, the Justice Department said.

Another brother, Argenis Ibarra, 25, and their former roommate, Rosbeli Flores-Bello, 29, admitted to having fake green cards, and agents found counterfeit Social Security cards for them in the apartment they shared with Diego and Jose Ibarra, the department added in a news release.

Diego Ibarra was sentenced Wednesday to four years in federal prison after pleading guilty in July to two counts of possessing a fraudulent document. He is to be transferred to the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, for deportation after he completes his sentence, the department said.

Argenis and Flores-Bello each were sentenced Wednesday to time served after pleading guilty in December to one count of possessing a fraudulent document. They were to be immediately turned over to ICE for deportation, according to the news release. The statement did not elaborate on those deportation plans.

Federal authorities said they believe that Diego Ibarra is affiliated with the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua based on his multiple tattoos and social media photos of him making signs and wearing clothes associated with the gang.

Researchers find a hint at how to delay Alzheimer's symptoms. Now they have to prove it

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and SHELBY LUM Associated Press

An experimental treatment appears to delay Alzheimer's symptoms in some people genetically destined to get the disease in their 40s or 50s, according to new findings from ongoing research now caught up in Trump administration funding delays.

The early results — a scientific first — were published Wednesday even as study participants worried that politics could cut their access to a possible lifeline.

"It's still a study but it has given me an extension to my life that I never banked on having," said Jake Heinrichs of New York City.

Now 50, Heinrichs has been treated in that study for more than a decade and remains symptom-free despite inheriting an Alzheimer's-causing gene that killed his father and brother around the same age.

If blocked funding stops Heinrichs' doses, "how much time do we have?" asked his wife, Rachel Chavkin. "This trial is life."

Two drugs sold in the U.S. can modestly slow worsening of early-stage Alzheimer's by clearing the brain of one of its hallmarks, a sticky gunk called amyloid. But until now, there haven't been hints that removing amyloid far earlier — many years before the first symptoms appear — just might postpone the disease.

The research led by Washington University in St. Louis involves families that pass down rare gene mutations almost guaranteeing they'll develop symptoms at the same age their affected relatives did — information that helps scientists tell if treatments are having any effect.

The new findings center on a subset of 22 participants who received amyloid-removing drugs the longest, on average eight years. Long-term amyloid removal cut in half their risk of symptom onset, researchers reported Wednesday in the journal *Lancet Neurology*.

Despite the study's small size, "it's incredibly important," said Northwestern University neuroscientist David Gate, who wasn't involved with the research.

Now participants have been switched from an earlier experimental drug to Leqembi, an IV treatment approved in the U.S., to try to answer the obvious next question.

"What we want to determine over the next five years is how strong is the protection," said Washington University's Dr. Randall Bateman, who directs the Dominantly Inherited Alzheimer's Network of studies involving families with these rare genes. "Will they ever get the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease if we keep treating them?"

Here's the worry: Bateman raised money to start that confirmatory study while seeking National Institutes of Health funding for the full project but his grant has been delayed as required reviews were canceled. It's one example of how millions of dollars in research have been stalled as NIH grapples with funding restrictions and mass firings.

At the same time researchers wonder if NIH will shift focus away from amyloid research after comments by Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, nominated as the agency's new director.

"One of the reasons I think that we have not made progress in Alzheimer's, as much as we ought to have, is because the NIH has not supported a sufficiently wide range of hypotheses," Bhattacharya told senators, responding to one who brought up an example of earlier science misconduct unrelated to current research.

Scientists don't know exactly what causes Alzheimer's, a mind-destroying disease that affects nearly 7 million Americans, mostly late in life. What's clear is that silent changes occur in the brain at least two decades before the first symptoms -- and that sticky amyloid is a major contributor. At some point amyloid buildup appears to trigger a protein named tau to begin killing neurons, which drives cognitive decline.

Tau-fighting drugs now are being tested. Researchers also are studying other factors including inflammation, the brain's immune cells and certain viruses.

NIH's focus expanded as researchers found more potential culprits. In 2013, NIH's National Institute on Aging funded 14 trials of possible Alzheimer's drugs, over a third targeting amyloid. By last fall, there were

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68 drug trials and about 18% targeted amyloid.

Northwestern's Gate counts himself among scientists who "think amyloid isn't everything," but said nothing has invalidated the amyloid hypothesis. He recently used brain tissue preserved from an old amyloid study to learn how immune cells called microglia can clear those plaques and then switch to helping the brain heal, possible clues for improving today's modest therapies.

For now, amyloid clearly is implicated somehow and families with Alzheimer's-causing genes are helping answer a critical question for anyone at risk: Can blocking amyloid buildup really stave off symptoms? Without NIH funding, Bateman said, that opportunity will be lost.

"It's absolutely insane," said longtime study participant June Ward, who lives near Asheville, North Carolina, and plans to ask friends to complain to lawmakers.

Ward turns 64 in June and is healthy, two years older than when her mother's symptoms appeared. "It is exciting to think about the possibility that Alzheimer's disease might not be what gets me," she said.

In New York, Heinrichs said he has hope that his 3-year-old son won't "experience the stress and sorrow that I lived through as a young man to watch my father fade away."

"We need the NIH to be not politicized," added Chavkin, his wife. "It's just about keeping people alive or helping them live better. And in this case, it's helping my husband survive."

Newly released JFK assassination files reveal more about CIA but don't yet point to conspiracies

By JOHN HANNA and JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — Newly released documents related to President John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963 gave curious readers more details Wednesday into Cold War-era covert U.S. operations in other nations but didn't initially lend credence to long-circulating conspiracy theories about who killed JFK.

Assessments of the roughly 2,200 files posted by the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration on its website came with a huge caveat: No one had enough time as of Wednesday to review more than a small fraction of them. The vast majority of the National Archives' more than 6 million pages of records, photographs, motion pictures, sound recordings and artifacts related to the assassination have previously been released.

An initial Associated Press review of more than 63,000 pages of records released this week shows that some were not directly related to the assassination but rather dealt with covert CIA operations, particularly in Cuba. And nothing in the first documents examined undercut the conclusion that Kennedy assassin Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone gunman in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

"Nothing points to a second gunman," said Philip Shenon, who wrote a 2013 book about the assassination. "I haven't seen any big blockbusters that rewrite the essential history of the assassination, but it is very early."

Kennedy was killed on a visit to Dallas, when his motorcade was finishing its parade route downtown and shots rang out from the Texas School Book Depository building. Police arrested the 24-year-old Oswald, a former Marine who had positioned himself from a sniper's perch on the sixth floor. Two days later Jack Ruby, a nightclub owner, fatally shot Oswald during a jail transfer broadcast live on television.

Historians hope for new details about the man who killed JFK

A year after the assassination, the Warren Commission, established by President Lyndon B. Johnson to investigate, concluded that Oswald acted alone and there was no evidence of a conspiracy. But critics of the commission still spun a web of alternative theories.

Historians are hoping for details fleshing out Oswald's activities before the assassination and what the CIA and FBI knew about him beforehand.

Shenon pointed Wednesday to previously released documents about a trip Oswald made to Mexico City at the end of September 1963. Records show Oswald intended to contact the Soviet Union's embassy there after living as a U.S. defector in the U.S.S.R. from October 1959 until June 1962.

Shenon said the U.S. government may have kept information about what it knew about Oswald before

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the assassination secret to hide what he described as officials' possible "incompetence and laziness."

"The CIA had Oswald under pretty aggressive surveillance while he was there and this was just several weeks before the assassination," Shenon said. "There's reason to believe he talked openly about killing Kennedy in Mexico City and that people overheard him say that."

Speculation about such details surrounding Kennedy's assassination has been intense over the decades, generating countless conspiracy theories about multiple shooters and involvement by the Soviet Union, the mafia and the CIA. The new release fueled rampant online speculation and sent people scurrying to read the documents and share online what they might mean.

Many documents already were public but information had been redacted

The latest release of documents followed an order by President Donald Trump, though most of the records were made public previously with redactions. Before Tuesday, researchers had estimated that 3,000 to 3,500 files were still unreleased, either wholly or partially. Last month, the FBI said it had discovered about 2,400 new records related to the assassination.

Jefferson Morley, vice president of the Mary Ferrell Foundation, a repository for files related to the assassination, said in a statement posted on the social platform X that much of the "rampant overclassification of trivial information has been eliminated" from the documents.

The timing of the release drew criticism from a Kennedy grandson, Jack Schlossberg. In a post on X, Schlossberg said the Trump administration did not notify family members before the records were made public.

"a total surprise, and not shocker !!" Schlossberg wrote.

Trump issued his executive order to release the files on Jan. 23.

A boon to historians of the Cold War

The latest release also is a boon to historians of the Cold War. Timothy Naftali, an adjunct professor at Columbia University who is writing a book about JFK's presidency, said scholars now appear to have more details about U.S. intelligence activities under Kennedy than under any other president.

For example, in October 1975, U.S. senators were investigating what the CIA knew about Oswald, and an October 1975 memo said they considered the agency "not forthcoming."

A version of that memo released in 2023 redacted the name of the CIA's security contact on Oswald in Mexico, as well as the identity of someone behind the "penetration of the Cuban embassy" there. The latest version shows that the security contact was the president of Mexico in 1975, Luis Echeverria Alvarez, who died in 2022, and that the Mexican government itself penetrated the Cuban embassy.

Also, Naftali said, before the latest release, the government had made public copies of Johnson's presidential "daily checklist" of highly sensitive foreign intelligence in the days after Kennedy's assassination, but with much of the material redacted. Now, he said, people can read what Johnson read.

"It's quite remarkable to be able to walk through that secret world," he said.

Some records provide small details about covert operations

Documents show that in December 1963, the CIA director's office was receiving messages from and replying to operatives in Cuba seeking to undermine the government under Fidel Castro. One, on Dec. 9, 1963, relayed a message to the director from Cuba: "TODAY RECD THE MAGNUM PISTOLS BUT NO BULLETS."

"You're getting both a bird's-eye view of U.S. foreign policy, and you're also getting a snail's eye view of covert action, right there on the ground," Naftali said.

In a previously released April 1975 memo, the CIA downplayed what it knew about Oswald's visit to Mexico City before the assassination. The memo said the CIA recorded three phone calls between Oswald and a guard at the Soviet embassy, but only in the last one did Oswald identify himself.

"We're now discovering how much more the CIA and the FBI knew before the assassination about Oswald," Shenon said. "And the question is, why didn't they act on the information in their own files?"

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Arizona executes a man who murdered his girlfriend's ex-husband

By JACQUES BILLEAUD and SEJAL GOVINDARAO Associated Press

FLORENCE, Ariz. (AP) — An Arizona man who kidnapped and murdered his girlfriend's ex-husband was executed Wednesday, the second of four prisoners scheduled to be put to death this week in the U.S.

Aaron Brian Gunches, 53, was lethally injected with pentobarbital at the Arizona State Prison Complex in the town of Florence, John Barcello, deputy director of Arizona's department of corrections, told news outlets. He was pronounced dead at 10:33 a.m.

Gunches fatally shot Ted Price in the desert outside the Phoenix suburb of Mesa in 2002. He pleaded guilty to first-degree murder in 2007.

Sitting up on a gurney, covered with what looked like a white onesie and tucked in with a sheet, Gunches looked straight ahead and had no final words before the execution, witnesses said.

According to Barcello, the prisoner took a few heavy breaths and let out a snoring-type sound after the lethal injection.

"By all accounts, the process went according to plan without any incident at all," Barcello said.

An execution scheduled, then delayed

Gunches' execution had originally been scheduled for April 2023, but was called off after Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs ordered a review of the state's death penalty procedures. Late last year, Hobbs fired the retired judge she had appointed to conduct the review, and the state's corrections department announced changes in the team that lethally injects death row prisoners.

The lethal injection was administered through IVs inserted into Gunches' arms, according to a handful of news media representatives who witnessed the execution. In the state's two previous executions, the IV had been inserted into the prisoner's femoral artery.

The media witnesses reported no visible problems with the execution. But Dale Baich, a former federal public defender who teaches death penalty law at Arizona State University and witnessed the execution, said he believed Gunches suffered from pulmonary edema, when fluid seeps into the lungs and causes people to drown in their own fluids.

"The eight deep breaths and chest heaving, the gurgling sounds, and Mr. Gunches trying to catch his breath, are all signs of pulmonary edema," Baich said. "Even though it may have looked peaceful, it was not."

The Associated Press left an email message with corrections officials seeking comment. Michael Kiefer, of the Arizona Mirror, said he did not see any signs of pulmonary edema, such as a shaking or jerking of Gunches' abdomen.

For his last meal, Gunches had a double western bacon cheeseburger, two sandwiches, french fries, onion rings and baklava for dessert.

Gunches is the second person executed this week in the U.S. Louisiana executed a man on Tuesday, and two more executions were scheduled in Florida and Oklahoma on Thursday. Arizona is the first state with a Democratic governor to execute someone since 2017, when Virginia did so under then-Gov. Terry McAuliffe.

The end of a long, painful process

"The family of Ted Price has been waiting for justice for more than two decades," Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes said at a news conference following Wednesday's execution. "They deserve closure."

Price's sister Karen Price described her brother as a kind and loving person who enjoyed watching the Phoenix Suns and Arizona Diamondbacks and riding his motorcycle. She said her family was devastated by Ted's death.

"I'd like to imagine we would be both enjoying our retirement and perhaps planning a trip together, rather than me coming here to witness the execution of a man that took his life," Price said Wednesday.

She added that "closure" doesn't capture the reality of the family's situation. "Although we've taken the final step in the legal process, the pain of losing Ted remains profound and cannot be conveyed in mere words. It is a relief that we no longer have to deal with lawyers, sift through documents, check prison

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records, or communicate with victims' advocates or reporters," she said.

Ted Price's daughter, Brittney Price, said in a statement distributed to the news media that the "pain of reliving the circumstances surrounding my father's death for over two decades has taken a significant toll on my family and me."

"Today marks the end of that painful chapter and I couldn't be more grateful," she said.

The crime

Authorities say Ted Price's ex-wife struck him in the face with a phone during an argument in late 2002 at her apartment, leaving him conscious but dazed. Karen Price said her brother had threatened to report his ex to child welfare authorities for doing drugs in front of their children.

Gunches arrived at the apartment later. He asked two other women who were there with his girlfriend to put Price in a car and drive him to a bus station. But when they realized they didn't have enough money for a bus ticket, they instead drove into the desert, where Gunches shot Price, authorities said.

Gunches was arrested in January 2003 after being pulled over by an Arizona Department of Public Safety trooper near the California state line. Gunches shot the trooper, who was saved by a bulletproof vest. Bullet casings from that shooting matched ammunition that had been found near Price's body, and Gunches was charged with first-degree murder and kidnapping in October 2003.

Gunches tried to move up the execution

Gunches, who represented himself even though he isn't a lawyer, asked the Arizona Supreme Court in 2022 to issue an execution warrant against him to give closure to Price's family. He later withdrew the request. The execution was scheduled anyway but later postponed amid the review ordered by Hobbs.

In late December, Gunches asked the state's highest court to skip legal formalities and schedule his execution as soon as possible, saying his death sentence was "long overdue." The court refused the request and later set his execution date for Wednesday. Gunches never addressed Price's family while in the execution chamber, and Price's sister said he showed no remorse. Still, Gunches did not try to avoid being put to death — a month earlier he told the state's clemency board that he was not seeking a reprieve.

When the board scheduled a meeting to confirm his wishes, he declined to participate, saying he delivered a similar message when waiving his chance at clemency in 2022.

"My position hasn't changed," Gunches wrote.

How will the universe end? A changing understanding of dark energy may provide a new answer

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Scientists are homing in on the nature of a mysterious force called dark energy, and nothing short of the fate of the universe hangs in the balance.

The force is enormous — it makes up nearly 70% of the universe. And it is powerful — it is pushing all the stars and galaxies away from each other at an ever faster rate.

And now scientists are getting a little closer to understanding how it behaves. The big question is whether this dark energy is a constant force, which scientists have long thought, or whether the force is weakening, a surprising wrinkle tentatively proposed last year.

Results presented at a meeting of the American Physical Society Wednesday bolster the case that the force is weakening, though scientists are not yet certain and they still haven't worked out what this means for the rest of their understanding of the universe.

The updated findings come from an international research collaboration that is creating a three-dimensional map to see how galaxies have spread and clustered over 11 billion years of the universe's history. Carefully tracking how galaxies move helps scientists learn about the forces that are moving them around.

Called the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument, the collaboration released its first analysis of 6 million galaxies and quasars last year and has now added more data, bringing the count to nearly 15 million. Their updated results, taken with other measurements — exploding stars, leftover light from the young universe and distortions in galaxy shape — support the idea presented last year that dark energy may be waning.

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"It's moving from a really surprising finding to almost a moment where we have to throw out how we've thought about cosmology and start over," said Bhuvnesh Jain, a cosmologist with the University of Pennsylvania who was not involved with the research.

It's not time to completely rule out the idea that dark energy is constant because the new results are still shy of the gold standard level of statistical proof physics requires. The collaboration aims to map around 50 million galaxies and quasars by the end of its survey in 2026. And other efforts around the globe have an eye on dark energy and aim to release their own data in the coming years, including the European Space Agency's Euclid mission and the Vera C. Rubin Observatory in Chile.

"We want to see several different collaborations having similar measurements" at that gold standard to be sure that dark energy is weakening, said cosmologist Kris Pardo with the University of Southern California who was not involved with the new research.

If dark energy is constant, scientists say our universe may continue to expand forever, growing ever colder, lonelier and still.

If dark energy ebbs with time, which now seems plausible, the universe could one day stop expanding and then eventually collapse on itself in what's called the Big Crunch. It might not seem like the cheeriest fate, but it offers some closure, said cosmologist and study collaborator Mustapha Ishak-Boushaki of the University of Texas at Dallas.

"Now, there is the possibility that everything comes to an end," he said. "Would we consider that a good or bad thing? I don't know."

Pentagon reviews plans to cut troops handling migrants at Guantanamo by as much as half

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Military officials are reviewing plans that would cut the number of U.S. troops deployed to the Guantanamo Bay naval base in Cuba to handle detained migrants by as much as half, because there are no detainees there now and the program has stumbled during legal challenges, The Associated Press has learned.

U.S. officials said the military's Southern Command was asked to give Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth a plan that would outline how many troops are actually needed and what additional space may be required if more detainees are sent there.

That plan, said officials, is expected to recommend that a number of the troops be sent home — and one official said the decision could chop the 900 troops there now in half.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because the decisions are not yet finalized. Southern Command is preparing options that would address the fact that there have been no migrants transferred to the base since early March, but the administration has warned that future "high-threat" detainees may be sent to the base.

U.S. authorities have transferred at least 290 detainees to Guantanamo since February. But on March 11, the 40 people still housed there were flown off the base to Louisiana.

The base is best known for housing foreigners associated with the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, but it has a separate facility used for decades to hold migrants intercepted trying to reach the U.S. by sea. That use had been expanded recently to include some of the migrants swept up in President Donald Trump's broader campaign to secure the southern border.

Trump has said he will send the worst criminal migrants to Guantanamo Bay, but civil rights attorneys say many detainees transferred there don't have a criminal record and that the administration has exceeded its authority in violation of U.S. immigration law.

A judge recently ruled against immigration and civil rights advocates who sued over the transfers, but it largely hinged on the fact that, at the current time, there were no migrant detainees being held there.

Meanwhile, the 900 troops at the base have little to do. There are roughly 500 Army soldiers, nearly 300 Marines and several dozen sailors and airmen deployed to the base for the detainee program.

Officials said the new Southern Command plan will likely send a significant number home, but they or others may be told to be prepared to deploy if needed. Currently, nearly 800 additional U.S.-based soldiers are already on prepare-to-deploy orders and could be sent to the base quickly if needed.

Civil rights attorneys sued the Trump administration this month to prevent it from transferring 10 migrants detained in the U.S. to Guantanamo Bay, filing statements from men held there who said they were mistreated in conditions that one of them called "a living hell."

The judge indicated a willingness to revisit the issue if and when the government sends more detainees to Guantanamo. He said he wouldn't set a timeline for how quickly the government has to tell him of future transfers.

U.S. authorities say they began transferring migrants to Guantanamo Bay with the first military transport flight out of Fort Bliss on Feb. 4. Initial flights transported Venezuelans — a prelude to the transfer of 177 detainees from Guantanamo Bay to Venezuela, with a brief stopover in Honduras.

What to know about a legal dispute over one Ohio school district's pronoun policy

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A federal appeals court in Cincinnati heard arguments Wednesday in a legal dispute that pits a suburban Ohio school district's policy on gender pronouns against the free speech rights of classmates who believe there are only two genders.

The lawsuit brought by Parents Defending Education, a national membership organization, against the Olentangy Local School District in 2023 has captured broad national attention, with a number of conservative policy groups, the American Civil Liberties Union and Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu rights organizations lining up against the policy and leading LGBTQ+ rights and schools groups lining up generally in defense of it. Ohio's solicitor general, Elliot Gaiser, participated in oral arguments on behalf of 22 U.S. states that have interests in the case.

A lower court rejected the group's arguments that the policies violated students' First Amendment and Fourteenth Amendment rights, and a three-judge panel of the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati affirmed that decision in July.

The full court reconsidered that decision during a rare en banc hearing lasting more than an hour on Wednesday. Here's what you need to know:

What are the policies involved?

The lawsuit takes issue with overlapping district policies that prohibit the use of gender-related language that other students might deem insulting, dehumanizing, unwanted or offensive and call for the use of peers' "preferred pronouns."

The district's electronic devices policy — which applies both on and off school time — prohibits transmitting "disruptive" material or material that could be seen as harassing or disparaging other students based on their gender identity or sexual orientation, among other categories.

A separate antidiscrimination policy prohibits students from engaging in "discriminatory language" during times when they're under the school's authority. That is defined as "verbal or written comments, jokes, and slurs that are derogatory towards an individual or group based on one or more of the following characteristics: race, color, national origin, sex (including sexual orientation and transgender identity), disability, age, religion, ancestry, or genetic information."

The district's code of conduct echoes many of the same themes a third time.

What is the position of the parents' group?

Parents Defending Education, founded in 2021 amid the culture wars over schools' teachings on race, diversity and sexuality, argues that the policies compel students and parents who belong to their group to "affirm an idea that gender is fluid" in contradiction of their religious beliefs.

"These students have views that the District disfavors," the group wrote in a court filing. "Specifically,

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they believe that people are either male or female, that biological sex is immutable, and that sex does not change based on someone's internal feelings. Accordingly, they 'd(o) not want to be forced to 'affirm' that a biologically female classmate is actually a male — or vice versa — or that a classmate is 'nonbinary' and neither male nor female."

The group argues that the policies violate the First Amendment's guarantees to free speech and similar protections contained in the 14th Amendment, particularly since students are subject to punishment for violating the policies. But it also notes that the district documented no disruptive activity before imposing the policy some 10 years ago.

"Common sense says that Olentangy's policies aren't helping students by compelling their peers to parrot words they don't really believe," PDE's attorney Cam Norris told judges Wednesday. "They are harming them by teaching them that different world views should be silenced and banned, not understood and rebutted."

Gaiser contended that the policies have taken a side in a political debate. "Schools cannot silence dissenters by labeling those dissenters bullies," he said.

What is the position of the school district?

Olentangy Local Schools, a sprawling 24,000-student district north of Columbus, maintains the policies proactively protect students against abuse and harassment and asserts that Parents Defending Education represents "Christian, cisgender" students "seeking dispensation under the free speech clause of the First Amendment to harass other students based on their gender identity."

In its supporting brief, the Ohio School Boards Association said districts across Ohio have identical or very similar anti-bullying and -discrimination policies in place as they "walk a proverbial tightrope" to both protect students' First Amendment rights and maintain a conducive learning environment.

During Wednesday's arguments, attorney Jaime Santos told judges that Olentangy's policies don't impede students' open discussions of their views on issues of gender identity.

"The only thing they can't do is repeatedly make comments about these issues that are directed to a particular student, including by repeatedly and intentionally misgendering a classmate," she said. "Just because a student should be able to say that the body positivity movement is harmful and it encourages obesity, doesn't mean a school has to allow that student to call a classmate fat."

Alternatives to avoid that are provided to students, including using a peer's first name, using gender-neutral pronouns or simply not referring to them at all. That played in the district's favor when the three-judge panel upheld its side last summer.

The court did not say when it would rule.

A judge has moved a jailed Palestinian activist's deportation fight to New Jersey

By SUSAN HAIGH and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A Columbia University student activist detained by the U.S. government over his participation in pro-Palestinian demonstrations can challenge the legality of his detention, but the case should be heard in New Jersey, rather than in New York or Louisiana, a federal judge ruled Wednesday.

Mahmoud Khalil, 30, a legal U.S. resident with no criminal record, was detained by federal immigration agents on March 8. He was held overnight at an immigration detention center in New Jersey before being moved to an immigration facility in Jena, Louisiana.

Judge Jesse Furman in Manhattan called the legal challenge an "exceptional case" in need of careful legal review to determine whether the government "violated the law or exercised its otherwise lawful authority in an arbitrary and discriminatory manner."

Furman said New Jersey was the appropriate venue because Khalil was detained there when his lawyers sued the government.

Federal authorities argued to move the case to Louisiana, saying Khalil was there because of a lack of

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available detention center beds in the metropolitan New York region and because of a bedbug infestation at a lockup in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Khalil's lawyers said the transfer was a "retaliatory" action separating Khalil from his lawyers and an effort to find a jurisdiction where judges may be more favorable to the Republican administration's unusual legal claims.

The Justice Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Government lawyers had said that if the case wasn't sent to Louisiana, New Jersey was also a proper venue.

In a statement released by the American Civil Liberties Union, Khalil's wife, Dr. Noor Abdalla, called Furman's order a "first step."

"His unlawful and unjust detention cannot stand. We will not stop fighting until he is home with me," said Abdalla, a dentist and U.S. citizen who is pregnant with their first child.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has cited as grounds for Khalil's deportation a rarely-used statute giving him sweeping power to deport those who pose "potentially serious adverse foreign policy consequences for the United States."

The White House has accused Khalil of "siding with terrorists," but has yet to provide support for the claim. President Donald Trump has described Khalil's case as the "first of many to come."

Khalil, an international affairs graduate student, had represented student activists in negotiations with Columbia University over protests of the war in Gaza. The Trump administration is acting quickly to make an example of Columbia as it demands stronger action against allegations of anti-Jewish bias on college campuses.

Defense Department webpage on Jackie Robinson goes down, then returns amid DEI purge

By The Associated Press undefined

A Department of Defense webpage describing baseball and civil rights icon Jackie Robinson's military service was restored Wednesday after it was missing earlier in the day.

That development came after pages honoring a Black Medal of Honor winner and Japanese American service members were taken down — the Pentagon said that was a mistake — amid the department's campaign to strip out content singling out the contributions by women and minority groups, which the Trump administration considers "DEI."

The page on Robinson includes biographical information about his Army service during World War II, which occurred prior to his famously breaking baseball's color barrier in 1947 with the Brooklyn Dodgers. When that page's address was entered Wednesday, a message showed up saying it "might have been moved, renamed, or may be temporarily unavailable." The letters "dei" were also automatically added to the URL.

"We were surprised to learn that a page on the Department of Defense's website featuring Jackie Robinson among sports heroes who served in the military was taken down," said David Robinson, son of Jackie Robinson and a board member of the Jackie Robinson Foundation. "We take great pride in Jackie Robinson's service to our country as a soldier and a sports hero, an icon whose courage, talent, strength of character and dedication contributed greatly to leveling the playing field not only in professional sports but throughout society.

"He worked tirelessly on behalf of equal opportunities, in education, business, civic engagement, and within the justice system. A recipient of both the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Gold Medal, he of course is an American hero."

Later Wednesday, the page reappeared on the department's site, and the Pentagon released a statement.

"We are pleased by the rapid compliance across the Department with the directive removing DEI content from all platforms," press secretary John Ulyot said. "In the rare cases that content is removed — either deliberately or by mistake — that is out of the clearly outlined scope of the directive, we instruct the components and they correct the content so it recognizes our heroes for their dedicated service alongside

their fellow Americans, period.”

The page includes an anecdote about Robinson refusing to move to the back of an Army bus in 1944, prompting the driver to call military police. Robinson was court martialed but acquitted.

Thousands of pages honoring contributions by women and minority groups have been taken down in efforts to delete material promoting diversity, equity and inclusion, commonly referred to as DEI. Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell defended the practice at a briefing Monday.

A Defense Department webpage honoring Black Medal of Honor recipient Army Maj. Gen. Charles Calvin Rogers was taken down last week but was back online by Monday night.

“Everyone at the Defense Department loves Jackie Robinson, as well as the Navajo Code Talkers, the Tuskegee airmen, the Marines at Iwo Jima and so many others — we salute them for their strong and in many cases heroic service to our country, full stop,” Ulyot said. “We do not view or highlight them through the prism of immutable characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, or sex. We do so only by recognizing their patriotism and dedication to the warfighting mission like (every) other American who has worn the uniform.”

Ulyot’s statement referred to DEI as “Discriminatory Equity Ideology.”

“It is a form of woke cultural Marxism that Divides the force, Erodes unit cohesion and Interferes with the services’ core warfighting mission,” he said.

Legal showdown as Justice Department resists judge’s demand for more details on deportation flights

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department is resisting a federal judge’s demand for more information about flights that took deportees to El Salvador, arguing on Wednesday that the court should end its “continued intrusions” into the authority of the executive branch.

It’s the latest development in a showdown between the Trump administration and the judge who temporarily blocked deportations under an 18th century wartime declaration. President Donald Trump has called for the judge’s impeachment as the Republican escalates his conflict with a judiciary after a series of court setbacks over his executive actions.

U.S. District Judge James E. Boasberg, who was nominated to the federal bench by Democratic President Barack Obama, had ordered the Trump administration to answer several questions under seal, where the information would not be publicly exposed. There were questions about the planes’ takeoff and landing times, and the number of people deported under Trump’s proclamation.

The judge has questioned whether the Trump administration ignored his court order on Saturday to turn around planes with deportees headed for the Central American country, which had agreed to house them in a notorious prison.

In court papers filed hours before the deadline to respond Wednesday, the Justice Department said the judge’s questions are “grave encroachments on core aspects of absolute and unreviewable Executive Branch authority relating to national security, foreign relations and foreign policy.” The department said it was considering invoking the “state secrets privilege” to allow the government to withhold some of the information sought by the court.

“The underlying premise of these orders ... is that the Judicial Branch is superior to the Executive Branch, particularly on non-legal matters involving foreign affairs and national security. The Government disagrees,” Justice Department lawyers wrote. “The two branches are co-equal, and the Court’s continued intrusions into the prerogatives of the Executive Branch, especially on a non-legal and factually irrelevant matter, should end.”

Boasberg later issued an order giving the administration until Thursday at 12 p.m. EDT to either provide the requested information or make a claim that it must be withheld because it would harm “state secrets.” He took issue with the government’s characterization of his request as a “unnecessary judicial fishing” expedition, saying it was necessary to “determine if the government deliberately flouted” his order to turn

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around the flights, "and if so, what the consequences should be."

He also questioned how providing the information to the court could "jeopardize state secrets," given that administration officials have already publicly released many details about the flights.

Trump invoked the Alien Enemies Act, which has only been used three times before in U.S. history, all during congressionally declared wars, and claimed there was an invasion by the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua.

Boasberg ordered the administration not to deport, through that 1798 law, anyone in its custody.

Told there were planes in the air headed to El Salvador, Boasberg said Saturday evening that he and the government needed to move fast. "You shall inform your clients of this immediately, and that any plane containing these folks that is going to take off or is in the air needs to be returned to the United States," Boasberg told the government's lawyer.

Hours later, El Salvador's president, Nayib Bukele, said the deportees had arrived in his country. "Oopsie... too late" he said in a social media post, above an article referencing Boasberg's original order.

The administration contends that a judge lacks the authority to tell the president whether he can determine the country is being invaded under the act, or how to defend it.

Boasberg's new order for answers came after the administration provided limited information in response to a sharp questioning from the judge at a Monday hearing.

The administration said in a filing Tuesday that two planes took off before Boasberg's order went into effect, and a third plane that took off after the ruling came down did not include anyone deported under the law. The administration declined, however, to provide estimates about the number of people subject to the proclamation.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters during a Monday briefing that about 261 people were deported, including 137 under the law.

DOGE official takes a leadership role at USAID, an agency Musk's team has helped dismantle

By MATT BROWN and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A senior official at Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency is taking a leadership role at the U.S. Agency for International Development, according to an email obtained by The Associated Press, giving DOGE a top job at an agency that it has helped to dismantle.

Jeremy Lewin, who has played a central role in DOGE's government-cutting efforts at USAID and other federal agencies, becomes at least the second DOGE lieutenant to be appointed to a top job at an agency during the Trump administration, further formalizing the work of Musk's associates in the federal government.

The integral role that DOGE teams have played in the administration's push to dramatically reduce the size of the government has been divisive among the public and lawmakers. Musk has faced heavy blowback from some and support from others for his chainsaw-wielding approach to laying off workers and slashing programs.

Pete Marocco, a Trump administration political appointee who was serving as deputy head of USAID, disclosed the change in an email Tuesday to State Department staff. It comes after Marocco and DOGE oversaw the gutting of 83% of USAID contracts, shifting the remaining programs under the State Department.

Marocco said in his email that he will serve as the State Department's director of foreign assistance. State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce on Wednesday confirmed his appointment.

She told reporters it was "an indispensable role in aligning all U.S. government foreign assistance with the president's priorities."

Marocco wrote that Secretary of State Marco Rubio will "effective immediately" designate Lewin as deputy administrator for policy and programs at USAID and as chief operating officer.

The move comes as multiple proposals circulate among State Department and USAID officials on what foreign assistance programs to save and how to carry them out as the Trump administration works to

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scrap the aid and development agency.

Marocco's email was sent the same day a federal judge ruled that Musk and DOGE likely lacked constitutional authority to help the Trump administration shut down State Department and USAID foreign assistance, fire staffers and terminate humanitarian and development contracts.

In a ruling Tuesday, U.S. District Judge Theodore Chuang in Maryland indefinitely blocked DOGE from making further cuts to the agency.

The ruling came in a lawsuit filed by USAID employees and contractors, who argued that Musk and DOGE are wielding power that the Constitution reserves only for those who win elections or are confirmed by the Senate. Their lawyers said the ruling "effectively halts or reverses" many of the steps taken to dismantle the agency.

The lawsuit was aimed specifically at DOGE, and the ruling suggested that similar moves from designated officials at USAID would not necessarily run afoul of the Constitution in the same way.

In February, the Treasury Department designated another worker associated with DOGE, Tom Krause, to perform the functions of an assistant secretary at the agency. That came after Democratic lawmakers and others expressed alarm at DOGE's access to Treasury's payment systems.

In this week's actions, Rubio also designated Kenneth Jackson as administrator for management and resources who will also serve as the agency's chief financial officer, according to Marocco's email. President Donald Trump also recently appointed Jackson as acting president of the U.S. Institute for Peace, a government think tank meant to promote conflict resolution.

Trump administration suspends \$175 million in federal funding for Penn over transgender swimmer

By ZEKE MILLER and ANNIE MA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration has suspended approximately \$175 million in federal funding for the University of Pennsylvania over a transgender swimmer who last competed for the school in 2022, the White House said Wednesday.

President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Feb. 5 that was intended to ban transgender athletes from competing in girls and women's sports. The next day, the Education Department announced an investigation into Penn's swimming program.

But the Ivy League school's federal money was suspended in a separate review of discretionary federal money going to universities, the White House said. The money that was paused came from the Defense Department and the Department of Health and Human Services.

A Penn spokesperson said the school had not received any notification or details of the action.

"It is important to note, however, that Penn has always followed NCAA and Ivy League policies regarding student participation on athletic teams," spokesperson Ron Ozio said. "We have been in the past, and remain today, in full compliance with the regulations that apply to not only Penn, but all of our NCAA and Ivy League peer institutions."

The investigation opened by the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights at Penn focuses on Lia Thomas, who swam on the school's women's team and was the first openly transgender athlete to win a Division I title in 2022. Thomas graduated from Penn the same year.

At the time, the NCAA used a sport-by-sport approach to allowing transgender athletes to participate, deferring to an individual sport's national governing organization, international federation or prior established International Olympic Committee criteria. Thomas competed under those guidelines, which allowed female transgender swimmers who had completed one year of hormone replacement therapy to compete.

Trump's executive order on transgender athletes allows federal agencies to withhold funding if an entity does not follow the administration's interpretation of Title IX, which outlaws sex-based discrimination in schools and colleges. The order interprets "sex" as the gender someone was assigned at birth.

The NCAA changed its policy the day after the order was signed, ending its sport-by-sport practice in favor of a blanket policy that only allows athletes assigned female at birth to participate in women's sports.

The Education Department also opened reviews of San Jose State University volleyball and the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association.

Violent attacks on Tesla dealerships spike as Musk takes prominent role in Trump White House

By JONATHAN J. COOPER and GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Cybertrucks set ablaze. Bullets and Molotov cocktails aimed at Tesla showrooms.

Attacks on property carrying the logo of Elon Musk's electric-car company are cropping up across the U.S. and overseas. While no injuries have been reported, Tesla showrooms, vehicle lots, charging stations and privately owned cars have been targeted.

There's been a clear uptick since President Donald Trump took office and empowered Musk to oversee a new Department of Government Efficiency that's slashing government spending. Experts on domestic extremism say it's impossible to know yet if the spate of incidents will balloon into a long-term pattern.

In Trump's first term, his properties in New York, Washington and elsewhere became a natural place for protest. In the early days of his second term, Tesla is filling that role.

"Tesla is an easy target," said Randy Blazak, a sociologist who studies political violence. "They're rolling down our streets. They have dealerships in our neighborhoods."

Musk critics have organized dozens of peaceful demonstrations at Tesla dealerships and factories across North America and Europe. Some Tesla owners, including a U.S. senator who feuded with Musk, have vowed to sell their vehicles.

But the attacks are keeping law enforcement busy.

Prosecutors in Colorado charged a woman last month in connection with attacks on Tesla dealerships, including Molotov cocktails thrown at vehicles and the words "Nazi cars" spray-painted on a building.

And federal agents in South Carolina last week arrested a man they say set fire to Tesla charging stations near Charleston. An agent from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives wrote in an affidavit that authorities found writings critical of the government and DOGE in his bedroom and wallet.

"The statement made mention of sending a message based on these beliefs," the agent wrote.

Some of the most prominent incidents have been reported in left-leaning cities in the Pacific Northwest, like Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, where anti-Trump and anti-Musk sentiment runs high.

An Oregon man faces charges after allegedly throwing several Molotov cocktails at a Tesla store in Salem, then returning another day and shooting out windows. In the Portland suburb of Tigard, more than a dozen bullets were fired at a Tesla showroom last week, damaging vehicles and windows, the second time in a week that the store was targeted.

Four Cybertrucks were set on fire in a Tesla lot in Seattle earlier this month. On Friday, witnesses reported a man poured gasoline on an unoccupied Tesla Model S and started a fire on a Seattle street.

In Las Vegas, several Tesla vehicles were set ablaze early Tuesday outside a Tesla service center where the word "resist" was also painted in red across the building's front doors. Authorities said at least one person threw Molotov cocktails — crude bombs filled with gasoline or another flammable liquid — and fired several rounds from a weapon into the vehicles.

"Was this terrorism? Was it something else? It certainly has some of the hallmarks that we might think — the writing on the wall, potential political agenda, an act of violence," Spencer Evans, the special agent in charge of the Las Vegas FBI office, said at a news conference. "None of those factors are lost on us."

Tesla becomes a target for the left

Tesla was once the darling of the left. Helped to viability by a \$465 million federal loan during the Obama administration, the company popularized electric vehicles and proved, despite their early reputation, that they didn't have to be small, stodgy, underpowered and limited in range.

More recently, though, Musk has allied himself with the right. He bought the social network Twitter, renamed it X and erased restrictions that had infuriated conservatives. He spent an estimated \$250 million to boost Trump's 2024 Republican campaign, becoming by far his biggest benefactor.

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Musk continues to run Tesla — as well as X and the rocket manufacturer SpaceX — while also serving as Trump's adviser.

Tesla stock doubled in value in the weeks after Trump's election but has since shed all those gains.

Trump gave a boost to the company when he turned the White House driveway into an electric-vehicle showroom. He promoted the vehicles and said he would purchase an \$80,000 Model S, eschewing his fierce past criticism of electric vehicles.

Tesla didn't respond to a request for comment. Musk briefly addressed the vandalism Monday during an appearance on Sen. Ted Cruz's podcast, saying "at least some of it is organized and paid for" by "left-wing organizations in America, funded by left-wing billionaires, essentially."

"This level of violence is insane and deeply wrong," Musk wrote Tuesday on X, sharing a video of burning Teslas in Las Vegas. "Tesla just makes electric cars and has done nothing to deserve these evil attacks."

The progressive group Indivisible, which published a guide for supporters to organize "Musk Or Us" protests around the country, said in a statement that all of its guidance is publicly available and "it explicitly encourages peaceful protest and condemns any acts of violence or vandalism."

Some Tesla owners have resorted to cheeky bumper stickers to distance themselves from their vehicle's new stigma and perhaps deter would-be vandals. They say things like "I bought this before we knew Elon was crazy" or "I just wanted an electric car. Sorry guys."

Prices for used Cybertrucks, Tesla's most distinctive product, have dropped nearly 8% since Trump took office, according to CarGurus, which aggregates used-car vehicle listings. The market as a whole remained steady over the period.

The White House vows a crackdown

The White House has thrown its weight behind Musk, the highest-profile member of Trump's administration and a key donor to committees promoting Trump's political interests. Trump has said Tesla vandalism amounts to "domestic terror," and Trump has threatened retribution, warning that those who target the company are "going to go through hell."

Attorney General Pam Bondi said she'd opened an investigation "to see how is this being funded, who is behind this."

"If you're going to touch a Tesla, go to a dealership, do anything, you better watch out because we're coming after you," Bondi said Friday on Fox Business Network. In a statement Tuesday, she vowed to "continue investigations that impose severe consequences," including for "those operating behind the scenes to coordinate and fund these crimes."

Colin Clarke, a senior research fellow at the Soufan Center, said left-wing political violence tends to target property rather than people. He views the rise of neo-Nazi groups as a bigger security threat at this point.

"It's not the type of act that I would prioritize," Clarke said. "Not right now compared to all the other threats that are out there."

Theresa Ramsdell is the president of the Tesla Owners of Washington state, a club for Tesla enthusiasts, and she and her husband own three of them.

"Hate on Elon and Trump all you want — that's fine and dandy, it's your choice," she said. "It doesn't justify ruining somebody's property, vandalizing it, destroying it, setting it on fire. There's other ways to get your voice heard that's more effective."

Someone recently slapped a "no Elon" sticker on the tailgate of her Cybertruck, but she said she doesn't intend to stop driving her Teslas. Other club members have taken a similar view, she said.

"I love my car. It's the safest car," Ramsdell said. "I'm not going to let somebody else judge me for the car I drive."

Who else has been stuck in space? A short history of long spaceflights

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams aren't the first to run late in space, and their 9 ½-month mission falls short of any endurance record.

But never before has a quick trip morphed into such a long haul.

The pair launched last June on a test flight of Boeing's new Starliner crew capsule, figuring to be gone eight days. By the time they splashed down with SpaceX on Tuesday, they had spent 286 days off the planet — 36 times longer than anticipated.

"If you look at it mathematically, by percentage of the original planned mission, this is the largest percentage extension," NASA's space operations chief Ken Bowersox.

A former astronaut, Bowersox saw his own space station mission abruptly prolonged. He was up there with Don Pettit, who's currently aboard the orbiting lab, when shuttle Columbia broke apart during reentry in 2003, killing all seven on board and grounding the shuttle fleet for more than two years.

"The reasons were terrible that we stayed longer on our mission," said Bowersox, whose planned four-month stay clocked in at more than five months.

Here's a look at some others who found themselves stuck in space — by choice or not — along with some cool spaceflight statistics.

Longest U.S. spaceflight

NASA astronaut Frank Rubio saw his mission doubled in length — from 6 months to 12 months — after his assigned Russian Soyuz capsule took a micrometeorite hit while docked to the space station and leaked all its coolant. A replacement capsule was launched to bring Rubio and his two Russian crewmates home in 2023. His 371-day spaceflight is the longest by an American. NASA's first year-in-space astronaut was Scott Kelly; he logged 340 days at the space station in 2015 and 2016. His identical twin brother, U.S. Sen. Mark Kelly of Arizona, also served as a NASA astronaut on short shuttle flights.

World's longest spaceflight

Russian cosmonaut Valery Polyakov spent 14 ½ months aboard the Mir space station in the mid-1990s. He volunteered for it. As a physician, he wanted to observe the changes in the human body and mind after a prolonged period of weightlessness. His 437-day spaceflight remains a world record. Polyakov died in 2022 at age 80.

Longest spaceflight by a woman

NASA's Christina Koch holds the title with her 328-day space station mission in 2019 and 2020. During that same flight, she performed the first all-female spacewalk alongside Jessica Meir. Koch is currently assigned to NASA's first Artemis crew, which will fly around the moon and back as early as next year.

Most experience in space

Russian Oleg Kononenko last year became the first person to crack 1,000 days in space over the course of a career. By the time he returned from the space station last fall, he'd logged an incredible 1,111 days aloft over five spaceflights — a combined total of more than three years. Former NASA astronaut Peggy Whitson is America's most experienced space flier with 675 days over three long station stints and one short private trip for Axiom Space. She's due to lead another Axiom crew to the space station later this spring. Because of her delayed homecoming, Williams moved into the No. 2 spot with 608 days in space over three missions.

Female spacewalking records

Williams became the most experienced female spacewalker in the world, thanks to her prolonged mission. She ventured out twice earlier this year for station repairs and maintenance, bringing her spacewalking career total to 62 hours. Over three space station missions, she performed nine spacewalks, one less than Whitson. But Whitson's spacewalks were shorter, totaling 60 hours.

Overall spacewalking records

Retired Russian cosmonaut Anatoly Solovyev holds the overall record with 16 spacewalks totaling around

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80 hours. NASA's spacewalking champ is retired astronaut Michael Lopez-Alegria with 10 spacewalks for a total of 67 hours.

Number of space travelers

A NASA tally shows 721 people have flown in space, including tourists on short hops and military X-15 pilots. Of that total, 102 are women. The first person in space was the Soviet Union's Yuri Gagarin on April 12, 1961. The first American, Mercury astronaut Alan Shepard, followed on May 5, 1961. The first woman in space was the Soviet Union's Valentina Tereshkova in 1963. Sally Ride became the first American woman in space in 1983. Of those four, only Tereshkova is still alive.

Number of current NASA astronauts

NASA counts 47 on its active astronaut list. Twenty are women. That doesn't include several astronauts who have moved over to management roles at the space agency.

Vatican says Pope Francis no longer needs mechanical help to breathe as his health improves

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis' condition continued to improve Wednesday and he hasn't needed to use the mechanical ventilation mask to help him breathe, the Vatican said in signalling further progress in his recovery from double pneumonia.

The 88-year-old pontiff is also reducing his reliance on high-flow supplemental oxygen during the day, the Vatican said in a medical bulletin. His pneumonia infection, while not completely eliminated, is under control, the Holy See press office said.

Francis concelebrated Mass on Wednesday, which is an important feast day for the Catholic Church and is the anniversary of his installation as pope 12 years ago.

Francis has been at Rome's Gemelli hospital since Feb. 14 for a complex lung infection that turned into pneumonia in both lungs. He has been receiving respiratory and physical therapy to help strengthen his lungs.

For two nights in a row, he hasn't needed to use the noninvasive mechanical ventilation mask, which pumps oxygen into his lungs, and doctors said its use had been "suspended." Francis was put on the ventilation mask after he suffered a spate of respiratory crises in late February and early March during which he was unable to expel the mucus and fluid that had accumulated in his lungs.

Suspending use of the mask means Francis' lungs are working harder and better on their own.

The Vatican is also again reducing its medical updates as Francis slowly continues his recovery, with the next one not expected before Monday.

Italian President Sergio Mattarella commemorated the 12th anniversary of Francis' installation as pope by sending him a letter praising his initiatives as pope. Mattarella offered best wishes for the continuation of his pontificate and "all the more heartfelt wishes for a speedy recovery."

Can AI help you win your March Madness bracket? One disruptor bets \$1 million on 'yes' (and Houston)

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

DENVER (AP) — Perhaps the surest sign that artificial intelligence really is taking over the world will come the day it wins your favorite March Madness bracket pool.

The day could be coming soon.

In an experiment that a) was bound to happen, b) might actually make us all look smarter and c) should probably also scare the daylights out of everyone, a successful CEO-turned-disruptor is running a \$1 million March Madness bracket challenge that pits his AI programmers' picks against those belonging to one of the world's best-known sports gamblers.

"We're not a crystal ball," says Alan Levy, whose platform, 4C Predictions, is running this challenge. "But it's going to start to get very, very creepy. In 2025, we're making a million-dollar bet with a professional

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sports better, and the reason we feel confident to do that is because data, we feel, will beat humans.”

Levy isn't the only one leveraging AI to help people succeed in America's favorite pick 'em pool — one that's become even more lucrative over the past seven years, after a Supreme Court ruling led to the spread of legalized sports betting to 38 states.

ChatGPT, a chatbot developed by OpenAI, is hawking its services to help bracket fillers more easily find stats and identify trends. Not surprisingly, it makes no promises.

“With upsets, momentum shifts, and basketball's inherent unpredictability, consistently creating a perfect bracket may still come down to luck,” said Leah Anise, a spokesperson for OpenAI.

Also making no promises, but trying his hardest, is Sheldon Jacobson, the computer science professor at Illinois who has been trying to build a better bracket through science for years; he might have been AI before AI.

“Nobody predicts the weather,” he explained in an interview back in 2018. “They forecast it using chances and odds.”

\$1 million on the line in AI vs. Sean Perry showdown

Levy's angle is he's willing to wager \$1 million that the AI bracket his company produces can beat that of professional gambler Sean Perry.

Among Perry's claims to fame was his refusal to accept a four-way split in a pot worth \$9.3 million in an NFL survivor pool two years ago. The next week, his pick, the Broncos, lost to New England and he ended up with nothing.

But Perry has wagered and won millions over his career, using heaps of analytics, data and insider information to try to find an edge that, for decades, has been proprietary to casinos and legal sports books, giving them an advantage that allows them to build all those massive hotels.

Levy says his ultimate goal is bring that advantage to the average Joe — either the weekly football bettor who doesn't have access to reams of data, or the March Madness bracket filler who goes by feel or what team's mascot he likes best.

“The massive thesis is that the average person are playing games that they can never win, they're trading stocks where they can never win, they're trading crypto where they can never win,” Levy said. “4C gives people the chance to empower themselves. It's a great equalizer. It's going to level the playing field for everyone.”

But can AI predict the completely unexpected?

It's one thing to find an edge, quite another to take out every element of chance — every halfcourt game-winner, every 4-point-a-game scorer who goes off for 25, every questionable call by a ref, every St. Peter's, Yale, FAU or UMBC that rises up and wins for reasons nobody quite understands.

For those who fear AI is leading the world to bad places, Levy reassures us that when it comes to sports, at least, the human element is always the final decider — and humans can do funny and unexpected things.

That's one of many reasons that, according to the NCAA, there's a 1 in 120.2 billion chance of a fan with good knowledge of college basketball going 63 for 63 in picking the games. It's one of many reasons that almost everyone has a story about their 8-year-old niece walking away with the pot because she was the only one who picked George Mason, or North Carolina State, or VCU, to make the Final Four.

“You can't take the element of fun and luck out of it,” Levy said. “Having said that, as AI develops, it's going to get creepier and creepier and the predictions are going to get more and more accurate, and it's all around data sets.”

Levy suggests AI is no three-headed monster, but rather, an advanced version of “Moneyball” — the classic book-turned-movie that followed Oakland A's GM Billy Beane's groundbreaking quest to leverage data to build a winning team.

Now, it's all about putting all that data on steroids, trying to minimize the impact of luck and glass slippers, and building a winning bracket.

“We've got to understand that this technology is meant to augment us,” Levy said. “It's meant to make our lives better. So, let's encourage people to use it, and even if it's creepy, at least it's creepy on our side.”

The AI's side in this one: Houston to win it all. Perry, the gambler, is going with Duke.

A list of the Social Security offices across the US expected to close this year

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Dozens of Social Security Administration offices across the country are slated to close this year due to actions taken by Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency as part of the Trump administration's unprecedented effort to shrink the size of government.

DOGE has published a list of nearly 800 federal real estate leases that it is seeking to cancel. The Associated Press has obtained an internal planning document from the General Services Administration, which manages federal real estate, which shows when nearly two-thirds of those cancellations are expected to go into effect.

The offices are closing despite a new requirement that tighter identity-proofing measures be put in place to prevent fraud and abuse. These steps will require millions of recipients and applicants to visit agency field offices rather than interact with agency employees over the phone.

The AP also obtained more information about each lease on DOGE's list through other publicly available datasets, including their addresses, the dates the leases had started and were originally expected to expire, and the landlords who own the properties.

Of the 47 Social Security Administration offices listed for closure, only some had anticipated dates for when those lease cancellations would take effect. Here's a state-by-state breakdown of the 26 offices listed as expected to close this year, along with the termination date for each lease, according to the General Services data:

Alabama

634 Broad St., Gadsden: Sept. 30

Arkansas

965 Holiday Drive, Forrest City: April 25

4083 Jefferson Ave., Texarkana: May 25

Colorado

825 N. Crest Drive, Grand Junction: June 21

Florida

4740 Dairy Road, Melbourne: May 16

Georgia

1338 Broadway, Columbus: Sept. 30

Kentucky

825 High St., Hazard: April 24

Louisiana

178 Civic Center Drive, Houma: April 25

Mississippi

4717 26th St., Meridian: June 1

604 Yalobusha St., Greenwood: June 1

2383 Sunset Drive, Grenada: May 1

Montana

3701 American Way, Missoula: June 21

North Carolina

730 Roanoke Ave., Roanoke Rapids: Aug. 1

2123 Lakeside Drive, Franklin: June 23

2805 Charles Blvd., Greenville: June 24

1865 W. City Drive, Elizabeth City: June 24

North Dakota

1414 20th Ave. SW, Minot: June 21

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Nevada

701 Bridger Ave., Las Vegas: June 1

New York

75 S. Broadway, White Plains: May 31

332 Main St., Poughkeepsie: July 31

Ohio

30 N. Diamond St., Mansfield: May 17

Oklahoma

1610 SW Lee Blvd., Lawton: April 25

Texas

1122 N. University Drive, Nacogdoches: May 7

8208 NE Zac Lentz Parkway, May 25

West Virginia

1103 George Kostas Drive, Logan: April 30

Wyoming

79 Winston Drive, Rock Springs: June 20

Quirky livestream that lets viewers help fish is a hit with millions

By ALEKSANDAR FURTULA Associated Press

UTRECHT, Netherlands (AP) — The central Dutch city of Utrecht has installed a “fish doorbell” on a river lock that lets viewers of an online livestream alert authorities to fish being held up as they make their springtime migration to shallow spawning grounds.

The idea is simple: An underwater camera at Utrecht’s Weerdsluis lock sends live footage to a website. When somebody watching the site sees a fish, they can click a button that sends a screenshot to organizers. When they see enough fish, they alert a water worker who opens the lock to let the fish swim through.

Now in its fifth year, the site has attracted millions of viewers from around the world with its quirky mix of slow TV and ecological activism.

Much of the time, the screen is just a murky green with occasional bubbles, but sometimes a fish swims past. As the water warms up, more fish show up.

Without the help, native freshwater fish like bream, pike and bass can become backed up behind the lock and form easy prey for predators in the spring, when the lock is rarely opened for passing boats.

The bell is the brainchild of ecologist and concept developer Mark van Heukelum. He’s been happily surprised at the response, with millions of people from around the world tuning in over the years.

“I guess the combination of a good cause, a beautiful story and just a simple idea generates all this attention,” he said.

Anna Nijs, an ecologist with Utrecht municipality, was also amazed at the popularity of the concept around the world.

“We get a lot of fan mail from people who think it’s slow TV and they find it relaxing,” said Nijs. Besides, “they appreciate that they can actually do something to help.”

JuJu Watkins, Hannah Hidalgo headline women’s AP All-America team; Bueckers, Betts, Booker join them

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

JuJu Watkins of Southern California and Hannah Hidalgo of Notre Dame have joined an elite group, making The Associated Press All-America team in their first two seasons playing college basketball.

The duo on Wednesday became only the third and fourth players to earn first team All-America honors in their freshman and sophomore years, joining Oklahoma’s Courtney Paris and UConn’s Maya Moore.

Watkins was a unanimous choice from the 31-member national media panel that chooses the AP Top

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25 each week. Hidalgo received all but two first place votes.

UConn's Paige Bueckers earned All-America honors for the third time, becoming just the 12th player to do that. UCLA's Lauren Betts and Texas' Madison Booker rounded out the first team. Bueckers and Betts were also unanimous choices.

Watkins led USC to its the Big Ten regular season title, the school's first conference championship since 1994, and its highest ranking in the poll. She averaged 24.6 points, 6.9 rebounds and 3.5 assists to lead the Trojans.

"She set her own bar so high last year and then she managed to surpass it," USC coach Lindsay Gottlieb said. "She has the ability to lock in and get to a zone, raise her own level and galvanize those around her. Above all else, she's a winner."

Hidalgo has been dominant on both ends of the floor for the Fighting Irish. She earned both ACC Player of the Year and Defensive Player of the Year honors. She averaged 24.2 points, 5.1 rebounds and 3.7 steals. She's fourth in the country in steals a year after leading in that category.

"What a well-deserved honor for Hannah. To be one of just four players to ever make the AP All-America first team in both of their first seasons is a major accomplishment," Notre Dame coach Niele Ivey said. "I'm so proud of her and I can't wait to see what she does in March!"

Bueckers had another strong season for the Huskies. She averaged 19.0 points, 4.9 assists and 4.5 rebounds. She guided UConn to another undefeated Big East season and is the expected No. 1 pick in the WNBA draft next month.

"She makes it look like it is never hard and never a struggle to get her points and get the shots off she wants," UConn coach Geno Auriemma said.

Betts averaged 19.6 points, 9.7 rebounds and shot 63.4% from the field. She also was fifth in the country, averaging 2.93 blocks a game. She's the first player in UCLA history to earn first-team All-America honors.

"Lauren Betts has been dominant from start to finish on both ends of the floor," UCLA coach Cori Close said. "She continues to grow her versatility and her skill set and this is the deserved fruit of her labor. This is first an individual accomplishment for Lauren, but it is also a team accomplishment. So proud of it all!"

Booker, who was a second-team All-America last spring, averaged 16.2 points, 6.6 rebounds and 2.8 assists for the Longhorns, who tied for the SEC regular season title with South Carolina.

"To be preseason (All-American) and then to go live it, getting everybody's best shot, and you're the first person talked about in the scouting report. That's the most difficult thing to do. She did it," Texas coach Vic Schaefer said.

Watkins, Bueckers, Booker and Hidalgo were all on the preseason AP All-America team. They were joined by USC's Kiki Iriafen.

Second team

The AP second team was headlined by LSU's Aneesah Morrow, who led the nation in rebounding averaging 13.6 a game. She was joined by UConn's Sarah Strong, Florida State's Ta'niya Latson, Notre Dame's Olivia Miles and Kentucky's Georgia Amooore.

Third team

The AP third team was Iriafen, TCU's Hailey Van Lith, who was the Big 12 player of the year, Vanderbilt's Mikayla Blakes, LSU's Flau'Jae Johnson and Iowa State's Audi Crooks.

Honorable mention

Raegan Beers of Oklahoma, Sedona Prince of TCU and Joyce Edwards of South Carolina were the leading vote-getters among players who didn't make the three All-America teams. Players earned honorable-mention status if they appeared on one of the ballots.

European telescope studying the dark universe unveils new images of distant galaxies

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A European space telescope launched to explore the dark universe has released a trove of new data on distant galaxies.

The images and other information released Wednesday by the European Space Agency's Euclid observatory includes a preview of three cosmic areas that the mission will spy in finer detail, mapping the shapes and locations of galaxies billions of light years away. A light year is nearly 6 trillion miles.

The observatory, which blasted off in 2023 from Florida, is creating a cosmic atlas to gain clues about how our ever-expanding universe works and how mysterious forces called dark energy and dark matter may play a role. The elusive duo make up most of our universe, but researchers don't know exactly what they are.

Over six years of observing, the mission hopes to capture glamour shots of over 1.5 billion galaxies.

Democrats clashed over their shutdown strategy. But the party's identity crisis runs far deeper

By MATT BROWN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats have been sniping at each other in public since Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer helped pass a Republican spending bill that prevented a government shutdown. But the divisions in their party hardly began there.

For months, Democrats have been struggling to coalesce behind a political strategy as they confront President Donald Trump and the Republican majorities in the House and the Senate. Behind closed doors at party retreats, think tank meetings and strategy sessions, Democrats have been having tense and searching conversations about ideology, policy and messaging as they urgently try to address what went wrong in last year's election.

"I think we're in a place internally where we're having these family discussions and figuring out what the path forward is," said Rep. Maxwell Frost, a Florida Democrat and, at age 28, the youngest member of Congress.

Democrats grapple with the scale of their challenges

The Democratic Party's political woes were front and center last week as House Democrats gathered a short drive away from Washington for their annual political retreat.

Frost said Democrats were alarmed by exit polls from November's presidential election, which found Trump won voters without a college degree and those who made less than \$100,000 in annual income. The same data showed Trump also made inroads with communities of color and young voters, traditionally areas of strength for Democrats.

Recent polls underscore the challenge.

Democrats are facing stark dissatisfaction among Americans, including among the party's base. Only about 3 in 10 U.S. adults had a favorable view of the Democratic Party, versus 54% who held an unfavorable view in a March CNN poll. And about 6 in 10 Democrats said they preferred to see the party work to stop the Republican agenda, compared with about 4 in 10 who preferred Democrats work with Republicans. That represents a stark shift from the outset of Trump's first term in 2017, when about three-quarters of Democrats said they preferred working with Republicans over stopping the GOP agenda.

"The Democratic brand absolutely needs to change," said Rep. Seth Moulton, a Massachusetts Democrat. "We will not win with the status quo."

Moulton said that Democrats must "be very public about" their reckoning.

"I think we need a high-level message from leadership that, 'Hey, we got the message of the last election. We heard you voters. You voted us out across the board, and we're going to change,'" Moulton said.

Democrats agree on some points. They uniformly detest Trump, broadly believe that they have failed

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to connect with the working-class voters they aim to champion and generally agree on the direction that economic and social policies should trend.

But party leaders are far from united about how to best confront Trump in his second term and about what policies should be emphasized to voters as they do it.

The 2024 election offered little clarity in the progressive vs. moderate debate

Part of the difficulty is that both the Democratic Party's progressive and moderate wings feel as though the early days of the Trump administration have vindicated at times their differing approaches.

"We are locked out of accessing the levers and buttons of power, of reaching government. Our next milestone, and it is a critical milestone to achieve, is winning the majority in 2026 that is of paramount importance," said Rep. Brad Schneider of Illinois, chair of the New Democrat Coalition, a bloc of House Democrats that advocates for "pragmatic, effective policies."

For Schneider, all of the party's efforts should be focused on winning back the majority, rather than winning the day's news cycle.

"I've said this to my colleagues, and I'll keep repeating it: We can win moments (that) go viral. We can win arguments here and there. We can even win a day. But if what we're doing isn't putting us on the path to win the election next year, we haven't gotten to where we need to be, and we're not doing what we need to do," Schneider said.

More progressive lawmakers make a different case.

"So I think that this is a real opportunity for the Democratic Party to transform — the way we need it to — to be a party of working people," said Rep. Greg Casar of Texas, chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

"I think that we should stop looking at this so much as a left-right fight within our caucus — so many voters don't even think about it that way — and think of it more as a bottom-up fight where we can unite the vast majority of the country against the small number of people that are screwing them over in their government and their workplaces," Casar said.

Democrats are already looking ahead to next year's midterm elections

With Republicans controlling the House by only a handful of seats, Democrats say they are in a strong position to retake the majority — and they aren't waiting until 2026 to get their campaigns off the ground. The pace, intensity and unpredictability of Trump's governance have alarmed, frightened and excited voters across the country. In Trump's blitz, Democrats see an opportunity for pushback.

This week, with the House on recess, the Democratic National Committee launched a "People's Town Hall" series of national events meant to connect with voters in swing states and districts. The effort follows weeks of town halls hosted by national liberal figures, including Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Gov. Tim Walz of Minnesota.

The Congressional Black Caucus, meanwhile, plans next month to launch a bus tour of lawmakers to Black communities in congressional districts across the country in a bid to engage voters disenchanted with the party and highlight potentially unpopular decisions by Trump.

And members of Congress have supported the efforts of aligned legal groups like Democracy Forward, which has spearheaded the legal pushback to Trump's agenda in the judicial system, while liberal organizing groups like Indivisible are coordinating nationwide protests throughout April against the Trump administration.

Rep. Suzan DelBene of Washington, chair of the House Democrats' campaign arm, said House Democrats will focus on "kitchen table issues" in making their pitch to voters. She singled out lowering costs and public safety as key topics.

"That's why we outperformed the top of the ticket pretty much across the country," DelBene said, referring to last year's election results. "So we'll continue to do that."

But even as Democrats try to hone their message, some Democrats are stressing the urgency of taking a stand against Trump now, long before votes are cast next November. Rep. Ayanna Pressley, a progressive from Massachusetts, said the party must respond first to "this unprecedented power grab" and "lawless

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actions" from the Trump administration before debating whether to drop parts of its agenda.

"Who are we? The midterms are around the corner," Pressley said, "and our most compelling argument will not just be what we stopped but what it is that we seek to advance."

"What I will say is that I think now is not the time to be moderating our aspirations," she said.

Today in History: March 20, sarin gas attack in Tokyo subway

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, March 20, the 79th day of 2025. There are 286 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 20, 1995, in Tokyo, packages containing the deadly chemical sarin were opened on five separate subway trains in a domestic terror attack by members of the Aum Shinrikyo cult, causing 14 deaths and injuring more than 1,000.

Also on this date:

In 1815, Napoleon Bonaparte returned to Paris after escaping his exile on Elba, beginning his "Hundred Days" rule.

In 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe's influential novel about slavery, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," was first published in book form after being serialized in the abolitionist newspaper The National Era; it would become the best-selling novel of the 19th century.

In 1854, the Republican Party of the United States was founded by opponents of slavery at a schoolhouse in Ripon, Wisconsin.

In 1976, kidnapped newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst was convicted of armed robbery for her part in a San Francisco bank holdup carried out by the Symbionese Liberation Army. (Hearst was sentenced to seven years in prison; she was released after serving 22 months and was pardoned in 2001 by President Bill Clinton.)

In 1987, azidothymidine (AZT) became the first medication approved by the Food and Drug Administration to treat HIV/AIDS.

In 1996, a jury in Los Angeles convicted Erik and Lyle Menendez of first-degree murder in the shotgun slayings of their wealthy parents. (They were sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.)

In 2014, President Barack Obama ordered economic sanctions against nearly two dozen members of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inner circle and a major bank that provided them support, raising the stakes in an East-West showdown over Ukraine.

In 2018, in a phone call to Vladimir Putin, President Donald Trump offered congratulations on Putin's re-election victory; a senior official said Trump had been warned in briefing materials that he should not congratulate Putin.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Hal Linden is 94. Basketball Hall of Fame coach Pat Riley is 80. Hockey Hall of Famer Bobby Orr is 77. Guitarist Jimmie Vaughan is 74. Film director Spike Lee is 68. Actor Holly Hunter is 67. Model-entrepreneur Kathy Ireland is 62. Actor David Thewlis is 62. Actor Michael Rapaport is 55. MMA commentator and former champion Daniel Cormier is 46. Actor-singer Christy Carlson Romano is 41. Tennis player Sloane Stephens is 32.