

Groton Daily Independent

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Friday, March 21

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

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

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.

Monday, March 24

Senior Menu: Creamed chicken, capri blend, fruit, biscuit.

School Breakfast: Stuffed bages.

School Lunch: Corn dogs, baked beans.

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Groton Senior Citizens Meet, Noon Potluck., Groton Community Center

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

United Methodist: PEO Meeting, 7 p.m.

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1440

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

Education Department Order

President Donald Trump signed an executive order yesterday seeking to minimize the US Education Department and give more authority to state governments. Critical programs, including Pell Grants, student loans, and funding for low-income students, will still be administered but through other agencies. The Education Department cannot be shuttered without approval from Congress, which established the department in 1979.

The order follows mass layoffs that have slashed the department's workforce by nearly half. The department oversees education policy, supports funding for state and local education systems, and promotes educational equity. It also provides aid to higher education institutions and students, managing \$1.6T in federal student loans. In fiscal year 2024, the department had a \$268B budget, accounting for 4% of total federal spending. The Office of Federal Student Aid was its highest-spending division at \$161B.

Separately, a judge temporarily blocked the Department of Government Efficiency from accessing Social Security Administration systems that hold millions of Americans' sensitive data.

Oxygen at Cosmic Dawn

Astronomers detected oxygen in a galaxy confirmed to be the farthest known from Earth, challenging current theories around galactic formation in the early universe. Light from the galaxy, known as JADES-GS-z14-0, took 13.4 billion years to reach Earth and reveals the so-called cosmic dawn roughly 300 million years after the Big Bang.

The galaxy was first discovered by the James Webb Space Telescope in January 2024. The research, published in two separate studies yesterday, used data from an interferometer telescope array located in Chile's high, dry Atacama desert to zoom in on the region. The results revealed 10 times the amount of heavier elements in the galaxy than previously expected.

Current theories about galaxy development argue young galaxies and their stars are full of light elements like hydrogen and helium and that heavier elements like oxygen would take millions of years longer to develop. The studies add to growing evidence such theories need to be revised.

Boston Celtics Sale

The Boston Celtics sold for a record-breaking \$6.1B yesterday to a group led by private equity executive Bill Chisholm. The sale is the largest in North American sports franchise history, surpassing the NFL's Washington Commanders' \$6.05B sale in 2023. The deal reflects a trend of rising sports franchise valuations and team owners cashing out for major returns.

Chisholm, a native of Massachusetts, is the cofounder and managing director of Symphony Technology Group, a private equity firm investing in tech. The billionaire purchased the team from the Grousbeck family, which bought the Boston Celtics in 2002 for \$360M. The new ownership includes private equity firm Sixth Street, current shareholder and businessman Rob Hale, and real estate president Bruce Beal Jr. The deal awaits approval from the NBA's Board of Governors.

Since their formation in the 1940s, the Boston Celtics have won 18 championships—the most in NBA history—and currently hold the second-best record in the Eastern Conference.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NCAA women's basketball tournament kicks off in earnest today; see full preview.

Mariah Carey wins lawsuit against songwriter who alleged copyright infringement on Carey's "All I Want for Christmas is You".

"Coco" sequel in the works at Disney with a 2029 release date.

Kirsty Coventry, two-time swimming gold medalist and current Zimbabwe Minister of Sport, elected as the first woman and first African president of the International Olympic Committee.

Science & Technology

AI startup Anthropic adds web search in preview to Claude 3.7 Sonnet for paid US users, enabling the chatbot to automatically search for information across the internet.

Babies form episodic memories in hippocampus, study finds, challenging long-held belief that infantile amnesia is due to inability to store memories; finding suggests issue may instead be an inability to access those memories.

Scientists successfully replace defective gene in mice to alleviate symptoms of Dravet syndrome—a rare form of epilepsy—without adverse side effects or death.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.2%, Dow -0.0%, Nasdaq -0.3%).

Fintech startup Klarna inks deal with DoorDash to offer US customers deferred and installment food delivery payments; comes ahead of initial public offering.

Tesla recalls 46,000 Cybertrucks manufactured from November 2023 to February 2025 due to an exterior trim panel that can detach from the vehicle.

US charges three people accused of using Molotov cocktails to set fire to Tesla cars, dealerships, or charging stations.

US existing home sales rose 4.2% month over month in February, beating estimates of 3.2%; median home price of \$398,400 is up 3.8% from a year ago and is the highest median home price for any February.

Politics & World Affairs

At least 85 dead from expanded Israeli strikes in Gaza, while Hamas fires rockets back at Tel Aviv, with no casualties reported; Israeli military says Palestinians will no longer be allowed to enter northern Gaza from the south.

European Union delays implementing first retaliatory tariffs on US goods, including a 50% levy on whiskey, to mid-April for more time to negotiate.

Delta plane that crashed and overturned upon landing at Toronto's international airport last month descended too quickly, preliminary report finds.

Groton Area Tigers Fall to Sioux Falls Christian in State A Tournament Opener

SIoux FALLS – The Groton Area Tigers faced a tough challenge in their opening game of the State A Basketball Tournament, falling to the Sioux Falls Christian Knights 66-41 on Thursday. Despite a hard-fought effort, the Tigers struggled against the Knights' efficient shooting and strong defensive play.

Sioux Falls Christian came out firing, opening the game with a 7-0 run. Groton's first basket came from Keegen Tracy off a steal, cutting the deficit to 7-2 with 4:34 left in the first quarter. However, the Knights maintained control, leading 16-7 at the end of the quarter. Shooting struggles hampered the Tigers early on, as they made just 3-of-15 shots (20%), while Sioux Falls Christian hit 7-of-12 (58%).



Karson Zak gets the dunk after stealing the ball early in the fourth quarter. This basket made it a 51-27 lead for Sioux Falls Christian with 6:38 left in the game. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Ryder Johnson drives the baseline. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

In the second quarter, Groton showed signs of life, improving their shooting to 43% (3-of-7). A six-point run brought the Tigers within 11, trailing 28-17, but turnovers proved costly as Sioux Falls Christian capitalized on their opportunities. The Knights led 30-17 at halftime, highlighted by a pair of three-pointers and dunks from Griffen Goodbary and Brant Wassenaar.

Sioux Falls Christian broke the game open in the third quarter with a dominant 12-0 run, pushing their lead to 47-23. The Knights' three-point shooting (3-of-5 in the quarter) helped extend their advantage to 47-25 entering the final period. Groton, meanwhile, struggled offensively, shooting just 25% (3-of-12).

The highlight of the fourth quarter came when Karson Zak provided a spark for Groton with a steal and a dunk, answering an earlier slam by Brant Wassenaar. Ryder Johnson later hit Groton's only three-pointer of the game with five minutes remaining, but the Knights had already secured their victory. Both teams emptied their benches in the closing minutes, and Sioux Falls Christian closed

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out the game with a 66-41 win.

Stat Recap:

- Groton Area Scoring: Karson Zak (13), Ryder Johnson (13), Keegen Tracy (8), Turner Thompson (4), Gage Sippel (3).

- Sioux Falls Christian Scoring: Brant Wassenaar (17), Britton Mulder (12), Griffen Goodbary (11 points, 10 rebounds), Carson Nickles (9), Cole Snyder (7), Jude Vandonkersgoed (4), Cooper Goodbary (2), Ryan Dieleman (2).

- Shooting Percentages: Groton – 29% on two-pointers (14-of-49), 9% from three (1-of-11); Sioux Falls Christian – 57% on two-pointers (28-of-49), 39% from three (7-of-18).

- Rebounds: Both teams grabbed 29 total rebounds; Groton had 13 offensive and 16 defensive, while Sioux Falls Christian had 5 offensive and 24 defensive.

- Other Key Stats: Groton had 13 turnovers to Sioux Falls Christian's 10. The Knights blocked eight shots, including five from Griffen Goodbary. Sioux Falls Christian also recorded eight steals, while Groton had five.



Senior Teylor Diegel gets ready to pass the ball as he is defended by Jude Vandonkersgoed.

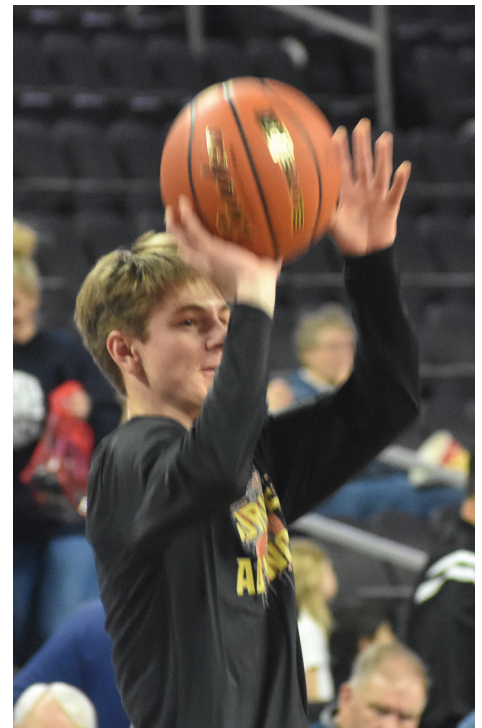
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Senior Turner Thompson finds an opening and drives to the basket. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

With the loss, Groton Area falls to 17-6 on the season and will face West Central at noon on Friday in the consolation bracket. Sioux Falls Christian, now 22-1, advances in the tournament as they look to continue their dominant run.

- Story compiled by ChatGPT



Senior Blake Pauli shoots the ball during warmups. (Photo by

Paul Kosel)

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Neon was the color of the day for the GHS Fans at the State A Tournament. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Everyone is at attention for the National Anthem. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Becker Bosma tries for an under hand shot. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



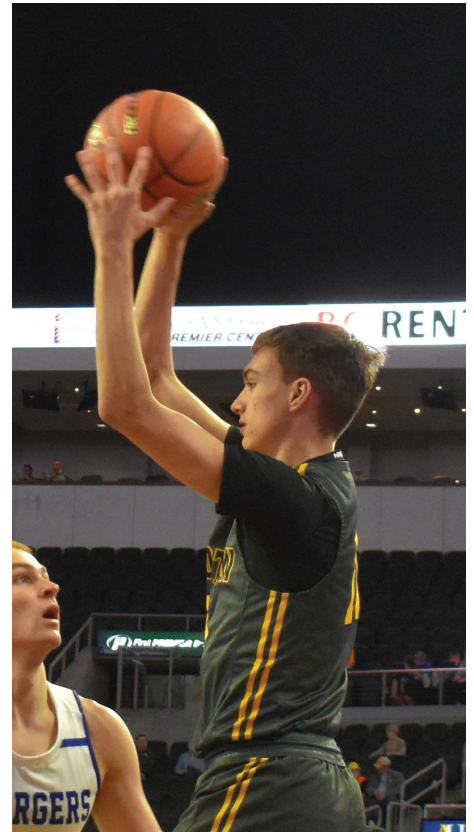
Ryder Johnson makes this under hand shot with 6:37 left in the second quarter to make it a 20-9 game. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Easton Weber tries this shot under the basket. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Karson Zak puts up this shot over Cole Snyder. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Jayden Schwan passes the ball. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Gage Sippel makes this basket with 5:57 left in the third quarter to make it 33-21 in favor of the Knights. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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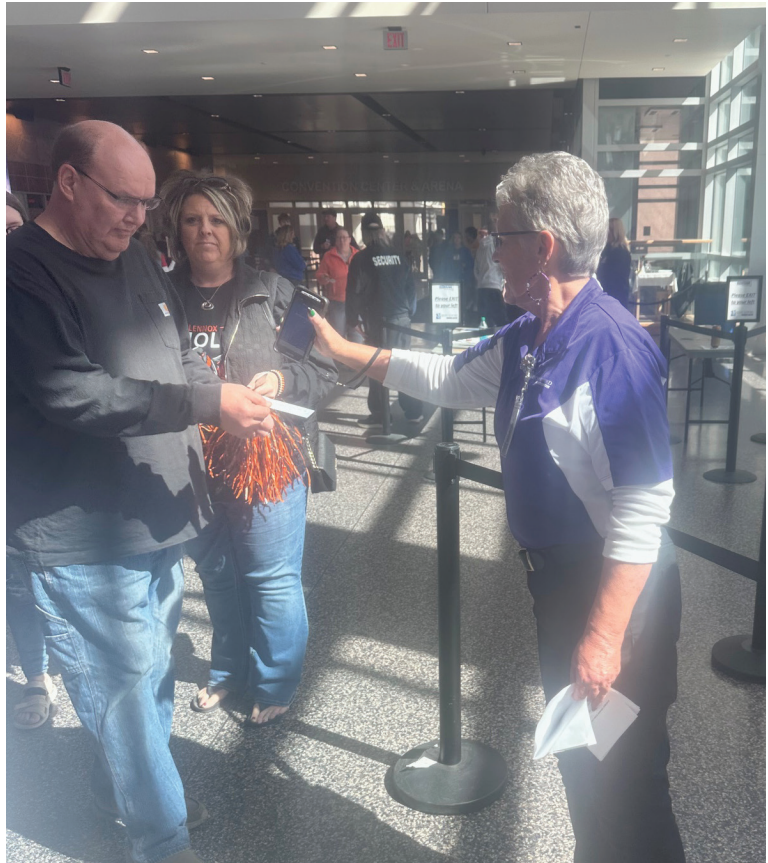
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Keegen Tracy makes this shot with 5:48 left in the second quarter to make it a 25-11 game. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



A screen is set by Turner Thompson as Becker Bosma gets ready to hand off the ball to Keegen Tracy. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Susan Foster, former elementary principal at Groton Area, is now working at the Denny-Sanford Premier Center. She said after retiring from her last principal job, she needed something to do. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Groton Area coaches are in sync as they arrive on the floor. They are Head Coach Brian Dolan and assistant coaches Ryan Tracy and Jordan Carson. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



State A Tournament Coverage Sponsored by

Avantara - Groton
Bary Keith at Harr Motors
BaseKamp Lodge
BK Custom T's 'n More
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James Valley Telecommunications
John Sieh Agency
Ken's Food Fair
KR Body Shop of Andover
Krueger Brothers
Lori's Pharmacy
MJ's Sinclair
ML Real Estate of Bristol
Northeast Chiropractic Clinic
Olive Grove Golf Course
Poet
Rix Farms / R&M Farms
Ryan Likness Agency
The Meat House of Andover
Weismantel Insurance Agency
of Columbia

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Official Box Score Groton Area vs Sioux Falls Christian Game Totals -- Final Statistics March 20, 2025 at Sioux Falls, SD



Groton Area 41

Record: 17-6

No.	Player	S	Pts	FG	3FG	FT	OR	DR	TR	PF	A	TO	Blk	Stl	Min	+/-
01	TRACY, KEEGAN		8	4-11	0-1	0-0	1	4	5	1	3	2	0	1	30	-23
04	JOHNSON, RYDER		13	5-12	1-4	2-3	1	2	3	1	2	2	0	2	29	-22
05	BOSMA, BECKER		0	0-5	0-1	0-0	4	2	6	0	0	3	0	1	20	-13
22	ZAK, KARSON		13	3-11	0-2	7-7	0	1	1	2	0	4	0	1	28	-29
30	SIPPEL, GAGE		3	1-2	0-0	1-2	4	2	6	1	0	0	0	0	22	-14
03	PAULI, BLAKE	*	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
10	WEBER, EASTON		0	0-3	0-2	0-0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	6	-4
11	SCHWAN, JAYDEN	*	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	5	-4
14	KROLL, ETHAN	*	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
24	WARRINGTON, LOGAN	*	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
32	THOMPSON, TURNER		4	1-5	0-1	2-4	2	2	4	0	1	0	0	0	13	-10
55	DIEGEL, TEYLOR	*	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1
TOTALS			41	14-49	1-11	12-16	13	16	29	6	7	13	0	5	160	

Shooting By Period

Period	FG	FG%	3FG	3FG%	FT	FT%
Game	14-49	28.6%	1-11	09.1%	12-16	75.0%

Deadball Rebounds: 2,0

Last FG: 4th-2:24

Largest lead: By at

Technical Fouls: None.

Sioux Falls Christian 66

Record: 22-1

No.	Player	S	Pts	FG	3FG	FT	OR	DR	TR	PF	A	TO	Blk	Stl	Min	+/-
00	GOODBARY, COOPER		2	1-8	0-3	0-0	2	4	6	4	1	1	1	2	24	25
03	SNYDER, COLE		7	3-4	1-1	0-0	0	4	4	2	5	1	0	2	18	15
22	GOODBARY, GRIFFEN		11	5-7	0-1	1-2	1	9	10	1	2	3	5	1	22	14
23	MULDER, BRITTON		12	4-8	4-7	0-0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	2	19	14
35	WASSENAAR, BRANT		17	8-11	0-2	1-3	0	1	1	2	1	3	0	0	22	19
02	WASSENAAR, BENNETT		2	1-2	0-0	0-0	1	1	2	2	1	2	0	0	11	11
04	VANDONKERSGOED, JUDE		4	2-2	0-0	0-0	0	1	1	0	3	0	0	0	13	11
05	HUMPAL, JACOB	*	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
10	DIELEMAN, RYAN	*	2	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	4	1
11	STRANDE, COOPER	*	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	4	1
12	VANDERLEEST, LEVI		0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
24	NICKLES, CARSON		9	3-4	2-3	1-2	1	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	15	9
34	HOFFER, MITCHELL	*	0	0-1	0-1	0-0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
42	VANLEEUEWEN, LUKE	*	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	-1
TOTALS			66	28-49	7-18	3-7	5	24	29	16	16	10	8	8	160	

Shooting By Period

Period	FG	FG%	3FG	3FG%	FT	FT%
Game	28-49	57.1%	7-18	38.9%	3-7	42.9%

Deadball Rebounds: 4,0

Last FG: 4th-1:21

Largest lead: By at

Technical Fouls: None.

Game Notes:

Officials: , ,

Start Time: 12:00:00

Postseason Game;Neutral Court;

Score	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	TOT
GRO	7	10	8	16	41
SFC	16	14	17	19	66

GRO led for 0:0. SFC led for 0:0.

Game was tied for 0:0.

Times tied: 0 Lead Changes: 0

Points	GRO	SFC
In the Paint	26	40
Off Turns	12	19
2nd Chance	5	4
Fast Break	7	22
Bench	4	17
Per Poss	0.745 20/55	1.158 30/57

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2025 SDHSAA State Boys Basketball Thursday Recap

SDPB | By Nate Wek

The 2025 SDHSAA state boys basketball tournaments began on Thursday, March 20, from Rapid City, Sioux Falls, and Aberdeen.

Here are the quarterfinal results from all three tournaments, and the schedule for Friday.

Class B Quarterfinals

Castlewood 64 Lyman 38

Castlewood topped Lyman 64-38 in the quarterfinals with four players hitting double digits in scoring. Luke Baumberger led the Warriors with 15-points and Jamiso Keszler had 13-points. Bryon Laue had a double-double with twelve points and eleven rebounds, and then Kamden Keszler scored ten for Castlewood. Lyman was led by MJ Diehm, who finished with twelve points and three steals.

Wessington Springs 74 Wall 52

Wessington Springs moved past Wall 74-52 on Thursday in the quarterfinal round. The Spartans were led by Colby Flowers, who scored 24-points and grabbed 16 rebounds. Karter Mebius contributed with 20-points and Ryder Michalek added 19-points for Wessington Springs as well. Wall was led offensively by Emmet Dinger, who scored 19-points.

St. Mary's 66 Aberdeen Christian 45

St. Mary's defeated Aberdeen Christian on Thursday night 66-45 in the quarterfinals. Trevon Beckman scored 21-points in the win. He also had six rebounds and five assists. Maverick LeBrun also tallied 18-points and Trimmier Hanson contributed with 15-points for the Cardinals. Aberdeen Christian was led offensively by Brooks Jett, who scored 17-points and nabbed eleven rebounds – a double-double performance.

Viborg-Hurley 72 Freeman 44

Viborg-Hurley defeated Freeman 72-44 in Thursday's quarterfinal round. Owen Niederbaumer and Brady Schroedermeier combined for 41-points in the contest for the Cougars. As a team, Viborg-Hurley shot 47% from the field. The Flyers were led by David Waltner, who contributed with 15-points and a couple steals in the loss.

Class A Quarterfinals

Sioux Falls Christian 66 Groton Area 41

Sioux Falls Christian rolled past Groton Area 66-41 in the quarterfinal round. The Chargers were led by Brant Wassenaar, who finished with 17-points. Griffen Goodbary had a double-double in the contest with eleven points and ten rebounds. Britton Mulder also scored 12-points for Sioux Falls Christian. Groton Area's top scorers were Ryder Johnson and Karson Zak, who both contributed 13-points for the Tigers.

Lennox 51 West Central 43

Lennox defeated West Central 51-43 in the quarterfinal round. The Orioles were led by Tate Gerdes and Teegan Musser who combined for 23-points. Seven Lennox players scored points in the contest. For the Trojans, Connor Mebius and Will Kuhl each led the scoring with 12-points each.

Hamlin 82 Hill City 43

Hamlin stormed past Hill City 82-43 on Thursday night in the quarterfinal round. The Chargers shot an impressive 62% from the field. Easton Neuendorf, Evan Stormo, Jackson Wadsworth, Dawson Noem, and Bodee Stevenson all recorded double digits in scoring. The top scorer was Noem, who finished with 18-points. Hill City was led by Zane Messick and Devin Buehler. The duo combined for 33-points.

Rapid City Christian 76 Clark/Willow Lake 53

Rapid City Christian defeated Clark/Willow Lake 76-53 in the quarterfinals. The Comets shot 56% in the game. Simon Kieffer was the top scorer in the win with 20-points. Julius Frog and Benson Kieffer each scored 14-points as well. For the Cyclones, Sullivan Felberg led the team with 16-points and nine rebounds.

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Class AA Quarterfinals

Sioux Falls Lincoln 55 Spearfish 33

Sioux Falls Lincoln advances to the semifinal round following a 55-33 win over Spearfish on Thursday. Sam DeGroot led the Patriots with 15-points with Sam Ericsson following close behind with 13-points. Brody Schafer also notched eleven points for Lincoln and contributed eight assists as well. Spearfish was led by Cooper Gibbs, who scored eight points and grabbed eight rebounds.

Mitchell 50 Huron 41

Mitchell defeated Huron on Thursday afternoon 50-41 to advance to the semifinals. Gavin Hinker scored 18-points in the win for the Kernels. Markus Talley also scored 16-points, had nine rebounds, and four steals for Mitchell too. Blake Ellwein was the top scorer for Huron. He finished with 16-points in the loss.

Brandon Valley 55 Sioux Falls Jefferson 41

Brandon Valley advances to the semifinal round with a 54-41 win over Sioux Falls Jefferson in the quarterfinals. Landon Dulaney, Aiden Zerr, and Grant Hennen each scored ten-points for the Lynx. Dulaney also had nine rebounds and two steals in the win. The top scorer for the Cavaliers was Kuek Kuek, who finished with 12-points in the loss.

Harrisburg 48 O'Gorman 45

Harrisburg defeated O'Gorman in the nightcap quarterfinal game in Rapid City, 48-45. Stellen Larson and Aiden Costain both led the Tigers with ten points. Costain also grabbed eleven rebounds to get the double-double. The Knights were led by Austin Terveen offensively. He scored 15-points in the loss.

Class B Consolation Semifinals

Lyman vs Wall – 12 pm CT
Aberdeen Christian vs Freeman – 1:45 pm CT

Semifinals

Castlewood vs Wessington Springs – 6 pm CT
St. Mary's vs Viborg-Hurley – 7:45 pm CT

Class A Consolation Semifinals

Groton Area vs West Central – 12 pm CT
Hill City vs Clark/Willow Lake – 1:45 pm CT

Semifinals

Sioux Falls Christian vs Lennox – 6 pm CT
Hamlin vs Rapid City Christian – 7:45 pm CT

Class AA Consolation Semifinals

Spearfish vs Huron – 12 pm MT
Sioux Falls Jefferson vs O'Gorman – 1:45 pm MT

Semifinals

Sioux Falls Lincoln vs Mitchell – 6 pm MT
Brandon Valley vs Harrisburg – 7:45 pm MT

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Queen of Hearts

The jackpot was \$19,992 on Thursday for the Queen of Hearts. Ticket sales for the week was \$1,390. The name of Tiffany Unzen was drawn and she picked card number seven which was the three of hearts. She won the consolation prize of \$139.

Johnson, Riley Introduce Bill to Lower Egg Prices

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Representatives Dusty Johnson (R-S.D.), Josh Riley (D-NY), Pat Harrigan (R-NC), and Kristen McDonald Rivet (D-MI) introduced the Lowering Egg Prices Act. The bill would help lower the cost of eggs for consumers, provide relief to poultry farmers, and cut through bureaucratic red tape.

"Eggs are an important staple for American families and businesses," said Johnson. "While we search for solutions to stop the spread of the avian flu, we must take steps to bolster our egg supply and lower prices. Reversing this Obama-era regulation would make hundreds of millions of eggs available in the market, easing the crisis and the burden felt by consumers. We need more yolks for folks."

"Families across Upstate New York are struggling to make ends meet because the grocery bills are too high," said Riley. "The Lowering Egg Prices Act is a common-sense, bipartisan bill to take unnecessary regulations off the books, put hundreds of millions of eggs on the market, and lower your grocery bill."

"The FDA's rule is a textbook example of government overreach making life more expensive for hard-working Americans," said Harrigan. "For 15 years, this unnecessary regulation has forced businesses to throw away 400 million perfectly good eggs every single year. That's over 6 billion eggs wasted—eggs that should have gone to breakfast tables, school lunches, and food banks. There is no public health benefit here, just pure bureaucratic nonsense that's driving up costs. This bill stops the waste, lowers prices, and restores common sense."

"The consistently rising cost of groceries continues to make things exceptionally hard for families in Michigan, and we need to do something about it. One solution we're putting forward is to get more eggs into the supply chain, which will bring down the prices you see at your grocery store," said McDonald Rivet. "We have to use every tool in the bag to put more money back in the pockets of working Michiganders."

Background:

Federal regulations from the Obama Administration require farmers to refrigerate eggs immediately after they are laid. But that rule does not distinguish between table eggs (which are raw products that need to be refrigerated), and breaker eggs (which are pasteurized for use in everyday grocery products like salad dressing, cake mix, and pasta). This has forced chicken farmers to throw away nearly 400 million perfectly good eggs each year. That rule didn't make sense when it was enacted, and it makes even less sense now, at a time when egg prices are too high and supermarket shelves are too empty.

The Lowering Egg Prices Act will fix this problem by overturning the Obama regulation and putting hundreds of millions of breaker eggs back on the market.

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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, neapolitan 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>

Q&A: Meet the conservative working to make environmentalism nonpartisan

National organization launches with an event in Belle Fourche

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 20, 2025 4:12 PM

A national nonprofit working to promote a middle ground on environmentalism launched with an event Thursday in the South Dakota city of Belle Fourche, which advertises itself as the geographic center of the United States.

Benji Backer, 27, of Seattle, is the founder of Nature is Nonpartisan. The self-described conservative environmentalist founded the American Conservation Coalition in 2017 while in college. That conservative group promotes policies like free-market approaches to climate change and environmental policy. In 2024, Backer wrote a book, "The Conservative Environmentalist," outlining his vision for right-of-center environmentalism.

With his new group, Backer is bringing people together from across the political spectrum.

Nature Is Nonpartisan's board ranges from people like David Bernhardt, who was secretary of the Department of Interior during the first Trump administration, to Michael Brune, former executive director of the Sierra Club. Partners include the National Wildlife Federation, American Forests, Ducks Unlimited and more.

South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden attended the Belle Fourche event and signed an executive proclamation establishing "Nature Is Nonpartisan Week" in the state.

Backer said he is critical of Green New Deal-style environmentalism, referring to a swath of proposals to help address climate change and income inequality introduced by progressive lawmakers. He said the movement has become an ineffective political football.

The new nonprofit focuses on bipartisan policies like funding wildlife migration corridors, wetland and forest conservation, and farm practices that pull more heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions out of the atmosphere.

Backer took questions from South Dakota Searchlight ahead of Thursday's event. The following conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Why start this organization?

I grew up in the Midwest — I grew up in Wisconsin — and grew up loving the outdoors just like almost every person in this country.

I also grew up a conservative, and I felt very frustrated with the fact that there wasn't really a home for dialogue on the environment that was being done in a nonpartisan way. It was either you subscribe to the Green New Deal-type ideology or you just didn't have a home at all. And the majority of Americans care a lot about the environment, but they don't want radical solutions.

So, our mission is to rebuild the environmental movement, to a movement that represents all Americans, of all political backgrounds — not just the left side of the aisle — and also forges solutions that benefit and work for every American, not just Americans on one side of the aisle.

We want to recreate the legacy that Americans have around the environment. This used to be seen as a nonpartisan issue in America. There used to be many environmental organizations that resembled the breadth of political beliefs in America. That does not exist anymore.

So, we're here in Belle Fourche — because it is the center of the country — to launch from the heart of

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America an environmental movement that speaks for the heart of America.

While many people care about the environment, resistance to environmental policy often comes from the right. Isn't environmentalism inherently partisan?

Yeah, look, it has been a partisan issue, but that doesn't mean it has to be.

If you look back at history, previous iterations of the environmental movement resembled both sides of the aisle. It had hunters and anglers, it had conservatives, and it also had liberals. It had both sorts of populations represented, and so the solutions represented those communities, too.

My philosophy is that when you're not at the table, you're on the table. When you're not at the table, you're automatically losing. And the majority of Americans are losing with the current environmental movement as we see it. Hunters and anglers, conservatives, used to self-identify as environmentalists. Polling back in 1990 shows nearly 80% of Americans self-identified as environmentalists.

And so, it is currently partisan, but it doesn't need to be.

The reality is that the political left owning this issue only allows half of the country to be represented. So, when the other half of the country, conservatives, are running the show, whether that be in the South Dakota Legislature or in D.C., all they're doing is focusing on opposing what the left has proposed because a lot of the times it's out of touch with conservative communities.

It's this political back and forth of, like, either the Green New Deal, or trying to oppose everything about the Green New Deal philosophy. What if there was an approach, that we used to have, where you put landowners, ranchers, farmers, hunters, anglers at the same table with those who care about the environment for other reasons, and created a solution that works for all the people there. That has not happened for decades, but it can happen, and it will happen again.

So, your group identifies popular support for environmental issues and pushes Republican lawmakers to support those things?

What we're trying to create is a grassroots movement of Americans from both sides of the aisle who believe the environment is more important, and conserving the environment is more important, than partisan politics.

Now, how we get there is up for debate. But that's a debate we're not even having right now.

Some people might be more in favor of protecting the environment through private property rights because private property owners tend to take really good care of their environment. Some people might prefer a more public land approach. Then let's have a debate, issue by issue, so we can actually get to solutions.

Right now, our forests are burning at record levels. Right now, biodiversity is decreasing here and around the world. Right now, extreme storms are damaging our country's economy and our communities. And the list goes on and on.

I understand why immigration, guns or some of these other issues get caught up in culture wars and partisan politics: A lot of people have inherently different end goals on those issues.

But on the environment, there's not really anybody in this country that doesn't want clean air, clean water, nature to be protected and biodiversity to be protected — as long as it's not at the expense of humanity and people's communities.

Politicians aren't hearing that message from an environmental organization. They're only hearing a message of doom and gloom, alarmism, kind of extremism, or an opposition to that.

So, we're trying to create a movement that incentivizes politicians to get to the table and find solutions to the environmental problems that are happening, that are real, that are impacting us, and that no one's trying to find solutions to because it's become such a culture warfare issue.

What is your message to conservatives who might worry this group is a trojan horse to implement policies they disagree with?

I would say to conservatives, over the next few years, we will prove that we're a movement for all

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Americans.

I think there's an automatic distrust of the environmental movement that is totally fair and totally to be expected based on how this has progressed as an issue in recent years.

But, we have two options. We can sit on the sidelines and complain about how bad the left's ideas are, or we can sit at the table. We're either on the sidelines complaining and losing or at the table conversing and winning.

I understand the skepticism, but if you look at our board, if you look at our staff, we have some of the most hardcore conservative bona fide leaders on our team and board that you could ever imagine, that validate the fact that conservatives need to have a voice at this discussion, that validate the fact that we are going to represent both sides, not just one — not just greenwashing for the left, but also representing both sides and the priorities they have.

There's nothing more pro-conservative than caring about your local community, about your country and its amazing beauty, and the legacy of conservation that our country has. There's nothing more pro-conservative than engaging in conservation conversations.

Who funds Nature is Nonpartisan?

I've been building this organization for the last year. I don't even take a salary right now.

We already have diverse funders from across the political spectrum. We have hundreds of donors already and we haven't even launched yet. We have conservative donors, liberal donors. There's not one donor or two donors or three donors that I can point to as people who are, you know, "buying us out."

How will your group approach the issue of heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions?

Climate change is one of the most polarizing issues in America right now, and one of the most partisan. I think Americans can and should stand united in our desire to reduce pollution in our atmosphere.

I think we should be focusing on efficiency, and Americans appreciate opportunities to save money and be more efficient, to have more abundant energy choices, to have lower energy prices, which helps scale all different energy sources. People just don't want to be told what to do.

As an organization, we're going to be dedicated to reducing pollution, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but not in a way that hurts people, and in a way that actually benefits communities.

We are going to show politicians what Americans want to be for, rather than what they're against. So, on the topic of climate change, people are for efficient, abundant energy; people are for resilient ecosystems to create adaptation measures in extreme storms; they are for more efficient transportation methods and more fuel-efficient vehicles, as long as it's not more expensive and comes at the cost of their livelihoods. And so that's the sort of approach we're going to take.

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.

Public school advocates worry about lack of planning as Trump moves to close US Education Department

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 20, 2025 5:07 PM

South Dakota public education advocates are anxious about the impending closure of the U.S. Department of Education, saying they don't see a plan of action for how federal funding will be distributed moving forward.

President Donald Trump signed an executive order Thursday directing Education Secretary Linda McMahon to dismantle her department and "return education authority to the states." The move follows a

recent 50% reduction in department staff.

Sandra Waltman, director of public affairs for the South Dakota Education Association, described the situation as chaotic, particularly for districts reliant on federal Title I funding that supports schools with high numbers of low-income students.

"If you close down the Department of Education without a plan for ensuring that programs like Title I and special education services continue, then what happens to the students who depend on them?" Waltman said.

Public education advocates in South Dakota were already concerned about the sweeping staff reductions to the federal department, warning of potential disruptions to federally funded programs.

"What we need to know is if there's an implementation plan," said Rob Monson, executive director of School Administrators of South Dakota. "If not, we're really at a loss for what to do next."

Special education funding is another concern, because federal funding supplements local resources to cover services like specialized teachers, transportation and individualized education plans for students with disabilities. Advocates fear that shifting federal funds into block grants managed by the state — as proposed by some Republican politicians including Sen. Mike Rounds of South Dakota — could lead to budget cuts at the legislative level.

"My biggest fear is that when you turn this over to the state, it becomes state money, and we know how that can go," said Dianna Miller, a lobbyist for large public schools in the state. "We've already had to face education funding cuts this year."

Waltman also warned of the potential ripple effect on South Dakota's universities, whose students rely on federal student loans and grants.

"We're just starting to bounce back in enrollment," she said. "If students can't access federal aid, what will that do to our universities?"

Monson said uncertainty now looms over school staffing levels and program availability.

"Schools plan their budgets a year in advance, and this kind of uncertainty puts us in a difficult position," Monson said. "If federal funding mechanisms change or are delayed, schools will be forced to make staffing adjustments before contract renewals in mid-April. That means potential layoffs and service reductions."

According to the Pew Research Center, South Dakota's K-12 public education system is the nation's second-most reliant on federal aid. The National Education Association reports that annual funding routed through the U.S. Department of Education to South Dakota includes \$66.4 for Pell grants to college students, \$57.8 million for Title I, \$48.1 million from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and \$30.7 million in career and technical education grants.

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.

Dakota Gold will conduct pre-permit study for potential mine in Homestake area

Academic report to outline potential jobs, impact on housing in Lawrence County

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 20, 2025 3:22 PM

A South Dakota company earned the state's blessing Thursday to take a formal step toward a large-scale gold mining permit in the northern Black Hills.

The South Dakota Board of Minerals and Environment unanimously approved Dakota Gold's request to begin a socioeconomic study on the potential impact of the company's proposed Richmond Hill mining operation. State law requires such a study from any operation with plans to apply for a large-scale mine.

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The Richmond Hill project area in Lawrence County sits on private land half a mile north of the Wharf Mine, the state's only operational, large-scale gold mine, which is operated by Chicago-based Coeur Mining. Richmond Hill is one of the multiple exploratory projects in Dakota Gold's portfolio in that area, home historically to the Homestake mine, shuttered in 2002 after 125 years of production.

Last month, the company released a report saying the Richmond Hill site has the potential to produce 3.65 million ounces of gold.

The Wharf Mine, for context, has produced about 3 million ounces of gold since 1982. Homestake produced more than 40 million ounces.

Short audience with board, no opposition

Dakota Gold Environmental Director Timm Comer attended Thursday's meeting virtually, as did Dakota Institute CEO Jared McEntaffer, the contract academic whose firm will conduct the socioeconomic impact study. Dakota Institute is a research firm not affiliated with Dakota Gold.

A lone board member asked to confirm that the companies are separate entities. Aside from that, no board members asked questions before unanimously approving Dakota Gold's request to set McEntaffer to work.

No one spoke on the Richmond Hill project during the board's public comment period.

After the meeting, Comer confirmed that the mine would be an above-ground operation.

The Black Hills Clean Water Alliance posted information to its website in advance of Thursday's meeting that notes concerns about Dakota Gold and the potential environmental impact of a mine.

The group's Lilius Jarding told South Dakota Searchlight that a member monitored the meeting remotely, but that the socioeconomic study is too preliminary in the multi-step process of permitting to have warranted opposition testimony.

Scope of study

The \$35,000-\$50,000 Dakota Institute study will address Lawrence County's infrastructure, economic base and social conditions, according to a proposal filed with the board prior to Thursday's meeting.

McEntaffer aims to return to Dakota Gold a "realistic approximation" of the economic activity of an operational Richmond Hill mine, which the mining company in turn would submit as part of an official application for a large-scale mine.

"This activity will include direct company labor and material requirements as well as input requirements by subcontractors," the proposal says.

The study would also touch upon housing needs and availability, social impacts of population growth and "adjacent land issues." The latter part of the study would engage with Lawrence County planning and zoning officials and RESPEC, a Rapid City consulting firm.

The analysis will be completed by 2026.

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

COMMENTARY

South Dakota cannot afford to ignore the child care crisis

by Michael Bockorny

Child care is not just a family issue. It is a business development issue. The ability of South Dakota families to access quality, affordable child care directly impacts workforce participation, economic productivity and long-term growth. As the CEO of the Economic Development Professionals of South Dakota, I see firsthand the challenges businesses face in attracting and retaining workers due to the child care crisis.

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Across the state, we have seen communities bring together business leaders, community stakeholders, child care providers and parents to work toward viable solutions. I have had the privilege to work on this issue over the past two years as a member of the Statewide Childcare Task Force, led by Sen. Tim Reed, R-Brookings. The task force worked tirelessly with businesses and individuals across the state. This effort yielded an in-depth report that led to the introduction of legislation this past session.

One bill, HB 1132, passed the House and Senate but was vetoed by the governor. While we disagree with the governor's reasoning, we look forward to partnering with the administration in the future and will engage over the summer with all stakeholders.

Child care is an essential support system for families, allowing parents to pursue careers, education and financial stability while ensuring their children are cared for in a safe, enriching environment. Without access to reliable child care, families are forced to make difficult choices — many parents, particularly mothers, must scale back work hours or leave the workforce, straining household incomes and limiting career growth. This also places stress on extended family members who may step in to provide care, often at the cost of their own employment and well-being.

For working families, child care is a pathway to financial independence. A lack of accessible child care can lead to lost wages, decreased career mobility and increased reliance on public assistance programs. Ensuring all families have access to affordable, high-quality child care strengthens our workforce and promotes economic resilience.

Beyond the economic implications, high-quality, state-licensed child care environments provide significant benefits for children. Research shows that children who participate in structured early learning programs experience better cognitive, social and emotional outcomes. These programs provide young children with opportunities to develop critical thinking skills, build relationships and establish early literacy and numeracy foundations that prepare them for success.

Quality child care environments also contribute to healthier emotional development by providing consistency, positive social interactions and nurturing relationships. Children in these programs learn essential skills such as problem-solving, communication and collaboration. Studies have demonstrated that children who receive early education are more likely to graduate from high school, pursue higher education and achieve higher earnings in adulthood.

South Dakota is home to nearly 70,000 children age 5 and under, and 72% of them have all parents in the workforce, underscoring the need for reliable child care. Yet the state faces a 35% shortfall in licensed child care capacity, leaving thousands of families scrambling. This child care deficit costs the state an estimated \$329 million annually in lost productivity and economic growth.

Employers across the state recognize this as a barrier to workforce participation. This, in turn, contributes to labor shortages, increased turnover and reduced economic output. In an era where talent attraction is key to economic growth, South Dakota cannot afford to ignore the child care crisis.

Child care is an essential part of the workforce infrastructure. Just as roads and broadband facilitate commerce, a strong child care system enables parents to work, employers to operate efficiently and communities to thrive. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has identified child care as a critical economic driver, emphasizing that industries across the board suffer when child care is unavailable or unaffordable.

Moreover, investments in early childhood yield significant returns. Studies show that every dollar spent on high-quality early childhood programs generates a return of \$4 to \$9 through improved educational outcomes, increased earnings and reduced social services costs. The Heckman Equation, a leading economic model on early childhood investment, demonstrates that early interventions lead to higher productivity and a more skilled workforce.

The child care sector in South Dakota operates on a broken business model. The cost of providing quality care exceeds what many families can afford to pay, leading to chronic underfunding and high staff turnover. Early educators earn an average of \$12.67 per hour, below the state's living wage of \$19.58. This wage disparity makes it difficult to attract and retain qualified child care professionals, further exacerbating the shortage of available care.

Additionally, nearly 44% of South Dakota's population resides in rural communities, where access to

licensed child care is even more limited. Families in these areas often rely on informal care arrangements, which can be inconsistent and lack the developmental benefits of formal early childhood programs.

South Dakota's future depends on strong families and a stable workforce, and neither of these work well without affordable and amazing child care. We can no longer afford to treat child care as a secondary issue. It is a fundamental component of economic development, workforce participation and long-term prosperity for families. While we were not successful in our legislative efforts this year, we will continue to search for legislative and non-legislative solutions to solve the child care crisis in South Dakota.

Michael Bockorny is the CEO of the Economic Development Professionals Association of South Dakota, headquartered in Aberdeen. He previously served as CEO of the Aberdeen Development Corporation for over 10 years, and prior to that worked in the private sector in senior living, the nonprofit sector in a university setting, and in retail development.

Trump, who has his own meme coin, promotes crypto at industry conference

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - MARCH 20, 2025 3:31 PM

President Donald Trump signaled his continued support for cryptocurrency, saying at an industry conference Thursday morning he wanted to see the United States lead the world in digital asset technology.

In a brief recorded video broadcast to the Digital Assets Summit in New York, Trump, who launched his own meme coin in January that held an overall market value of \$2.3 billion Thursday, noted some steps his administration has taken to encourage crypto. He positioned himself as a leading advocate for the technology but was vague about future policy proposals.

"It's an honor to speak with you about how the United States is going to dominate crypto and the next generation of financial technologies," he said. "And it's not going to be easy, but we're way ahead."

Trump noted he held the first ever White House digital assets summit this month, appointed a White House artificial intelligence and crypto czar and created a Strategic Bitcoin Reserve and Digital Asset Stockpile.

The reserves would allow the government to retain the value of digital currencies, he said, adding that was impossible under his predecessor, Joe Biden.

Reversing policy

Trump said his administration would seek to loosen regulations, in a reversal from Biden policy.

"We're ending the last administration's regulatory war on crypto and bitcoin," he said. "Frankly, it was a disgrace. But as of Jan. 20, 2025, all of that is over."

He also said he'd asked Congress to create "simple, commonsense rules for stable coins and market structure."

Despite looser regulations, the framework would lead to "greater privacy, safety, security and wealth for American consumers and businesses alike," he said, calling the decentralized finance system "one of the most exciting technological revolutions in modern history."

Trump's ties to industry

The decentralized nature of cryptocurrency allows anyone to launch a currency, which has led to a series of so-called meme coins fronted by celebrities or tied to internet trends that form a particularly volatile segment of the crypto market.

Trump has a vested interest in the success of the crypto market, with a reported 80% stake in his own token.

Trump's coin peaked at a value of \$14.5 billion the day before his inauguration but has since lost nearly 85% of its value. The financial news service Reuters reported last month that firms generated nearly \$100 million in trading fees associated with the Trump coin, even as its market value plummeted.

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

Trump signs order directing Education secretary to shut down her own department

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - MARCH 20, 2025 12:29 PM

WASHINGTON — In a sweeping executive order signed Thursday, President Donald Trump called on Education Secretary Linda McMahon to “take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure” of the U.S. Education Department.

Trump signed the order at a major White House ceremony, flanked by children seated at desks. It directs McMahon to “return authority over education to the States and local communities while ensuring the effective and uninterrupted delivery of services, programs, and benefits on which Americans rely.”

Trump spoke to an audience packed with top GOP state officials, and he cited Republican Govs. Greg Abbott of Texas, Mike Braun of Indiana, Ron DeSantis of Florida, Bill Lee of Tennessee, Kim Reynolds of Iowa, Jeff Landry of Louisiana, Brad Little of Idaho, Jim Pillen of Nebraska and Mike DeWine of Ohio.

Deena Bishop, commissioner of Alaska’s Department of Education and Early Development, was slated to attend, though she was not cited by Trump.

“After 45 years, the United States spends more money in education by far than any other country and spends, likewise, by far, more money per pupil than any country, and it’s not even close, but yet we rank near the bottom of the list in terms of success,” Trump said at the brief ceremony.

GOP Reps. Tim Walberg of Michigan and Virginia Foxx of North Carolina, the respective current and former chairs of the House Committee on Education and Workforce, were also in attendance.

The children each signed their own individual executive orders, proudly displaying them alongside Trump.

The order, which is sure to draw legal challenges, “also directs that programs or activities receiving any remaining Department of Education funds will not advance DEI or gender ideology,” referring to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Widespread reports ahead of the signing drew intense blowback from leading education groups, labor unions and congressional Democrats.

Rep. Bobby Scott, ranking member of the House Committee on Education and Workforce, noted that the department “was founded in part to guarantee the enforcement of students’ civil rights” in a statement Thursday.

“Legality aside, dismantling (the department) will exacerbate existing disparities, reduce accountability, and put low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, rural students, and English as a Second Language (ESL) students at risk,” the Virginia Democrat added.

Title I, IDEA funds

The department’s many responsibilities include administering federal student aid, carrying out civil rights investigations, providing Title I funding for low-income school districts and guaranteeing a free public education for children with disabilities via the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA.

Following the signing, McMahon clarified in a statement that “closing the Department does not mean cutting off funds from those who depend on them — we will continue to support K-12 students, students with special needs, college student borrowers, and others who rely on essential programs.”

“We’re going to follow the law and eliminate the bureaucracy responsibly by working through Congress to ensure a lawful and orderly transition,” McMahon said.

Trump’s long-held campaign promise to move education “back to the states” comes despite much of the funding and oversight of schools already occurring at the state and local levels. The department also legally cannot dictate the curriculum of schools across the country.

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Congress has the sole authority to shut down the department, and any bill to completely close the agency would face extreme difficulties getting through the narrowly GOP-controlled Senate, with at least 60 senators needed to advance past the filibuster.

However, it could be possible for the administration to take significant actions short of closure, such as moving some Education Department functions to other agencies.

The agency has an annual budget of \$79 billion in discretionary spending, or funds appropriated yearly by Congress.

Layoffs, buyouts

The department has already witnessed mass layoffs, contract cuts, staff buyouts and major policy changes in the weeks since Trump took office.

Earlier in March, the department announced that more than 1,300 employees would be cut through a "reduction in force" process — sparking concerns across the country over how the mass layoffs would impact the agency's abilities to carry out its core functions.

The department had 4,133 employees when Trump took office, but the cuts brought the total number of workers remaining down to roughly 2,183.

A group of 21 Democratic attorneys general quickly sued over that effort and asked a federal court in Massachusetts to block the department from implementing the "reduction in force" action and Trump's "directive to dismantle the Department of Education."

Lawsuit incoming

Opponents of the closure said it's one more example of how Trump and billionaire Elon Musk, head of the temporary U.S. DOGE Service, are seeking to destroy the federal government as they reduce the workforce and spending.

"Donald Trump and Elon Musk have aimed their wrecking ball at public schools and the futures of the 50 million students in rural, suburban, and urban communities across America, by dismantling public education to pay for tax handouts for billionaires," said Becky Pringle, president of the National Education Association, in a Wednesday night statement.

"Now, Trump is at it again with his latest effort to gut the Department of Education programs that support every student across the nation," added Pringle, who leads the largest labor union in the country.

"If successful, Trump's continued actions will hurt all students by sending class sizes soaring, cutting job training programs, making higher education more expensive and out of reach for middle class families, taking away special education services for students with disabilities, and gutting student civil rights protections," she said.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, one of the largest teachers unions in the country, kept her response to reports of the forthcoming order succinct.

"See you in court," she said.

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

Governor signs bills cutting and adding to education-related funding

BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MARCH 20, 2025 9:17 AM

South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden signed four bills Wednesday that reduce education funding in some areas and increase it in others.

The cuts are in HB 1040, which reduces the state subsidy for high-schoolers taking dual enrollment courses for college credit, and HB 1039, which bars new enrollments in a program that pays teachers and school counselors a stipend for becoming nationally board certified. Both measures were among numerous budget-cutting ideas considered by lawmakers during the legislative session.

The dual enrollment cut will shift the cost-share for the program to a 50-50 split with students. Currently, the state pays two-thirds of the \$150 per credit-hour cost, which is a reduced rate compared to regular university tuition. Students and families currently pay about \$50 per credit hour. They'll experience a price hike to \$75 per credit hour, saving the state — and costing families — about \$1.2 million annually.

The teacher certification measure will continue to aid teachers already in the program, but will end new enrollments. The program pays up to a \$2,000 stipend annually.

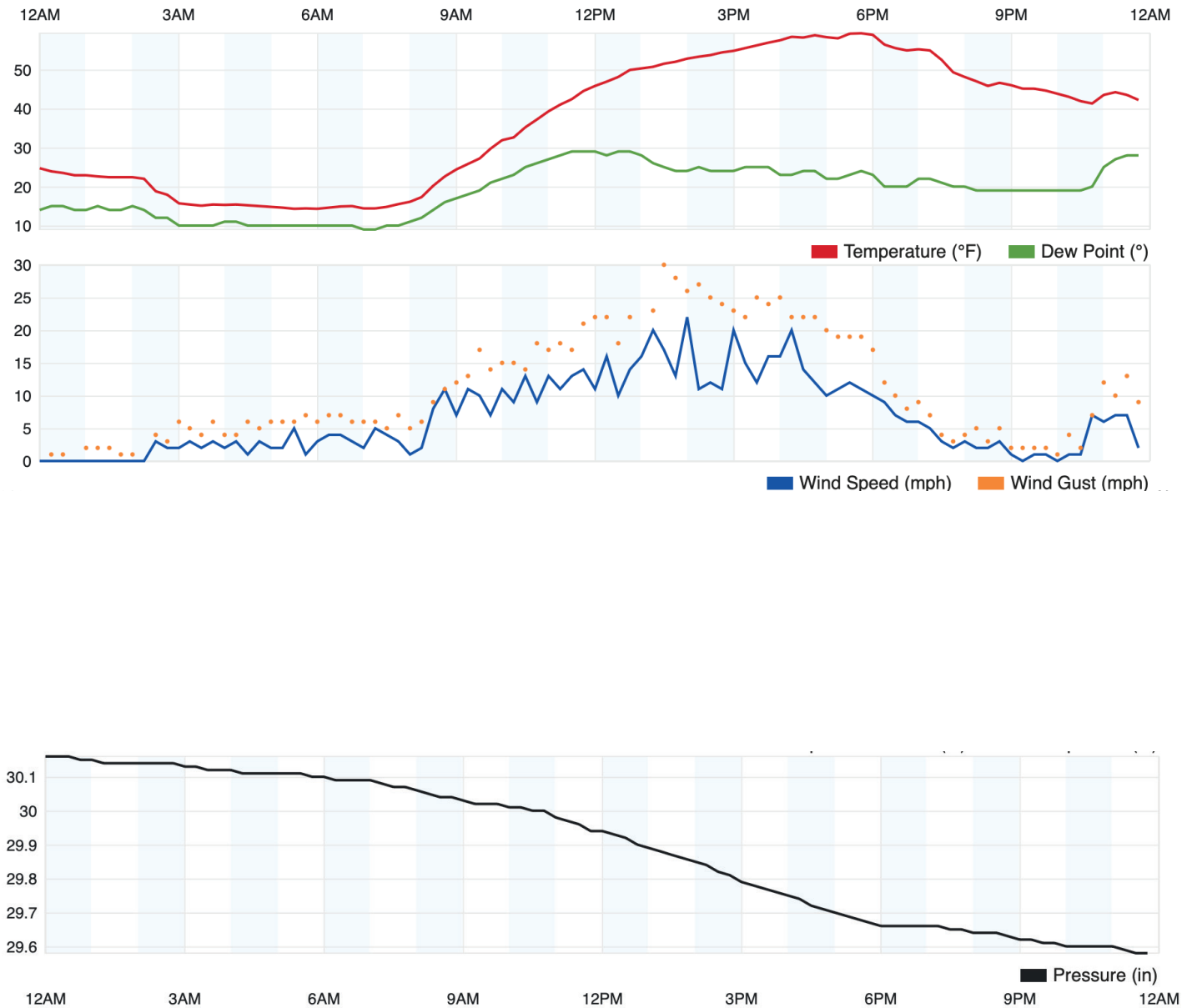
The bills adding money for education are HB 1114, which appropriates \$4 million for the state's technical colleges to purchase equipment, and SB 70, which increases sparsity payments to local school districts. Schools that have costs associated with an especially large and sparsely populated district will be able to receive extra state funding payments up to \$137,000 per year, instead of the prior cap of \$110,000.

Rhoden has signed 146 bills and vetoed one from the legislative session so far, which is over except for a day on March 31 for the Legislature to consider his vetoes.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 44 °F

Slight Chance
Showers then
Partly Sunny

Tonight



Low: 21 °F

Partly Cloudy

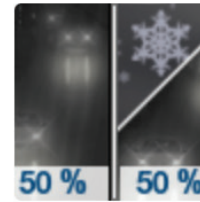
Saturday



High: 59 °F

Mostly Sunny
then Slight
Chance
Showers and
Breezy

Saturday Night



Low: 29 °F

Chance Rain
then Chance
Rain/Snow and
Blustery

Sunday



High: 44 °F

Chance Snow
and Windy

Today



**Highs: 39-53°F
Lows: 17-30°F**

Saturday



**Highs: 50-65°F
Lows: 27-33°F**

Sunday



**Highs: 38-52°F
Lows: 20-29°F**



March 21, 2025
3:55 AM

Winds will shift to be out of the northwest this morning as a cold front moves north to south across the area. Stronger wind gusts will continue through mid-day. Once that moves out, winds will switch back to the south. With this directional shift and strong wind gusts, grassland fire danger will be in the high to very high categories. Any fires that ignite will spread rapidly and show erratic behavior. Outdoor burning is not recommended.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 60 °F at 5:39 PM

Low Temp: 14 °F at 7:02 AM

Wind: 30 mph at 1:20 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 17 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 76 in 1926

Record Low: -12 in 1965

Average High: 44

Average Low: 22

Average Precip in March.: 0.55

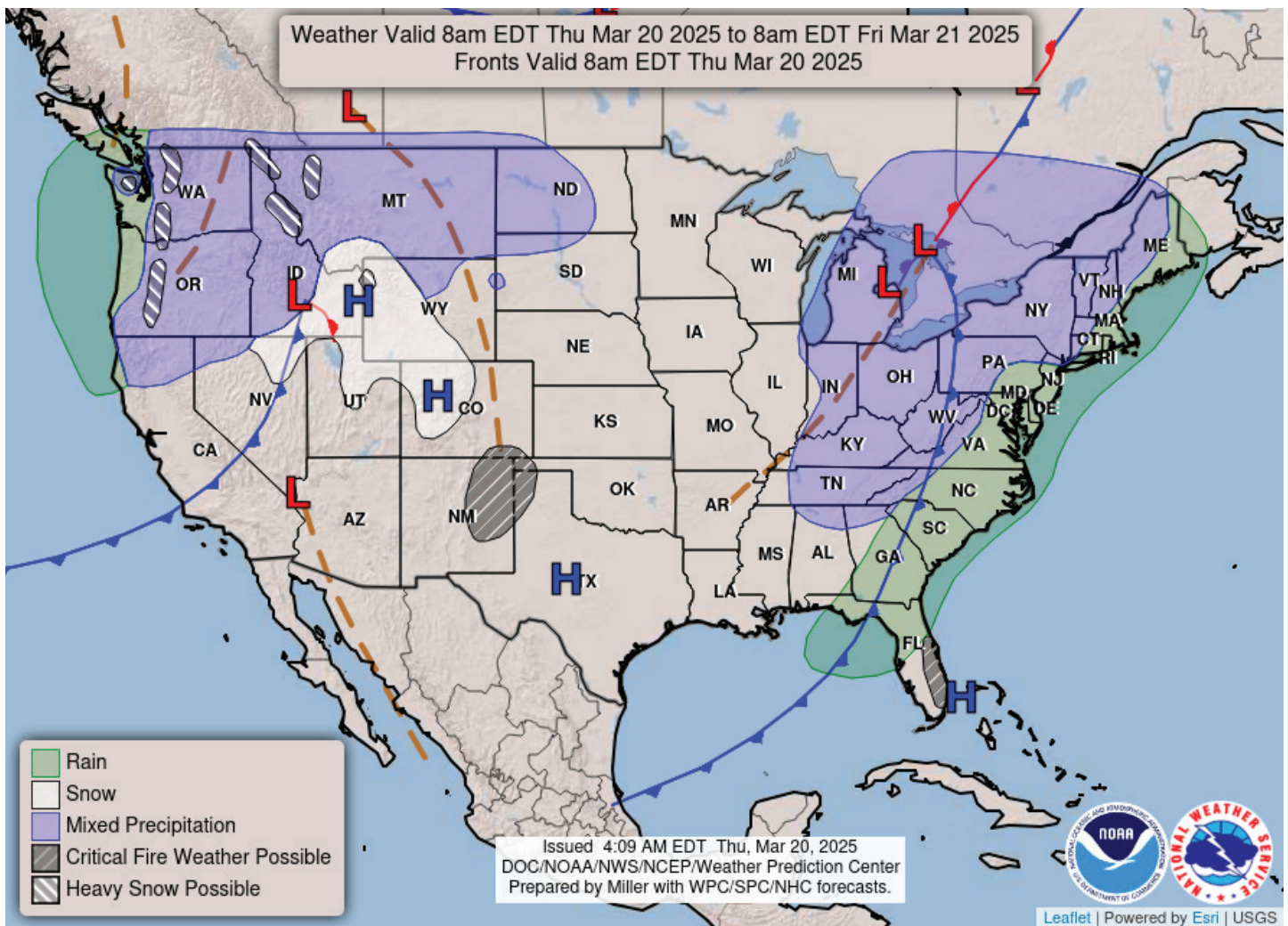
Precip to date in March.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.72

Precip Year to Date: 0.45

Sunset Tonight: 7:47:56 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:28:57 am



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Today in Weather History

March 21, 1997: As temperatures began to warm up towards the end of March, the near-record to record winter snowpack over central, north-central, and northeast South Dakota started to melt. The resulting runoff filled up ditches, lakes, creeks, streams, and low-lying areas. The massive amount of water swamped hundreds of sections of county and township roads as well as several state and federal highways. The inundated parts of roads were either broken up or washed out. Tens of culverts were blown out or damaged, and several bridges were either destroyed or washed out by chunks of ice and the high water flow. Road closures were extensive, with rerouting taking place for school buses, mail carriers, farmers, and ranchers. Many spillways and dams received some damage or were washed out. Also, thousands of acres of farmland and pastureland were underwater. Due to the high groundwater, a countless number of homes received water in their basements. A few towns were partially flooded, including Twin Brooks in Grant County, Corona in Roberts County, and Raymond in Clark County. The following week, in the early morning hours of March 27, water flowed into Raymond filling the basements of several homes. In rural areas, several farms were surrounded by water and were inaccessible, leaving some people stranded and livestock marooned. Many other residences and businesses, mainly across northeast South Dakota, received significant damage or were a total loss. As a result, several people had to be evacuated. At the time, many long-term residents said this was the most significant flooding they had seen in their lifetimes. The flooding continued into early to mid-April.

March 21, 2012: Several record high temperatures occurred across the region in March. Click [HERE](#) for a recap.

1801: The Jefferson Flood hit the Connecticut Valley. The flooding was the greatest since 1692. The Federalists named the flood for the new President, who they blamed for the disaster.

1876: More than 40 inches of snow stopped traffic in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Trains were delayed, and mail carriers resorted to snowshoes.

1932: A tornado swarm occurred in the Deep South. Between late afternoon and early the next morning, severe thunderstorms spawned 31 tornadoes in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and Tennessee. The tornadoes killed 334 persons and injured 1784 others. Northern Alabama was the hardest hit. Tornadoes in Alabama killed 286 persons and caused five million dollars damage.

1951: Antarctica is the windiest place in the world. Port Martin averaged 40 mph winds throughout the year. On this day, the winds averaged 108 mph.

1952 - Severe thunderstorms spawned thirty-one tornadoes across Arkansas, Tennessee, Missouri, Mississippi, Alabama and Kentucky. The tornadoes killed 343 persons and caused 15 million dollars damage. Arkansas and Tennessee each reported thirteen tornadoes. The towns of Judsonia AR and Henderson TN were nearly wiped off the map in what proved to be the worst tornado outbreak of record for Arkansas. A tornado, one and a half miles wide at times, left a church the only undamaged building at Judsonia. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A winter storm in the Northern High Plains Region produced blizzard conditions in western South Dakota. Winds gusted to 70 mph at Rapid City SD, and snowfall totals ranged up to 20 inches at Lead SD. The high winds produced snow drifts six feet high. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Bitterly cold weather prevailed across the northeastern U.S. Portland ME reported their coldest spring day of record with a morning low of 5 above, and an afternoon high of just 21 degrees. Marquette MI reported a record low of 15 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (The Weather Channel)

1989 - Snow blanketed the northeastern U.S. early in the day, with six inches reported at Rutland VT. Morning and afternoon thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds from southwestern Mississippi to southwest Georgia. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - The first full day of spring was a cold one for the eastern U.S. Freezing temperatures damaged 62 percent of the peach crop in upstate South Carolina, and 72 percent of the peach crop in the ridge area of South Carolina. Elkins WV, which a week earlier reported a record high of 82 degrees, was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 16 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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BE ALL YOU CAN BE

Years ago, after being introduced to the students in a small college in South Carolina, the guest speaker stood quietly for a moment.

She then began her remarks by saying, "I was born to a mother who was deaf and could not speak. I do not know who my father is or where he may be. The first job I ever had was in a cotton field."

Smiling, she continued and said, "I stand before you today as the Treasurer of the United States. My name is Azie Taylor Morton. Nothing has to remain the way it is if that's not the way you want it to be."

Paul said that "I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength that I need." Does that mean we can become the Treasurer of the United States? The chief executive officer of a large corporation? The driver of an eighteen-wheeler? The crossing guard for an elementary school? Perhaps.

The power that is ours through Christ is available to meet every challenge in life as long as we are doing His will. His strength will prevail in us, for us, and through us whenever we do what He has called us to do. But we must be willing and committed to fulfilling the purpose He has for our lives. It is inappropriate for us to expect God to empower us to be or do anything that is not in keeping with His will. What we do must be in keeping with what His character is!

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to be faithful to You in everything we do, and to always seek Your will for our lives. May what we do and think follow the example of Your Son. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength that I need. Philippians 4:13

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: 15 Hrs 51 Mins 1 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: 1 Days 15 Hrs 6 Mins 1 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.20.25

7 14 25 35 40 14

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 21 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.19.25

7 15 22 25 26

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$71,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 21 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.19.25

7 15 36 40 56 8

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 50 Mins 0 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: 1 Days 15 Hrs 50 Mins 0 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

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

SDHSAA Class A State Playoffs Quarterfinal

Hamlin 82, Hill City 43

Lennox 51, West Central 43

Rapid City Christian 76, Clark-Willow Lake 53

Sioux Falls Christian 66, Groton 41

SDHSAA Class AA State Playoffs First Round

Brandon Valley 55, Sioux Falls Jefferson 41

Harrisburg 48, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 45

Mitchell 50, Huron 41

Sioux Falls Lincoln 55, Spearfish 33

SDHSAA Class B State Playoffs Quarterfinal

Castlewood 64, Lyman 38

Dell Rapids St Mary 66, Aberdeen Christian 45

Viborg-Hurley 72, Freeman 44

Wessington Springs 74, Wall 52

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

Some voters are pushing back on lawmakers' efforts to overturn citizen ballot initiatives

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — One by one, each of the more than 50 people seated on folding chairs at a public library explained why they were there.

"I'm just really upset about our voting rights being taken away from us," one woman said.

"I'm mad, and I want to do something with my anger that protects my rights," the next woman exclaimed.

"I want to understand how the heck they can do this," added another.

The citizen activists, many of them heretofore strangers, had come together two days after the Missouri House passed legislation to overturn a voter-approved ballot initiative guaranteeing paid sick leave for workers and cost-of-living increases to the minimum wage.

The people weren't focused on how to stop the Senate from taking the same action. Rather, the group had something bigger in mind: Preventing the Legislature from ever reversing the will of the voters again.

Paid sick leave highlights a Missouri fight

As Republican President Donald Trump tests the Constitution's separation of powers with far-reaching executive orders, lawmakers in some states are engaged in a tug-of-war for power with the people who elected them.

In Missouri, Republican lawmakers not only want to reverse the workers' benefits law approved by voters in November, they're also proposing to undo parts of a new abortion rights amendment and make it more difficult to approve future constitutional amendments.

Missouri lawmakers have a history of such actions. They previously tried to block funding for a voter-approved Medicaid expansion and authored changes to voter-approved measures regulating dog breeders and legislative redistricting.

Frustrated citizen activists are fighting back. They are holding town-hall forums across the state seeking

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to build support to put a constitutional amendment on the 2026 ballot limiting the Legislature's ability to limit citizen initiatives.

"Our goal is to ban politicians from attacking the will of the people," presenter Lindsay Browning told people gathered on a recent Saturday at the Missouri River Regional Library, blocks from the state Capitol.

Two days earlier, Republican state Rep. Mitch Boggs used a parental analogy while explaining to colleagues why they should overrule voters' desire for paid sick leave and annual minimum wage increases.

"Of course the people voted for it. It would be like asking your teenager if he wanted a checkbook. They're going to vote for it every time," Boggs said. But "if we don't protect our businesses, there's not going to be a job to go to to get a minimum wage."

Nebraska lawmakers also are considering carving out exceptions to voter-approved minimum wage and paid sick leave laws.

100 bills that restrict citizen initiatives

About half the states allow citizens to place proposed laws or constitutional amendments on the ballot through initiative petitions. In recent years, activists have used that process to enshrine abortion rights in state constitutions, legalize recreational marijuana, raise minimum wages, expand Medicaid health care coverage and enact other measures that legislatures had been unwilling to approve.

Some lawmakers have responded by trying to make it harder to get initiatives on the ballot and tougher for voters to pass them.

The Ballot Initiative Strategy Center, which backs progressive ballot measures, is tracking about 100 active bills in 18 states that would "make it more difficult for citizen-led initiatives to succeed," said the group's executive director, Chris Melody Fields Figueredo.

The abundance of such legislation is "an indictment of our representative democracy," said Kelly Hall, executive director of The Fairness Project, another progressive group that has backed 43 state ballot initiatives since 2016.

In Idaho, a Republican lawmaker this year proposed giving the governor veto power over ballot initiatives approved by voters with less than two-thirds support. That bill stalled in a House committee.

But bills already have passed in other states. Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders signed several laws aimed at initiative canvassers, including ones requiring them to verify that petition signers have read the full ballot title and shown photo identification.

Utah lawmakers this month voted to place a proposed constitutional amendment on the 2026 ballot that would require 60% approval for future initiatives that raise or impose taxes. Arizona voters narrowly approved a similar measure in 2022.

South Dakota looks to rein in initiatives

In South Dakota, which gave birth to the initiative movement in 1898, lawmakers recently passed several measures seeking to rein in the initiative process. One would shorten the time for gathering petition signatures. Another would require a minimum number of signatures from all 35 state Senate districts — in addition to the current statewide threshold — to qualify a proposed constitutional amendment for the ballot.

Yet another measure, which will go before voters in 2026, would set a 60% threshold for approving constitutional amendments instead of a simple majority.

In 2022, South Dakota voters rejected a legislative proposal to require 60% approval for new taxes and multimillion-dollar spending measures. That same year, voters approved a Medicaid expansion initiative by a 56% vote.

This year, lawmakers placed a proposed constitutional amendment on 2026 ballot that would end the expanded Medicaid coverage if the federal government doesn't continue to pay at least 90% of the costs.

Republicans who control the Legislature noted that amendments to the U.S. Constitution require approval from three-fourths of states. They also asserted that out-of-state groups have bankrolled initiatives pushing "radical agendas," citing recently defeated ballot proposals for abortion rights and open primaries.

"Our constitution must be protected from the transient political influence and whims of a bare majority," South Dakota state Sen. Sue Peterson said during debate.

The Education Department was created to ensure equal access. Who would do that in its absence?

By BIANCA VÁZQUEZ TONESS AP Education Writer

As the Trump administration moves to dismantle the Education Department, officials have suggested other agencies could take over its major responsibilities: civil rights enforcement to the Justice Department, perhaps; student loans to Treasury or Commerce; oversight of student disability rights to Health and Human Services.

Less clear is what could happen with a more lofty part of its mission — promoting equal access for students in an American education system that is fundamentally unequal.

Trump on Thursday signed an executive order calling for a plan to eliminate the department. In recent weeks, his administration already had been overhauling the department, cutting the workforce in half at an agency he has called wasteful and infiltrated by leftists.

Without the department, advocates worry the federal government would not look out in the same way for poor students, those still learning English, disabled students and racial and ethnic minorities.

"Gutting the agency that is charged to ensure equal access to education for every child is only going to create an underclass of students," said Weadé James, senior director of K-12 education policy for the Center for American Progress, a think tank that advocates for racial equity policies and increased investment in public schools.

The equity goal of the Education Department, which was created by Congress in 1979, emerged partly from the anti-poverty and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The act creating the department described its mission, in part, as: "To strengthen the Federal commitment to ensuring access to equal educational opportunity for every individual."

If new Education Secretary Linda McMahon really does work herself "out of a job," as Trump has said he wants, the government will lose a bully pulpit to draw attention to the nation's challenges and evangelize solutions, said Michael Petrilli, president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, an education think tank that advocates for more rigorous academic standards and accountability for public schools.

But Petrilli doubts that significantly paring back the department — if not completely eliminating it — will be "noticeable in the real world."

Test scores continue to show many school children are struggling academically. The latest national tests showed one-third of eighth grade students missing fundamental skills in reading, and a widening gap between the highest-performing and lower-performing students. That's the justification McMahon and other Trump allies have used for dismantling the department and sending its funding directly to states to spend.

Far from perfect, the department has offered a valuable "north star" for schools, said Wil Del Pilar, senior vice president of EdTrust, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank that advocates for educational equity. It is the role of the department to institute guardrails, investments and protections "that support equal outcomes for students," he said.

Trump has said he wants to return all control of schools to states.

The biggest question for many is what happens to the billions of dollars sent to run public schools every year, such as Title I funding, which supports schools in communities with high concentrations of poverty.

Educating low-income children, students learning English and those with disabilities often costs more because it requires specialized teaching or smaller class sizes. Districts without a strong tax base to fund schools often struggle to meet these students' needs, which Congress recognized by authorizing the money.

McMahon has said she wants to send the money directly to states, with fewer restrictions. Some have worried that without guardrails or federal oversight, states will use the money to advance their own priorities in ways that potentially entrench inequality.

If the funding is distributed to states as block grants, it's potentially a "way to defund public education," said Del Pilar. Block grants allow politicians to "direct funds as they see fit, and that could be away from schools," he said.

Students in Mississippi, South Dakota, Arkansas, Montana and Alaska could be affected the most if rules

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or oversight changes for how states spend this money. During the 2021-2022 school year, these states relied on federal aid for at least 20% of school funding, according to government data.

The agency traditionally has worked on behalf of disadvantaged students through its Office for Civil Rights, with an emphasis defending the rights of students with disabilities and students facing harassment tied to their skin color. Under the Trump administration, the agency has prioritized allegations of antisemitism.

While some advocates worry about the pivot in priorities, some attorneys say they had given up on recommending parents pursue complaints with the Office for Civil Rights, which they perceived as understaffed and too slow to provide relief.

Well before Trump was sworn in for a second term, the system moved slowly, but it has now gotten even worse, said A. Kelly Neal, a special education attorney in Macon, Georgia.

"Usually they were a little bit more responsive," Neal said. "It may not have been the response you wanted. But at least they tried to pretend they were doing something."

She said she would have no problem if the Department of Justice took on enforcement of these cases.

As part of a crackdown on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, the Trump administration last month ended the contract for the Equity Assistance Center-South, a technical assistance program for Southern school districts still operating under federal desegregation orders. Last week, the Southern Education Foundation appealed the decision to cancel its contract to run the center.

The attempt to close these such centers abdicates the government's responsibility to "help school districts address educational inequities and provide greater education opportunities for our students," said Raymond Pierce, Southern Education Foundation's president and chief executive officer.

The Latest: Hundreds of thousands of passengers face flight cancellations as Heathrow closes

By The Associated Press undefined

LONDON (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of passengers faced flight cancellations at Europe's busiest travel hub after a fire knocked out power to London's Heathrow Airport, forcing it to close for the day.

At least 1,350 flights to and from Heathrow were affected already, including several from U.S. cities that were canceled, flight tracking service FlightRadar 24 said.

Here's the latest:

Scandinavian Airlines cancels 12 roundtrip London flights

Scandinavian Airlines has canceled all 12 of its flights to and from London Heathrow on Friday.

"We are closely monitoring the situation and remain in continuous dialogue with Heathrow. Naturally, we hope for a swift resolution," the company said in a statement.

Known as SAS, it's considered the national airline of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

Hopes dashed for family seeking to travel home to Texas

LONDON — At Heathrow's Terminal 5, a family of five traveling to Dallas had shown up in the hopes their flight home — still listed as delayed — would take off.

But when Andrea Sri brought her brother, sister-in-law and their three children to the airport, they were told by police that there would be no flight.

"It was a waste of time. Very confusing," said Sri, who lives in London. "We tried to get in touch with British Airways, but they don't open their telephone line until 8 a.m."

Other London-area airports could reroute stranded travelers

Heathrow is one of the world's biggest airports, but there are five others in the wider London area as well.

Travelers might be able to rebook through the remaining five airports -- City, Gatwick, Luton, Stansted and Southend -- in the aftermath of Heathrow's closure.

However, they aren't all easy to reach from Heathrow. While City is in inner London, and buses link Heathrow with Gatwick, the others are further out. Southend is about a 78-mile drive from Heathrow, around the congested M25 orbital highway and then out to the eastern coast of England.

Witnesses describe fireball and loud explosion from substation blaze

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LONDON — Residents in west London have described hearing a large explosion, followed by a fireball and clouds of smoke, when a blaze ripped through an electrical substation near Heathrow Airport.

Matthew Muirhead, who was working a night shift, said that at about 11:30 p.m. Thursday he saw smoke rising over trees, then “a bright flash of white and all the lights in town went out.”

Delivery driver Adeel Anwar said the heat and billowing smoke from the blaze were “absolutely apocalyptic.” He told Sky News that as he drove past the substation “I just felt the heat ... I tried to just get out of the area as quick as possible.”

Firefighters brought the blaze under control after seven hours and were still working to douse the flames on Friday. No injuries were reported.

Electricity supplier National Grid said power was restored to 62,000 customers by Friday morning, with 4,900 still without electricity.

Air India suspends Heathrow flights, with one turning around in mid-air

NEW DELHI — All Air India flights to Heathrow were suspended until Friday midnight, the carrier said in a statement, adding that it will “update about resumption of operations as soon as we have more information.”

The airline also said one of its flights had to return mid-air to Mumbai and another was diverted to Frankfurt. The company didn’t specify how many flights were affected in total.

Some passengers at New Delhi’s Indira Gandhi International Airport said they had been informed of cancellations, while others said they were still waiting for the airline to provide them with alternate flights.

“As soon I went inside to get my boarding pass, they (airline staff) told us that the flight has been cancelled and there is no flight for next two, three days,” passenger Vikas Swarup said.

Emma Fulton, who was in India’s Jaipur city for a wedding, said she received a text message en route to the airport.

“We had a text message about 20 mins before we arrived here, but we were already on the road,” she said.

9 flights through Dubai canceled after Heathrow closure

DUBAI — Eight outbound flights from Dubai International Airport to Heathrow, and one inbound from London to Dubai, were canceled Friday, according to Dubai Airports.

Travelers were told to contact their airlines for rebooking options.

What should travelers do?

Any travelers impacted by the Heathrow closure should contact their airline.

If a phone call doesn’t go through, travelers can also try contacting the airline on social media. Several airlines were responding to passengers’ posts on social platform X on Friday. A representative for British Airways, for example, was telling customers on X to send a direct message to the airline’s account so they could assist in rebooking.

For customers who are seeking a refund or other compensation, a European Union regulation known as EU261 could apply. Because the United Kingdom is no longer part of the EU, however, not every flight will be covered under EU261. The regulation covers flights within the EU, as well as flights departing from the EU to a non-EU country.

London flights from Barcelona and Madrid canceled

Spanish airport operator Aena said on Friday morning that 20 flights to and from Madrid and Barcelona had been cancelled due to the Heathrow power outage. A total of 54 flights headed to or departing from Spanish airports were affected.

In a post on X, the state-controlled commercial airport operator advised travelers to contact airlines for more information about disrupted flights.

Limited disruption in Rome from Heathrow closure

ROME — The fire that shut Heathrow airport has caused limited disruption at Rome’s Leonardo da Vinci international airport in Fiumicino.

A spokesperson said that so far 10 flights, to and from Heathrow, have been canceled, but passengers have been kept informed and there were no lines at the airport.

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'An incredibly long day' for travelers

GLASGOW — Lawrence Hayes was three-quarters of the way to London from John F. Kennedy International in New York when Virgin Atlantic announced they were being diverted to Glasgow.

"It was a red-eye flight and I'd already had a full day, so I don't even know how long I've been up for," Hayes told the BBC as he was getting off the plane in Scotland. "Luckily I managed to get hold of my wife and she's kindly booked me a train ticket to get back to Euston (railway station in London), but it's going to be an incredibly long day."

Ryanair adds 'rescue flights' between Dublin and London Stansted to help Heathrow travelers

DUBLIN — Ryanair has added eight "rescue flights" between Dublin and Stansted, another London airport, on Friday and Saturday to help travelers impacted by the fire at Heathrow, the budget airline announced. Ryanair does not operate at Heathrow.

Four of the flights will occur Friday afternoon, and the remaining on Saturday morning.

Lufthansa Group cancels flights to and from Heathrow

BERLIN — All flights by Lufthansa Group to and from Heathrow were canceled on Friday.

The company didn't specify how many flights were affected in total, but said in an emailed statement that "passengers affected by the flight cancellations have been rebooked on other flights and informed about it."

Lufthansa Group includes Germany's biggest airline, Lufthansa, as well as Austrian Airlines, Swiss, Brussels Airlines and others.

No evidence that substation fire was suspicious, UK officials say

LONDON — British officials working to determine the cause of an electrical substation fire that shut Heathrow Airport have not yet found evidence it's suspicious.

Energy Secretary Ed Miliband says "it's too early to say" what caused the huge blaze, but there's "no suggestion" of foul play.

London's Metropolitan Police say the fire brigade is leading the investigation, suggesting it's not thought to be criminal.

Flights from Tokyo diverted or turned around

TOKYO — The closure of Heathrow forced two Japanese flights that had already departed to return to Tokyo and a third to change its destination, airline officials said.

Japan Airlines said one of its two Heathrow-bound flights Friday returned to Tokyo's Haneda international airport, and another one diverted to the Finnish capital, Helsinki. A third flight out of Tokyo, operated by All Nippon Airways, another major Japanese carrier, also returned to Haneda.

Airline officials advised passengers to check the latest flight information for Saturday.

Birdsong replaces aircraft noise for Heathrow neighbors

The noise from Europe's busiest airport is a constant bugbear for those who live nearby, but has temporarily fallen silent.

"Basically living near Heathrow is noisy. There are planes every 90 seconds or so, plus the constant hum of traffic, but you get used to it, to the point of no longer noticing," said James Henderson, who has lived next to Heathrow for over 20 years.

"Today is different. You can hear the birds singing."

Qantas diverts Heathrow flights to Paris

Australian airline Qantas diverted its Singapore-London and Perth-London flights to Paris on Friday and then bused the travelers to London, a spokesperson said.

Customers will be contacted directly if their flight is impacted.

Aviation expert compares impact to 9/11 or Icelandic volcano

LONDON — Aviation consultant John Strickland says it will take several days for global airline travel to recover from a daylong closure of Heathrow Airport.

He said: "We're talking about several days' worth of disruption to get the planes recovered and start using them again to move planned and disrupted passengers."

Strickland compared the disruption to "a contained version of 9/11 or, to an extent, the Icelandic volcanic eruption" that shut European airspace in 2010.

"I remembered seeing on those occasions — particularly more so on 9/11 — it happened so quick and

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then U.S. airspace was closed, they were turning back aircraft and holding planes. That's the parallel I would make.

"Heathrow being such a busy airport and full, there's no kind of wriggle room for getting out of these kind of things."

Heathrow closure has widespread impact on air travel

The closure of Heathrow rippled through global aviation. The long-haul carrier Emirates in Dubai, which has London as one of its top destinations, cancelled six round-trip flights to Heathrow on Friday alone.

Etihad in neighboring Abu Dhabi cancelled two round-trip flights, while one flight diverted to Frankfurt, Germany. Qatar Airways said at least seven scheduled flights were "impacted," with its staff working with passengers.

Blaze that shut down Heathrow is unprecedented, UK government minister says

A British government minister says a "catastrophic" fire knocked out a backup generator as well as the electrical substation that supplies power to Heathrow Airport.

Energy Secretary Ed Miliband told the BBC that the blaze is "unprecedented."

He said it's too early to know the cause but that lessons will have to be learned about "protection and the resilience that is in place for major institutions like Heathrow."

Flights from Hong Kong rerouted to Amsterdam, airline says

Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific Airways rerouted two overnight flights to Amsterdam and canceled at least two daytime flights to Heathrow, according to the flight status page on its website.

Fire that closed Heathrow is now under control but not out

The London Fire Brigade says the electrical substation blaze closed Heathrow Airport is under control.

The fire caused a widespread power outage, affecting thousands of homes, local businesses, and disrupting thousands of flights.

LFB Assistant Commissioner Pat Goulbourne says the fire was under control just after 8 a.m.

"This was a very visible and significant incident, and our firefighters worked tirelessly in challenging conditions to bring the fire under control as swiftly as possible," he said. "Thanks to their efforts and a coordinated multi-agency response, we successfully contained the fire and prevented further spread."

Heathrow is one of the world's busiest airports

Heathrow is one of the world's busiest airports for international travel. It had its busiest January on record earlier this year, with more than 6.3 million passengers, up more than 5% for the same period last year. January also was the 11th month in a row it averaged over 200,000 passengers a day, with the airport citing transatlantic travel as a key contributor.

Heathrow normally opens for flights at 6 a.m. due to nighttime flying restrictions. It said the closure would last until 11:59 p.m. Friday.

The U.K. government earlier this year approved building a third runway at the airport to boost the economy and connectivity to the world.

Flights turn around as airport closes

Seven United Airlines flights returned to their origin or diverted to other airports and its flights Friday to Heathrow were canceled, the airline said.

The FlightAware website showed more cancellations including two from John F. Kennedy International in New York, a Delta Airlines flight and an American Airlines flight.

Other jets were diverted to Gatwick Airport outside London, Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris and Ireland's Shannon Airport, tracking services showed.

National Rail canceled all trains to and from the airport.

Fire cuts off power to Heathrow and thousands of homes

Flames soared into the sky when a transformer at an electrical substation caught fire in west London late Thursday night. The fire continued to smolder after daybreak.

Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks said in a post on X the power outage affected more than 16,300 homes. About 150 people were evacuated. The cause of the fire is yet to be determined.

Sudan's military says it has retaken Khartoum's Republican Palace, seat of country's government

By SAMY MAGDY and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Sudan's military said Friday it retook the Republican Palace in Khartoum, the last heavily guarded bastion of rival paramilitary forces in the capital, after nearly two years of fighting.

The seizure of the Republican Palace, surrounded by government ministries, represents a major symbolic victory for Sudan's military against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. However, it likely doesn't mean the end of the war as the RSF holds territory in Sudan's western Darfur region and elsewhere.

Social media videos showed its soldiers inside giving the date as the 21st day of Ramadan, the holy Muslim fasting month, which corresponds to Friday. A Sudanese military officer wearing a captain's epaulettes made the announcement in the video and confirmed the troops were inside the compound.

The palace appeared to be partly in ruins, with soldiers' steps crunching broken tiles underneath their boots. Soldiers carrying assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenade launchers chanted: "God is the greatest!"

Khaled al-Aiser, Sudan's information minister, said the military had retaken the palace in a post on the social platform X.

"Today the flag is raised, the palace is back and the journey continues until victory is complete," he wrote.

Palace's fall a symbolic and strategic moment

The fall of the Republican Palace, a compound along the Nile River that was the seat of government before the war erupted and is immortalized on Sudanese banknotes and postage stamps, marks another battlefield gain for Sudan's military. It has made steady advances in recent months under army chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan.

It means the rival Rapid Support Forces, under Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, have been mostly expelled from the capital, Khartoum, after Sudan's war began in April 2023. Sporadic gunfire could be heard throughout the capital Friday, though it wasn't clear if it involved fighting or was celebratory.

Brig. Gen. Nabil Abdullah, a spokesperson for the Sudanese military, described its troops as holding the palace, surrounding ministry buildings and the Arab Market to the south of the palace. Khartoum International Airport, only some 2.5 kilometers (1.5 miles) southeast of the palace, has been held by the RSF since the start of the war.

Suleiman Sandal, a politician associated with the RSF, acknowledged the government took the palace and called it part of "the ups and downs" of history.

The RSF later issued a statement claiming its forces "are still present of the vicinity of the area, fighting bravely." A drone attack on the palace believed to have been launched by the RSF reportedly killed troops and journalists with Sudanese state television.

Late Thursday, the RSF claimed it seized control of the Sudanese city of al-Maliha, a strategic desert city in North Darfur near the borders of Chad and Libya. Sudan's military has acknowledged fighting around al-Maliha, but has not said it lost the city.

Al-Maliha is around 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of the city of El Fasher, which remains held by the Sudanese military despite near-daily strikes by the surrounding RSF.

The head of the U.N. children's agency has said the conflict created the world's largest and humanitarian crisis. UNICEF on Friday separately decried the looting of food aid meant to go to malnourished children at Al Bashir Hospital on the outskirts of Khartoum.

"Commercial supplies and humanitarian aid have been blocked for more than three months due to ongoing conflict along key routes," UNICEF warned. "The result is a severe shortage of food, medicine and other essentials, with thousands of civilians trapped in active fighting."

The war has killed more than 28,000 people, forced millions to flee their homes and left some families eating grass in a desperate attempt to survive as famine sweeps parts of the country. Other estimates suggest a far higher death toll.

The Republican Palace had been the seat of power during the British colonization of Sudan. It also saw some of the first independent Sudanese flags raised over the country in 1956. It also had been the main

office of Sudan's president and other top officials.

The Sudanese military has long targeted the palace and its grounds, shelling and firing on the compound. Sudan has faced years of chaos and war

Sudan, a nation in northeastern Africa, has been unstable since a popular uprising forced the removal of longtime autocratic President Omar al-Bashir in 2019. A short-lived transition to democracy was derailed when Burhan and Dagalo led a military coup in 2021.

The RSF and Sudan's military then began fighting each other in 2023.

Burhan's forces, including Sudan's military and allied militias, have advanced against the RSF since the start of this year. They retook a key refinery north of Khartoum. They then pushed in on RSF positions around the capital itself. The fighting has led to an increase in civilian casualties.

Al-Bashir faces charges at the International Criminal Court over carrying out a genocidal campaign in the early 2000s in the western Darfur region with the Janjaweed, the precursor to the RSF. Rights groups and the U.N. accuse the RSF and allied Arab militias of again attacking ethnic African groups in this war.

Since the war began, both the Sudanese military and the RSF have faced allegations of human rights abuses. Before U.S. President Joe Biden left office, the State Department declared the RSF are committing genocide.

The military and the RSF have denied committing abuses.

Ocean dumping – or a climate solution? A growing industry bets on the ocean to capture carbon

By HELEN WIEFFERING Associated Press

HALIFAX, Nova Scotia (AP) — From the grounds of a gas-fired power plant on the eastern shores of Canada, a little-known company is pumping a slurry of minerals into the ocean in the name of stopping climate change.

Whether it's pollution or a silver bullet that will save the planet may depend on whom you ask.

From shore, a pipe releases a mixture of water and magnesium oxide — a powdery white mineral used in everything from construction to heartburn pills that Planetary Technologies, based in Nova Scotia, is betting will absorb more planet-warming gases into the sea.

"Restore the climate. Heal the ocean," reads the motto stamped on a shipping container nearby.

Planetary is part of a growing industry racing to engineer a solution to global warming using the absorbent power of the oceans. It is backed by \$1 million from Elon Musk's foundation and competing for a prize of \$50 million more.

Dozens of other companies and academic groups are pitching the same theory: that sinking rocks, nutrients, crop waste or seaweed in the ocean could lock away climate-warming carbon dioxide for centuries or more. Nearly 50 field trials have taken place in the past four years, with startups raising hundreds of millions in early funds.

But the field remains rife with debate over the consequences for the oceans if the strategies are deployed at large scale, and over the exact benefits for the climate. Critics say the efforts are moving too quickly and with too few guardrails.

"It's like the Wild West. Everybody is on the bandwagon, everybody wants to do something," said Adina Paytan, who teaches earth and ocean science at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Planetary, like most of the ocean startups, is financing its work by selling carbon credits — or tokens representing one metric ton of carbon dioxide removed from the air. Largely unregulated and widely debated, carbon credits have become popular this century as a way for companies to purchase offsets rather than reduce emissions themselves. Most credits are priced at several hundred dollars apiece.

The industry sold more than 340,000 marine carbon credits last year, up from just 2,000 credits four years ago, according to the tracking site CDR.fyi. But that amount of carbon removal is a tiny fraction of what scientists say will be required to keep the planet livable for centuries to come.

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Those leading the efforts, including Will Burt, Planetary's chief ocean scientist, acknowledge they're entering uncharted territory — but say the bigger danger for the planet and the oceans is not moving quickly enough.

"We need to understand if it's going to work or not. The faster we do, the better."

Vacuuming carbon into the sea

Efforts to capture carbon dioxide have exploded in recent years.

Most climate models now show that cutting emissions won't be enough to curb global warming, according to the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The world needs to actively remove heat-trapping gases, as well — and the ocean could be a logical place to capture them.

Money has already poured into different strategies on land — among them, pumping carbon dioxide from the air, developing sites to store carbon underground and replanting forests, which naturally store CO₂. But many of those projects are limited by space and could impact nearby communities. The ocean already regulates Earth's climate by absorbing heat and carbon, and by comparison, it seems limitless.

"Is that huge surface area an option to help us deal with and mitigate the worst effects of climate change?" asked Adam Subhas, who is leading a carbon removal project with the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, based on Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

On a Tuesday afternoon along the edge of Halifax Harbour, Burt stashed his bike helmet and donned a hard hat to give two engineering students a tour of Planetary's site.

A detached truck trailer sat in a clearing, storing massive bags of magnesium oxide mined in Spain and shipped across the Atlantic to Canada.

Most companies looking offshore for climate solutions are trying to reduce or transform the carbon dioxide stored in the ocean. If they can achieve that, Burt said, the oceans will act "like a vacuum" to absorb more gases from the air.

Planetary is using magnesium oxide to create that vacuum. When dissolved into seawater, it transforms carbon dioxide from a gas to stable molecules that won't interact with the atmosphere for thousands of years. Limestone, olivine and other alkaline rocks have the same effect.

Other companies are focused on growing seaweed and algae to capture the gas. These marine organisms act like plants on land, absorbing carbon dioxide from the ocean just as trees do from the air. The company Gigablue, for instance, has begun pouring nutrients in New Zealand waters to grow tiny organisms known as phytoplankton where they otherwise couldn't survive.

Still others view the deepest parts of the ocean as a place to store organic material that would emit greenhouse gases if left on land.

Companies have sunk wood chips off the coast of Iceland and are planning to sink Sargassum, a yellowish-brown seaweed, to extreme depths. The startup Carboniferous is preparing a federal permit to place sugarcane pulp at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico, also referred to as the Gulf of America as declared by President Donald Trump.

Though Planetary's work can sound like some "scary science experiment," Burt said, the company's testing so far suggests that magnesium oxide poses minimal risks to marine ecosystems, plankton or fish. The mineral has long been used at water treatment plants and industrial facilities to de-acidify water.

Halifax Harbour is just one location where Planetary hopes to operate. The company has set up another site at a wastewater treatment plant in coastal Virginia and plans to begin testing in Vancouver later this year.

According to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, the industry needs to remove billions of tons of carbon dioxide per year by mid-century to meet climate goals set nearly a decade ago during the Paris climate agreement.

"The whole point here is to mitigate against a rapidly accelerating climate crisis," Burt said. "We have to act with safety and integrity, but we also have to act fast."

'Twisted in knots'

While there's broad enthusiasm in the industry, coastal communities aren't always quick to jump on board. In North Carolina, a request to dump shiploads of olivine near the beachside town of Duck prompted

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questions that downsized the project by more than half.

The company Vesta, formed in 2021, promotes the greenish-hued mineral as a tool to draw down carbon into the ocean and create mounds that buffer coastal towns from storm surges and waves.

During the permitting process, officials at the state Wildlife Resources Commission, Division of Marine Fisheries and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service raised a long list of concerns.

"As proposed, the project is a short term study with the potential for long term impacts and no remediation plans," a field supervisor for the Fish and Wildlife Service wrote. The agencies said olivine could smother the seafloor ecosystem and threaten a hotspot for sea turtles and Atlantic sturgeon.

Vesta CEO Tom Green said the company never expected its original application to be approved as written. "It's more the start of a dialogue with regulators and the community," he said.

The project went forward last summer with a much smaller scope, a restoration plan, and more detailed requirements to monitor deep-water species. Eight thousand metric tons of olivine shipped from Norway are now submerged beneath North Carolina's waves.

Green said he understands why people are skeptical, and that he tries to remind them Vesta's goal is to save the environment, not to harm it. It's the company's job, he says, "to show up in local communities, physically show up, and listen and share our data and build trust that way."

Fishing communities have opposed another climate project led by Subhas of the Woods Hole research center that has generated 10 months of conversation and debate.

The project as proposed last spring would have poured 66,000 gallons of sodium hydroxide solution into ocean waters near Cape Cod. Woods Hole later proposed downsizing the project to use less than 17,000 gallons of the chemical, with federal approval still pending.

In two separate reviews, the Environmental Protection Agency said it believes the project's scientific merit outweighs the environmental risks, and noted it doesn't foresee "unacceptable impacts" on water quality or fishing.

But fifth-generation fisherman Jerry Leeman III wants to know what will happen to the lobster, pollock and flounder eggs that float in the water column and on the ocean surface if they are suddenly doused with the harsh chemical.

"Are you telling all the fishermen not to fish in this area while you're doing this project? And who compensates these individuals for displacing everybody?" he said.

Subhas' team expects the chemical's most potent concentrations to last for less than two minutes in the ocean before it's diluted. They've also agreed to delay or relocate the project if schools of fish or patches of fish eggs are visible in the surrounding waters.

Sarah Schumann, who fishes commercially for bluefish in Rhode Island and leads a campaign for "fishery friendly" climate action, said after attending four listening sessions she's still unsure how to balance her support for the research with the apprehension she hears in the fishing community.

"If I was actually trying to decide where I land on this issue, I'd be twisted in knots," she said.

And Planetary, which has seen little pushback from locals along Halifax Harbour, faced a series of protests against a climate project it proposed in Cornwall, England.

In April last year, more than a hundred people marched along a beach carrying signs that read "Keep our sea chemical free."

Sue Sayer, who runs a research group studying seals, said she realized in discussions with Planetary that "they had no idea about what animals or plants or species live in St. Ives Bay." The company's initial release of magnesium hydroxide into the bay, she said, fired up a community that is "massively, scientifically passionate about the sea."

David Santillo, a senior scientist with Greenpeace Research Laboratories at the University of Exeter, took issue with how Planetary proposed tracking the impact of its work. According to a recorded presentation viewed by AP, the company's baseline measurements in Cornwall were drawn from just a few days.

"If you don't have a baseline over a number of years and seasons," Santillo said, "you don't know whether you would even be able to detect any of your effects."

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An audit commissioned by the United Kingdom's Environment Agency found that Planetary's experiments posed a "very low" risk to marine life, and a potential for significant carbon removal.

Still, the company put its proposal to pump another 200 metric tons of minerals on pause. Following a government recommendation, Planetary said it would search for a source of magnesium hydroxide closer to the Cornwall site, rather than shipping it from China. It also assured locals that it wouldn't sell carbon credits from its past chemical release.

Sara Nawaz, research director at American University's Institute for Responsible Carbon Removal, said she understood why scientists sometimes struggle to connect with communities and gain their support. Early research shows the public is reluctant to the idea of "engineering" the climate.

Many people have a strong emotional connection to the ocean, she added. There's a fear that once you put something in the ocean, "you can't take it back."

The great unknowns

It's not just locals who have questions about whether these technologies will work. Scientists, too, have acknowledged major unknowns. But some of the principles behind the technologies have been studied for decades by now, and the laboratory can only simulate so much.

During a recent EPA listening session about the Woods Hole project, a chorus of oceanographers and industry supporters said it's time for ocean-scale tests.

"There's an urgency to move ahead and conduct this work," said Ken Buesseler, another Woods Hole scientist who studies the carbon captured by algae.

Even so, the ocean is a dynamic, challenging landscape to work in. Scientists are still uncovering new details about how it absorbs and recycles carbon, and any materials they add to seawater are liable to sink, become diluted or wash away to other locations, challenging efforts to track how the ocean responds.

"It's so hard to get the ocean to do what you want it to," said Sarah Cooley, a carbon cycle scientist who has worked for the nonprofit Ocean Conservancy and the federal government.

Katja Fennel, chair of the oceanography department at Dalhousie University, works on modeling how much carbon Planetary has captured in Halifax Harbour— a number that comes with some uncertainty.

She co-leads a group of academics that monitors the company's project using water samples, sensors and sediment cores taken from locations around the bay. Some days, her team adds a red dye to the pipes to watch how the minerals dissolve and flow out to sea.

The models are necessary to simulate what would happen if Planetary did nothing, Fennel said. They're also necessary because the ocean is so large and deep it's impossible to collect enough data to give a complete picture of it.

"We can't measure everywhere all the time," she said.

Questions also linger about how long the carbon capture will last.

It's a point especially important to companies working with algae, wood chips, or other organic materials, because depending on where they decompose, they could release carbon dioxide back into the atmosphere.

The deeper the plants and algae sink, the longer the carbon stays locked away. But that's no easy feat to ensure. Running Tide, a now-shuttered company that sank nearly 20,000 metric tons of wood chips in Icelandic waters, said carbon could be sequestered for as long as three millennia or as little as 50 years.

Even if these solutions do work long term, most companies are operating on too small of a scale to influence the climate. Expanding to meet current climate goals will take massive amounts of resources, energy and money.

"The question is, what happens when you scale it up to billions of tons every year?" said David Ho, co-founder and chief science officer of the nonprofit (C)Worthy, which works on verifying the impact of ocean-based carbon removal. "And that's still to be determined."

Planetary's Burt imagines a future in which minerals are pumped out through power plants and water treatment facilities on every major coastline in the world. But that would require a large, steady volume of magnesium oxide or similar minerals, along with the energy to mine and transport them.

Seaweed and algae growth would need to expand exponentially. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine has estimated that nearly two-thirds of the world's coastline would need to be

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encircled by kelp to even begin to make a dent in global warming. The company Seafields, which is running tests in the Caribbean, says it envisions building a Sargassum farm between Brazil and West Africa more than 200 miles wide.

There's the risk that these expansions exacerbate environmental harm that isn't detectable in small trials, and because of global water circulation, could be felt around the world.

But the alternative to never trying, Ho said, is unabated climate change.

Running out of time

Late last year, Planetary announced that its Nova Scotia project successfully captured 138 metric tons of carbon – allowing it to deliver exactly 138 carbon credits to two of the company's early investors, Shopify and Stripe.

Monetizing the work is uncomfortable for many who study the ocean.

"On one hand, it's encouraging more research and more science, which is good. On the other hand, it's opening doors for abuse of the system," said Paytan, the Santa Cruz professor, who has been contacted by several startups asking to collaborate.

She pointed to companies that are accused of drastically overestimating the carbon they sequestered, though they bragged of restoring rainforests in Peru and replacing smoke-producing stoves in Africa.

But absent more government-funded research, several companies told AP there's little way for the field to advance without selling credits.

"Unfortunately, that's the way we've set things up now, is that we put it in the hands of these startups to develop the techniques," said Ho.

Back in his shipping container office along Halifax Harbour, Burt said he understood the unease around selling credits, and said Planetary takes seriously the need to operate openly, responsibly and cautiously. But he also says there's a need for startups that can move at a faster pace than academia.

"We cannot study this solution at the same rate that we've been studying the problems," he said. He says there's not enough time.

Last year marked the hottest year in Earth's history, even as global carbon emissions are projected to reach another all-time high.

"We need to reduce emissions urgently, drastically," said Fennel, the researcher studying Planetary's project. "Any removal of CO2 from the atmosphere is much more difficult and costly than avoiding CO2 emissions to begin with."

The industry continues to push forward. Planetary said in February that it had sequestered a total of 1,000 metric tons of carbon in the ocean, and Carboniferous completed its first test of sinking sugarcane to the seafloor. Early this year, Gigablue signed a deal for 200,000 carbon credits for dispersing nutrient-filled particles in the ocean.

A growing number of companies are also using electricity to alter seawater molecules, with the same goal of prompting the ocean to absorb more carbon dioxide. The startup Ebb Carbon recently struck a deal with Microsoft to provide up to 350,000 carbon credits, and Captura, which is funded in part by investors affiliated with oil and gas production, expanded its operations from California to Hawaii.

It's unclear whether the U.S. government will stall or support ocean climate work going forward. The policy landscape continues to shift as the Trump administration seeks to roll back a wide range of environmental regulations and reconsider the scientific finding that greenhouse gases endanger public health.

Though White House adviser Musk has downplayed some of his past statements about global warming, four years ago his foundation committed \$100 million to fund a competition for the best solution for carbon capture, of which Planetary is in the running for the top prize.

The winner will be announced April 23 — the day after Earth Day.

Russian drones strike Ukrainian city of Odesa, underlining challenges for even limited truce

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian drones pummeled the Ukrainian Black Sea port city of Odesa, injuring three people and sparking massive fires, officials said Friday, an attack that underlined Moscow's intention to pursue aerial attacks even as it agreed to temporarily halt strikes on energy facilities.

The strike came shortly before Czech Republic President Peter Pavel visited Odesa early Friday morning and held meetings with the city's leaders and officials from other southern regions.

"This is another reminder to the whole world: the war continues and Ukraine continues to fight," the head of the Odesa region, Oleh Kiper, said in a statement.

He reported blazes at at least three locations after the attack late Thursday. "Civilian infrastructure, commercial facilities are on fire, cars damaged," Kiper said.

Over 70 people and 20 fire engines were involved in extinguishing what the emergency services called "massive fires."

In another attack, Russian glide bombs injured at least six people, including a child, in the Zaporizhzhia region overnight Thursday to Friday. Regional head Ivan Fedorov published photos showing fire fighters extinguishing flames at multiple damaged residential buildings.

The Ukrainian air force reported that Russia fired 214 exploding drones and decoys in the latest wave of attacks. It said 114 of them were intercepted and another 81 were jammed.

Russia's Defense Ministry said air defenses shot down 43 Ukrainian drones, 34 of them over the Volgograd region and others over Rostov, Kursk and Belgorod regions. The authorities didn't report any casualties or significant damage.

Meanwhile, a massive blaze at an oil depot in the Krasnodar region has continued to rage since it was hit by a Ukrainian drone attack late Wednesday.

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

After a roughly hourlong call with Trump on Wednesday, 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 from attack under the agreement.

The three sides appeared to hold starkly different views about what the deal covered. While the White House said "energy and infrastructure" would be covered, the Kremlin declared that the agreement referred more narrowly to "energy infrastructure." Zelenskyy said he would also like railways and ports to be protected.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov emphasized Friday that the agreement reached between Trump and Putin referred only to energy facilities, adding that the Russian military is fulfilling Putin's order to halt such attacks for 30 days.

"The Russian military are currently refraining from strikes on Ukraine's energy infrastructure in accordance with the agreement reached between Russia and the United States," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters.

Democrats' new internet strategy tops trending charts but also draws mockery from allies and foes

By MATT BROWN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For weeks, Democratic lawmakers have met with and mimicked figures they believe may offer them a path back to power in Washington: online influencers and content creators.

Hours before President Donald Trump's joint address to Congress this month, Senate Democrats huddled

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with a dozen online progressive personalities who have millions of followers. House Democrats were introduced, without staff, to 40 content creators who Democratic leaders said could help them grow their audience online.

An earlier tutorial session in February featured online personalities like the YouTube commentator Brian Tyler Cohen.

The result has been a burst of Democratic online content, including direct-to-camera explainers in parked cars, scripted vertical videos, podcast appearances and livestreams — some topping trending charts online, others drawing mockery from liberal allies and Republicans in Congress.

But while the Democratic Party is largely divided over the path forward after last year's election losses, party leaders agree that, no matter the message, how they connect with voters in the digital media landscape will be key to a political comeback.

Democrats are aiming to double engagement with digital content

More than a dozen Democratic senators, asked about the party's digital strategy, pointed to Sen. Cory Booker of New Jersey as the architect of their new push.

"We've seen tremendous growth of Democratic senators now. They're engaging in the tools and strategies necessary to elevate their voice in a new, changing media market, where legacy media is not the place that people get their news now," Booker said. "We're just weeks into this, but just by making key changes ... we're seeing a massive growth in engagement with the content that our senators are creating, and we've only just begun."

Booker said he's aiming for Democratic senators to double online engagement with their content over the next year — and early metrics have been noticeable. Democratic senators racked up more than 87 million views on content they published in response to Trump's joint address to Congress, according to Booker's office.

But the Democrats' digital efforts also draw Republican mockery

Not all of that online engagement is positive. After more than two dozen Democratic senators posted identical scripted videos knocking Trump's speech, saying he should have addressed the cost of living and his support for billionaire adviser Elon Musk, conservatives mocked them as inauthentic and out of touch.

"They are all actors reading a script," Musk wrote on X, the social media platform he owns.

There's no doubt that Democrats are playing catch-up. Trump and his fellow Republicans built a digital operation that fed on bombast and celebrity, and it's a strategy they've taken with them to the White House. Official government accounts are now filled with right-wing memes, cinematic videos and pugnacious statements.

The Democratic embrace of influencers has also yielded mixed early results. Democrats were ridiculed online after a food and wellness influencer who attended the House Democrats' creators event created a "Choose Your Fighter" video collage of Democratic congresswomen for Women's History Month.

The White House posted a video in response that read "America chose its fighters last November," and the Pentagon, normally known for being studiously non-partisan, posted a video stating "We chose our fighters a long time ago."

But Booker and other Democratic leaders don't consider the sneers to be a downside. Missteps are to be expected, they say, but the path to Americans' attention will require some discomfort from lawmakers.

"I do think that the caucus as a whole is trying to figure out how we show people that we are real people," said Rep. Jasmine Crockett of Texas, one of the congresswomen featured in the viral "Fighter" video. Crockett, whose posts regularly garner millions of views online, said she was used to criticism for her often frank statements and was more interested in combating perceptions that Democrats are "elitist" or "robotic."

"I didn't like the jumping, I'm going to be honest, though," Crockett added about the viral "Choose Your Fighter" video.

Trump prompts a more aggressive digital posture

Democrats adopted a more combative stance online in recent weeks as Trump's moves to slash the federal workforce drew protests from liberals and pushback at GOP town halls. Top Democratic digital

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operatives who worked for the 2024 presidential campaign of then-Vice President Kamala Harris have been in high demand, with many Democrats anticipating close 2026 races in which digital strategies may be key.

Some of the most prominent Democrats across the country have been engaging more in new media since the election. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York has touted the party's message on progressive podcasts over the last month, including from the comedian Jon Stewart and the progressive outlet MeidasTouch. Clips of those videos were also lampooned online but garnered millions of views.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a potential Democratic presidential contender in 2028, has launched a podcast of his own on which he has welcomed close Trump allies like the right-wing activist Charlie Kirk and former Trump aide Steve Bannon to discuss hot-button political topics.

"We want to make sure we hit the podcasters that normally don't have Democrats on there," said Rep. Derek Tran, a Democrat from a competitive California House district. "The ones that are more right-leaning or independent, and be able to address a crowd and an audience that's not typical for the Democratic base."

Democrats divide on message vs. messaging

Some House Democrats have expressed frustration that the guidance from Democratic leaders about social media is too vague, while others grumble that leaders are too prescriptive in their approach to messaging on platforms they don't intuitively understand. Meanwhile, Democratic strategists have cautioned lawmakers that garnering attention online is secondary to the goal of using social media as a tool in specific policy fights and campaigns.

"I think there's a fine line before we're being cringe and trying too hard and seeming too thirsty. I think the most important thing in any of this is being as authentic and genuine as we can be," said Rep. Sara Jacobs, D-Calif.

"When it comes to authenticity, it also means leaning into what makes each of us unique. Like many of my colleagues probably should not be doing 'get ready with me' videos. It would look super cringe. But I'm a 36-year-old woman, and I do my makeup all the time, and I watch a lot of makeup tutorial videos, so it makes sense for me to do it," said Jacobs.

Some Democrats think that the party's messaging strategy hinges as much on the messengers as the medium it's communicated on.

"If you know how to talk to people, it doesn't matter what medium is going to exist," said Sen. Ruben Gallego, a freshman Democratic senator from Arizona. "You could be the best freaking spokesperson in the world, but if you don't know how to talk to working-class people, it doesn't matter if you have the best TikTok following, it's just not going to translate."

London's Heathrow Airport closed for the day after a substation fire, disrupting travel

By BRIAN MELLEY and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's Heathrow Airport was closed all day Friday after a fire at a nearby electrical substation knocked out its power, disrupting flights for hundreds of thousands of passengers at Europe's busiest travel hub.

At least 1,350 flights to and from Heathrow were affected, flight tracking service FlightRadar 24 said, and the impact was likely to last several days as passengers try to reschedule their travel.

Some 120 flights were in the air when the closure was announced, with some turned around and others diverted to Gatwick Airport outside London, Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris or Ireland's Shannon Airport, tracking services showed.

Lawrence Hayes was three-quarters of the way to London from John F. Kennedy International in New York when Virgin Atlantic announced they were being diverted to Glasgow.

"It was a red-eye flight and I'd already had a full day, so I don't even know how long I've been up for," Hayes told the BBC as he was getting off the plane in Scotland. "Luckily I managed to get hold of my wife and she's kindly booked me a train ticket to get back to Euston, but it's going to be an incredibly long day."

Fire under control but impact to last days

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The fire at a power station about 2 miles from the airport was brought under control about seven hours after it erupted in a ball of flames, the London Fire Brigade said.

"We don't know the cause of this fire. It's obviously an unprecedented event," Energy Secretary Ed Miliband said.

Miliband said the fire had also knocked out a backup power supply to the airport. Heathrow said in a statement that the fire had given it no choice but to close the airport for the day.

"We expect significant disruption over the coming days, and passengers should not travel to the airport under any circumstances until the airport reopens," the airport said.

Heathrow is one of the world's busiest airports for international travel. It had its busiest January on record earlier this year, with more than 6.3 million passengers, up more than 5% from the same period last year. January also was the 11th month in a row that it averaged over 200,000 passengers a day, with the airport citing trans-Atlantic travel as a key contributor.

The disruption was reminiscent of the 2010 eruption of Iceland's Eyjafjallajokull volcano, which spewed clouds of ash into the atmosphere and created trans-Atlantic air travel chaos for months.

Heathrow was at the heart of a shorter disruption in 2023 when Britain's air traffic control system was hit by a breakdown that slowed takeoffs and landings across the U.K. on one of the busiest travel days of the year.

Anita Mendiratta, an aviation consultant, said the impact of the closure will be felt over two to four days as airlines, cargo carriers, and crews are re-mobilized and passengers rebooked.

"As soon as the airport opens up at midnight tonight, it's not only about resuming with tomorrow's flights, it's the backlog and the implications that have taken place," Mendiratta said. "Crew and aircraft, many are not where they're supposed to be right now. So the recalculation of this is going to be intense."

Diverted, canceled and in limbo

United Airlines said seven of its flights returned to their origin or diverted to other airports and its flights Friday to Heathrow were canceled.

At least two flights from Taiwan to London were affected, the island's Central News Agency reported. A China Airlines flight that left in the morning turned around and was headed back to Taiwan. An EVA Air flight stopped in Bangkok, a planned stopover, while the airline assessed the situation in London.

Singapore Airlines said on the X social media platform that its overnight flight to London was diverted to Frankfurt.

The FlightAware website showed more cancellations, including two from JFK in New York, a Delta Airlines flight and an American Airlines flight.

National Rail canceled all trains to and from the airport.

Blaze lit up the sky and darkened homes

The London Fire Brigade sent 10 fire engines and around 70 firefighters to control the blaze after flames soared into the sky when a transformer at an electrical substation caught fire in west London late Thursday night.

About 150 people were evacuated from their homes near the power station.

"This was a very visible and significant incident, and our firefighters worked tirelessly in challenging conditions to bring the fire under control as swiftly as possible," Assistant Commissioner Pat Goulbourne said. "Thanks to their efforts and coordinated multi-agency response, we successfully contained the fire and prevented further spread."

Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks said in a post on X the power outage affected more than 16,300 homes.

Heathrow normally opens for flights at 6 a.m. due to nighttime flying restrictions. It said the closure would last until 11:59 p.m. Friday.

The U.K. government earlier this year approved building a third runway at the airport to boost the economy and connectivity to the world.

This AP map shows sabotage across Europe that has been blamed on Russia and its proxies

By EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

Western officials have accused Russia and its proxies of staging dozens of attacks and other incidents across Europe since the invasion of Ukraine three years ago, according to data collected by The Associated Press.

They allege the disruption campaign is an extension of Russian President Vladimir Putin's war, intended to sow division in European societies and undermine support for Ukraine.

The AP documented 59 incidents in which European governments, prosecutors, intelligence services or other Western officials blamed Russia, groups linked to Russia or its ally Belarus for cyberattacks, spreading propaganda, plotting killings or committing acts of vandalism, arson, sabotage or espionage since the Feb. 24, 2022, invasion.

The incidents range from stuffing car tailpipes with expanding foam in Germany to a plot to plant explosives on cargo planes. They include setting fire to stores and a museum, hacking that targeted politicians and critical infrastructure, and spying by a ring convicted in the U.K.

Richard Moore, the head of Britain's foreign intelligence service, called it a "staggeringly reckless campaign" in November.

It is often difficult to prove Russia's involvement, and the Kremlin denied carrying out a sabotage campaign against the West. But more and more governments are publicly attributing attacks to Russia.

The alleged disruption has a double purpose, James Appathurai, the NATO official responsible for the alliance's response to such threats, told the AP.

One is to create "political disquiet" and undermine citizens' support for their governments and the other is to "undercut support for Ukraine," said Appathurai, deputy assistant secretary-general for Innovation, Hybrid, and Cyber.

During the investigation, the AP spoke to 15 current officials, including two prime ministers, and officials from five European intelligence services, three defense ministries and NATO, in addition to experts.

The AP plotted the incidents on a map to show the scope of the alleged campaign, which experts say is particularly worrying at a time when U.S. support for Ukraine is wavering and European allies are questioning Washington's reliability as a security partner and ally.

What is happening?

The cases are varied, and the largest concentrations are in countries that are major supporters of Ukraine.

Some incidents had the potential for catastrophic consequences, including mass casualties, as when packages exploded at shipping facilities in Germany and the U.K. Western officials said they suspected the packages were part of a broader plot by Russian intelligence to put bombs on cargo planes headed to the U.S. and Canada.

In another case, Western intelligence agencies uncovered what they said was a Russian plot to kill the head of a major German arms manufacturer that is a supplier of weapons to Ukraine.

European authorities are investigating several cases of damage to infrastructure under the Baltic Sea, including to a power cable linking Estonia and Finland. Finnish authorities detained a ship, suspected of being part of Russia's "shadow fleet" used to avoid sanctions, after that cable and others were damaged.

When a fake French Defense Ministry website claimed citizens were being called up to fight in Ukraine, a French minister denounced it as Russian disinformation. German authorities suspect Russia was behind a campaign to block up scores of car tailpipes ahead of national elections, according to a European intelligence official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

Officials from Estonia, Poland, Latvia and Finland, meanwhile, have accused Russia and Belarus of directing migrants to their borders.

Putin's spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, told the AP that the Kremlin has never been shown "any proofs" supporting the accusations and said "certainly we definitely reject any allegations."

How AP documented the cases

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The AP scoured through hundreds of incidents suspected to be linked to Russia since Moscow's invasion that were reported in open sources such as local media and government websites.

They were included in AP's tally only when officials drew a clear link to Russia, pro-Russian groups or ally Belarus. Most of the accusations were made to or reported by AP, either at the time they occurred or during the course of this investigation. Fourteen cases were reported by other news organizations and attributed to named officials.

In about a quarter of the cases, prosecutors have brought charges or courts have convicted people of carrying out the sabotage. But in many more, no specific culprit has been publicly identified or brought to justice.

A 'bolder' approach

Countries have always spied on their enemies and long waged propaganda campaigns to further their interests abroad. But since the invasion of Ukraine, Moscow has become "bolder," hitting the West with sabotage, vandalism and arson in addition to the tactics it previously used, including killings and cyberattacks, said Elisabeth Braw, an expert on the attacks at the Atlantic Council in Washington.

"The way you can weaken a country today is not by invading it," she said.

China has also been accused of espionage and cyber operations in Europe, and The Wall Street Journal reported that Ukrainian authorities were responsible for blowing up the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines in 2022. Kyiv has denied this.

"Multiple countries engage in hybrid operations," said David Salvo, managing director of the Alliance for Securing Democracy at the German Marshall Fund. "Russia is the overwhelming culprit in Europe."

How to respond — even as US support wavers

A coordinated approach — especially sharing intelligence — is critical to tracking and countering the threats, Appathurai said.

That cooperation — never easy since intelligence is not shared collectively across NATO members — faces new challenges now, as the Trump administration increasingly questions the role of the alliance, embraces Russia and spars with its European partners.

Still, as the scale of the campaign becomes clearer, some nations are becoming more assertive.

Appathurai pointed to the approach to suspected sabotage in the Baltic Sea, where NATO has launched a mission to protect critical infrastructure.

"If we are to have a chance of stemming the threat," Braw said, "then we have to work together."

Top Russian official visits North Korea to meet Kim

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A top Russian security official traveled to North Korea on Friday to meet leader Kim Jong Un, after North Korea recently reportedly sent additional troops to Russia to support its war against Ukraine.

A brief dispatch by Russia's state-run news agency Tass reported that Sergey Shoigu, Russia's Security Council secretary, had arrived in Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, and plans to meet top North Korean officials including Kim. It gave no further details including what Shoigu would discuss with Kim.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency confirmed the arrival of a Russian delegation led by Shoigu but didn't provide details on the purpose of their visit.

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

North Korea has been supplying a vast amount of conventional weapons to Russia, and last fall it sent about 10,000 to 12,000 troops to Russia as well, according to U.S., South Korean and Ukraine intelligence officials. In late February, South Korea's spy agency said North Korea appeared to have sent additional troops to Russia. South Korean media put the number of newly sent North Korean soldiers at about 1,000 to 3,000.

South Korea, the U.S. and others suspect North Korea is receiving economic and military assistance from

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Russia in return for providing weapons and troops. Many experts say North Korea will likely ramp up its support of Russia to win as much benefits as possible from Russia before the war ends.

Shoigu's trip could be related to Kim's possible trip to Russia, some observers say. In June 2024, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Pyongyang and signed a major mutual defense treaty with Kim. At the time, Putin invited Kim to visit Moscow.

In 2023, when Shoigu, then a defense minister, traveled to North Korea, Kim gave him a personal tour of a North Korean arms exhibition in what outside critics likened to a sales pitch. In September 2024, Shoigu, then with the new security council post, went to North Korea again for a meeting with Kim, and the two discussed expanding cooperation, according to North Korea's state media.

Earlier Friday, KCNA said Kim oversaw the test-launches of new anti-aircraft missiles the previous day. It cited Kim as calling the missiles "another major defense weapons system" for North Korea.

The missile launches, North Korea's sixth weapons testing activity this year, occurred on the same day that the U.S. and South Korean militaries concluded their annual training that North Korea views as an invasion rehearsal. The 11-day Freedom Shield command post exercise was the allies' first major joint military exercises since the inauguration of President Donald Trump in January, and the two countries held diverse field training exercises alongside the Freedom Shield drills.

North Korea's Defense Ministry alleged Friday the recent U.S.-South Korean drills involved simulations to destroy underground tunnels in the North to remove its nuclear weapons. An unidentified ministry spokesperson said the U.S. and South Korea would face "the gravest consequences they do not want," if they perform similar provocative actions again.

North Korea often churns out warlike rhetoric and threats of attacks when the U.S. and South Korea militaries conduct big drills. South Korea's Unification Ministry on Friday warned North Korea not to use its defensive drills with the U.S. as a pretext to launch provocations.

Trump has said he's willing to reach out to Kim to revive their nuclear diplomacy, but North Korea hasn't made any public responses to Trump's overture. Many experts say Kim, now preoccupied with his support of Russia's war efforts against Ukraine, won't likely embrace Trump's outreach anytime soon, but could seriously consider it when the war ends.

Kim and Trump met three times in 2018-19 to discuss North Korea's possible nuclear disarmament, but their diplomacy eventually fell apart due to disputes over U.S.-led economic sanctions on North Korea.

Deportees from the US hop embassy to embassy in Panama in a desperate scramble to seek asylum

By MATÍAS DELACROIX and MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

PANAMA CITY (AP) — Migrants from Afghanistan, Russia, Iran and China deported from the United States and dropped into limbo in Panama hopped door-to-door at embassies and consulates this week in a desperate attempt to seek asylum in any country that would accept them.

The focus of international humanitarian concern just weeks before, the deportees now say they're increasingly worried that with little legal and humanitarian assistance and no clear pathway forward offered by authorities, they may be forgotten.

"After this, we don't know what we'll do," said 29-year-old Hayatullah Omagh, who fled Afghanistan in 2022 after the Taliban takeover.

In February, the United States deported nearly 300 people from mostly Asian nations to Panama. The Central American ally was supposed to be a stopover for migrants from countries that were more challenging for the U.S. to deport to as the Trump administration tried to accelerate deportations. Some agreed to voluntarily return to their countries from Panama, but others refused out of fear of persecution and were sent to a remote camp in the Darien jungle for weeks.

Earlier this month, Panama released those remaining migrants from the camp, giving them one month to leave Panama. The government said they had declined assistance from international organizations, instead

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choosing to make their own arrangements. But with limited money, no familiarity with Panama and little to no Spanish, the migrants have struggled.

Seeking asylum door-to-door

On Tuesday, about a dozen migrants began visiting foreign missions in Panama's capital, including the Canadian and British embassies, and the Swiss and Australian consulates with the hope of starting the process to seek refuge in those countries. They were either turned away or told that they would need to call or reach out to embassies by email. Messages were met with no response or a generic response saying embassies couldn't help.

In one email, Omagh detailed why he had to flee his country, writing "please don't let me be sent back to Afghanistan, a place where there is no way for me to survive."

"The Embassy of Canada in Panama does not offer visa or immigration services, not either services for refugee. Nor are we allowed to answer any questions in regards to visa or immigration," the response read.

At the British Embassy, a security guard handed asylum-seekers a pamphlet reading "Emergency Help for British People." The Swiss consulate told the group they would have to reach out to the embassy in Costa Rica, and handed the migrants a piece of paper with general phone lines and emails printed from the embassy's website.

Canadian, British and Australian diplomats in Panama did not respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press. The Swiss consulate denied that they turned away the asylum-seekers.

Panama limbo

The migrants had travelled halfway across the globe, reached the U.S. border where they sought asylum and instead found themselves in Panama, a country some had traversed months earlier on their way to the U.S.

Many of the deportees said they would be open to seeking asylum in Panama, but had been told both by international aid groups and Panamanian authorities that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to be granted refuge in the Central American nation.

Alvaro Botero, among those advocating for the migrants at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, said he wasn't surprised that they were turned away from embassies, as such help is often only offered in extreme cases of political persecution, and that other governments may fear tensions with the Trump administration.

"It's crucial that these people are not forgotten," Botero said. "They never asked to be sent to Panama, and now they're in Panama with no idea what to do, without knowing what their future will be and unable to return to their countries."

The Trump administration has simultaneously closed legal pathways to the U.S. at its southern border, ramped up its deportation program, suspended its refugee resettlement program, as well as funding for organizations that could potentially aid the migrants now stuck in Panama.

Over the weekend, the Trump administration sent more than 200 Venezuelan migrants to El Salvador to be held in a maximum-security gang prison, alleging that those expelled were part the Venezuelan Tren de Aragua gang without providing evidence.

Limited options remain

On Thursday, the migrants visited the Panama offices of the U.N. refugee agency. Omagh said they were told that the agency could not help them seek asylum in other countries due to restrictions by the Panamanian government. A U.N. official told them they could help start the asylum process in Panama, but warned that it was very unlikely that Panama's government would accept their claim, Omagh said.

The U.N.'s International Organization for Migration and the refugee agency did not immediately respond to requests for comment by the AP.

The same day, Filippo Grandi, head of the U.N. refugee agency, warned that aid cuts by the U.S. government would hurt refugee services around the world.

"We appeal to member States to honor their commitments to displaced people. Now is the time for solidarity, not retreat," Grandi said in a statement.

Deportees including Omagh worried that foreign governments and aid organizations were washing their hands of them.

Omagh said that as an atheist and member of an ethnic minority group in Afghanistan known as the Hazara, returning home under the rule of the Taliban would mean death. He only went to the U.S. after trying for years to live in Pakistan, Iran and other countries but being denied visas.

Russian Aleksandr Surgin, also among the group seeking help at the embassies, said he left his country because he openly opposed the war in Ukraine on social media, and was told by government officials he could either be jailed or fight with Russian troops in Ukraine.

When asked Thursday what he would do next, he responded simply: "I don't hope for anything anymore."

Israel returns to war in Gaza with wider aims and almost no constraints

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

Israel's renewed military offensive in the Gaza Strip threatens to be even deadlier and more destructive than the last, as it pursues wider aims with far fewer constraints.

Israel resumed the war with a surprise bombardment early Tuesday that killed hundreds of Palestinians, ending the ceasefire and vowing even more devastation if Hamas doesn't release its remaining hostages and leave the territory.

President Donald Trump has expressed full support for the renewed offensive and suggested last month that Gaza's 2 million Palestinians be resettled in other countries. Iran-backed militant groups allied with Hamas are in disarray.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition is stronger than ever, and there are fewer hostages inside Gaza than at any point since Hamas ignited the war with its Oct. 7, 2023, attack, which gives Israel's military more freedom to act.

It all suggests that the war's next phase could be more brutal than the last, in which tens of thousands of Palestinians were killed, the vast majority of the population was displaced and much of Gaza was bombed to rubble.

"If all the Israeli hostages are not released and Hamas is not expelled from Gaza. Israel will act with an intensity that you have not seen," Defense Minister Israel Katz said Wednesday.

"Return the hostages and expel Hamas, and other options will open up for you, including going to other places in the world for those who wish. The alternative is complete destruction and devastation."

Even less US pressure to spare civilians

The Biden administration provided crucial military and diplomatic support to Israel throughout the first 15 months of the war.

But it also tried to limit civilian casualties. In the early days of the war, Biden persuaded Israel to lift a complete siege on Gaza and repeatedly urged it to allow in more humanitarian aid, with mixed results. He opposed Israel's offensive in southern Gaza last May and suspended a weapons shipment in protest, only to see Israel proceed anyway. Biden also worked with Egypt and Qatar to broker the ceasefire through more than a year of negotiations, with Trump's team pushing it over the finish line.

The Trump administration appears to have set no restrictions. It hasn't criticized Israel's decision to once again seal off Gaza, to unilaterally withdrawal from the ceasefire agreement that Trump took credit for, or to carry out strikes that have killed hundreds of men, women and children.

Israel says it only targets fighters and must dismantle Hamas to prevent a repeat of the Oct. 7 attack, when Palestinian militants killed roughly 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took 251 hostages.

The Biden administration voiced doubt about those aims, saying months ago that Hamas was no longer able to carry out such an attack.

The offensive killed more than 48,000 Palestinians before the January ceasefire, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. It does not distinguish between militants and civilians in its count but says more than half of the dead were women and children.

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Trump has suggested Gaza be depopulated

Trump appeared to lose interest in the ceasefire weeks ago, when he said it should be canceled if Hamas didn't immediately release all the hostages.

A short-lived White House attempt to negotiate directly with Hamas was abandoned after it angered Israel. Trump's Mideast envoy, Steve Witkoff, then blamed Hamas for the demise of the truce because it didn't accept proposals to immediately release hostages.

Hamas has said it will only release the remaining hostages — its only bargaining chip — in exchange for more Palestinian prisoners, a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, as called for in the ceasefire agreement.

Trump, meanwhile, has suggested that Gaza's entire population be transferred to other countries so that the U.S. can take ownership of the territory and rebuild it for others.

Palestinians say they don't want to leave their homeland, and Arab countries roundly rejected the proposal. Human rights experts said it would likely violate international law.

Israel has embraced the proposal and said it is drawing up plans to implement it.

Netanyahu's government is stronger than ever

Netanyahu came under heavy pressure from families and supporters of the hostages to stick with the truce in order to bring their loved ones home. For months, thousands of protesters have regularly gathered in downtown Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, blocked major highways and scuffled with police.

In restarting the war, though, Netanyahu brushed them aside and strengthened his hard-line coalition.

Israel's far-right national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, who resigned to protest the ceasefire, returned to the government shortly after Tuesday's strikes. He and Bezalel Smotrich, another far-right ally of Netanyahu, want to continue the war, depopulate Gaza through what they refer to as voluntary migration, and rebuild Jewish settlements there that Israel removed two decades ago.

Netanyahu has also fired or forced out several top officials who had appeared more open to a hostage deal.

Hamas and its allies are in disarray

Hamas still rules Gaza, but most of its top leaders have been killed and its military capabilities have been vastly depleted. Israel says it has killed some 20,000 militants — without providing evidence.

In its first attack since Israel ended the ceasefire, Hamas fired three rockets on Thursday that set off air raid sirens in Tel Aviv, without causing casualties.

Lebanon's Hezbollah, which traded fire with Israel throughout much of the war, was forced to accept a truce last fall after Israel's air and ground war killed most of its top leadership and left much of southern Lebanon in ruins. The overthrow of Syrian President Bashar Assad removed a key ally and further diminished the militant group.

Iran, which supports Hamas and Hezbollah, and which directly traded fire with Israel twice last year, appears unlikely to intervene. Israel said it inflicted heavy damage on Iran's air defenses in a wave of retaliatory strikes last fall, and Trump has threatened U.S. military action if Iran doesn't negotiate a new agreement on its nuclear program.

The Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen have resumed long-range missile fire against Israel, which has rarely caused casualties or serious damage. The U.S., meanwhile, launched a new wave of strikes on the Houthis, which could further limit their capabilities.

International criticism could be more muted

The first phase of the war sparked worldwide protests, some criticism from European leaders and action at the United Nations. Israel was accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice, and the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Netanyahu.

This time could be different.

The Trump administration has detained foreign-born pro-Palestinian student activists and others, and threatened to pull billions of dollars in federal funding from universities accused of tolerating antisemitism, making a repeat of last year's U.S. campus protests unlikely. Europe is already locked in high-stakes disputes with Trump over aid to Ukraine and American tariffs, and appears unlikely to push back on the Middle East.

The U.S. and Israel have adamantly rejected the actions by both international courts, accusing them of bias. Trump signed an executive order in early February imposing sanctions on the ICC, of which neither the United States nor Israel are members.

Arkansas holds off Kansas 79-72 in March Madness matchup of coaches Calipari and Self

By KYLE HIGHTOWER AP Sports Writer

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — John Calipari got past a familiar foe to put himself — and the coach's new school — back on the winning side in March.

Jonas Aidoo scored 22 points to help 10th-seeded Arkansas to a 79-72 opening-round NCAA Tournament victory over No. 7 seed Kansas on Thursday night in the latest meeting between two of college basketball's winningest coaches.

Johnell Davis added 18 points, including some crucial late free throws, to help Calipari to his first tournament victory with the Razorbacks. Freshman standout Boogie Fland played for the first time since having right thumb surgery in January and scored six points in 24 minutes.

"We have to rely on everyone. When you're down in numbers, everyone's got to help you," Calipari said. "That's where we are. The second half, we didn't shoot it well. We didn't make 3s, but we made the ones that mattered and we made free throws."

Arkansas will face No. 2 seed St. John's — led by another national title-winning coach, Rick Pitino — in the second round of the West Region on Saturday.

Zeke Mayo had 18 points for Kansas (21-13), which has made 35 straight NCAA Tournaments and hadn't lost in the first round since 2006 — coach Bill Self's third season at the school. AJ Storr finished with 15 points and Hunter Dickinson added 11 points and nine rebounds.

Thursday's matchup was the third March Madness meeting between two of the four active win leaders in men's college basketball. Calipari is second (876), with Self fourth (831) on the list. Both previous meetings were in the national championship game, with each winning once.

Despite having a third consecutive tournament appearance end before the Sweet 16 since Kansas' last national title in 2022, Self doesn't believe the Jayhawks are in decline.

"We've got to reevaluate on how we do things and you can't afford misses," Self said. "In today's time, there's going to be schools that do a great job, but still there's an element of luck involved, I think more now than there was even before."

Kansas erased an 11-point second-half deficit and nudged ahead 65-64 on a follow shot by Storr with less than six minutes remaining.

The Jayhawks kept the lead until Aidoo connected on a pair of free throws to put the Razorbacks back in front. Arkansas got a stop on the other end and then got a 3-pointer by Davis that gave it a 71-67 cushion with less than two minutes on the clock.

Arkansas' edge was down to 71-69 before Davis dropped in a pair of free throws. Dickinson missed a 3 on Kansas' next trip and Arkansas added two more free throws.

The Jayhawks got it back down to 75-72 on a 3-pointer by Rylan Griffen with 13 seconds left. The Razorbacks called back-to-back timeouts trying to get the ball inbounds. They finally did and Davis calmly sank two free throws to help close it out.

"We believed in the moment," Davis said. "Coach always stayed on us, pushed us, even when we were down and he helped us get through everything."

Takeaways

Arkansas: Posted its first tournament victory since reaching the Sweet 16 in 2023 under then-coach Eric Musselman.

Kansas: Kansas fell to 47-6 in first-round games.

Adams injured

Kansas forward KJ Adams limped off the court with 3:10 to play with what Self said is an apparent Achilles

les tendon injury. Adams had 13 points and four rebounds.

"We're hoping for the best tomorrow. I'm not sure it's going to be great news, though," Self said. "It's one thing to lose the game but to see him potentially lose a year on top of the game, you know, that's a pretty big blow."

Up next

The Razorbacks face Pitino, the active coach with the most wins. He was also Calipari's longtime rival when he was with Louisville and Calipari coached at Kentucky.

Thousands allege sexual abuse in youth detention centers. It could cost Maryland a huge sum

By LEA SKENE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — Arlando "Tray" Jones was a toddler when his dad was killed by Baltimore police during a robbery. His mom died several years later after battling alcoholism.

His surviving relatives often struggled to provide for him. Sometimes the lights got turned off and the refrigerator was empty.

Jones turned to a notorious neighborhood drug dealer, a sinister father figure whose lavish lifestyle demonstrated what could be achieved in the streets. Under the supervision of "Fat Larry," Jones finally had stable housing and money in his pocket, but violence was all around him. He started carrying a gun and punishing anyone who crossed him. Barely a teenager, he was charged with attempted murder and sent to juvenile detention in the early 1980s.

There, at the Maryland Training School for Boys, Jones says a staff member repeatedly sexually assaulted him while another kept watch. The guards would corner children in dark spaces and bribe them with extra snacks and other special treatment, according to a slew of recent lawsuits alleging widespread misconduct in Maryland's juvenile detention facilities.

"They broke me," Jones said, recounting how his abusers beat him into submission. "Everything that connected me to my humanity was just gone."

Jones is among thousands of people seeking accountability under a new state law that eliminated the statute of limitations for child sexual abuse claims. It was passed in 2023 with the Catholic Church abuse scandal in mind. But now Maryland lawmakers are scrambling to address an unexpected onslaught of cases targeting the state's juvenile justice system. They're worried the state budget can't support a potential payout.

The Associated Press requested an interview with the state's Department of Juvenile Services, but the department responded with a statement instead.

"DJS takes allegations of sexual abuse of children in our care with utmost seriousness and we are working hard to provide decent, humane and rehabilitative environments for youth committed to the Department. We do not comment on pending litigation," the agency said.

To the plaintiffs, it's no surprise that Maryland leaders failed to anticipate a public reckoning of this size. Many victims spent decades in silence, paralyzed by shame. They were some of Maryland's most vulnerable residents, mostly Black kids growing up in poverty with little family support.

All these years later, Jones still broke down crying in an interview. "But now I know the shame is not mine to bear," he said.

A law with unexpected consequences

Maryland lawmakers passed the Child Victims Act in the immediate aftermath of a scathing investigative report that revealed widespread abuse within the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Before its passage, victims couldn't sue after they turned 38.

The law change prompted the archdiocese to file for bankruptcy to protect its assets. But state leaders didn't anticipate they'd be facing similar budgetary concerns. Lawmakers are now considering new legislation to shield the state financially.

An estimated 6,000 people have retained attorneys and new complaints are pouring in, according to

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lawyers involved. In addition to monetary damages, plaintiffs want mandated reform of Maryland's juvenile justice system.

The system has drawn serious criticism over the years. A 2004 Justice Department report found a "deeply disturbing degree of physical abuse" at the facility where Jones was detained, now called the Charles H. Hickey Jr. School. The state closed Hickey's youth treatment program in 2005, but it's still operating as a youth detention center.

Many other facilities named in the lawsuits have already been closed, and state leaders have strengthened oversight in recent years. They've also focused on detaining fewer youths.

Advocates say they're confident the system is significantly less abusive than it was.

Other states have faced similar reckonings after changing their laws. While juvenile arrests and detention rates are declining nationally, research shows the majority of detainees are children of color. A 2024 report from the nonprofit The Sentencing Project found Black youth are roughly five times more likely to be incarcerated than their white peers.

"It's not just in Maryland, it's everywhere," said attorney Corey Stern, who represents Jones and others. "It's really a ripple effect across the U.S."

Systemic abuse all over the state

Still, the Maryland lawsuits paint a particularly disturbing picture. It wasn't just select facilities or a small group of abusive staff members, it was statewide and persisted for decades, attorneys say. The abuse was often a poorly kept secret, but the system repeatedly failed to stop it, the lawsuits say.

In a complaint filed earlier this month, 69 people brought claims against the same abuser, a former housing supervisor at Hickey.

One of the plaintiffs in that case, who asked to remain anonymous, said that as the abuse escalated, he started to avoid properly cleaning himself to become less desirable. He later spent decades struggling with addiction and mental health issues. He said suing the state "even now felt like I was snitching." The AP doesn't typically identify victims of abuse unless they want to be named.

Nalisha Gibbs said she didn't initially report her abuse because no one would have listened. A past experience gave her proof of that.

Not long before she went to juvenile detention over a missed curfew enforced by a school truancy officer, Gibbs said, she had been raped by an uncle — and punished by her mother when she didn't keep quiet about the abuse.

In the detention center, a female guard would come to her cell at night and assault her. Gibbs said the woman would degrade her, calling her worthless and "a throwaway."

For coming home 15 minutes after curfew, she was sentenced to a lifetime of trauma.

After 30 days in detention, Gibbs never went back to middle school. She ended up in foster care, where she suffered more sexual abuse. She spent most of her 20s addicted to drugs, sometimes living on the streets. But in 2008, she sought treatment. She enrolled in a transitional housing program and earned her GED. She now lives with her fiancé and his mother.

Thinking back on her childhood, she sees a scared little girl who needed an adult to stand up for her.

"She just had so much life snuffed out by people mistreating her and mishandling her," Gibbs said through tears. "But I'm not that little girl anymore. I can fight for myself."

Pushed over the edge

A couple years after being released from Hickey, Jones was involved in a fight over drugs that escalated into gunshots, killing Joshua O'Neal.

Jones was 16 when he was arrested and charged with murder. He was later convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

He said the sexual abuse pushed him over the edge; if he was headed down a negative path before juvenile detention, that experience sent him hurtling toward the unchecked brutality of the drug game.

In 2022, he was released from prison under a state law that allows sentence reductions for people convicted as children.

During his incarceration, Jones earned a bachelor's degree in psychology. He's studied philosophy and

published two books. Now 56, he works at Georgetown University's Prisons and Justice Initiative, which teaches students about mass incarceration and prison reform.

He said getting educated restored some of the humanity he lost. It helped him regain his freedom and gave him a second chance at life. It also made him question everything.

"An orphan child surviving poverty as best I can," he said. "Where was my first chance?"

Detentions of European tourists at US borders spark fears of traveling to America

By JULIE WATSON Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Lennon Tyler and her German fiancé often took road trips to Mexico when he vacationed in the United States since it was only a day's drive from her home in Las Vegas, one of the perks of their long-distance relationship.

But things went terribly wrong when they drove back from Tijuana last month.

U.S. border agents handcuffed Tyler, a U.S. citizen, and chained her to a bench, while her fiancé, Lucas Sielaff, was accused of violating the rules of his 90-day U.S. tourist permit, the couple said. Authorities later handcuffed and shackled Sielaff and sent him to a crowded U.S. immigration detention center. He spent 16 days locked up before being allowed to fly home to Germany.

Since President Donald Trump took office, there have been other high-profile incidents of tourists like Sielaff being stopped at U.S. border crossings and held for weeks at U.S. immigration detention facilities before being allowed to fly home at their own expense.

They include another German tourist who was stopped at the Tijuana crossing on Jan. 25. Jessica Brösche spent over six weeks locked up, including over a week in solitary confinement, a friend said.

On the Canadian border, a backpacker from Wales spent nearly three weeks at a detention center before flying home this week. And a Canadian woman on a work visa detained at the Tijuana border spent 12 days in detention before returning home last weekend.

Sielaff, 25, and the others say it was never made clear why they were taken into custody even after they offered to go home voluntarily.

Pedro Rios, director of the American Friends Service Committee, a nonprofit that aids migrants, said in the 22 years he has worked on the border he has never seen travelers from Western Europe and Canada, longtime U.S. allies, locked up like this.

"It's definitely unusual with these cases so close together, and the rationale for detaining these people doesn't make sense," he said. "It doesn't justify the abhorrent treatment and conditions" they endured.

"The only reason I see is there is a much more fervent anti-immigrant atmosphere," Rios said.

U.S. authorities did not respond to a request from The Associated Press for figures on how many tourists have been held at detention facilities or explain why they weren't simply denied entry.

The incidents are fueling anxiety as the Trump administration prepares for a ban on travelers from some countries. Noting the "evolving" federal travel policies, the University of California, Los Angeles sent a notice this week urging its foreign-born students and staff to consider the risks of non-essential travel for spring break, warning "re-entry requirements may change while you are away, impacting your return."

Immigration and Customs Enforcement said in an email to the AP that Sielaff and Brösche, who was held for 45 days, "were deemed inadmissible" by Customs and Border Protection. That agency said it cannot discuss specifics but "if statutes or visa terms are violated, travelers may be subject to detention and removal." The agencies did not comment on the other cases.

Both German tourists were allowed into the United States under a waiver program offered to a select group of countries, mostly in Europe and Asia, whose citizens are allowed to travel to the U.S. for business or leisure for up to 90 days without getting a visa in advance. Applicants register online with the Electronic System for Travel Authorization.

But even if they are authorized to travel under that system, they can still be barred from entering the country.

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Sielaff arrived in the U.S. on Jan. 27. He and Tyler decided to go to Tijuana for four days in mid-February because Tyler's dog needed surgery and veterinary services are cheaper there. They figured they would enjoy some tacos and make a fun trip out of it.

"Mexico is a wonderful and beautiful country that Lucas and I love to visit," Tyler said.

They returned Feb. 18, just 22 days into Sielaff's 90-day tourist permit.

When they pulled up to the crossing, the U.S. border agent asked Sielaff aggressively, "Where are you going? Where do you live?" Tyler said.

"English is not Lucas' first language and so he said, 'We're going to Las Vegas,' and the agent says, 'Oh, we caught you. You live in Las Vegas. You can't do that,'" Tyler said, recounting what happened.

Sielaff was taken away for more questioning. Tyler said she asked to go with him or if he could get a translator and was told to be quiet, then taken out of her car and handcuffed and chained to a bench. Her dog, recovering from surgery, was left in the car.

After four hours, Tyler was allowed to leave but said she was given no information about her fiancé's whereabouts.

During questioning, Sielaff said he told authorities he never lived in the U.S. and had no criminal history. He said he was given a full-body search and ordered to hand over his cellphone and belongings. He was put in a holding cell where he slept on a bench for two days before being transferred to the Otay Mesa Detention Center in San Diego.

There, he said, he shared a cell with eight others.

"You are angry, you are sad, you don't know when you can get out," Sielaff said. "You just don't get any answers from anybody."

He was finally told to get a direct flight to Germany and submit a confirmation number. In a frantic call from Sielaff, Tyler bought it for \$2,744. He flew back March 5.

"What happened at the border was just blatant abuse of the Border Patrol's power," Tyler said.

Ashley Paschen agrees. She said she learned about Brösche from a TikTok video asking anyone in the San Diego area for help after her family learned she was being held at the Otay Mesa Detention Center. Paschen visited her several times and told her people were working to get her out. Brosche flew home March 11.

"She's happy to be home," Paschen said. "She seems very relieved if anything but she's not coming back here anytime soon."

On Feb. 26, a tourist from Wales, Becky Burke, a backpacker on a trip across North America, was stopped at the U.S.-Canada border and held for nearly three weeks at a detention facility in Washington state, her father, Paul Burke, posted on Facebook. She returned home Tuesday.

On March 3, Canadian Jasmine Mooney, an actress and entrepreneur who had a visa to work in the U.S., was detained at the Tijuana crossing. She was released Saturday, her friend Brittany Kors said.

Before Mooney's release, British Columbia Premier David Eby expressed concern, saying, "It certainly reinforces anxiety that many British Columbians have, and many Canadians have, about our relationship with the U.S. right now, and the unpredictability of this administration and its actions."

The detentions come amid legal fights over the Trump administration's arrests and deportations of other foreigners with valid visas and green card holders, including a Palestinian activist who helped organize campus protests of the war in Gaza.

Tyler plans to sue the U.S. government.

Sielaff said he and Tyler are now rethinking plans to hold their wedding in Las Vegas. He suffers nightmares and is considering therapy to cope with the trauma.

"Nobody is safe there anymore to come to America as a tourist," he said.

Facing anti-DEI investigations, colleges cut ties with nonprofit targeted by conservatives

By CHEYANNE MUMPHREY and JOCELYN GECKER AP Education Writers

Until recently, it was a little-known program to help Black and Latino students pursue business degrees. But in January, conservative strategist Christopher Rufo flagged the program known as The PhD Project in social media posts that caught the attention of Republican politicians. The program is now at the center of a Trump administration campaign to root out diversity, equity and inclusion programs in higher education.

The U.S. Education Department last week said it was investigating dozens of universities for alleged racial discrimination, citing ties to the nonprofit organization. That followed a warning a month earlier that schools could lose federal money over "race-based preferences" in admissions, scholarships or any aspect of student life.

The investigations left some school leaders startled and confused, wondering what prompted the inquiries. Many scrambled to distance themselves from The PhD Project, which has aimed to help diversify the business world and higher education faculty.

The rollout of the investigations highlights the climate of fear and uncertainty in higher education, which President Donald Trump's administration has begun policing for policies that run afoul of his agenda even as he moves to dismantle the Education Department.

There is a range of nonprofits that work to help minority groups advance in higher education but The PhD Project was not well known before Rufo began posting on X about its work with colleges, said Jonathan Fansmith, senior vice president of government relations at the American Council on Education, an association of college presidents.

"It's not hard to draw some lines between that incident and why 45 institutions that were partners with The PhD Project are getting this investigation announced," he said.

The 45 colleges under investigation for ties to the organization include public universities such as Arizona State, Ohio State and the University of California, Berkeley, along with private schools like Yale, Cornell, Duke and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The Education Department sent letters to the universities informing them its Office for Civil Rights had received a complaint and they were under investigation for allegedly discriminating against students on the basis of race or ethnicity because of a past affiliation with The PhD Project. The letters set a March 31 deadline for information about their relationship with the nonprofit.

In a statement, the PhD Project said it aims to "create a broader talent pipeline" of business leaders. "This year, we have opened our membership application to anyone who shares that vision," it said.

Public reaction from the universities' leadership has been minimal and cautious, with most issuing brief statements saying they will cooperate with investigators and refusing further comment.

Colleges may see reason not to push back. The Trump administration has shown willingness to withhold federal funding over issues involving antisemitism allegations, diversity programs and transgender athletes. At Columbia University, under fire for its handling of pro-Palestinian protests, the administration pulled \$400 million in federal money and threatened billions more if it does not comply with its demands.

"There is a concern that if one university steps up and fights this then that university will have all of their funding cut," said Veena Dubal, general counsel for the American Association of University Professors. "They are being hindered not just by fear but a real collective action problem. None of these universities wants to be the next example."

Some colleges moved swiftly to stop working with The PhD Project.

The University of Kentucky said it severed ties with the nonprofit on Monday. The University of Wyoming said in a statement that its college of business was affiliated with the group to develop its graduate student pipeline, but it plans to discontinue its membership.

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas issued a statement saying three professors participated in the program, but two no longer work at the university and a third was killed in a shooting on campus in 2023. Arizona State said its business school is not financially supporting The PhD Project this year and it told

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faculty in February the school would not support travel to the nonprofit's conference.

Similar fallout came in Texas earlier this year, when Rufo began posting on X about the PhD Project.

"Texas A&M is sponsoring a trip to a DEI conference," Rufo posted on Jan. 13. Rufo, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, a conservative think tank, accused the university of "supporting racial segregation and breaking the law."

The next day Republican Texas Gov. Greg Abbot posted on X that the university "president will soon be gone" unless he immediately "fixed" the matter. Texas A&M responded by withdrawing from the conference, and soon after at least eight other Texas public universities that had participated previously in The PhD Project's conference also withdrew, the Texas Tribune reported.

Rufo has not responded to a request for comment.

Some of the schools under investigation raised questions about where the complaints against them originated.

Montana State University said it follows all state and federal laws and was "surprised" by the notice it received and "unaware of any complaint made internally with regards to The PhD Project."

Six other colleges are being investigated for awarding "impermissible race-based scholarships," the Education Department said. Additionally, the University of Minnesota is being investigated for allegedly operating a program that segregates students on the basis of race.

At the University of California, Berkeley, hundreds gathered Wednesday on the campus known for student protests. But this one was organized by faculty, who stood on the steps of Sproul Hall, known as the birthplace of the free speech movement in the 1960s.

"This is a fight that can be summed up in five words: Academic freedom is under assault," Ula Taylor, a professor of African American studies, said to the crowd.

In a campus email Monday, Berkeley Chancellor Rich Lyons did not specifically mention the investigation targeting his school. But he described the federal government's actions against higher education as a threat to the school's core values.

"A Berkeley without academic freedom, without freedom of inquiry, without freedom of expression is simply not Berkeley," Lyons said. "We will stand up for Berkeley's values and defend them to the very best of our ability."

Hegseth says he'll meet with Musk at the Pentagon to discuss 'efficiencies'

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said late Thursday that he would be meeting with billionaire Elon Musk at the Pentagon Friday to discuss "innovation, efficiencies & smarter production."

Musk, a top adviser to President Donald Trump, and his Department of Government Efficiency have played an integral role in the administration's push to dramatically reduce the size of the government. Musk has faced intense blowback from some lawmakers and voters for his chainsaw-wielding approach to laying off workers and slashing programs, although Trump's supporters have hailed it.

A senior defense official told reporters Tuesday that roughly 50,000 to 60,000 civilian jobs will be cut in the Defense Department.

In a post on Musk's X platform, Hegseth emphasized that "this is NOT a meeting about 'top secret China war plans,'" denying a story published by The New York Times late Thursday.

Hegseth is also scheduled to deliver remarks with Trump at the White House Friday morning.

Strikes in Gaza kill 85 overnight, bringing the total since Israel broke ceasefire to nearly 600

By WAFAA SHURAF and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR-AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Local health officials said Israeli strikes killed at least 85 Palestinians across the Gaza Strip overnight and into Thursday, bringing the total to nearly 600 killed since Israel

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shattered a truce that had facilitated the release of more than two dozen hostages and brought relative calm since late January.

Hours later, Hamas fired three rockets at Israel without causing casualties, in the first such attack since Israel broke the ceasefire on Tuesday.

Zaher al-Waheidi, the head of the records department at the Gaza Health Ministry, said Israeli bombardments have killed at least 592 people in the past three days.

The Israeli military said it was again enforcing a blockade on northern Gaza, including Gaza City. Palestinians were not being ordered to leave northern Gaza but can no longer enter, the military said, and are only allowed to move south on foot using the coastal road. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians had returned to what remains of their homes in the north during the ceasefire.

Early Friday, Israel's Cabinet unanimously approved Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's request to fire the head of the country's Shin Bet internal security service. The late-night decision to sack Ronen Bar deepens a power struggle focused largely over who bears responsibility for the Hamas attack that sparked the war in Gaza.

It also could set the stage for a crisis over the country's division of powers. Israel's attorney general has ruled that the Cabinet has no legal basis to dismiss Bar.

Israeli ground forces, meanwhile, are pushing into Gaza near the northern town of Beit Lahiya and the southern border city of Rafah, the military said Thursday. The operations come a day after Israel moved to split Gaza in two by retaking part of the strategic Netzarim corridor that divides Gaza's north from south.

The military ordered Palestinians to evacuate an area in central Gaza near the city of Khan Younis, saying it would operate there in response to Thursday's rocket fire from Hamas. The Palestinian militant group said it targeted Tel Aviv. One rocket was intercepted and two fell in open areas, according to the army.

Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels also launched two missiles at Israel, one early Thursday morning and another in the evening, the military said. Both were intercepted before reaching Israeli airspace, according to the army, and no injuries were reported. Air raid sirens rang out and exploding interceptor rockets were heard in Jerusalem. There have been three such attacks since the United States began a new campaign of airstrikes against the Houthis earlier this week.

A 'bloody night' for hard-hit Gaza

Gaza's Health Ministry said overnight Israeli strikes killed at least 85 people, mostly women and children. The ministry's records do not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

The Indonesian Hospital said it received 19 bodies after strikes in Beit Lahiya, near Gaza's northern border, which was heavily destroyed and largely depopulated earlier in the war.

"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. "The situation is catastrophic."

Israel's military said Thursday its airstrikes in Gaza had killed the head of Hamas' internal security apparatus and two other militant commanders. Israel has said it only targets militants and blames civilian deaths on Hamas because it operates in densely populated areas. A United Nations-backed group of human rights experts accused Israel last week of "disproportionate violence against women and children" during the war in Gaza.

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

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."

War in Gaza has no end in sight

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration reiterated its support for Israel, with White House press

secretary Karoline Leavitt saying, "The president made it very clear to Hamas that if they did not release all of the hostages there would be all hell to pay."

Israel, which 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 — 24 of whom are believed alive — and gives up control of the territory.

Hamas says 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 mediated by the United States, Egypt and Qatar.

Hamas says it's 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.

Shin Bet chief's dismissal deepens Israeli political turmoil

Netanyahu said Sunday he would seek Bar's dismissal, saying he had lost faith in his security chief.

But critics say the move is a power grab by Netanyahu against an independent-minded civil servant.

Tens of thousands of Israelis have demonstrated across the country in recent days in support of Bar, including a mass gathering outside Netanyahu's office late Thursday in the pouring rain.

A Shin Bet report into the Oct. 7 attack acknowledged failures by the security agency. But it also said that policies by Netanyahu's government created the conditions for the attack.

Netanyahu is also upset that the Shin Bet has launched an investigation into connections between some of his close aides and the Gulf state of Qatar. His office said Bar's dismissal would take effect on April 10 or before then if a replacement is found.

Bar did not attend the meeting but sent a letter to the Cabinet ahead of time protesting the firing.

He said the dismissal was meant to hinder the agency from further investigating the failures of Oct. 7 and undermining the investigation into whether Qatar influenced the prime minister's office.

"This is a direct danger to the security of the state of Israel," Bar wrote.

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 has killed more than 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.

Florida man is executed for the killings of an 8-year-old girl and her grandmother

By CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

STARKE, Fla. (AP) — A Florida man who killed an 8-year-old girl and her grandmother on a night in which he drank heavily and used drugs was executed Thursday evening.

Prison officials said Edward James, 63, was pronounced dead at 8:15 p.m. after receiving a three-drug injection at Florida State Prison near Starke. He drew the death penalty after pleading guilty to the Sept. 19, 1993, killings of Toni Neuner, 8, and her grandmother, Betty Dick, 58.

As he awaited the injection, James said he did not wish to give a final statement. Then, as the drugs were administered, James breathed heavily, his arms flinching, and then he was still.

Jared Pearson, Neuner's brother, said afterward that the family was able to find some kind of peace with the process.

"But we lost generations because of him," Pearson said. "It's all pure evil. That night was horrific."

Three other executions were carried out this week in the U.S., including the lethal injection earlier Thurs-

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day of an Oklahoma man for the fatal shooting of a woman during a home invasion. Arizona executed a man by an injection Wednesday and Louisiana used nitrogen gas for the first time Tuesday, putting a man to death as that state ended a 15-year pause on executions.

The U.S. Supreme Court denied James' final appeals earlier in the day, clearing the way for the state's second execution of the year. Gov. Ron DeSantis signed James' death warrant earlier this year and another warrant for an execution in early April.

James had been renting a room in Dick's house in Casselberry, about 10 miles (16 kilometers) north of Orlando, where Neuner and three other children were staying the night of the attack.

Court records show James drank up to 24 beers at a party, downed some gin and also took LSD before returning to his room at Dick's house. The girl was raped and strangled to death. The other children were not harmed.

James, who pleaded guilty to the charges, was also convicted of the girl's rape and of stealing Dick's jewelry and car after stabbing her 21 times. Court documents show James drove the car across the country, occasionally selling pieces of jewelry until he was arrested on Oct. 6 of that year in Bakersfield, California.

Police obtained a videotaped confession from James, who despite his guilty pleas was sentenced to death upon an 11-1 recommendation by a jury.

James' lawyers had filed several appeals with state and federal courts, all of which were denied. Most recently, the Florida Supreme Court rejected an argument that his longtime use of drugs and alcohol, several head injuries and a heart attack in 2023 led to a mental decline that would make executing him cruel and unusual punishment.

The justices instead agreed with a lower court decision that "James's cognitive issues do not shield him from execution." The court also rejected an argument from James' lawyers that a heart attack he suffered in prison led to oxygen deprivation that affected his brain and should have been considered as new evidence for halting plans to execute him.

The nonprofit Death Penalty Information Center said Florida uses a three-drug cocktail for its lethal injection: a sedative, a paralytic and a drug that stops the heart.

Earlier this year, James Ford was executed for the 1997 killings of a couple in Charlotte County — witnessed by their toddler daughter, who survived.

Florida officials said they are next preparing for the scheduled April 8 execution of Michael Tanzi for the 2000 slaying of a woman in the Florida Keys.

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

By HANNA ARHIROVA and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Senior military officers from more than 30 countries across Europe and beyond met in England on Thursday 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 he didn't know whether there would be a peace deal in the Russia-Ukraine war, but "we are making steps in the right direction" as a "coalition of the willing" led by Britain and France moves into an "operational phase."

"We hope there will be a deal but what I do know is if there is a deal, the time for planning is now," he said during a visit to the meeting of military planners at a British base in Northwood, just outside London. "It's not after a deal is reached."

"It is vitally important we do that work, because we know one thing for certain which is a deal without anything behind it is something that (Russian President Vladimir) Putin will breach," he said.

French President Emmanuel Macron said a meeting of the "coalition of the willing" will take place Thursday in Paris in the presence of Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Ukraine and Russia agreed in principle Wednesday to a limited ceasefire after U.S. President Donald

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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.

Zelenskyy, speaking in Norway on Thursday, said that although he originally had sought a broader ceasefire, he was committed to working with the U.S. to stop arms being directed at power production and civilian facilities.

"I raised this issue with President Trump and said that our side would identify what we consider to be civilian infrastructure," Zelenskyy said. "I don't want there to be any misunderstanding about what the sides are agreeing on."

'Shuttle diplomacy' expected after Saudi Arabia talks

The tentative deal to partially rein in the three-year war came after Putin rebuffed Trump's push for a full 30-day ceasefire. The difficulty in getting the combatants to stop targeting one another's energy infrastructure highlights the challenges Trump will face in trying to fulfill his campaign pledge to quickly end the war.

Negotiators from Moscow and the U.S. will meet Monday in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Putin's foreign affairs adviser Sergei Ushakov told Russian news agencies.

Zelenskyy said team would also meet with the U.S. in Saudi Arabia to discuss technical issues, and then the U.S. will act as an intermediary running "shuttle diplomacy" between Kyiv and Moscow.

Despite the negotiations, hundreds of drone attacks were launched overnight by both sides, injuring several people and damaging buildings.

Kropyvnytskyi, a city in central Ukraine, faced its biggest attack of the war as about four dozen drones injured 14 people, including a couple with serious burns, and damaged houses and apartments.

"In a cruel twist, enemy drones hit Myru Street ('Peace Street' in English)," Andrii Raikovych, head of the regional administration, said.

More than 50 drones were intercepted in Russia's Saratov region — the largest attack of its kind in the area — shattering windows in a hospital and damaging two kindergartens, a school and about 30 homes, Gov. Roman Busargin said. The attacks were focused on Engels, an industrial city near Russia's main base for nuclear-capable strategic bombers.

Battlefield losses mount, though official numbers elusive

In its latest estimate, the U.K. Defense Ministry said Russian troops suffered 900,000 casualties — including up to 250,000 killed — since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine three years ago. That's a jump of 200,000 from a fall estimate.

Western estimates of the parties' war losses have varied and couldn't be independently verified.

War losses have been a tightly guarded secret in Russia. The Defense Ministry's most recent figures were from 2023 when it reported 6,000 deaths, which was regarded as unreliable.

The U.K. did not release a similar estimate for Ukrainian casualties.

Zelenskyy told NBC News last month that more than 46,000 Ukrainian soldiers had been killed, and more than 350,000 wounded. Those figures couldn't be independently confirmed and could be an undercount.

Russia resistant to NATO peacekeepers

If peace comes to Ukraine, the number of troops that would help enforce it is vague. Officials have cited figures of between 10,000 and 30,000 troops as part of what's been termed a "reassurance force."

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

At Thursday's meeting, which involved 31 countries, Starmer said planning was broken down into four areas: "the sea in one scenario, the sky, obviously land and borders, and regeneration."

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."

Jack Watling, a senior research fellow at military think-tank RUSI, said Thursday that the purpose of the Western military force would be to "give Ukraine confidence that a violation of the ceasefire would lead to the Russians having to contend with European forces, and in particular European air power."

In addition to the meeting in England, EU leaders in Brussels planned to discuss Ukraine's security needs with Zelenskyy during a meeting about ramping up defense spending after the Trump administration signaled Europe must take care of its own security.

The German parliament's budget committee is expected to decide Friday to clear up to 3 billion euros (\$3.3 billion) in extra funding for German military aid to Ukraine this year. That comes after parliament voted to loosen Germany's debt rules for military and security spending.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said European plans for raising military spending conflicted with Putin and Trump's efforts to reach a peace deal.

"Europe has engaged in militarization and has turned into a party of war," Peskov said.

Residents of Kyiv voiced a mix of optimism, skepticism and confusion about a potential ceasefire.

Olena Morozova, an accountant, said she hoped Putin would agree to the terms of a peace agreement while Volodymyr Zakusylo, a retiree, said he didn't trust Trump and he thinks Russia will renege on any agreement.

Natalia Volkotrub, a medic, said she didn't know what to think because Russia had betrayed Ukraine when it failed to provide the protection it offered when Kyiv agreed to surrender its nuclear weapons after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

"We gave up our arms and were promised peace and protection," she said. "But as of today, all promises were broken."

What's next for the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant after it was highlighted in Ukraine-US talks

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — During a call between U.S. President Donald Trump and his Ukrainian counterpart, the U.S. leader apparently suggested Volodymyr Zelenskyy consider transferring ownership of Ukraine's power plants to the U.S. for long-term security, according to a U.S. statement.

Briefing the media later, Zelenskyy said the discussion with Trump had focused specifically on the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, ZNPP, in southern Ukraine.

While the facility remains connected to Ukraine's energy grid without producing electricity, it has been under Russian control since the early days of the war, making it unclear what future U.S. involvement could look like.

Who controls the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant?

The Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant is one of the world's 10 largest and Europe's biggest. Located in Ukraine's southern Zaporizhzhia region, Russian forces occupied it shortly after Moscow's February 2022 invasion.

While Russia declared the region annexed in fall 2022, its largest city, Zaporizhzhia, remains under Ukrainian control.

Ukraine has accused Russia of stationing troops and weapons at the plant and using it as a launchpad for attacks across the Dnipro River. Russia denies this, accusing Ukraine of shelling the facility.

How many nuclear power plants does Ukraine have?

Besides Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine operates three active nuclear power plants, which generate the majority of the country's electricity following sustained Russian attacks on thermal and hydroelectric plants.

These facilities are located in southern, western and northwestern Ukraine, away from frontline areas.

What did Trump and Zelenskyy discuss and are there negotiations over Zaporizhzhia's fate?

During their call on Wednesday, 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 U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and National Security Adviser Mike Waltz.

"American ownership of those plants could be the best protection for that infrastructure," Trump suggested, according to the statement.

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Zelenskyy later told journalists their conversation focused on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, and the following day, made it clear that “the issue of ownership” of the other three plants was never discussed. “All nuclear power plants belong to the people of Ukraine,” he said.

Zelenskyy said that when they discussed Zaporizhzhia, the U.S. leader had inquired about the facility’s future. “Trump asked my thoughts on the plant,” Zelenskyy said. “I told him that if it is not Ukrainian, it will not operate. It is illegal.”

Even though ZNPP is a state-owned plant, Zelenskyy acknowledged that if the U.S. were to claim it from Russian control, invest in it and modernize it, Ukraine might consider it. “That is a separate question, an open one,” he said.

What is the current state of Zaporizhzhia’s nuclear plant?

Since falling under Russian control, the plant’s conditions have deteriorated. While its six reactors have been shut down for years, they still require power and qualified staff to maintain cooling systems and safety features.

Energoatom, Ukraine’s state nuclear operator, said that after Russian forces took over, Ukrainian personnel were forced to sign contracts with Russian authorities and take Russian citizenship. Those who refused faced abduction or threats, forcing thousands to flee, leaving the facility understaffed and harder to manage.

The collapse of a dam in June 2023 further jeopardized the plant’s cooling systems, which relied on water from the reservoir. In response, plant administrators dug wells, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Zelenskyy said extensive repairs would be needed before the plant could operate again, estimating the process could take at least two years.

The IAEA has repeatedly warned the war could cause a radiation leak. While the plant no longer produces electricity, it still holds large amounts of nuclear fuel, requiring constant cooling.

Regular blackouts caused by the fighting have disrupted the facility, though power has been quickly restored each time.

IAEA experts permanently stationed there still face restricted access, with Russian authorities blocking some inspection requests, according to IAEA head Rafael Grossi.

Is any kind of deal imminent?

Zelenskyy said the discussions with Trump on restoring Zaporizhzhia were a positive step, but cautioned that no one would work at the plant if Russian forces remained stationed nearby.

Control over the plant is likely to remain a legal and logistical challenge, intertwined with a highly divisive issue for both warring sides: control over the land itself. Russian troops hold the area, while Ukrainian forces are separated from it by the Dnipro River and more than 100 kilometers (62 miles) of terrain.

“Simply handing over the plant while everything within a meter of it remains occupied or armed by Russia — no one will work under such conditions,” Zelenskyy said after the call with Trump. “It’s impossible.”

He said there would be no way to operate securely in such a scenario. “That would mean that the plant could start operating tomorrow, only to be blown up by the Russians the following day.”

The release of a 1961 plan to break up the CIA revives an old conspiracy theory about who killed JFK

By JOHN HANNA Associated Press

A key adviser warned President John F. Kennedy after the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 that the agency behind it, the CIA, had grown too powerful. He proposed giving the State Department control of “all clandestine activities” and breaking up the CIA.

The page of Special Assistant Arthur Schlesinger Jr.’s memo outlining the proposal was among the newly public material in documents related to Kennedy’s assassination released this week by the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. So, too was Schlesinger’s statement that 47% of the political officers in U.S. embassies were controlled by the CIA.

Some readers of the previously withheld material in Schlesinger’s 15-page memo view it as evidence of

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both mistrust between Kennedy and the CIA and a reason the CIA at least would not make Kennedy's security a high priority ahead of his assassination in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963. That gave fresh attention Thursday to a decades-old theory about who killed JFK — that the CIA had a hand in it.

Some Kennedy scholars, historians and writers said they haven't yet seen anything in the 63,000 pages of material released under an order from President Donald Trump that undercuts the conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald, a 24-year-old Marine and onetime defector to the Soviet Union, was a lone gunman. But they also say they understand why doubters gravitate toward the theory.

"You have this young, charismatic president with so much potential for the future, and on the other side of the scale, you have this 24-year-old waif, Oswald, and it doesn't balance. You want to put something weightier on the Oswald side," said Gerald Posner, whose book, "Case Closed," details the evidence that Oswald was a lone gunman.

The first 'big event' in the US to spawn conspiracy theories

Critics of the Oswald-acted-alone conclusion had predicted that previously unreleased material would bolster their positions. One of them, Jefferson Morley, the editor of the JFK Facts blog, said Thursday that newly public material is important to "the JFK case." Morley is vice president of the Mary Ferrell Foundation, a repository for files related to the assassination.

Morley said that even with the release of 63,000 pages this week, there is still more unreleased material, including 2,400 files that the FBI said it discovered after Trump issued his order in January and material held by the Kennedy family.

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 Oswald, 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.

"It was the first big event that led to a series of events involving conspiracy theories that have left Americans believing, almost permanently, that their government lies to them so often they shouldn't pay close attention," said Larry Sabato, director of the University of Virginia Center for Politics and author of "The Kennedy Half-Century"

The Bay of Pigs fiasco prompts an aide's memo

Morley said Schlesinger's memo provides the "origin story" of mutual mistrust between Kennedy and the CIA.

Kennedy had inherited the Bay of Pigs plan from his predecessor, President Dwight Eisenhower, and had been in office less than three months when the operation launched in April 1961 as a covert invasion to topple Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Schlesinger's memo was dated June 30, 1961, a little more than two months later.

Schlesinger told Kennedy that all covert operations should be cleared with the U.S. State Department instead of allowing the CIA to largely present proposed operations almost as accomplished tasks. He also said in some places, such as Austria and Chile, far more than half the embassies' political officers were CIA-controlled.

Ronald Neumann, former US ambassador to Afghanistan, Algeria and Bahrain, said most American diplomats now are "non-CIA," and in most places, ambassadors do not automatically defer to the CIA.

"CIA station chiefs also have an important function for ambassadors, because the station chief is usually the senior intelligence officer at a post," Neumann said, adding that ambassadors see a CIA station chiefs as providing valuable information.

But he noted: "If you get into the areas where we were involved in covert operations in supporting wars, you're going to have a different picture. You're going to have a picture which will differ from a normal embassy and normal operations."

A proposal to break up the CIA that didn't come to fruition

Schlesinger's memo ends with a previously redacted page that spells out a proposal to give control of covert activities to the State Department and to split the CIA into two agencies reporting to separate undersecretaries of state. Morley sees it as a response to Kennedy's anger over the Bay of Pigs and

something Kennedy was seriously contemplating.

The plan never came to fruition.

Sabato said that Kennedy simply "needed the CIA" in the Cold War conflict with the Soviet Union and its allies like Cuba, and a huge reorganization would have hindered intelligence operations. He also said the president and his brother, U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, wanted to oust Castro before JFK ran for reelection in 1964.

"Let's remember that a good percentage of the covert operations were aimed at Fidel Castro in Cuba," Sabato said.

Timothy Naftali, an adjunct professor at Columbia University who is writing a book about JFK's presidency, discounts the idea of tensions between the president and the CIA lasting until Kennedy's death. For one thing, he said, the president used covert operations "avidly."

"I find that the more details we get on that period, the more it appears likely that the Kennedy brothers were in control of the intelligence community," Naftali said. "You can see his imprint. You can see that there is a system by which he is directing the intelligence community. It's not always direct, but he's directing it."

Israeli hostage freed after 491 days asks: Where was the United Nations, the Red Cross, the world?

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Freed Israeli hostage Eli Sharabi, who was beaten, chained and starved while held for 491 days by Hamas, expressed his anger during an appearance at the U.N. Security Council on Thursday for having to suffer for so long and worry every day about being killed.

"Where was the United Nations? Where was the Red Cross? Where was the world?" Sharabi asked.

He challenged the U.N.'s most powerful body: "If you stand for humanity prove it" by bringing home the 59 hostages still in Gaza, many of whom are believed to be dead.

The fate of the remaining hostages became more uncertain after Israel on Tuesday ended a six-week break in the fighting that had allowed for the return of some hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners.

Sharabi said the council talked about the need to get humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza, but he saw Hamas militants eating stolen food from dozens of boxes marked with U.N. emblems while the hostages starved. They were given maybe a piece of pita and a sip of tea a day, and an occasional dry date, he said.

When he was released on Feb. 8, Sharabi said he weighed 44 kilos (about 97 pounds) — less than the weight of his youngest daughter, who was killed along with his wife and older daughter in Hamas' surprise attack in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, along with about 1,200 others. He was among 251 people taken hostage.

The United States in November vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution demanding an immediate cease-fire in Gaza because it was not linked to an immediate release of the hostages.

The Palestinians and their supporters then went to the 193-member General Assembly, which adopted a resolution in December demanding a ceasefire and reiterating its demand for the release of the hostages. Unlike Security Council resolutions, though, those passed by the General Assembly are nonbinding.

The ceasefire that went into effect in January was shattered on Tuesday with surprise airstrikes on Gaza that killed more than 400 Palestinians, one of the highest death tolls in the nearly 18-month war. Gaza's Health Ministry said most victims were women and children.

Sharabi's appearance before the council, the second by a freed hostage, followed an Israeli request last week for a meeting on the plight of the hostages.

Britain's deputy ambassador James Kariuki called Sharabi's suffering "beyond the imagination" and said "Hamas must be held accountable for their despicable actions."

But Kariuki also said the U.K. condemns Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz's "warning of the total destruction of Gaza." Britain calls for the rapid resurgence of aid to Gaza, an investigation into allegations of sexual and gender-based violence against Palestinian detainees by Israeli forces, and an urgent return to the ceasefire deal, he said.

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France's new U.N. ambassador, Jérôme Bonnafont, expressed his country's deepest condolences to Sharabi but also condemned the resumption of Israel's bombing, saying it will not ensure the release of hostages, and demanded an end to Israel's humanitarian blockade of Gaza.

Russia's deputy U.N. ambassador Dmitry Polyansky told the council, "Our hearts were filled with sorrow as we listened to the tragic story of Mr. Eli Sharabi," adding "such brutality can have no justification."

Polyansky criticized Israel's leaders for not moving to phase 2 of the ceasefire deal, which calls for the release of all hostages and a permanent end to the fighting. He said it's difficult to discuss the future when Israel's military and political leaders appear to have made the choice in favor of war.

Algeria's U.N. Ambassador Amar Bendjama, representing the Arab world on the council, called Sharabi a "representative of civil society," and said "no civilian, irrespective of their background, should endure suffering."

He then accused Israel of "cherry-picking" international law. He pointed to Israel's ban on humanitarian aid, fuel and electricity entering Gaza since March 2, its killing of civilians, and the cutoff of the International Committee of the Red Cross' access to over 9,500 Palestinians detained in Israeli prisons since Oct. 7.

After all council members spoke, Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian U.N. ambassador, sent "our condolences" to Sharabi over the killing of his loved ones and his prolonged captivity. He said Palestinians "understand this pain because we live it."

Sharabi made no mention of Israeli actions, except to say that on the morning of Oct. 7, when he heard that militants were inside Kibbutz Be'eri where he lived, he reassured his wife not to worry: "The army will come, they always come." That morning, they never came.

He told the council he came to speak for 24-year-old Alon Ohel, a fellow hostage whom he left behind in the tunnel, and all others, including his older brother, Yossi, who was killed but whose body remains in Gaza.

"Bring them all home. Now!" Sharabi said.

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

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER and KOSTYA MANENKOV Associated Press

HELSINKI (AP) — Finland is 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.

Aino Virolainen, a digital commerce director, has lived abroad but always wants to return home to Finland.

"This is where I always want to come back to and where I want to, you know, grow my kids and grow old myself," Virolainen said Thursday. "And I think it's because, you know, the peace and the quietness and the trustworthiness. You know, how we speak directly and the nature, of course. It's clean and the air is fresh and what's there not to love?"

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 U.N. 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 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.

Alexandra Peth, a managing director, said Finnish culture prioritizes trust and connection.

"People trust each other in Finland and I think on many levels in the society, we try to support each other," Peth said. "So I think the system makes it kind of that you can trust it somehow."

Overall, researchers said that 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 eighth. Costa Rica and Mexico entered the top 10 for the first time, ranking at sixth 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 third from the bottom.

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

In a concerning development, the study said that 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 gross domestic product per capita, healthy life expectancy, having someone to count on, a sense of freedom, generosity and perceptions of corruption.

Jouni Purhonen, a Helsinki resident, called Finns "really calm."

"So we have the time to think about things like live our life really peacefully and I guess easily, if you will," Purhonen said.

Trump orders a plan to dismantle the Education Department while keeping some core functions

By COLLIN BINKLEY and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump signed an executive order Thursday calling for the dismantling of the U.S. Education Department, advancing a campaign promise to take apart an agency that's been a longtime target of conservatives.

Trump has derided the Education Department as wasteful and polluted by liberal ideology. However, completing its dismantling is most likely impossible without an act of Congress, which created the department in 1979. Republicans said they will introduce legislation to achieve that, while Democrats have quickly lined up to oppose the idea.

The order says the education secretary will, "to the maximum extent appropriate and permitted by law, take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education and return authority over education to the States and local communities."

It offers no detail on how that work will be carried out or where it will be targeted, though the White House said the agency will retain certain critical functions.

Trump said his administration will close the department beyond its "core necessities," preserving its re-

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sponsibilities for Title I funding for low-income schools, Pell grants and money for children with disabilities.

The White House said earlier Thursday the department will continue to manage federal student loans, but the order appears to say the opposite. It says the Education Department doesn't have the staff to oversee its \$1.6 trillion loan portfolio and "must return bank functions to an entity equipped to serve America's students."

At a signing ceremony, Trump blamed the department for America's lagging academic performance and said states will do a better job.

"It's doing us no good," he said.

Already, Trump's Republican administration has 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.

Education Secretary Linda McMahon said she will remove red tape and empower states to decide what's best for their schools. But she promised to continue essential services and work with states and Congress "to ensure a lawful and orderly transition."

Part of her job will be exploring which agencies can take on the Education Department's various roles, she said.

"The Department of Justice already has a civil rights office, and I think that there is an opportunity to discuss with Attorney General Bondi about locating some of our civil rights work there," McMahon told reporters after the signing.

The measure was celebrated by groups that have long called for an end to the department.

"For decades, it has funneled billions of taxpayer dollars into a failing system — one that prioritizes leftist indoctrination over academic excellence, all while student achievement stagnates and America falls further behind," said Kevin Roberts, president of the Heritage Foundation.

Advocates for public schools said eliminating the department would leave children behind in a fundamentally unequal education system.

"This is a dark day for the millions of American children who depend on federal funding for a quality education, including those in poor and rural communities with parents who voted for Trump," NAACP President Derrick Johnson said.

Opponents are already gearing up for legal challenges, including Democracy Forward, a public interest litigation group. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., called the order a "tyrannical power grab" and "one of the most destructive and devastating steps Donald Trump has ever taken."

Margaret Spellings, who served as education secretary under Republican President George W. Bush, questioned whether the department will be able to accomplish its remaining missions, and whether it will ultimately improve schools.

"Will it distract us from the ability to focus urgently on student achievement, or will people be figuring out how to run the train?" she asked.

Spellings said schools have always been run by local and state officials, and rejected the idea that the Education Department and federal government have been holding them back.

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, like school meals and support for homeless students. The agency also is key in overseeing civil rights enforcement.

The Trump administration has not addressed the fate of other department operations, like its support for technical education and adult learning, grants for rural schools and after-school programs, and a federal work-study program that provides employment to students with financial need.

States and districts already control local schools, including curriculum, but some conservatives have pushed to cut strings attached to federal money and provide it to states as "block grants" to be used at their discretion.

Block granting has raised questions about vital funding sources including Title I, the largest source of federal money to America's K-12 schools. Families of children with disabilities have despaired over what could come of the federal department's work protecting their rights.

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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.

Republicans have talked about closing the Education Department for decades, saying it wastes 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.

Even as Trump moves to dismantle the department, he has leaned on it to promote elements of his agenda. He has used investigative powers of the Office for Civil Rights and the threat of withdrawing federal education money 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.

Sen. Patty Murray of Washington, a Democrat on the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, dismissed Trump's claim that he's returning education to the states. She said he is actually "trying to exert ever more control over local schools and dictate what they can and cannot teach."

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.

US government cannot deport Georgetown scholar until court rules, judge orders

By OLIVIA DIAZ and BEN FINLEY Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP) — A federal judge on Thursday ordered immigration officials not to deport a Georgetown scholar who was detained by the Trump Administration and accused of spreading Hamas propaganda in the latest battle over speech on U.S. college campuses.

U.S. District Judge Patricia Tolliver Giles in Alexandria, Virginia, ordered that Indian national Badar Khan Suri "shall not be removed from the United States unless and until the Court issues a contrary order."

Suri's attorney wrote in an earlier court filing that Suri was targeted because of his social media posts and his wife's "identity as a Palestinian and her constitutionally protected speech."

"Dr. Suri is an academic, not an activist," his attorney Hassan Ahmad wrote in a court filing on Thursday. "But he spoke out on social media about his views on the Israel-Gaza war. Even more so, his wife is an outspoken critic of the Israeli government and the violence it has perpetrated against Palestinians."

Suri's attorney argued that federal authorities have provided no evidence that he's committed any crimes and that his detention violates his free speech and due process rights. Suri, who has no criminal record, holds a visa authorizing him to be in the U.S. as a visiting scholar, and his wife is a U.S. citizen, according to the motion.

"The Trump Administration has openly expressed its intention to weaponize immigration law to punish noncitizens whose views are deemed critical of U.S. policy as it relates to Israel," Suri's attorney wrote.

Suri was accused of "spreading Hamas propaganda and promoting antisemitism on social media" and determined to be deportable by the Secretary of State's office, Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said late Wednesday on the social platform X. Suri's case was first reported by Politico.

Suri was arrested Monday night outside of his Virginia home, where he lives with his wife and three children, who are between the ages of 5 and 9, according to the filing by his lawyer.

Masked agents "refused to tell him the basis for the arrest, handcuffed him, and forced him into an unmarked black SUV," Suri's lawyer wrote. "Dr. Suri's wife quickly arrived on the scene and begged for answers; the agents only disclosed that they were from Homeland Security, the government was revoking Dr. Suri's visa, and he would be detained in Chantilly."

Suri and his wife, Mapheze Saleh, "have long been doxxed and smeared," Suri's lawyer wrote, while she

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said in a separate statement to the court that a website had "claimed falsely that my husband and I have 'ties to Hamas.'"

"I feel completely unsafe and can't stop looking out the door, terrified that someone else will come and take me and the children away as well," she said in her statement.

Saleh was born in Missouri but spent much of her life in Gaza after age five, according to court filings. She and Suri married in New Delhi, India, in 2013 and lived there before moving to the U.S.; he came in 2022 and she and their children joined him the following year.

Nader Hashemi, a professor of Middle East and Islamic politics at Georgetown, told The Associated Press that Suri was intensely focused on teaching and research that centered on religion and peace processes in the Middle East and South Asia.

Suri felt strong solidarity and sympathy for Palestinians, but was not outwardly political on campus, the professor said.

"We've organized dozens of events since Oct. 7th, when the Israel-Gaza war began, and I don't recall seeing him in any of those events," said Hashemi, who directs the Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, where Suri is a post-doctoral fellow. "That's not who he was."

Before his arrest, Suri and his wife had been targets of right-wing campus groups, in part because Saleh's father is Ahmed Yousef, a former adviser to Hamas, Hashemi said.

Yousef confirmed to The New York Times that Suri is his son-in-law, adding that Suri wasn't involved in any "political activism," including on behalf of Hamas.

Yousef, who has publicly criticized the Oct. 7 attack on Israel, told the newspaper that he left his position in the Hamas-run government in Gaza more than a decade ago and does not hold a senior position with the militant group.

Georgetown's Alwaleed Center said in a statement that Suri's arrest was part of a "campaign by the Trump Administration to destroy higher education in the United States and punish their political opponents."

Suri was later taken to a detention facility in Louisiana, according to a government website. His lawyers are seeking his immediate release and to halt deportation proceedings through their habeas motion filed Tuesday against the Trump administration.

Suri's detention more than 1,000 miles (about 1,600 kilometers) away from his family and attorney is "plainly intended as retaliation and punishment for Mr. Suri's protected speech," his attorney added.

Separately, Columbia University student activist Mahmoud Khalil, a legal U.S. resident with no criminal record, was detained earlier this month over his participation in pro-Palestinian demonstrations and is fighting deportation efforts in federal court. And Dr. Rasha Alawieh, a kidney transplant specialist who previously worked and lived in Rhode Island, was deported over the weekend despite having a U.S. visa.

Democratic U.S. Rep. Don Beyer, whose district includes the county where Suri was detained, said in a Thursday statement that the scholar's detention was illegal, urging the court to consider Suri's case.

"The 'justification' given for these violations of Mr. Suri's right to due process is another violation of the Constitution: a blatant attack on the First Amendment," Beyer said in a statement. "Mr. Suri and his family are unfortunately the latest victim of President Trump's assault on the freedom of speech."

Suri's lawyers say he hopes to become a university professor. A Georgetown webpage said that he earned a doctorate in India while studying efforts to introduce democracy to Afghanistan and Iraq, and he has traveled extensively in conflict zones in several countries.

The university said in a statement Thursday that Suri was "duly granted a visa to enter the United States to continue his doctoral research on peacebuilding in Iraq and Afghanistan."

"We support our community members' rights to free and open inquiry, deliberation and debate, even if the underlying ideas may be difficult, controversial or objectionable. We expect the legal system to adjudicate this case fairly," the school said.

The U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement detainee locator website lists Suri as being in the custody of immigration officials at the Alexandria Staging Facility in Louisiana.

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No. 12 seed McNeese holds off late Clemson charge to earn first March Madness victory

By JIMMY GOLEN AP Sports Writer

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — McNeese coach Will Wade and his boombox-toting manager gave March Madness its first bracket buster.

The 12th-seeded Cowboys used a stifling first half to open a 24-point lead, and then held off late-charging No. 5 seed Clemson for the program's first NCAA Tournament victory, a 69-67 win in the opening round of the East Region on Thursday.

"We have broken every record in the book," said Wade, who led the school to its first back-to-back appearances in the NCAA Tournament and now its first victory. "This was the last one to get. We want to keep this going. We want to keep this going."

McNeese earned a matchup on Saturday with fourth-seeded Purdue, a 75-63 winner over High Point earlier in Providence.

Brandon Murray scored 14 of his 21 points in the first half, when the Southland Conference school from Lake Charles, Louisiana, held Clemson to 13 points. After falling behind by as many as 24 in the second, the Tigers rallied, erasing most of a 12-point deficit in the final minute before running out of time.

"We went out there and took the first punch and they didn't know how to react to that, honestly," Murray said. "Coach tells us to be ourselves, play with swag. That's what we're going to do."

Chris Shumate added 13 points and 11 rebounds for McNeese, which has been best-known this March for its viral, rapping manager and a renegade coach who has reportedly already lined up his next job — at NC State.

The Wolfpack will have to wait at least another 48 hours, because Wade is still needed in Providence.

Wade celebrated by running into the stands join the McNeese crowd — though even the neutral observers were rooting for the Cowboys against the Tigers from the powerful Atlantic Coast Conference. When he arrived in the locker room, his players doused him with water.

"Coach Wade made this plan. This is not something that started just now," guard Quadir Copeland said. "This is something that's been a goal the whole way and it's been amazing."

A 7½-point underdog, McNeese (28-6) held the Tigers to one basket over almost eight minutes during a 17-2 first-half run that turned a tie game into a 23-8 lead. After Clemson (27-7) scored the first three points of the second, the Cowboys ran off nine in a row and led by as many as 24 points.

Jaeden Zackery scored 24 points, Chase Hunter had 21 and Viktor Lakhin grabbed 10 rebounds for Clemson before fouling out with six minutes left in the game.

Takeaways

The once-feared ACC is down to two teams: No. 1 seed Duke and North Carolina, one of the last teams in. No. 8 seed Louisville lost to ninth-seeded Creighton in another of the tournament's first games.

Comebacks

With 70 seconds left, Javohn Garcia blocked Zackery twice on the same shot and Shumate streaked toward the basket for the long pass and reverse dunk that gave the Cowboys a 12-point lead.

But Zackery hit a 3-pointer with 45 seconds left to make it a nine-point game, Jake Heidbreder hit one to cut the deficit to six, and then, after Sincere Parker's reverse dunk brought the crowd to its feet, Zackery hit another 3 to make it 67-62.

After McNeese missed a free throw — one of six missed foul shots in the final six minutes — Chauncey Wiggins hit a long 3 to make it a three-point game. Another missed free throw gave Clemson the ball with 10 seconds left, down four.

Hunter drove to the basket, but scored as time expired.

Coaching carousel

Wade was fired from LSU amid an investigation into recruiting violations, and he took a year off before returning to Louisiana at McNeese. In two seasons, he has led the Cowboys to their first back-to-back NCAA Tournament appearances.

Gone cold

Teams have gone cold before – 11 of them have been held to a baker's dozen or fewer points in the first half – but Clemson is just the second one to do it when seeded fifth or better since the shot clock era began in 1986.

Clemson was 1 for 15 from 3-point range in the first half and made just five baskets before the break.

Up next

The Cowboys head into the Purdue game with a 9-5 record in nonconference games this year, including two losses to SEC teams in the regular season. Under Wade, they are 1-0 against the Big Ten, beating Michigan in Ann Arbor last year.

Judge calls Trump administration's latest response on deportation flights 'woefully insufficient'

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge instructed the Trump administration on Thursday to explain why its failure to turn around flights carrying deportees to El Salvador did not violate his court order in a growing showdown between the judicial and executive branches.

U.S. District Judge Jeb Boasberg demanded answers after flights carrying Venezuelan immigrants alleged by the Trump administration to be gang members landed in El Salvador after the judge temporarily blocked deportations under an 18th century wartime law. Boasberg had directed the administration to return to the U.S. planes that were already in the air when he ordered the halt.

Boasberg had given the administration until noon Thursday to either provide more details about the flights or make a claim that it must be withheld because it would harm "state secrets." The administration resisted the judge's request, calling it an "unnecessary judicial fishing" expedition.

In a written order, Boasberg called Trump officials' latest response "woefully insufficient." The judge said the administration "again evaded its obligations" by merely repeating "the same general information about the flights." And he ordered the administration to "show cause," as to why it didn't violate his court order to turn around the planes, increasing the prospect that he may consider holding administration officials in contempt of court.

The Justice Department has said the judge's verbal directions did not count, that only his written order needed to be followed and that it couldn't apply to flights that had already left the U.S. A Justice Department spokesperson said Thursday that it "continues to believe that the court's superfluous questioning of sensitive national security information is inappropriate judicial overreach."

A U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement official told the judge Thursday the administration needed more time to decide whether it would invoke the state secrets privilege in an effort to block the information's release.

Boasberg ordered Trump officials by Friday to submit a sworn declaration by a person "with direct involvement in the Cabinet-level discussions" about the state secrets privilege and to tell the court by next Tuesday whether the administration will invoke it.

In a deepening conflict between the judicial and executive branch, Trump and many of his allies have called for impeaching Boasberg, who was nominated to the federal bench by Democratic President Barack Obama. In a rare statement earlier this week, Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts rejected such calls, saying "impeachment is not an appropriate response to disagreement concerning a judicial decision."

Taliban release an American man who was abducted while traveling in Afghanistan

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An American man who was abducted more than two years ago while traveling through Afghanistan as a tourist has been released by the Taliban in a deal with the Trump administration that Qatari negotiators helped broker, the State Department said Thursday.

George Glezmman, an airline mechanic from Atlanta, is the third American detainee to be released by the Taliban since January. He was seized by the Taliban's intelligence services in December 2022 and was designated by the U.S. government as wrongfully detained the following year.

In a statement, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Glezmman was on his way back to the United States to be reunited with his wife, Aleksandra, and praised Qatar for "steadfast commitment and diplomatic efforts" that he said were "instrumental in securing George's release."

"George's release is a positive and constructive step," Rubio said. "It is also a reminder that other Americans are still detained in Afghanistan. President Trump will continue his tireless work to free ALL Americans unjustly detained around the world."

Glezmman was being accompanied back to the U.S., through Qatar's capital, Doha, by Adam Boehler, who has been handling hostage issues for President Donald Trump's administration. The Taliban disclosed earlier Thursday that Boehler had met with a delegation that included Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi.

Glezmman, 66, was in Afghanistan as a tourist at the time of his abduction and has visited more than 100 countries as part of his passion for exploring different cultures, according to a profile on the website of the Foley Foundation, an organization that advocates for the release of Americans detained by foreign countries.

The release of Glezmman is part of what the Taliban has previously described as the "normalization" of ties between the U.S. and Afghanistan following the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. Most countries still don't recognize the Taliban's rule.

Glezmman's release follows a separate deal, arranged in January in the final days of the Biden administration and also mediated by the Qataris, that secured the releases of Ryan Corbett and William McKenty.

The Taliban's Foreign Ministry in Kabul said at the time that those two U.S. citizens had been exchanged for Khan Mohammed, who was sentenced to two life terms in 2008 after being convicted under U.S. narcotics laws for securing heroin and opium that he knew was bound for the U.S.

Unlike in that arrangement, the U.S. did not give up any prisoner to secure Glezmman's release, which was done as a goodwill gesture, according to an official briefed on the matter who insisted on anonymity due to the sensitivity of the negotiations.

On Thursday, Afghanistan's Foreign Ministry confirmed Glezmman's release on "humanitarian grounds." In a statement, it said the "Islamic Emirate again reaffirms its longstanding position that dialogue, understanding and diplomacy provide effective avenues for resolving all issues."

President Joe Biden contemplated before he left office an earlier proposal that would have involved the release of Glezmman and other Americans for Muhammad Rahim, one of the remaining detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

But Biden told families during a call in January that he would not support trading Rahim unless the Taliban released Mahmood Habibi, an Afghan-American businessman who worked as a contractor for a Kabul-based telecommunications company and vanished in 2022.

The FBI and Habibi's family have said they believe Habibi was taken by Taliban forces, but the Taliban has denied holding him. Representatives for Habibi on Thursday cited what they said was "overwhelming evidence" that he was arrested by the Taliban after his home was searched by people identifying themselves as part of the Taliban's security service.

"We are confident that the Trump Administration will hold firm that my brother needs to be released for relations with the U.S. to move forward," one of Habibi's brothers, Ahmad, said in a statement. "We have

reason to be confident Mahmood is alive and in Taliban custody, despite their hollow denials of holding him. My brother is an innocent man who has been held away from his wife, young daughter, and elderly parents for 953 days."

Freshman star Cooper Flagg is ready to go for No. 1 seed Duke in March Madness

By AARON BEARD AP Basketball Writer

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Duke freshman star Cooper Flagg says he's good to go after spraining his left ankle last week, just in time for March Madness.

The top-seeded Blue Devils said Flagg will be active for Friday's first-round game against Mount St. Mary's in the NCAA Tournament's East Region. Meanwhile, the unanimous Associated Press first-team All-American said Thursday that he's pain-free and was able to return to full practice a day earlier.

"I feel very good," he said. "I'm very confident moving forward."

Flagg was hurt in the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament quarterfinals and missed the Blue Devils' wins in the semifinals and title game. He said he "hated every second" of not being able to play after the injury, but X-rays and an MRI both came back with results that indicated he could return after a short absence.

"I've rolled my ankle a good amount of times growing up playing basketball," the 18-year-old Flagg said. "Usually I'm able to just tie my shoe and walk it off. It was definitely a little bit of a different feeling as soon as I rolled my ankle this time, I knew it was a little bit more severe and a little more serious."

Flagg jogged and glided through Thursday's public practice in the arena about a half-hour's drive from the Duke campus. He showed no indications of being hobbled, including when he knocked down five straight 3-pointers — twice on the right wing, left corner, left wing and back to the right — during a shootaround.

Coach Jon Scheyer said he wouldn't let Flagg play if he had been "compensating" for the injury in the practice, but added Flagg still "has to work through" a bit more to be 100 percent.

"We built him up slowly and really progressed him the right way, but he's ready to go," Scheyer said. "In his mind, he was ready last weekend, but he wasn't."

Friday's slate

Duke's opener against the 16th-seeded Mountaineers is one of six East first-rounders Friday, including eighth-seeded Mississippi State facing ninth-seed Baylor, also in Raleigh, North Carolina.

In Cleveland, second-seeded Alabama faces 15 seed Robert Morris, while 7 seed Saint Mary's meets 10 seed Vanderbilt. And in Seattle, fourth-seeded Alabama meets 13 seed Akron, while fifth-seeded Oregon meets 12th-seeded Liberty.

Uncertain status

Flagg's ankle isn't the only noteworthy injury in the East.

Alabama forward Grant Nelson and his balky knee will be a game-time decision for the Crimson Tide (25-8) when they face Robert Morris (26-8). Alabama's second-leading scorer (11.8 points per game) and key part of last year's Final Four run was hurt in the first half of a blowout loss to Florida in the Southeastern Conference Tournament last week.

Coach Nate Oats described Nelson, who saw a specialist earlier this week, as "day to day." Nelson has participated in workouts but has yet to go full speed in practice.

"I think it's looking a little better, obviously, for Sunday than maybe Friday," Oats said. "But there's a chance he could play."

Welcome back

Arizona's Tommy Lloyd is back in a region where he spent 22 years as an assistant at Gonzaga.

Lloyd grew up in Kelso, Washington, about a half-hour north of Portland, Oregon. And before joining the Big 12, the Wildcats were members of the now-defunct Pac-12.

He bought tickets for relatives and expects a large fan group to show up for his team's game against Akron in Seattle. Lloyd teared up when talking about his experiences growing up in western Washington.

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"I hope there's a great contingent of them coming here," Lloyd said.

Lloyd has reached March Madness in all four of his seasons as a head coach, with two Sweet 16 appearances.

"I honestly don't think I'm, you know, anything extra special," Lloyd said. "I think I ended up in a great place and I'm fortunate. So I'm thankful for my players, thankful for my staff, but you know, all I honestly care right now is about playing Akron tomorrow."

Pacific Northwest success

Dana Altman has Oregon thriving in March in his 15 years with the Ducks.

The Ducks (24-9) have 76 wins in March since Altman arrived in 2010. That has outpaced bluebloods North Carolina (74), Kansas (73), and Kentucky and Duke (73). Oregon has made five Sweet 16s, two Elite Eights and the 2017 Final Four in that span.

The Ducks will also be in their home Pacific Northwest region, while Conference USA champion Liberty (28-6) is making a cross-country trip from its Lynchburg, Virginia, campus. The Flames are in the NCAAAs for the third time in six tournaments under Ritchie McKay, which included pulling a 12-versus-5 upset against Mississippi State in the 2019 first round.

Clash of styles

Vanderbilt wants to go fast. Saint Mary's wants to go slow.

The Commodores (20-12) averaged over 78 points, while only four teams allowed fewer points than the seventh-seeded Gaels (28-5). Saint Mary's ranks eighth nationally in KenPom's adjusted defensive efficiency by allowing 92.2 points per 100 possessions, while the West Coast Conference's regular-season champ also led the country in rebounding margin.

"We try to go in every game with that mindset of we can try to break these guys, especially teams that like to score," Saint Mary's senior forward Luke Barrett said.

Vanderbilt enters on a three-game skid.

"We've went on the skids (late) in the season but we know that's not who we are," guard Jason Edwards said. "We know we deserve to be in this tournament and we're going to prove it to everybody tomorrow."

Another step?

Chris Jans is 3-for-3 in getting Mississippi State to March Madness after the program went just once from 2010-22 before his arrival.

Jans' 2023 team lost to Pittsburgh in the First Four, then fell to Michigan State last year as an 8 seed. The Bulldogs (21-12) are back in that position again, this time against the Bears (19-14).

"We got to wear the lighter-colored jersey for the first time (last year), then we're doing it again," Jans said.

Now it's about earning the program's first March Madness win since the 2008 first round.

"Getting here certainly was a goal, but it wasn't the ultimate goal," Jans said.

Mariah Carey didn't steal 'All I Want For Christmas Is You' from other writers, a judge says

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

A federal judge in Los Angeles has ruled that Mariah Carey did not steal her perennial megahit "All I Want for Christmas Is You" from other songwriters.

Judge Mónica Ramírez Almadani granted Carey's request for summary judgment on Wednesday, giving her and co-writer and co-defendant Walter Afanasieff a victory without going to trial.

In 2023, songwriters Andy Stone of Louisiana — who goes by the stage name Vince Vance — and Troy Powers of Tennessee filed the \$20 million lawsuit alleging that Carey's 1994 song, which has since become a holiday standard and annual streaming sensation, infringed the copyright of their country 1989 song with the same title.

Their lawyer Gerard P. Fox said he's "disappointed" in an email to The Associated Press.

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Fox said it is his experience that judges at this level “nearly always now dismiss a music copyright case and that one must appeal to reverse and get the case to the jury. My client will make a decision shortly on whether to appeal. We filed based on the opinions of two esteemed musicologists who teach at great colleges.”

Stone and Powers’ suit said their “All I Want For Christmas Is You” contains a unique linguistic structure where a person, disillusioned with expensive gifts and seasonal comforts, wants to be with their loved one, and accordingly writes a letter to Santa Claus.”

They said there was an “overwhelming likelihood” Carey and Afanasieff had heard their song — which at one point reached No. 31 on Billboard’s Hot Country chart — and infringed their copyright by taking significant elements from it.

After hearing from two experts for each side, Ramírez Almadani agreed with those from the defense, who said the writers employed common Christmas clichés that existed prior to both songs, and that Carey’s song used them differently. She said the plaintiffs had not met the burden of showing that the songs are substantially similar.

Ramírez Almadani also ordered sanctions against the plaintiffs and their lawyers, saying their suit and subsequent filings were frivolous and that the plaintiffs’ attorneys “made no reasonable effort to ensure that the factual contentions asserted have evidentiary support.”

She said they must pay at least part of the defendants’ attorney fees.

Defense attorneys and publicists for Carey did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Carey’s Christmas colossus has become an even bigger hit in recent years than it was in the 1990s. It has reached No. 1 on Billboard’s Hot 100 chart the past six years in a row — measuring the most popular songs each week — not just the holiday-themed — by airplay, sales and streaming.

Carey and Afanasieff have had their own public disagreement — though not one that’s gone to court — over who wrote how much of the song. But the case made them at least temporary allies.

The family of an airplane safety whistleblower is suing Boeing over his death

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — The family of a former Boeing quality control manager who police say killed himself after lawyers questioned him for days about his whistleblowing on alleged jumbo jet defects sued the airplane maker Thursday.

Boeing subjected John Barnett to a “campaign of harassment, abuse and intimidation intended to discourage, discredit and humiliate him until he would either give up or be discredited,” lawyers for the family wrote in a wrongful death lawsuit filed in federal court in South Carolina.

Barnett, 62, shot himself March 9, 2024, in Charleston after answering questions from attorneys for several days. He lived in Louisiana.

“Boeing had threatened to break John, and break him it did,” the attorneys wrote in court papers.

Boeing has not yet responded in court filings.

“We are saddened by John Barnett’s death and extend our condolences to his family,” the company said in a statement this week.

Barnett was a longtime Boeing employee and worked as a quality-control manager before he retired in 2017. In the years after that, he shared his concerns with journalists and became a whistleblower.

Barnett said he once saw discarded metal shavings near wiring for the flight controls that could have cut wiring and caused a catastrophe. He also noted problems with up to a quarter of the oxygen systems on Boeing’s 787 planes.

Barnett shared his concerns with his supervisors and others before leaving Boeing, but according to the lawsuit they responded by ignoring him and then harassing him.

Boeing intentionally gave Barnett inaccurate, poor job reviews and less desirable shifts, according to the lawsuit. Barnett’s family argues the company publicly blamed him for delays that angered his co-workers

and prevented him from transferring to another plant.

Barnett eventually was diagnosed with PTSD and his mental condition deteriorated, his family said.

"Whether or not Boeing intended to drive John to his death or merely destroy his ability to function, it was absolutely foreseeable that PTSD and John's unbearable depression, panic attacks, and anxiety, which would in turn lead to an elevated risk of suicide," the lawsuit said. "Boeing may not have pulled the trigger, but Boeing's conduct was the clear cause, and the clear foreseeable cause, of John's death."

The lawsuit doesn't specify the amount of damages sought by Barnett's family but asks for compensation for emotional distress and mental anguish, back pay, 10 years of lost future earnings as well as bonuses, health expenses and his lost life insurance benefits.

Ex-FBI agent who accused agency of political bias is charged with disclosing confidential records

NEW YORK (AP) — An FBI agent who publicly accused the agency of a pro-Trump bias has been arrested and charged with disclosing confidential records after authorities say he included sensitive material about investigations and informants into a draft of his memoir.

Johnathan Buma, who claimed in 2023 that the FBI went after President Joe Biden's son Hunter while stifling his own investigation of President Donald Trump's ally Rudy Giuliani, was arrested Monday evening at Kennedy Airport in New York as he was about to board a flight out of the country, authorities said.

In the draft of his book, Buma described himself as "the most significant whistleblower in FBI history."

Federal prosecutors in California, where Buma had worked as a counterintelligence and counterproliferation agent, charged him on Tuesday with a single count of disclosure of confidential information. The charge is punishable by up to one year in prison.

Buma submitted a letter of resignation Sunday, according to an affidavit prepared by an FBI agent involved in the investigation. The probe into Buma's conduct began well before Trump took office for his second term. The FBI searched Buma's home in November 2023, when Biden was in office.

Messages seeking comment were left with Buma's lawyer.

After filing a whistleblower complaint and testifying before Congress, the court affidavit said Buma went to his FBI office in Orange County, California, in October 2023 and printed copies of about 130 confidential files. The files included summaries of information provided by confidential informants, the identity of an informant and screenshots of text messages he exchanged with an informant, the affidavit said.

Some of that information also appeared in a draft of Buma's book, the affidavit said.

After emailing his bosses that he was taking an unpaid leave of absence, Buma posted excerpts of the draft on social media and emailed copies to various people, some of whom were helping him negotiate a publishing deal, according to the affidavit. Among other things, the book contained information about an FBI investigation into a foreign country's weapons of mass destruction program, the affidavit said.

This March Madness, women's teams are getting a perk men have enjoyed for years

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. (AP) — The Columbia women's basketball team plays in an intimate 2,700-seat gym nestled in Manhattan that is nowhere to be found on the national sports landscape. Now the Lions and all the other starry-eyed dreamers in the NCAA Tournament are being serenaded just like former national champions UConn, South Carolina or Tennessee.

And this year, they're all getting paid to be there.

The star treatment this year goes beyond charter flights, hotel accommodations and coveted swag. For the first time, women's teams are getting an individual share of the profits, a perk men's teams have enjoyed for years.

"It should be this way. We should be able to fly charter," said UNC Greensboro coach Trina Patterson,

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whose Spartans will take a charter flight to play a game for the first time. "We are all playing in the same March Madness, the treatment for the men and women should be equal. We get a unit!"

That's correct, each women's team in the tournament will get a "unit" — money that is paid to conferences when one of its teams appears in the NCAA Tournament. The formula and definition of a unit can be complicated, but the bottom line is conferences will receive \$113,000 for each game one of its women's team plays in the tournament.

Columbia reached the tournament last year, but neither the Lions nor the Ivy League received money for the appearance.

"You got to start somewhere and I think we've been so far behind," said Columbia coach Megan Griffith. "I think of Sedona Prince and it's really cool to see that she's still able to play at a high level on a big stage. This is more like the whipped cream. I think the cherry on top is going to keep coming, but this it's really good so far."

Prince's video from 2020 that shed light on the inequalities between the men's and women's tournament helped spearhead change in the tournament.

Patterson is now with UNCG but she knows what its like to be one of the marquee teams. She played at Virginia in the 1980s when Geno Auriemma was an assistant at the school. Patterson then went on to be an assistant coach at Stanford for a few years under Tara VanDerveer.

Her 16th-seeded team will enjoy the comforts of the cross-country charter flight from Greensboro to Los Angeles, where they will try to knock off JuJu Watkins and No. 1-seeded Southern California. It's UNCG's first appearance in the NCAA Tournament since 1998.

This is all new for William & Mary, which is making its first appearance but has the chance to earn two financial units. They are in the play-in game against High Point on Thursday with the winner facing No. 1 seed Texas.

"It should have always been that way. Women's basketball has been fighting for equality for a very long time," said William & Mary coach Erin Dickerson Davis, who was the associate head coach at Wake Forest, an assistant at Georgetown and has also coached at Towson, Illinois State, La Salle and Furman.

"I've been in this business for many, many years," Davis said. "I played college basketball, it's a long time coming."

It is the Tribe's first trip to March Madness in either men's or women's basketball.

"Everyone is so excited about the experience, going from the bus directly to the plane, everyone was so happy," Davis said. "Yes, we're here on a business trip and we want to win. But just to be able to have these experiences for them that no one has done at William & Mary is special."

Several of the players at Columbia can relate. They aren't in Chapel Hill for spring break. They are here to win. But that doesn't mean they aren't taking time to enjoy the moment.

"It was cool going to the charter and we've been taking it all in," junior Perri Page said. "But it's a business trip and we have a goal in mind."

The Lions' schedule this week has mirrored most schools' travel itinerary. There was the building anticipation on the bus ride from their New York campus to Newark Airport for their pride-filled one-hour charter flight to Chapel Hill and the giddiness that comes with picking up that tournament swag on Wednesday.

Yes, there is a game to be played Thursday night. A pretty big one at that.

But what a ride to get here — with a paycheck looming to top it off.

"We've been enjoying the whole season," Page said, adding, "It's great we can make money for the school now."

Patterson, the former Virginia Cavalier, Stanford Cardinal and now UNCG Spartan summed it up when she said: "It's great for women's basketball."

Oklahoma executes the man who killed a woman 20 years ago in a home invasion and robbery

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

McALESTER, Okla. (AP) — An Oklahoma man who fatally shot a woman during a home invasion and robbery 20 years ago apologized to the victim's family before he was executed Thursday, remorse a woman wounded in the attack said was sincere but came too late.

Wendell Grissom, 56, was declared dead by lethal injection at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester at 10:13 a.m. It was Oklahoma's first execution of 2025.

"It took him a total of 13 minutes to die, and it took him a total of two minutes to kill my best friend," said Dreu Kopf, who was shot multiple times by Grissom but managed to flee the home.

Grissom and a co-defendant, Jessie Floyd Johns, were convicted of killing of Amber Matthews, 23, and wounding Kopf at Kopf's Blaine County residence. Johns was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

"I apologize to all of you that I've hurt," Grissom, bearded and wearing a grey prison uniform, said while strapped to the gurney, an IV line affixed to his left arm. "I regret so much that I've put that hatred in your heart for me."

Grissom said he was under the influence of drugs and alcohol at the time of the killing and asked the victims' family to forgive him.

"I pray that you all can forgive me," he said. "Not for my sake. For your sake."

A minister prayed at Grissom's feet as the lethal drugs began to flow. He exhaled forcefully several times and could be heard snoring when a doctor entered the execution chamber and declared him unconscious about five minutes later. He appeared to stop breathing at 10:09 a.m. and the color started to drain from his face.

More than two dozen of Matthews' friends and family witnessed Grissom's execution.

Three other executions were scheduled this week around the United States. Louisiana put a man to death Tuesday using nitrogen gas for the first time as it resumed executions after a 15-year hiatus. A man who kidnapped and murdered his girlfriend's ex-husband in Arizona was executed Wednesday by lethal injection. Another lethal injection is scheduled Thursday in Florida.

Prosecutors said Grissom, who had a lengthy criminal record, picked up Johns, who was hitchhiking, and the two men were driving west on Interstate 40 when they decided to commit robberies. They randomly selected Kopf's home near Watonga, where Matthews was visiting Kopf and her two young daughters.

Matthews was shot twice in the head and left clinging to life on the floor as Kopf, also shot twice and seriously wounded, managed to flee in Grissom's truck to get help, prosecutors said. Grissom and Johns also fled, on a stolen four-wheeler, but quickly ran out of gas and were captured after hitching a ride to a cafe in a nearby county.

Authorities found Kopf's daughters still inside the home, physically unhurt. Matthews died after being flown by helicopter to an Oklahoma City hospital.

Kopf and her daughters, now 19 and 20, also witnessed Grissom's execution.

Grissom's attorneys did not dispute his guilt but argued at a clemency hearing that he suffered from brain damage that was never presented to a jury. The state's Pardon and Parole Board denied Grissom's request to recommend clemency.

Grissom's attorneys told the board he always accepted responsibility and wrote an apology to Matthews' family during his first interview with police.

"He cannot change the past, but he is now and always has been deeply ashamed and remorseful," said Kristi Christopher, an attorney with the federal public defender's office.

Christopher said his legal team did not pursue a last-minute appeal, per Grissom's request.

Kopf told the board that she still carries deep mental and physical scars from the attack, including bullet fragments still in her body. In the years since the attack, she said, she has called 911 when the doorbell rings unexpectedly or a stranger appears in her neighborhood.

"I lived in a heightened state of fear at all times," she said tearfully.

Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond has called Matthew's killing a "textbook" death penalty case.

"The crimes committed by Grissom, random, brutal attacks on innocent strangers in the sanctity of their own home, are the very kind that keep people awake at night," Drummond said during last month's hearing.

Grissom's lethal injection is the 128th execution by the state of Oklahoma since the U.S. reinstated the death penalty in 1976, state prison records show. It was the first since Kevin Underwood was executed in December.

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 prime-time address to a joint session of Congress and said it was "headed by Elon Musk." Republicans gave Musk a standing ovation, and he 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 Democratic 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 such as Musk.

Chuang, who is based in Maryland and was nominated 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 Democratic 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

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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 his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida after leaving the White House in 2021, Trump spoke extensively about the case in an interview with Fox News.

Longtime defense lawyers were startled because 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 counsel’s office dropped the charges after Trump won the election last November — 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 nominated 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.

The cases are still in their early stages, and the novel legal questions they’re raising will take time for the courts to consider, said Michael Fragoso, a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and former chief counsel to Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

“What Elon does on Twitter is not necessarily what DOGE does,” he said. “My hope would be courts take the time to sift between those two.”

Just because Musk claims credit online for deep agency cuts, that 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.

A month-old girl is pulled from the rubble in Gaza after an airstrike killed her parents

By MARIAM DAGGA and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — As rescuers dug through the remains of a collapsed apartment building in Gaza’s Khan Younis on Thursday, they could hear the cries of a baby from underneath the rubble.

Suddenly, calls of “God is great” rang out. A man sprinted away from the wreckage carrying a living infant swaddled in a blanket and handed her to a waiting ambulance crew. The baby girl stirred fitfully as

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paramedics checked her over.

Her parents and brother were dead in the overnight Israeli airstrike.

"When we asked people, they said she is a month old and she has been under the rubble, since dawn," said Hazen Attar, a civil defense first responder. "She had been screaming and then falling silent from time to time until we were able to get her out a short while ago, and thank God she is safe."

The girl was identified as Ella Osama Abu Dagga. She had been born 25 days earlier, in the midst of a tenuous ceasefire that many Palestinians in Gaza had hoped would mark the end of a war that has devastated the enclave, killed tens of thousands and displaced nearly its entire population.

Only the girl's grandparents survived the attack. Killed were her brother, mother and father, along with another family that included a father and his seven children. Rescuers digging through the rubble could be seen pulling out the small body of a child sprawled on the mattress where he had been sleeping.

The girl's grandmother, Fatima Abu Dagga, sat with a group of other women in a relative's house Thursday, taking turns cradling the infant. Her sons and their wives and eight grandchildren died in the bombing, and only the baby survived. She wept over the loss, and the return to the devastation of war.

"We weren't really living in a truce," she said. "We knew that at any moment the war might return. We never felt that there was stability, not at all."

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 for the second phase of the ceasefire that departed from their signed agreement, which was mediated by the United States, Qatar and Egypt.

Nearly 600 people have been killed in Gaza since then, including more than 400 on Tuesday alone, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Health officials said most of the victims were women and children.

The strike that destroyed the infant girl's home hit Abasan al-Kabira, a village just outside of Khan Younis near the border with Israel, killing at least 16 people, mostly women and children, according to the nearby European Hospital, which received the dead.

It was inside an area the Israeli military ordered evacuated earlier this week, encompassing most of eastern Gaza.

Nabil Abu Dagga, a relative of Ella's family who lives nearby, rushed to the scene of the strike.

"People were sitting together and enjoying themselves on a Ramadan night, staying up together as a family," he said. "... No one was expecting it and no one would imagine that a human could kill another human in this way."

He and others started pulling out bodies. Then they heard the baby girl's cries.

The Israel military says it only targets militants and blames civilian deaths on Hamas because it is deeply embedded in residential areas. The military did not immediately comment on the overnight strikes.

Hours later, the Israeli military restored a blockade on northern Gaza, including Gaza City, that it had maintained for most of the war, but which had been lifted under the ceasefire deal.

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians had returned to what remains of their homes in the north after a ceasefire took hold in January.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people and taking 251 hostage.

Israel's blistering retaliatory air and ground offensive has killed nearly 49,000 Palestinians since then, more than half of them women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. It does not say how many were militants. Israel says it has killed around 20,000 militants, without providing evidence.

Blood test for ovarian cancer misses some Black and Native American patients, study finds

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

A common blood test may miss ovarian cancer in some Black and Native American patients, delaying their treatment, a new study finds. It's the latest example of medical tests that contribute to health care disparities.

Researchers have been working to uncover these kinds of biases in medicine. Recently, the Trump administration's crackdown on diversity, equity and inclusion has jeopardized such research as universities react to political pressure and federal agencies comb through grants looking for projects that violate the president's orders.

Native American women have the highest rate of ovarian cancer. Black women with ovarian cancer have lower rates of survival compared to white women. Finding ovarian cancer early can lead to better chances of survival.

The new study, supported by grants from the National Cancer Institute and published Thursday in JAMA Network Open, looked at a test called CA-125. The test measures a tumor marker in the blood, and doctors use it to determine if a woman with a suspicious lump should be referred to a cancer specialist.

Doctors depend on the test during early evaluations, so understanding what the results mean for people of different races and ethnicities is critical, said Dr. Shannon Westin of MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, who was not involved in the research.

"This is a perfect example of work that absolutely needed to be stratified based on race and ethnicity," Westin said. The findings alert doctors that they shouldn't be totally reassured by a normal test result, she said.

So far, it's unknown why the test doesn't perform uniformly across groups. The researchers suspect it has something to do with a harmless genetic variation that is more common in people of African, Caribbean, Middle Eastern and West Indian descent.

Initial studies of the test, published in the 1980s, didn't record people's races but were in mostly white populations.

The test isn't perfect for white women either, said lead author Dr. Anna Jo Smith of the University of Pennsylvania's medical school.

"But if we have worse performance in certain groups, then we may be further contributing to disparities in referral, disparities in treatment, and ultimately we may be contributing to the lower survival in Black women with ovarian cancer," Smith said.

The researchers analyzed data from more than 200,000 women with ovarian cancer from 2004 through 2020 who'd had a CA-125 blood test.

Black and Native American patients were 23% less likely to have an elevated CA-125 level at ovarian cancer diagnosis compared with white patients, suggesting the current thresholds are set too high.

The researchers also found that patients with false negative results started chemotherapy on average nine days later than patients with elevated levels. That could make a difference for some patients, Smith said.

Last week, Smith and her colleagues presented work at a Society of Gynecologic Oncology meeting proposing a new lower threshold for the blood test that would work better across all populations. The work could lead to changes in guidelines.

"New thresholds for referral will ensure that all patients get in for rapid care when ovarian cancer is suspected," Smith said.

French citizen Olivier Grondeau is freed after over 880 days in a prison in Iran

By JON GAMBRELL and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A French citizen imprisoned in Iran for over 880 days has been freed and is back home, as was another French citizen held under house arrest in Tehran, French officials said Thursday. Their liberation came as France and the rest of Europe are trying to jumpstart talks with Iran over its rapidly advancing nuclear program.

U.S. President Donald Trump has sent a letter to Iran's 85-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khomeini seeking negotiations. Trump is also pressuring Tehran over its support of Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels as the American military carries out an intense new campaign of airstrikes targeting the group.

French President Emmanuel Macron announced online that Frenchman Olivier Grondeau had been freed. The French Foreign Ministry said another French citizen who had been under house arrest in Tehran for more than four months was released Wednesday night. He asked to not be publicly identified, the ministry said.

The release came ahead of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, when Iran has released prisoners in the past.

In January, Grondeau spoke to a French broadcaster from prison, alluding at the time 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.

His lawyer in France, Chirinne Ardakani, said he returned on Monday to Paris. "He's in good hands. He's recovering," the attorney told The Associated Press.

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

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot said France did not provide anything in exchange for Grondeau's liberation. Barrot told French broadcaster TF1 on Thursday that he had initially discussed the situation with Iran's foreign minister but when those discussions failed to secure a release, "it was via different means that we obtained this result." He didn't elaborate.

Iran isn't acknowledging the release

Releases of Westerners in Iran typically come in exchange for something. Tehran did not immediately acknowledge Grondeau's release.

Earlier this week, Iran's 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.

An image that circulated of Grondeau on a private jet flying home was a plastic-wrapped T-shirt with a photo of pop star Britney Spears. He put it on before getting off the plane and embracing his family on returning home, in footage aired by TF1.

After the family and Grondeau went public about his detention, his mother had described the former youth Scrabble champion as a fan of Beyoncé and karaoke in interviews with French media.

Arrest came during Mahsa Amini protests

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

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 Amini's 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 the January phone call with French broadcaster France 2.

"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

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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."

Grondeau was 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.

France is trying to release others, too

Barrot said that France is keeping up pressure on Iran to release two other French citizens held in Iran, Cécile Kohler and Jacques Paris, imprisoned for more than 1,000 days.

Macron also posted about the two, writing: "All my thoughts are with them and their families on this day."

Grondeau's lawyer said the news about his release was tempered by the continued detention of the two others. "We're only half-relieved," she said.

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.

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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 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.

Skiping this year's March Madness brackets? It's not just you

By LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In East Lansing, Michigan, college sports often dominate conversations — especially in March, when everyone seems to be filling out their NCAA brackets.

Jessica Caruss would know; she has lived in the area for most of her life. She loves sports, and she's a Michigan State fan, but she won't be drawing up a March Madness bracket that shows her team (or any team) winning it all.

"Oh, I'm aware. I just don't do brackets or anything," Caruss said. "I don't gamble; I don't see the appeal of it. For me it's not a rush. It's stressful."

She's far from alone in bypassing the brackets. As the annual tournament kicks off, some Americans skip the madness — or at least they don't try to predict who will win. A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that about 7 in 10 U.S. adults say they "never" fill out a bracket for the NCAA men's or women's basketball tournament.

This group leans more female: About 6 in 10 bracket avoiders are women.

"I'm probably not going to watch. I have not really been into it in quite some time," Caruss said. "I've never understood the March madness."

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Other bracket avoiders plan to watch tournament games but won't predict winners. Chris Lara lives in Belvidere, Illinois, but supports UCLA because of his California roots. Both the UCLA women's and men's basketball teams will be competing in the NCAA tournament, and he plans to cheer them on. But he doesn't feel confident in his ability to determine the winners for every match-up in a bracket.

"I don't have the knowledge to pick the teams correctly or to know the ones that are the best," Lara said. "I would just go with my heart and pick teams. ... And then it wouldn't work out well."

For some people, the madness is barely registering.

Justin Campbell, a 29-year-old from Brookhaven, Mississippi, said he's never followed sports closely. He's not tracking the NCAA tournament, let alone making a bracket. He might tune into a game if it's on at a restaurant he's at, but basketball takes a back seat to football in his corner of southern Mississippi.

"I'm sure if I was in a different town where it was all we talked about, it might be different," Campbell said. "But where I am, football is more the big thing."

Even among the sliver of U.S. adults who fill out a men's or women's bracket at least "some years," about two-thirds of that group say the fact that other people were doing it was a "major" or "minor" reason for their participation.

In the suburbs of Seattle, Laura Edain said she's not interested in March Madness, either, and does not plan to seek out any games. Edain, 55, used to work in an office that may have had more discussion of March Madness and brackets as it happened — or she would overhear references to Gonzaga University's many tournament runs — but the bracket predictions have never appealed to her.

"I don't think I would have participated, even then," Edain said. "And now, I just am not in any kind of circle that really talks about it at all."

Today in History: March 21

Civil rights activists begin march from Selma to Montgomery

Today is Friday, March 21, the 80th day of 2025. There are 285 days left in the year.

On March 21, 1965, civil rights demonstrators led by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. began their third attempt to march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama — this time under the escort of U.S. Army and National Guard troops assigned by President Lyndon B. Johnson.

In 1952, the Moondog Coronation Ball, considered the first rock and roll concert, took place at Cleveland Arena.

In 1963, the United States closed Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary; over 1,500 inmates had been jailed at the island prison off the coast of San Francisco, California over its three decades of use.

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter announced that the United States would boycott the Summer Olympic games in Moscow because of the Soviet Union's failure to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan.

In 1990, Namibia became an independent nation as the former colony marked the end of 75 years of South African rule.

In 2012, meting out unprecedented punishment for a bounty system that targeted key opposing players, the NFL suspended New Orleans Saints head coach Sean Payton without pay for the coming season and indefinitely banned the team's former defensive coordinator; NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell fined the Saints \$500,000 and took away two draft picks.

In 2019, President Donald Trump abruptly declared that the U.S. would recognize Israel's sovereignty over the disputed Golan Heights — the first country to do so — in a major shift in American policy.

In 2022, a China Eastern Boeing 737 aircraft with 132 people on board crashed in a mountainous area of southern China, setting off a forest fire visible from space in the country's worst air disaster in decades. (All 123 passengers and nine crew members would later be confirmed dead.)

Today's Birthdays: Football Hall of Fame coach Tom Flores is 88. Actor Timothy Dalton is 79. Actor Gary Oldman is 67. Actor Matthew Broderick is 63. Comedian-actor Rosie O'Donnell is 63. Former soccer player Ronaldinho is 45. Actor Sonequa Martin-Green is 40. Actor Scott Eastwood is 39. Tennis player Karolína Plíšková is 33. Actor Jasmin Savoy Brown is 31. Actor Jace Norman is 25. Actor Forrest Wheeler is 21.