

# Groton Daily Independent

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## **Saturday, March 22**

State A Boys Basketball Tournament, Sioux Falls: Groton Area vs. Clark/Willow Lake at noon.  
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

**Groton Daily Independent**

**PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445**

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



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.**

## **Heathrow Shutdown**

London's Heathrow Airport, one of the world's busiest and a major connection for US travelers to Europe, was temporarily closed Friday due to a power outage caused by a fire at a nearby electrical substation. The blaze, which began late Thursday, is now under control and full service is expected to resume today. Authorities are still investigating the cause of the fire as of this writing.

Up to 200,000 travelers globally were affected by the shutdown, with flights canceled or diverted to other airports like Amsterdam and Frankfurt. While Heathrow's backup generators functioned as intended during the outage, officials said the backup systems were not designed to support full airport operations. The incident raised concerns about the vulnerability of such a critical infrastructure to a single substation fire. Flight disruptions are still expected through this weekend.

Heathrow was the world's fourth-busiest airport last year, with roughly 84 million passengers and 1.7 million tons of cargo. The airport serves over 230 destinations in nearly 90 countries.

## **Small Business Administration to cut more than 40% of workforce.**

The Small Business Administration plans to cut 43% of its staff as part of the Trump administration's effort to downsize the government and reduce federal spending. The SBA employs roughly 6,500 people, or less than half a percent of the total federal workforce. President Donald Trump also announced the SBA would handle student loans. See other changes here.

## **Texas measles outbreak rises to 309 cases with 40 hospitalizations.**

The Texas outbreak has grown to 309 cases in roughly two months, surpassing the 285 cases reported nationwide last year. Most cases are in unvaccinated individuals or individuals whose vaccination status is unknown. Thirty of the cases were reported this week. Meanwhile, New Mexico's outbreak has grown to 38 cases. See CDC data here.

## **Johnson & Johnson pledges \$55B investment in US amid looming tariffs.**

The pharmaceutical giant will invest more than \$55B over the next four years, building four new manufacturing plants and expanding existing facilities. The investment is a 25% increase compared to the previous four years and appears to be a response to potential drug import tariffs from the Trump administration.

## **Sudan's army retakes Khartoum presidential palace from paramilitary forces.**

The development marks a symbolic victory for Sudan's military in the ongoing civil war against the Rapid Support Forces militia. The nearly two-year conflict between forces of two formerly allied generals—army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and RSF leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo—has killed an estimated 28,000 people and displaced an estimated 10 million others, about one-fifth of the country's population.

## **Bones of mammoths butchered for their tusks 25,000 years ago unearthed.**

Archaeologists in Austria found the ancient remains of butchered mammoths, including dismembered tusks, suggesting the site was used for ivory processing. The discovery provides insights into how humans hunted mammoths and used their resources before the peak of the last Ice Age.

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## Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Jessica I. in Port Angeles, Washington.

"I was driving down the highway on a road trip to visit my parents along with my two sons. We were only about ten minutes into the trip when I saw a pickup truck coming up really fast behind me. He suddenly drove up next to me and signaled for me to pull over. I instantly realized that the back of our truck must have come open. I got out of the car and the driver of the truck was carrying my suitcase, which had indeed fallen out of the truck and onto the highway. This kind human had not only witnessed my suitcase flying out of the truck bed but had stopped on the highway, picked it up (at his own risk), and chased me down to return it. I was floored that someone would go that far out of their way for a total stranger."



## West Central Overpowers Groton Area in State A Consolation Bracket



**Gage Sippel tries a three-pointer.**

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

SIOUX FALLS – In a rematch from earlier this season, the West Central Knights once again proved too much for the Groton Area Tigers, securing a 59-40 victory in the consolation bracket of the State A Boys Basketball Tournament on Friday.

The game started with a bang as West Central's Will Kuhl threw down a dunk to give his team an early spark. However, Groton Area answered quickly, with Ryder Johnson draining a three-pointer to give the Tigers a 5-4 lead. The first quarter was tightly contested, featuring four lead changes and three ties, before Becker Bosma's late basket put Groton ahead 12-10 at the break.

Shooting in the opening quarter reflected the evenly matched play. Groton Area shot 4-of-13 (31%), while West Central went 4-of-12 (33%). Both teams struggled to capitalize on turnovers, with Groton committing three and West Central just one, but neither resulted in points.

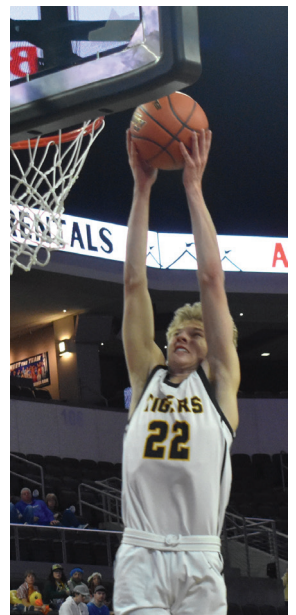
West Central began to separate itself in the second quarter. After another stretch of back-and-forth play that saw two more ties and three lead changes, the Knights rattled off seven straight points, capitalizing on Groton's five turnovers. West Central took advantage, scoring six points off those miscues to grab a 22-16 lead at halftime.

Groton's shooting woes were evident in the second period, as the Tigers managed just 1-of-9 (11%) from the field. West Central, while not lighting it up, still outpaced Groton by shooting 4-of-12 (33%), including one three-pointer. The Knights also maintained control of the ball, committing no turnovers in the quarter.

Momentum stayed with West Central in the third quarter as they opened with a three-pointer and continued to push the tempo. Kuhl's second dunk of the game energized the Knights, who extended their lead to 38-26 midway through the period. Groton fought back behind Keegen Tracy's aggressive play and a late three-pointer from Johnson, cutting the deficit to seven. However, West Central responded with a three-point play to push the lead back to double digits.

A key defensive moment for Groton came when Teylor Diegel came up with a steal, leading to a scoring opportunity that helped momentarily shift momentum in the Tigers' favor. Despite the effort, West Central held firm, leading 41-34 heading into the fourth quarter.

Groton had one turnover in the third quarter, which led to two points for West Central, while the Knights had two turnovers that Groton converted into three points. The Ti-

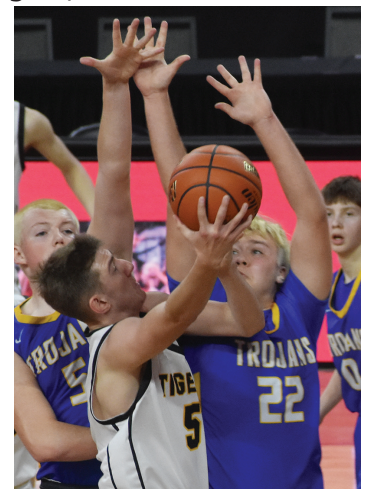


**Karson Zak goes high for an attempted basket.**

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**Teylor Diegel gets the steal and is on his way to the basket.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Becker Bosma is double teamed as he tries to put up this shot.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



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**Karson Zak puts up this shot just inside the paint.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Keegen Tracy dribbles the ball between his legs.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

gers improved their shooting efficiency, going 6-of-13 (46%), while West Central was even sharper at 7-of-13 (54%).

The fourth quarter saw West Central pull away for good. Groton Area struggled with turnovers, committing five giveaways that led to three points for the Knights. Meanwhile, West Central continued to execute offensively, shooting 7-of-15 (47%) compared to Groton's 3-of-10 (30%). The Knights capitalized on their defensive pressure, maintaining their lead and closing out the 59-40 win.

Ryder Johnson led Groton Area with 12 points, including a pair of three-pointers, while Becker Bosma contributed 10. Gage Sipel added seven points and a team-high eight rebounds. Defensively, the Tigers recorded seven blocks, with Carson Zack and Johnson

each tallying two. Taylor Diegel also added a steal in the third quarter to highlight Groton's defensive effort.

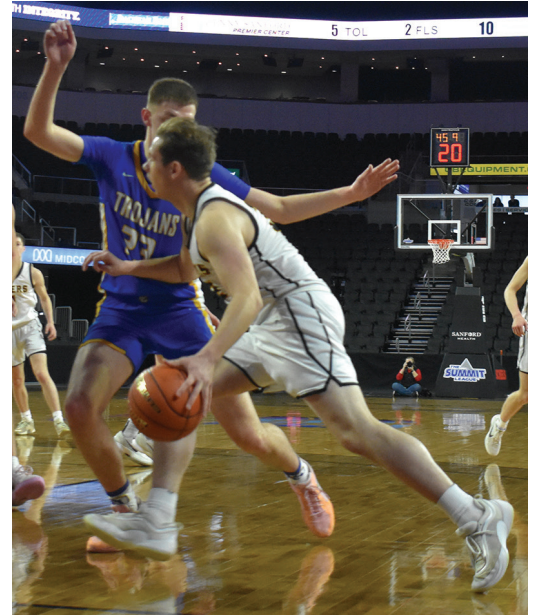
West Central's balanced attack was led by Connor Mebius, who poured in 20 points. Kuhl dominated inside with 14 points, nine rebounds, and three blocks, while Kolte Garry chipped in 12 points. The Knights controlled the boards, outrebounding Groton 38-30, and took advantage of the Tigers' 13 turnovers, converting nine steals into transition baskets.

With the win, West Central advanced in the consolation bracket taking on Hill City, while it will be a NEC battle for seventh place as Groton Area will face Clark-Willow Lake, Saturday at noon.

- Story compiled by ChatGPT



**Ryder Johnson makes his move to the basket.** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**Turner Thompson moves in front of West Central's Will Kuhl.**

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



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**The team huddles together after the introductions as Coach Brian Dolan gets ready to give last minute instructions.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Ryder Johnson moves around the screen set by Gage Sippel.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Keegen Tracy is double teamed.** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

**Friday was Neon/Construction theme at the State A Tournament.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)





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**Turner Thompson launches a three-pointer.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Gage Sippel dribbles the ball before passing it off.** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**Becker Bosma puts up this shot in front of West Central's Kolte Garry.** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**Teylor Diegel is fouled on this shot attempt after stealing the ball. He made one of two free throws to make it 41-34 at the end of the third quarter.** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



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**Cheer coaches Maddie Bjerke and Aubray Miller talk to the cheerleaders.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

## State A Tournament Coverage Sponsored by

Avantara - Groton  
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Farmers Union Co-op of Ferney/Conde  
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KR Body Shop of Andover  
Krueger Brothers  
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## Groton Area Full Box Score

#	Player	PTS	FG	3FG	FT	OR	DR	REB	A	PF	TO	BL	ST	MIN	+/-
1*	TRACY, KEEGAN	2	1-7	0-4	0-1	0	1	1	1	3	5	1	3	31	-22
4*	JOHNSON, RYDER	12	4-11	2-5	2-2	2	5	7	2	2	5	2	2	31	-17
5*	BOSMA, BECKER	10	4-10	0-4	2-2	4	1	5	3	3	1	1	0	28	-15
22*	ZAK, KARSON	5	2-11	1-3	0-0	0	2	2	2	3	2	2	1	31	-19
30*	SIPPEL, GAGE	7	2-5	0-1	3-4	6	2	8	1	2	0	0	0	18	-9
10	WEBER, EASTON	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	2	0	2	0	0	0	3	1
25	DIEGEL, TEYLOR	1	0-0	0-0	1-2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	-4
32	THOMPSON, TURN	3	1-4	1-4	0-0	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	16	4
TM	TEAM	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	0		0
TOTALS		40	14-48	4-21	8-11	15	15	30	9	15	13	7	7		0
GAME PCT			29.2	19.0	72.7										



## West Central Full Box Score

#	Player	PTS	FG	3FG	FT	OR	DR	REB	A	PF	TO	BL	ST	MIN	+/-	
0*	MEBIUS, CONNOR	20	5-15	3-7	7-12	2	4	6	2	2	3	0	2	31	17	
5*	GARRY, KOLTE	12	6-9	0-0	0-0	4	3	7	2	0	0	0	1	27	24	
10*	TETZLAFF, CARTE	4	2-6	0-2	0-0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	22	17	
22*	KNIGHT, LUKE	5	1-2	0-0	3-4	3	2	5	1	1	0	0	0	13	0	
23*	KUHL, WILL	14	6-14	0-1	2-2	4	5	9	1	2	3	3	1	28	21	
2	KNIGHT, BOCHE	4	2-4	0-0	0-0	0	2	2	0	0	1	0	2	11	0	
3	HEIER, HAYDEN	0	0-2	0-1	0-0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	1	15	6	
12	GROSS, CARTER	0	0-1	0-1	0-0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	8	-2	
25	DEJONG, ELLIOT	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	5	-7	
TM	TEAM	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	4	4	8	0	0	0	0	0		0	
TOTALS		59	22-53	3-12	12-18	17	21	38	9	12	7	3	9		0	
GAME PCT			41.5	25.0	66.7											0

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## **2025 SDHSAA State Boys Basketball Friday Recap**

**SDPB | By Nate Wek**

The 2025 SDHSAA state boys basketball tournaments continued on Friday, March 21, with the consolation semifinals and championship semifinals.

Here's a quick recap of each game.

### **Class B**

#### **Consolation Semifinals**

##### **Wall 59 Lyman 55**

Wall erased a 16-point, second half deficit to defeated Lyman 59-55 in the consolation semifinals on Friday. The Eagles were led by Teelan Kjerstad, who finished with 22-points. Emmet Dinger, who also scored 17-points for Wall, hit a go-ahead three late in the contest that put Wall up for good. Lyman's top scorer was Dawsen Volmer with 19-points. He also contributed with eight rebounds, two steals, and a block in the loss.

##### **Freeman 52 Aberdeen Christian 44**

Freeman defeated Aberdeen Christian 52-44 in the consolation semifinals. The Flyers shot 48% from the floor. Another key decider in the game was the Knights going 8 of 19 from the charity stripe. Tate Sorensen led Freeman with 17-points, seven rebounds, and three assists. Aberdeen Christian's top scorer was Brooks Jett, who finished with 16-points.

### **Semifinals**

##### **Castlewood 64 Wessington Springs 45**

Castlewood is championship bound after a 64-45 win over Wessington Springs on Friday night in the semifinals. Bryon Laue led the Warriors with 19-points, 13-rebounds, and two blocks. Jamison Keszler also contributed on offense for Castlewood with 17-points and five assists. The Spartans were led by Colby Flowers on offense. He finished with 15-points. Ryder Michalek had a double-double in the loss for Wessington Springs. He had 13-points and eleven rebounds.

##### **Viborg-Hurley 56 St. Mary's 49**

Viborg-Hurley won an energetic semifinal matchup against St. Mary's on Friday night in Aberdeen 56-49. The Cougars were led offensively by Nicholas Hanson. He scored 20-points and grabbed eight boards. Trevon Beckman led the Cardinals with 25-points. He also had eight rebounds, three assists, and three steals in the loss.

### **Class A**

#### **Consolation Semifinals**

##### **West Central 59 Groton Area 40**

West Central advances to the consolation championship game after a 59-40 win over Groton Area. The Trojans were led by Connor Mebius, who scored 20-points, grabbed six rebounds, and had a pair of steals in the win. Will Kuhl also contributed with 14-points for West Central. Groton Area was led on offense by Ryder Johnson. He scored 12-points in the loss.

Hill City 68 Clark/Willow Lake 63

Hill City picked up their first ever state tournament win on Friday with a 68-63 win over Clark/Willow Lake in the consolation semifinals. The Rangers were led by Zane Messick, who scored 20-points and had seven rebounds. Devin Buehler also notched 17-points for Hill City in the win. The Cyclones top scorer was Chris Bevers, who finished with 21-points. Emmerson Larson and Sullivan Felberg each contributed with 15-points for Clark/Willow Lake.

### **Semifinals**

##### **Sioux Falls Christian 71 Lennox 51**

Sioux Falls Christian took down Lennox 71-51 on Friday in the semifinals. Griffen Goodbary led the team with 16-points, four rebounds, three assists, and three blocks. Brant Wassenaar also scored 15-points, seven assists, and five rebounds in the win. Tate Gerdes had a double-double for Lennox in the loss –



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23-points and ten rebounds.

## **Hamlin 57 Rapid City Christian 42**

Hamlin erased a halftime deficit to defeated Rapid City Christian 57-42 in the semifinal round. Easton Neuendorf led the Chargers in scoring with 18-points. He also contributed defensively with six steals. Zach VanMeeteren also had a nice night with 14-points on 66% from the floor. Benson Kieffer led the Comets with 13-points in the loss.

## **Class AA**

### **Consolation Semifinals**

#### **Huron 49 Spearfish 35**

Huron topped Spearfish 49-35 on Friday in the consolation bracket. Blake Ellwein led the Tigers with 16-points. Chase Davis recorded a double-double for Huron with 12-points and 14 rebounds. The Spartans were led by the pair of Dylon Doren and Kamren Davis. Both scored 13-points in the loss, and combined for six steals.

#### **Sioux Falls Jefferson 68 O’Gorman 65**

Sioux Falls Jefferson advanced to the consolation championship after a 68-65 win over O’Gorman on Friday. Kuai Mayen led the Cavaliers with 16-points. Mason Payne also contributed for Jefferson with 14-points, nine rebounds, and five assists. O’Gorman was led by Nyun Dut, who finished with 19-points. Caleb Terveen also scored 17-points for the Knights.

## **Semifinals**

#### **Mitchell 55 Sioux Falls Lincoln 51**

Mitchell upset top seeded Sioux Falls Lincoln 55-51 in the semifinals on Friday. The Patriots now have just two losses on the year, both came at the hands of the Kernels. Markus Talley led Mitchell in the game with 22-points. Gavin Hinker also scored 14-points and had six rebounds. Colton Smith had a double-double for Mitchell. He scored 11-points and had 11-rebounds. Brody Schafer was the top performer for Lincoln in the loss. He ended with 18-points, five rebounds, four assists, and two steals.

#### **Brandon Valley 46 Harrisburg 31**

Brandon Valley defeated Harrisburg 46-31 in the semifinals on Friday night. The Lynx were led by Landon Dulaney. He had a double-double with 14-points, ten rebounds, and five assists. Mach Mayen also tallied ten points in the win for Brandon Valley. Harrisburg’s top performer was Stellen Larson. He totaled 18-points in the loss.

## **Class B**

7th: Lyman vs. Aberdeen Christian – 12 pm CT

5th: Wall vs Freeman – 1:45 pm CT

3rd: St. Mary’s vs Wessington Springs – 6 pm CT

1st: Castlewood vs Viborg-Hurley – 7:45 pm CT

## **Class A**

7th: Groton Area vs Clark/Willow Lake – 12 pm CT

5th: West Central vs. Hill City – 1:45 pm CT

3rd: Lennox vs Rapid City Christian – 6 pm CT

1st: Sioux Falls Christian vs Hamlin – 7:45 pm CT

## **Class AA**

7th: Spearfish vs O’Gorman – 12 pm MT

5th: Sioux Falls Jefferson vs Huron – 1:45 pm MT

3rd: Sioux Falls Lincoln vs Harrisburg – 6 pm MT

1st: Brandon Valley vs Mitchell – 7:45 pm MT

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**The northern lights were on display Friday night.** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



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

**Cow basket - \$20**



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

**Paw patrol basket -\$25**



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



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Rainbow basket - \$25



Teenager or adult Easter basket - \$25



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

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



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Blue basket - \$20

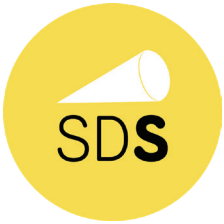
Pink basket - \$20



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

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





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **'You can't have it both ways': RVers bemoan state's welcome of their money, but not their votes**

**Legislative move to limit local voting rights of full-time travelers has some reconsidering their residency**

**BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 21, 2025 4:24 PM**

Mark Trowbridge is technically a South Dakota resident, but he might not be for long.

If South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden signs two bills designed to restrict the voting rights of full-time travelers like Trowbridge and his wife, "that could be a game-changer for us in terms of residency."

"My voting rights are important," Trowbridge said.

The bills would require county auditors to send a federal-only absentee ballot listing only candidates for president, U.S. Senate and U.S. House to mailbox-only South Dakotans who haven't spent 30 consecutive nights in a single in-state location.

"We travel a tremendous amount, and 30 consecutive days would be pretty unlikely," Trowbridge said.

The couple lived in Montana before transitioning into their itinerant lifestyle 12 years ago. They tend to spend colder months in Arizona and warmer ones with family in Okoboji, Iowa, or with friends in North Sioux City, South Dakota.

They plan to explore Canada and Alaska's northern reaches over the next two years. Places with vintage car rallies — in the U.S. or abroad — can also serve as temporary homes. The Trowbridges have put their 1968 Volvo P1800 through several of the niche racing contests.

Since 2018, the couple have been registered to vote in South Dakota. Their "residential" address is among the thousands in legislative District 15 listed to 3916 N. Potsdam Ave. in Sioux Falls, the site of a mail forwarding business called Dakota Post.

The state lacks an income tax, and it's fairly easy to establish residency. The bare minimum requirements to claim the Rushmore State as one's legal home include a driver's license, an address and a vehicle registration.

Trowbridge lists "no party affiliation" on his voter registration, but he leans conservative and votes that way.

Fewer than half the people registered with Dakota Post as their primary residence voted in the 2024 general election, but Trowbridge and his wife did.

### **Canadian immigrants: We take voting seriously**

So did Rodger "Dusty" Giles and his wife.

"I'm an immigrant by choice, so I take my citizenship very seriously," said Giles, who moved to the U.S. more than four decades ago. He and his wife are both originally from Canada.

The Gileses stay on the road for a little more than half the warmer months in any given year. They've considered buying property around Sioux Falls, but their appreciation for their ability to be South Dakota residents without that property is tied in part to the absentee ballots they get each election cycle.

"Some people obviously couldn't care less, because all they care about is being able to register there and save money on their taxes," Giles said.

They're conservative voters for the most part, Giles said, and they do their best to stay informed on local issues. They get election paraphernalia in the mail on state and local races, and they can use the internet to research candidates and ballot questions. If he doesn't know where candidates stand in a particular

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race, he doesn't vote in it.

Giles would prefer a ballot with only federal office candidates to no ballot — which is what House Bill 1208 envisions for voters who claim South Dakota residency but don't sleep there for a set number of nights.

But he's concerned the next step for lawmakers could be to make residency rules so tight that "we can't do this any more" at all.

## Noem over Walz for Minnesota native

Harry Aultman will be bummed to lose a vote in South Dakota's gubernatorial election.

When reached by South Dakota Searchlight, he and his wife were parked in Arizona, hiding from the rain inside their RV.

He has more affection for Republican former South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem than he had for Tim Walz, the 2024 Democratic vice presidential nominee who still serves as governor in the Aultmans' home state of Minnesota.

"I like South Dakota laws a lot more than I like Minnesota laws, and I hated our governor," Harry Aultman said, before reconsidering. "Well, I don't hate him. I shouldn't say that. That's a harsh word. I just think he's worthless."

He would hate to lose his right to vote in state and local races, even if he understands why some South Dakotans might get squirrely about his participation.

"I'm sure they're complaining that they're full-time residents, and they should have more control over what's in their county or their town, and I guess I'd have to agree with them," Aultman said.

With in-laws in the state and a conservative worldview that squares with the majority of the state's year-round population, he doesn't feel like a total outsider. He and his wife cast in-person early ballots in 2024, in part because they wanted a say in an abortion rights ballot measure.

## Lifetime RVer: Trump and Musk, not travelers, are the issue

Walter Liggon, meanwhile, didn't understand why a reporter in South Dakota would bother asking the whys and hows of his voting behavior when President Donald Trump and billionaire Elon Musk are "trying to take away Social Security."

"They will take over Social Security and privatize it," Liggon said from Oregon. "What they're doing now is all for their good, it's not to help the country."

Liggon's been a full-time traveler on-and-off since 1974, but he hasn't always affiliated himself with South Dakota. He registered to vote in the state as an independent in 2016, using a Dakota Post address.

He doesn't appreciate the idea that people in RVs are somehow out to influence elections.

"The RVers that live out here, they're not out to change somebody or anything like that," Liggon said. "But they want their rights."

Liggon doesn't spend as much time in South Dakota as someone with a physical District 15 address. He's more like the majority of his fellow 15ers than most Dakota Post voters in one way, though — he doesn't identify with a major party. Voters registered as independents or as voters with no party affiliation make up a majority of the district. Of the major parties, Republicans have only 5 percentage points more of District 15's total registered voters than Democrats do.

That pattern is different for RV voters in District 15. Republicans outnumber those in Liggon's party-less category by about 200 at the district's Potsdam Avenue precinct. GOP voters outnumber Democrats there more than 2-to-1.

Trowbridge, the classic Volvo driver who says he might need to reconsider his residency in light of recent legislation, said he's disillusioned with both major parties.

His political party, he said, shouldn't be an issue for state lawmakers when they think about RVers. Trowbridge sees the issue as one of ideological consistency. If the state lets him register as a resident, counts him as a resident when calculating seats in the U.S. Congress and lets him dump money into a local business like Dakota Post that pays property taxes, he said, it's disingenuous to deprive him of voting rights.

"You're either going to gain this advantage from people by giving them this choice, or stop it all together,"



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Trowbridge said. "If you choose to stop it all together, you know, I understand that, but you can't have it both ways."

*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.*

## **Republican purge of RV voters could shift Sioux Falls district more Democratic**

**Mail forwarding company's addition to precinct aided GOP in last election**

**BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 21, 2025 4:23 PM**

A Republican-led effort to limit the voting influence of full-time travelers, such as RVers, could tilt a South Dakota legislative district more safely into Democratic hands.

If Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden signs House Bill 1066 into law, a person would need to have spent 30 consecutive days at some point in their life in a single physical location in South Dakota to be legally eligible to vote in the state.

If he also signs House Bill 1208, however, it would open up one avenue for RV voters. Under that bill, people with a mailbox address in South Dakota — but no physical abode in the state or proof they'd ever had one for 30 consecutive days — could apply to register for a federal-only absentee ballot limited to candidates for president, U.S. senator and U.S. representative.

If Rhoden signs 1066 and not 1208, full-time travelers with South Dakota vehicle registrations and driver's licenses wouldn't be legally eligible for any kind of absentee ballot from the state without proof of a 30-day, single-location stay.

The bills target full-time travelers, drawn for decades to establish residency in South Dakota by the state's lack of an income tax and the relative ease of securing on-paper residency. In many cases, they register with mailbox forwarding businesses.

Those voters tend to be Republicans.

In one district in Sioux Falls, they nearly tipped a local legislative race away from a Democratic candidate.

Rep. Tony Kayser, the Sioux Falls Republican who sponsored the bills, wasn't surprised to hear that.

He knew the party skew of the voters he'd targeted but he said he doesn't care. Out-of-staters who vote in state or local races, he reasons, cancel out the votes of locals that might swing the other way.

"What's right is right, what's wrong is wrong, and that was wrong," Kayser said.

### **Bills among a host of electoral reform proposals**

Kayser's bills were among a spate of "election integrity" reforms backed by GOP lawmakers who said they're responding to constituent concerns about, among other issues, undue influence from out-of-state elements in South Dakota elections.

The GOP slant of the voters doing the alleged influencing wasn't front-and-center during most debates on how to change their access to local ballots, but it came up at least once.

Sioux Falls Democratic Sen. Jamie Smith talked about it on the state Senate floor moments before he voted to pass HB 1208.

"A friend of mine over in the House won by nine votes, OK?" Smith said. "You take out the mailboxes, and he wins by hundreds of votes. Hundreds."

He was referring to the spread in the race between his fellow District 15 Democratic lawmaker, Erik Muckey of Sioux Falls, and Republican Joni Tschetter. Muckey won after a recount.

Smith also claimed the race was competitive by design.

He and Muckey's constituency grew by thousands of full-time travelers in the last round of legislative redistricting because, he implied, the state's Republican lawmakers wanted to dilute the voting power of

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Sioux Falls Democrats.

"I'm not naive as to why they did that," Smith said.

Redistricting is a process that follows each U.S. census, undertaken to more or less equalize district boundaries by population.

Republicans involved in the 2021 redistricting efforts that moved a mail forwarding company called Dakota Post into District 15 disputed claims of willful political scale-tipping in interviews with South Dakota Searchlight.

A Searchlight analysis of voting data from District 15, however, shows that Smith is correct about the impact of Dakota Post voters in 2024.

## **Presence of mailbox votes contributes to recount**

District 15 voters were allowed to select up to two candidates in the 2024 state House race. The options were Democrats Muckey and Kady Wittman, and Republicans Joni Tschetter and Brad Lindwurm.

Both Democrats won in eight of the district's 12 precincts, often with lopsided results. The Democrats won a combined 60% of the votes in the central Sioux Falls precinct that's home to the Cathedral of St. Joseph, for example.

The opposite was true in three precincts, two of which were added in the 2021 redistricting. One other precinct delivered a split for Republicans – the precinct where Tschetter lives. She finished in the top two, but Lindwurm didn't.

The largest GOP margins in the House race came in the precinct where the only physical address belongs to Dakota Post.

There are 4,742 voters registered there, according to voter roll data purchased by South Dakota Searchlight through the Minnehaha County Auditor's office. Of those, 1,759 cast ballots in the 2024 general election, and most of them voted in the District 15 state House race.

The Republican candidates earned a combined 60% of the votes from Dakota Post.

"If you limit those mailbox voters, my election doesn't have a recount," Muckey said.

Yet he voted against both of the Kayser bills. The mailbox voters may have nearly swung the election against Muckey, but "at the end of the day, they're my constituents," he said, and he didn't want to cast ballots to limit their rights.

## **Auditor drew precinct lines**

The precinct boundaries in District 15 were determined by a Republican, Minnehaha County Auditor Leah Anderson. County auditors can't redraw legislative districts, but they do have the authority to define voting precincts within those districts.

Anderson put every voter registered to Dakota Post into one precinct. Voters registered at central Sioux Falls' Your Best Address, who were part of District 15 both prior to and after the 2021 redistricting, were also drawn into their own precinct. As a result, the 2024 primary and general elections were the first for which votes from those addresses could be sorted from others within District 15.

The move was inspired in part, Anderson said, by Pennington County, which long ago moved all the voters registered to a mail forwarding company called America's Mailbox in Box Elder, near Rapid City, to their own precinct.

Anderson supported HB 1208 and HB 1066, and testified for them in Pierre. She was in the Senate gallery when Smith made the claim about Muckey's race. She ran the recount that upheld the nine-vote margin.

She doesn't buy the notion that the addition of mailbox voters helped Republicans in District 15. She sees changing demographics and an increase in independent voters as equally important factors.

But she doesn't dispute that voters with mailboxes but no physical address lean Republican.

"Before I came into office, some of the legislators would tell me not to mess with this issue, because we get Republican votes out of those folks," Anderson said. "We don't need to do what benefits a certain party or benefits the state financially. It just needs to be what's right."



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## Democrats level gerrymandering accusation

Mailbox-only voters have been an issue for Democrats for years, according to the party's executive director, Dan Ahlers. Voters drawn to South Dakota for low taxes have always skewed right, he argued, which is why most lawmakers didn't worry much about them until "election integrity" came into vogue for pockets of the state's political right.

"Now that Republicans are interested, now it's an issue," Ahlers said.

The claim that the state's last redistricting work drew lines in the GOP's favor in District 15 sounds correct to Democratic former lawmaker Troy Heinert, of Mission, who was among the lawmakers who worked on the 2021 redistricting.

"We knew that was going to become an issue in the Sioux Falls districts," said Heinert.

He doesn't like the term "mailbox voter," at least not as a statewide term. Like many tribal-area residents, Heinert himself didn't always register to vote using his physical address (he says his rural home didn't even have one for years), opting instead for a post office box.

The problem, he said, is "nonresident voters" who don't have a place to lay their head in the state but claim residency for tax reasons.

If the Republicans involved in redistricting claim they didn't know they were adding thousands of those voters to District 15, Heinert said, "I don't see how they couldn't have."

Which is not to say that all Democrats have been fully engaged with the issue, however. Democratic former Sen. Reynold Nesiba, of District 15, told South Dakota Searchlight that Dakota Post wasn't top of mind until after his first post-redistricting election in 2022.

"I was shocked at how many thousands of people were registered at those places," Nesiba said.

## Republicans say gerrymandering claims overblown

Republican former lawmakers Mary Duvall and Jim Bolin, chair and vice chair of the state Senate Committee on Redistricting in 2021, denied that the mailbox moves were partisan.

Duvall, of Pierre, said specific addresses were not discussed by the committee.

"That is not a conversation that I engaged in at all," said Duvall, who added that she was surprised to hear Smith's claim on the Senate floor.

Bolin, of Canton, doesn't accept any claims about gerrymandering. District 10, also in Sioux Falls, added more Democrats and improved that party's chances. District 32's redistricting added North Rapid, a heavily Native American area in Rapid City, which was a move Heinert pushed for to avoid diluting that community's say. Democrat Nicole Uhre-Balk won a seat in District 32 in 2024.

"The current maps never could have passed without the support of the Democrats," Bolin said.

*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.*

## Groups pledge referendum if governor signs geographic rule for ballot petitions

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 21, 2025 3:05 PM**

SIoux FALLS — Two voter advocacy groups urged South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden to veto a bill that would require citizen-initiated constitutional amendments to gather petition signatures from all state Senate districts, and said they'll refer the measure to a public vote if he signs it.

The Voter Defense Association of South Dakota and the League of Women Voters of South Dakota announced the referendum pledge Friday at the Sioux Falls Downtown Library.

Matthew Schweich leads the Voter Defense Association. He said the bill creates unfair barriers for grass-

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roots efforts.

"This creates a tyranny of the minority over the petition process," Schweich said. "Just one district could block something the rest of the state wants."

For a citizen-initiated constitutional amendment to reach the ballot, current state law requires petitions to have signatures from registered voters equal to at least 10% of the votes cast statewide for governor in the last general election. The signatures can be from anywhere in the state.

House Bill 1169 would add a requirement that petitions have signatures from each of the 35 state Senate districts, in numbers equal to 5% of the total votes cast for governor in each district during the last general election.

Josie Harms, spokeswoman for the governor, declined to reveal the governor's thoughts on the bill Friday. "The governor has about 60 bills left to sign, and he will announce his decision on that specific bill in the coming days," Harms said.

The advocacy groups would have until June 30 to collect 17,508 signatures from South Dakota registered voters to refer the bill to the 2026 general election ballot. If voters rejected the bill, it would not become law.

Schweich said that beyond his opposition to the geographic requirement, he also has other concerns about the bill, including the burden of figuring out how many signatures in each district are needed.

"You would have to piece together complex data by hand," Schweich said.

The League of Women Voters also opposes the bill. Amy Scott-Stoltz spoke at the event.

"We are committed to safeguarding direct democracy for all South Dakota," she said. "Petition circulators across the state stand ready to begin circulating the referendum petition."

Democratic former state Sen. Reynold Nesiba, of Sioux Falls, plans to help with the referendum effort. He said the bill would overwhelm the state's petition process.

"Petitioners would need 35 clipboards," he said, referring to one for each district. "Circulators will have to turn voters away."

Nesiba also warned about the workload for the Secretary of State's Office, which oversees South Dakota elections.

"They would need to validate signatures from 35 separate piles," he said. "Each district must meet the mark or the whole thing fails."

Legislative supporters of the bill said it would prevent petitioners from focusing only on places like Sioux Falls and Rapid City.

"This ensures amendments have real statewide support before they go to the voters," said Rep. Rebecca Reimer, R-Chamberlain, during the legislative session.

The bill was one of several passed during the legislative session that would make it more difficult for citizen petitioners to put a measure on the ballot and win its approval.

A report from the Voter Defense Association says no state goes as far as South Dakota's proposed geographic rule. Colorado has the closest system. It requires 2% from each district.

"We're going from no requirement to the strictest in the nation," Schweich said.

The report also warns of legal risks. A similar law in Idaho was struck down by the state Supreme Court in 2021. The court ruled that Idaho's law gave every legislative district veto power. The court called it "tyranny of the minority."

Schweich said South Dakota would likely lose a similar case and "taxpayers should not pay for this mistake."

## **Ballot questions for 2026**

The bill requiring signatures from all state Senate districts for constitutional amendment petitions is one of many questions that could appear on South Dakota ballots in 2026.

Already placed on the ballot by the Legislature:

A constitutional amendment to authorize the termination of Medicaid expansion if federal funding support for the program falls below 90%.



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A constitutional amendment to raise the approval threshold for constitutional amendments to 60% instead of a simple majority.

A constitutional amendment seeking voter permission for the state Investment Council to manage a trust fund for unclaimed property.

A constitutional amendment clarifying that an individual must be a citizen of the United States to be eligible to vote.

Citizen-backed measures proposed for possible petition circulation:

An initiated measure requiring South Dakota public school teachers and students to recite a specific non-denominational prayer daily, with an exemption for students and teachers who object.

A constitutional amendment requiring approval from South Dakota voters for legislative changes to initiative and referendum procedures.

A constitutional amendment requiring that "laws may not be enacted to restrict the power of initiative and referendum."

A constitutional amendment requiring a two-thirds vote by the Legislature to change or repeal initiated measures.

A constitutional amendment requiring a seven-year wait and a three-fourths vote by the Legislature and vote of the people to make changes to voter-approved initiated measures.

An initiated measure rolling back nonagricultural property assessments to 2020 valuations and capping assessment increases to 2.25% annually.

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## **Only Congress can close Department of Education; Republicans including Rounds are going to try**

**BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - MARCH 21, 2025 3:38 PM**

WASHINGTON — Congressional Republicans are working to codify into law President Donald Trump's sweeping executive order that calls for the elimination of the U.S. Education Department.

GOP lawmakers, including Sens. Mike Rounds of South Dakota, Bill Cassidy of Louisiana and Rand Paul of Kentucky, along with Reps. Thomas Massie of Kentucky, Michael Rulli of Ohio and David Rouzer of North Carolina, are working on or have introduced legislation that would accomplish Trump's aims in abolishing the agency.

Trump's order recognizes that only Congress — which established the 45-year-old department — has the power to dismantle it.

But any of these lawmakers' efforts would face major difficulties getting through the narrowly GOP-controlled Senate, which requires at least 60 senators to advance a bill past the filibuster. Republicans hold 53 seats.

### **Seizing on the order**

Following the signing on Thursday, Cassidy, who chairs the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, said on social media he will support Trump "by submitting legislation to accomplish this as soon as possible."

The Louisiana Republican said he agrees with Trump "that the Department of Education has failed its mission."

Rounds also plans to reintroduce a bill that seeks to abolish the department and transfer existing programs to other federal agencies.

In a post on social media Thursday, the South Dakota Republican said he's "working on legislation that would return education decisions to states and local school districts while maintaining important programs

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like special education and Title I."

"We are discussing this legislation with Secretary (Linda) McMahon and we believe there is a very good path forward," he said.

Paul, of Kentucky, plans to reintroduce a measure this upcoming week that seeks to "terminate" the department, according to his office.

The legislation would serve as a companion to a bill that Massie, also of Kentucky, introduced in the House earlier this year.

Massie's bill offers no details as to how the core functions of the department would be transferred to other agencies, but says the agency should "terminate" on Dec. 31, 2026.

Rulli, of Ohio, is also bringing forth legislation in the House that would help make Trump's order a law, according to Fox News. He was one of several GOP lawmakers and state officials who attended the Thursday executive order signing ceremony in the White House.

And in January, Rouzer, of North Carolina, introduced a bill that calls for the elimination of the department and transferring certain programs to other agencies.

## **What the order says**

Trump directed McMahon to "take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure" of the department and "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."

The president is already taking significant steps to dismantle the agency.

Trump said Friday that the Small Business Administration would handle the student loan portfolio for the department, and that the Department of Health and Human Services would handle special education services and nutrition programs.

Prior to the executive order, the Education Department witnessed major shifts in the weeks since Trump took office.

The agency announced earlier in March that more than 1,300 employees would be cut through a "reduction in force," or RIF, process.

## **Congressional Democrats push back**

Meanwhile, congressional Democrats are fuming over Trump's move to shrink the department.

Virginia U.S. Rep. Bobby Scott, ranking member of the House Committee on Education and Workforce, led his fellow Democrats on the panel in introducing a resolution of inquiry on Friday that asks Trump and McMahon to provide documents on the RIF and "other downsizing measures at the Department of Education."

In response to Trump's order, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries said: "Enabled by compliant House Republicans, the Trump administration is determined to take a chainsaw to public education in America" in a Thursday statement.

"Shutting down the Department of Education will harm millions of children in our nation's public schools, their families and hardworking teachers. Class sizes will soar, educators will be fired, special education programs will be cut and college will get even more expensive, at a time when the cost of living is already too high," the New York Democrat said.

In a Thursday social media post, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said "attempting to dismantle the Department of Education is one of the most destructive and devastating steps Donald Trump has ever taken."

Schumer said the "horrible decision by Donald Trump will be felt by teachers, parents, school leaders, and in the quality of education our children receive" and reiterated that only Congress has the authority to eliminate a department.

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## Trump to rehouse student loans, other programs amid push to close Education Department

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - MARCH 21, 2025 3:23 PM

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Friday that the U.S. Small Business Administration would handle the student loan portfolio for the slated-for-elimination Education Department, and that the Department of Health and Human Services would handle special education services and nutrition programs.

The announcement — which raises myriad questions over the logistics to carry out these transfers of authority — came a day after Trump signed a sweeping executive order that directs Education Secretary Linda McMahon to “take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure” of the department to the extent she is permitted to by law.

“I do want to say that I’ve decided that the SBA, the Small Business Administration, headed by Kelly Loeffler — terrific person — will handle all of the student loan portfolio,” Trump said Friday morning.

The White House did not provide advance notice of the announcement, which Trump made at the opening of an Oval Office appearance with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

The Education Department manages student loans for millions of Americans, with a portfolio of more than \$1.6 trillion, according to the White House.

In his executive order, Trump said the federal student aid program is “roughly the size of one of the Nation’s largest banks, Wells Fargo,” adding that “although Wells Fargo has more than 200,000 employees, the Department of Education has fewer than 1,500 in its Office of Federal Student Aid.”

### ‘Everything else’ to HHS

Meanwhile, Trump also said that the Department of Health and Human Services “will be handling special needs and all of the nutrition programs and everything else.”

It is unclear what nutrition programs Trump was referencing, as the U.S. Department of Agriculture manages school meal and other major nutrition programs.

One of the Education Department’s core functions includes supporting students with special needs. The department is also tasked with carrying out the federal guarantee of a free public education for children with disabilities Congress approved in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA.

Trump added that the transfers will “work out very well.”

“Those two elements will be taken out of the Department of Education,” he said Friday. “And then all we have to do is get the students to get guidance from the people that love them and cherish them, including their parents, by the way, who will be totally involved in their education, along with the boards and the governors and the states.”

Trump’s Thursday order also 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.”

### SBA, HHS heads welcome extra programs

Asked for clarification on the announcement, a White House spokesperson on Friday referred States Newsroom to comments from White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt and heads of the Small Business Administration and Health and Human Services Department.

Leavitt noted the move was consistent with Trump’s promise to return education policy decisions to states.

“President Trump is doing everything within his executive authority to dismantle the Department of Education and return education back to the states while safeguarding critical functions for students and families such as student loans, special needs programs, and nutrition programs,” Leavitt said. “The President has always said Congress has a role to play in this effort, and we expect them to help the President deliver.”

Loeffler and HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said their agencies were prepared to take on the Education Department programs.

"As the government's largest guarantor of business loans, the SBA stands ready to deploy its resources and expertise on behalf of America's taxpayers and students," Loeffler said.

Kennedy, on the social media platform X, said his department was "fully prepared to take on the responsibility of supporting individuals with special needs and overseeing nutrition programs that were run by @usedgov."

The Education Department directed States Newsroom to McMahon's remarks on Fox News on Friday, where she said the department was discussing with other federal agencies where its programs may end up, noting she had a "good conversation" with Loeffler and that the two are "going to work on the strategic plan together."

*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.*

## **Medicaid cuts rippling through rural America could bring hospital closures, job losses**

**BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 21, 2025 1:35 PM**

WASHINGTON — Americans living in rural communities throughout the country could see their access to health care diminish if Congress changes eligibility for Medicaid or significantly reduces its federal funding.

While rural residents who depend on the state-federal program for lower income people would experience the most substantial impacts, those who have private health insurance or have other coverage, like Medicare, would likely encounter changes as well.

Rural hospitals and primary care physicians' incomes would likely go down if Medicaid patients are no longer able to afford the same level of health care, potentially leading to reductions in services offered for everyone or even closures, according to experts.

Whitney Zahnd, assistant professor in the Department of Health Management and Policy at the University of Iowa, said that cuts to Medicaid "will disproportionately hit rural communities," where 24% of people are covered by the program, including 47% of all births and a majority of nursing home patients.

"This is something that's going to impact them more than those in urban areas and that's on top of the already lower access to care, higher need for care, older populations," Zahnd said. "It's just going to make things that are already a challenge even more challenging for rural communities."

The Federal Office of Rural Health Policy categorizes about 20.3% of Americans, or 62.8 million people, as living in rural areas, based on 2020 Census data.

### **Hospital closings in rural America**

Rural areas have seen hospitals close their doors at higher rates than facilities in non-rural areas and that trend doesn't appear likely to reverse any time soon.

The Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has an interactive map showing where 87 rural hospitals have closed completely since 2010, while an additional 65 "no longer provide in-patient services, but continue to provide some health care services."

And a report from the Center for Healthcare Quality and Payment Reform released in February shows that more "than 700 rural hospitals — one-third of all rural hospitals in the country — are at risk of closing because of the serious financial problems they are experiencing."

Losing income from Medicaid patients could lead to a "domino effect," Zahnd said, exacerbating budget challenges for rural health care providers and potentially communities overall.

"Economically in a lot of rural communities, the hospital is the largest employer," Zahnd said. "So if you have a hospital close, it's not just that people are losing access to health care, they might be losing their



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job or their family member may be losing their job.”

Rural health care providers that are able to stay open might have to cut the services they offer to keep their accounts from going too far into the red. Such a decision wouldn’t just harm Medicaid patients, but anyone living in a rural community who goes to that doctor or hospital.

“So those are some risks we would anticipate if there are these big cuts to Medicaid,” Zahnd said.

## **Winners and losers**

Timothy McBride, co-director of the Center for Health Economics and Policy at the Institute for Public Health at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, said during a briefing on Medicaid in mid-March that financial margins for rural hospitals are “razor-thin.”

“Even in the urban hospitals, they’re probably just a few percentage points, but in rural hospitals, they can be just a percentage point or 2 or negative,” McBride said. “So if you take away the Medicaid dollars, they’re certainly going to go negative. And if you wonder why rural hospitals close, that’s why.”

McBride also made the point during a March 13 briefing hosted by SciLine, a service for journalists and scientists based at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, that Medicaid provides funding for a lot of rural health care providers.

“In an economic system, if we cut the spending, we can go, ‘Oh, that’s great. We cut \$880 billion.’ But whose income is that? It’s income to hospitals, it’s income to doctors,” McBride said. “And that’s going to, you know, be really hard on rural systems and on rural hospitals and urban systems.

“Yeah, it’s going to help the taxpayers, but, you know, just be mindful of who is going to be hurt. There’s winners and losers here.”

## **Budget process**

Republicans in Congress are planning to use the complicated budget reconciliation process to extend the 2017 tax cuts they enacted during President Donald Trump’s first term to the tune of about \$4.5 trillion in new deficits. They also want to boost spending on defense and border security by hundreds of billions of dollars and rewrite energy policy.

In order to pay for some of the package, the House’s budget resolution instructs the committee that oversees Medicaid to cut \$880 billion in spending during the next decade — the figure cited by McBride.

Republicans in the Senate haven’t yet agreed to that outline, with several expressing concerns about how steep cuts to federal funding would affect their constituents.

Census data shows that more than 85% of the United States remains rural, meaning every one of the 53 Republican senators represents a state with at least some rural areas.

The Senate in the weeks ahead is expected to debate the budget resolution the House voted along party lines to approve in February. Senators are likely to make changes and send it back across the Capitol for the House to give final approval.

Once the two chambers vote to adopt the same budget resolution with identical reconciliation instructions, Congress can formally begin advancing legislation that could restructure Medicaid. But the GOP will need to stay united throughout the process.

Republicans hold a paper-thin majority in the House of Representatives, requiring that any proposed changes to Medicaid garner the support of centrist and far-right GOP lawmakers.

Even a few defections over Medicaid changes, or other elements in the bill, would stop the package from becoming law.

## **Avoiding high medical costs, bankruptcy**

Joan Alker, executive director of the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families, said that in addition to being “a critical backbone to our healthcare system,” Medicaid helps prevent lower-income Americans from going into medical debt and reduces the number of people landing in emergency departments for conditions that can be managed by primary care providers.

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"We spend a lot of time, of course, rightly, thinking about Medicaid and the question of access. But fundamentally, Medicaid is an economic support — a critical piece of the puzzle for families who are struggling to pay bills with the high cost of housing and food," Alker said. "And so that's the number one most important thing: If you are uninsured in this country, unless you are a billionaire, you are going to be exposed to high medical costs, and those can lead to debt, and even bankruptcy."

When people lose access to health insurance or programs like Medicaid, they tend to delay or avoid going to primary care providers, who can diagnose issues early and help patients manage chronic conditions.

"That's not the way we want our health system to work," Alker said. "Their condition will have worsened. They won't have had access to prescription drugs that they needed to address chronic conditions, like asthma or diabetes or hypertension. And so they get worse and show up in the emergency room."

Medicaid also covers health care for about half of the children in the United States and more than 40% of the births, making the program a significant source of income for both pediatricians and OBGYNs. They would see their budgets decreased if patients lose access to the program.

"There are already challenges, and these kinds of cuts will really exacerbate those for families living in these communities, whether they're enrolled in Medicaid or not," Alker said.

## **Entire community affected**

Megan Cole, associate professor in the Department of Health Law, Policy and Management at Boston University School of Public Health, said during the SciLine briefing that if Congress cuts Medicaid, it would have wide-ranging effects on rural health care.

"I think these cuts will have impacts not just on Medicaid recipients but on whole economies and health systems; so particularly safety net health systems, community health centers, rural hospitals," Cole said. "As those institutions have less patient revenue. They may face reductions in services. They may close certain sites depending on finances. They may eliminate staff. So that affects not just the Medicaid enrollees, but also affects anyone who is otherwise served by those providers."

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

## **Governor signs bills regulating transgender bathroom use and requiring obscenity appeal process**

**BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MARCH 21, 2025 1:09 PM**

South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden's latest batch of bill signings includes one prohibiting transgender people from using public restrooms or changing rooms aligned with their gender identity, and another one requiring public schools and libraries to have appeal processes in place for decisions about obscene materials.

The bathroom bill requires state-owned properties and other public entities, such as schools, to designate multi-occupancy changing rooms, restrooms or sleeping quarters exclusively for females or males.

The legislation defines "female" as "an individual who naturally has, had, will have, or would have, but for a congenital anomaly or intentional or unintentional disruption, the reproductive system that produces, transports, and utilizes eggs for fertilization," and has a similar definition for "male" referencing "the reproductive system that produces, transports, and utilizes sperm for fertilization."

The bill empowers people who encounter "a member of the opposite sex in a restroom or changing room" to seek a court order against allowing it. A complaint would have cause for legal action if a public entity provided permission for a transgender person to use a bathroom matching their gender identity or failed to take reasonable steps to prohibit it.

The library bill started as an attempt to repeal the affirmative defense for libraries, schools, museums and universities against charges of distributing obscene material to children. Legislators supporting that



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version of the bill alleged that children are being exposed to pornographic books available at schools and public libraries.

A wave of opposition to the legislation resulted in a wholesale amendment. That version, which ultimately passed, converted the bill into a requirement that school and public libraries have appeal processes in place for people who disagree with determinations about what does or doesn't constitute obscene material that should be inaccessible to children.

Rhoden has signed 154 bills and vetoed one so far. The annual legislative session is over except for a day on March 31 for lawmakers to consider his vetoes.

## Trump wants to log more trees. He'll need states' help.

**States are increasingly leading projects in national forests**

**BY: ALEX BROWN, STATELINE - MARCH 21, 2025 9:15 AM**

Earlier this month, President Donald Trump signed a pair of executive orders to increase logging in national forests and on other federal lands.

Trump's orders direct federal agencies to set aggressive targets for timber harvests and to circumvent environmental laws such as the Endangered Species Act that protect critical habitats.

State officials and forestry experts say Trump's plan relies heavily on state land management agencies to carry it out. Most states say they'll cooperate to some extent — especially to boost wildfire prevention projects. But most states also are concerned that federal workforce cuts will undermine their goals, and some worry about loosening environmental standards.

"It's 100% dependent on state partnerships," said Dallin Brooks, executive director of the National Hardwood Lumber Association trade group. "It really is contingent on the states going in and helping. The states have the expertise, the manpower, the local desire, and they're less likely to face battles on the environmentalist front."

Leaders in liberal-leaning states say they've invested heavily in wildfire resilience work on federal forests. They're cautiously optimistic that Trump's orders could allow them to expand such projects. But they oppose efforts to slash environmental regulations to boost commercial logging.

Meanwhile, foresters in conservative-leaning states say they welcome the chance to increase domestic timber production and help a struggling industry.

### States' role

Over the past decade, states have played an increasing role in many of the projects on federal lands, from logging to thinning to habitat restoration. Foresters say state agencies often have a stronger workforce and more efficient contracting systems. By letting states take the lead, using partnerships such as the Good Neighbor Authority, the U.S. Forest Service has unlocked hundreds of projects spanning nearly every national forest.

"We almost end up becoming like an easy button," said Trevor McConchie, who leads the federal lands program with the Washington State Department of Natural Resources.

Meanwhile, Trump fired 3,400 Forest Service employees last month, who have since been temporarily reinstated. But the agency is poised to shed another 7,000 employees in the coming months, E&E News reported. The cuts are likely to increase the feds' reliance on state partners.

"The Forest Service is cutting staff left and right, so they're offloading to the states the ability to carry out this logging," said Randi Spivak, public lands policy director with the Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental nonprofit. "Some states can do good work. But I fear so many states will not."

The Forest Service did not respond to a Stateline interview request.

State leaders say they're still evaluating Trump's executive orders, but may find some benefits.

"If this results in new opportunities to partner for forest health work, fuels reduction, things that are

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beneficial for our interest as a state, I want to find and seize those opportunities," said Dave Upthegrove, the Washington state commissioner of public lands. "We wouldn't partner in something if we felt it didn't meet our department's rigorous environmental standards."

Since 2019, the state DNR has led projects to thin dense forests and restore habitat on more than 25,000 acres of federal forests.

Other states are taking a similar approach.

"If this helps achieve some of the work we need to make our forests more resilient to fire, that would be hopeful," said Chief Matthew Reischman, deputy director of resource management with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. "We have a huge focus on treating federal lands."

Reischman said that 50% to 60% of the state funding California spends on forest health projects is put toward work in national forests and other federal lands. State investments have funded projects covering 300,000 acres on those lands.

Oregon has also made significant investments in projects in national forests.

"To the extent that [Trump's executive orders] allow us to continue this work, we would welcome that," said Kyle Sullivan-Astor, federal forest restoration program lead with the Oregon Department of Forestry. "We're not interested in skirting around [environmental] laws or doing anything that is not in line with the mission of the agency."

## Boosting timber

In other states, foresters see an opportunity to increase the domestic timber supply and bring back jobs in rural communities.

"We have a lot of mills that are just barely making it right now," Wyoming State Forester Kelly Norris said. "We have to quickly find where to get more timber to offer."

Norris said the state's partnerships to work on federal land will drastically increase because of Trump's orders. She said her agency welcomes the feds' loosening of environmental regulations as well. But she said the cuts to staff at the Forest Service and other agencies could undermine Trump's goals.

"It has been such a disruption," Norris said. "One of the things we've all looked at as the Forest Service workforce reduces is how we use the state's strength in contracting systems and timber sale efficiencies on these federal lands. It's become more real than ever that we need to be doing that."

Brooks, of the hardwood lumber group, said the timber industry depends on a strong federal workforce.

"[The Forest Service] accidentally fired all their tree markers," he said. "You can't log it if you can't mark the trees. Then they brought them all back. We all want to see less waste from the government, but there is a need for those workers."

In Utah, State Forester Jamie Barnes said state leadership has proven to be a good model for projects on federal land.

"It's a lot more efficient, it's an easier way to get business done, it's a better way to coordinate between industry and the local community," she said.

Barnes said Utah has invested heavily in reducing wildfire risk on federal lands, while partnering with the feds on efforts to boost the timber industry. She called Trump's executive orders "long overdue," but said the state is still analyzing the details.

Utah leaders are also assessing how they might fill gaps caused by the Forest Service layoffs, which could include hiring seasonal workers at the state level. But Barnes expressed confidence that Trump's actions were a strong first step toward reviving the state's timber economy.

In Idaho, state forestry officials conduct projects on about 5,000 acres of federal lands each year, including 3,000 acres of timber harvesting. The state views federal lands as critical for its timber industry and aims to support Trump's efforts to increase logging, said Jon Songster, federal lands bureau chief with the Idaho Department of Lands.



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## More concerns

Environmental groups say Trump's orders, especially those overriding conservation protections, will have devastating effects.

"This is going to get carried out in a really horrific fashion," said Spivak, of the Center for Biological Diversity. "[Some states] have been chomping at the bit because they look at national forests as places where they can log, log, log."

Spivak said unchecked logging will focus on the biggest mature trees, which are most important for animal habitat, wildfire resilience and carbon storage. And she noted that large timber projects can cause erosion that damages critical watersheds.

Some state leaders say they're keeping a wary eye on Trump's regulatory rollbacks.

"We're looking to partner where we have shared interests and values," said Upthegrove, the Washington official. "It doesn't mean we're going to jump in and be a partner for the federal agencies to do anything they want."

Timber industry leaders claim the uptick in work on federal lands will mostly be focused on thinning projects and forest health initiatives. They say wood products are needed to address the national housing shortage. And they agree that states' role will be critical.

"It's really up to the individual states and how heavily invested they want to be in this model," said Nick Smith, public affairs director with the American Forest Resource Council, a timber industry group. "The Forest Service has a tough job in managing tens of millions of acres, and it needs to lean on its state partners for all the work that needs to be done."

Smith said state agencies should look to increase their own staffing numbers if they aim to help the timber industry increase its production.

Many foresters noted that some regions no longer have the lumber mill capacity to process the wood Trump is directing the feds to harvest. Upthegrove said Trump's orders take an "if you build it, they will come" approach. But he noted that companies may be unwilling to invest in building more mills to fulfill Trump's plan, given how often his actions have been overturned by the courts.

Oregon officials offered a similar assessment.

"The backdrop is the mill closures and mill curtailment happening in Oregon," Sullivan-Astor said. "These executive orders perhaps present a first step, but the private sector would need more certainty, because it would require a significant investment [to increase mill capacity]."

In Wyoming, Norris said the state is committed to reviving its mill infrastructure and workforce.

"We're going to do our job; we're going to make wood available to industry," she said.

Trump's plan to scale up timber production coincides with his trade war with Canada. The U.S. imports about 30% of its softwood lumber from Canada, primarily for use in construction. Smith said American companies can increase domestic production. He noted that federal lands currently only produce about 6% to 8% of the nation's timber supply.

Brooks, of the hardwood lumber group, agreed that the industry can produce more domestic wood. But he said Trump's tariffs have hurt his sector, because hardwood products get shipped back and forth across the border for processing.

Meanwhile, several state leaders said Trump's cuts to the Forest Service could limit the agency's capacity to fight wildfires, leading to conflagrations that burn the very trees they're planning to harvest.

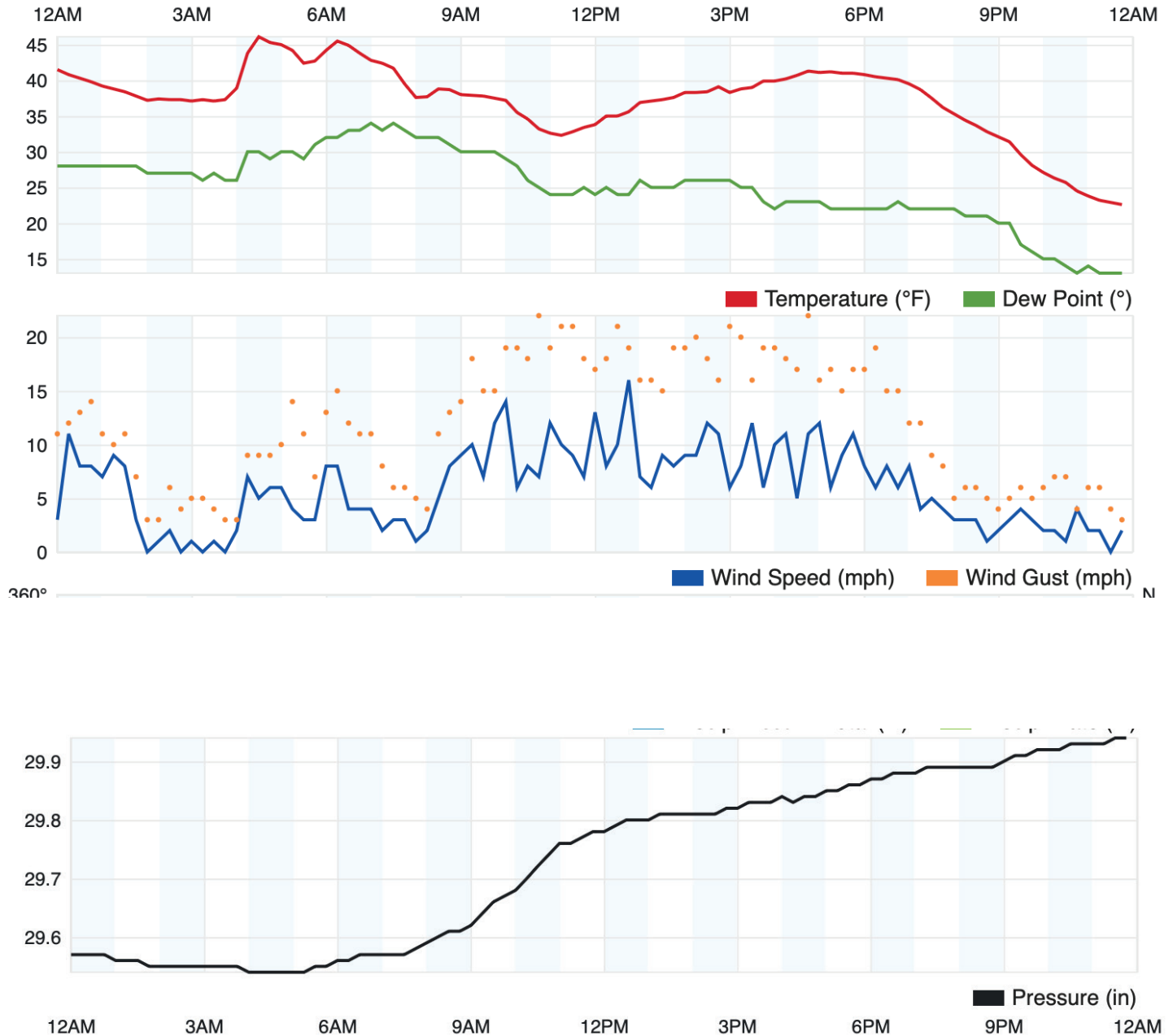
*Stateline reporter Alex Brown can be reached at [abrown@stateline.org](mailto:abrown@stateline.org).*

*Based in Seattle, Alex Brown covers environmental issues for Stateline. Prior to joining Stateline, Brown wrote for The Chronicle in Lewis County, Washington state.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





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Today



High: 61 °F

Partly Sunny  
then Slight  
Chance Rain  
and Breezy

Tonight



Low: 30 °F

Slight Chance  
Rain then  
Mostly Cloudy  
and Blustery

Sunday



High: 45 °F

Partly Sunny  
and Windy

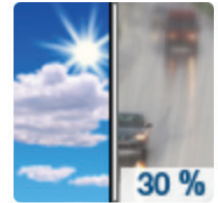
Sunday Night



Low: 22 °F

Mostly Clear  
and Blustery  
then Mostly  
Clear

Monday



High: 53 °F

Mostly Sunny  
then Chance  
Rain



## Red Flag Warning This Afternoon

March 22, 2025  
4:45 AM

### Key Messages

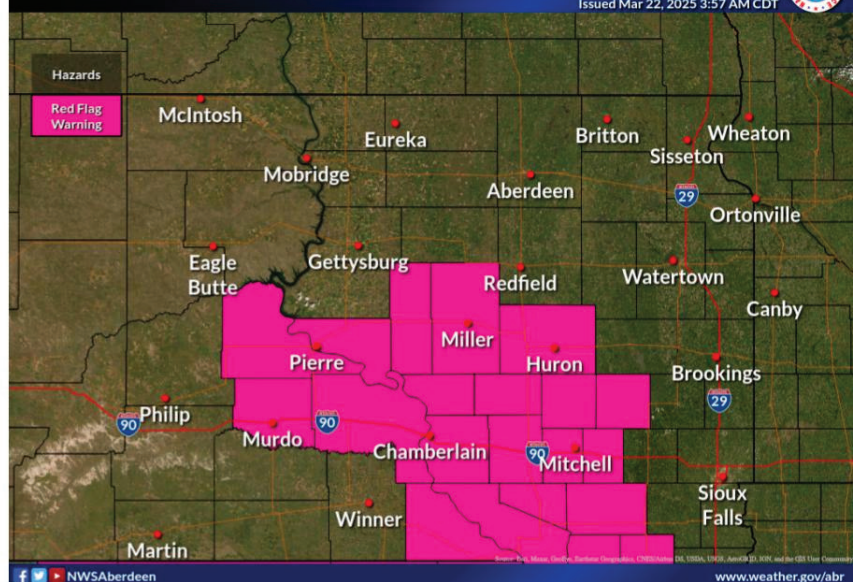
- Increasing winds mainly out of the south to southwest, with **gusts of 25 to 35 mph this afternoon and evening**
- **Relative humidity dropping between 20 and 25 percent**
- The combination of gusty winds, low relative humidity, and ongoing dry fuels leads to **very high grassland fire danger index values today**

### Important Updates

- A **Red Flag Warning** has been issued for portions of mainly south central SD this afternoon

### Fire Weather Headlines

Weather Forecast Office  
Aberdeen/Rapid City/Sioux Falls, SD  
Issued Mar 22, 2025 3:57 AM CDT



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

A Red Flag warning has been issued for this afternoon through the early evening for portions of mainly south central South Dakota. The combination of winds gusting 25-35 mph and dry conditions leads to very high Grassland Fire Danger Index. If a fire does ignite, it could spread rapidly and become difficult to control.

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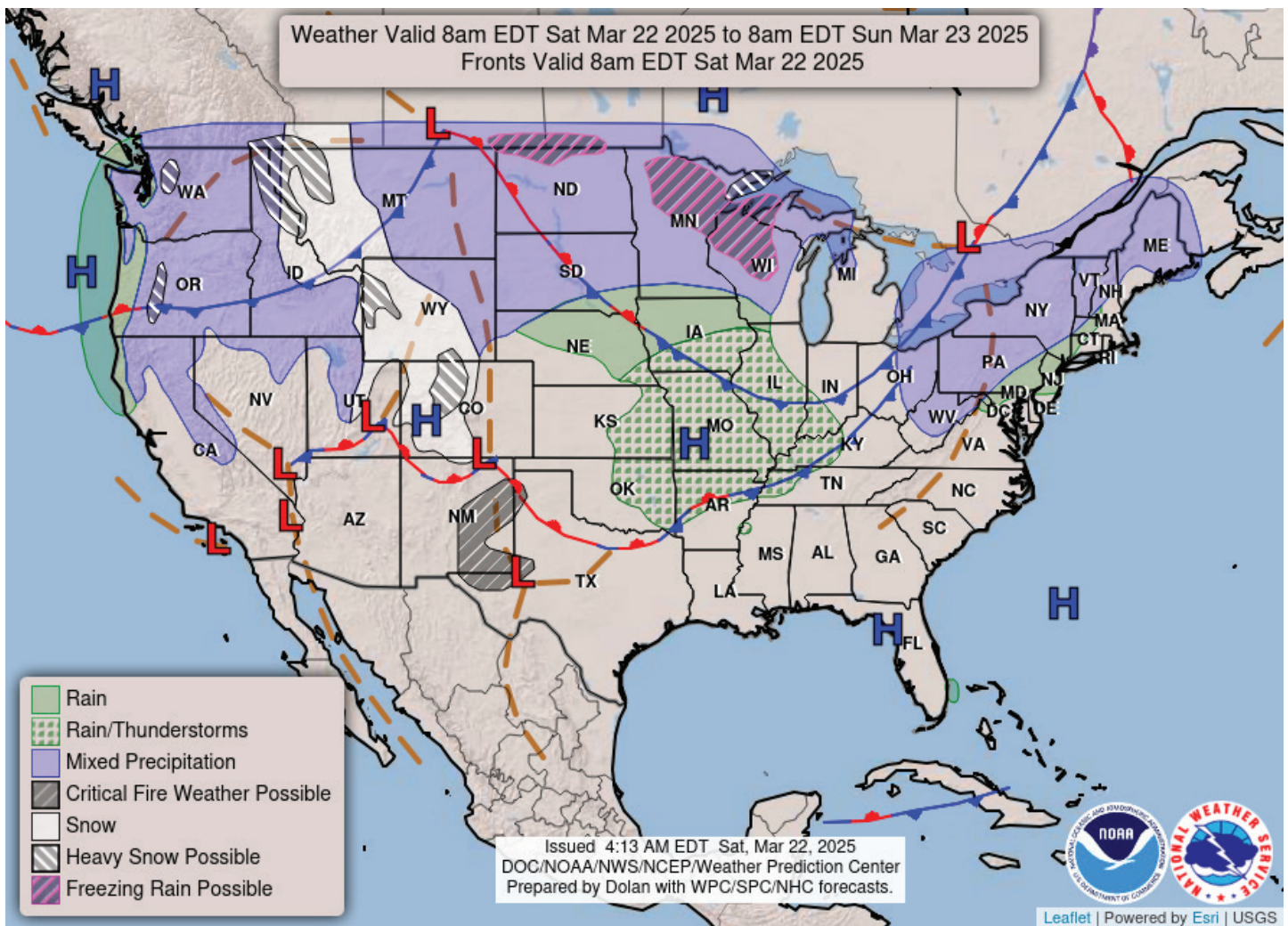
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 46 °F at 4:21 AM**  
**Low Temp: 23 °F at 11:26 PM**  
**Wind: 22 mph at 10:29 AM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 12 hours, 20 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 79 in 1907  
Record Low: -16 in 1899  
Average High: 45  
Average Low: 22  
Average Precip in March.: 0.58  
Precip to date in March.: 0.00  
Average Precip to date: 1.75  
Precip Year to Date: 0.45  
Sunset Tonight: 7:49:14 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:27:03 am





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## Today in Weather History

March 22, 1966: The blizzard began on the 22nd in the west, moving southeastward into Nebraska and then moving northeastward across the southeastern part of South Dakota. Winds up to 50 mph caused blowing snow, which reduced visibility to near zero. Seven to 8 inches of snow fell on the plains of South Dakota with up to 2 feet in the Black Hills. Traffic was paralyzed due to snow-blocked roads. Schools and many businesses were closed. One death was attributed to the storm to exposure and exhaustion. A heart attack indirectly caused one death in Sioux Falls.

March 22, 1987: Snowmelt and rainfall caused some rivers and small streams to rise to very high levels in central South Dakota. Lowland flooding around the basins occurred, submerging some minor roads and streets. Also, high water levels and ice damaged some railroad bridges between Wakpala and Mahto in Corson County.

March 22, 2009: A stretch of warmer weather occurred from March 14th to 17th, which resulted in high temperatures in the 40s and low 50s. The snow depth in Fargo on the 14th was 15 inches, with a melted water equivalent of 3.10 inches. By the 17th, the snow depth in Fargo had dropped to 6 inches. The snow was followed by a couple of colder days, which temporarily slowed down any additional snowmelt. The second period of warmer weather began on March 20th and continued through the 24th. During this period, high temperatures again climbed into the 40s and low 50s. Most of the remaining snow in Fargo melted during this stretch of warm weather, with the Fargo snow depth falling from 2 inches to 0. Conditions were about the same in Grand Forks, with the snow depth dropping to 0 by the 24th. These two warm-ups resulted in the quick response in river levels, especially across the southern Red River Valley and west-central Minnesota. The Red River also rose, especially in the southern part of the Red River Valley. With all the runoff moving into the river systems, water covered many roads and resulted in numerous road closures. The water covered entire sections of land as well and threatened many homes. A winter storm event on March 24th and 25th brought more snow to the region, along with a turn to colder temperatures. This resulted in the first crest for many rivers in the southern Red River Valley and west-central Minnesota. However, river levels at most points along the Red River continued to stay high. Another winter storm event hit much of the area March 30th to 31st, dropping up to 2 feet of snow in the southern Red River Valley. There was a lot of moisture in this new snow, with snow to liquid ratios of less than 10 to 1. This set the stage for continued flooding into April and early May. The North Dakota Governor issued a statewide disaster declaration on March 13 in anticipation of spring flooding. Most counties in eastern North Dakota later received a Presidential Disaster Declaration.

1888: Chicago's morning low dips to one degree below zero, the latest sub-zero Fahrenheit reading in the city's history. This record still stands today.

1893: The first tornado was recorded in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on this date. It destroyed 14 buildings and injured four people as it passed through the center of town. There was minor damage to the Weather Bureau office, which was located at Grand and Robinson in south Oklahoma City.

1920: A spectacular display of the "Northern Lights" was visible as far south as Bradenton FL, El Paso, TX and Fresno, CA. At Detroit MI, the display was described "so brilliant as to blot out all-stars below the first magnitude."

1936 - A great flood crested on rivers from Ohio to Maine. The flood claimed 107 lives and caused 270 million dollars property damage. (David Ludlum)

1954 - Six to ten inch rains caused the Chicago River to overflow its banks. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - An intense storm produced heavy snow in the southern and central Rockies, and high winds from southern California to West Texas. Wolf Creek Pass CO received 24 inches of snow, and winds gusted to 69 mph at Ruidoso NM. Blizzard conditions were reported in eastern Colorado. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Rain and high winds battered the Northern Pacific Coast Region, with wind gusts to 78 mph at Ocean Shores WA. The high winds uprooted trees and down power lines. Ten cities in the northeastern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date. Eight cities in the central U.S. reported record highs. Southerly winds gusting to 60 mph helped push the mercury at Ottumwa IA to a record warm reading of 83 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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## PROPER PREPARATION

A patient, walking with a nurse to prepare for surgery, recognized her doctor sitting alone in a small room reading his Bible. Prior to the operation he went to visit her and asked if she had any unanswered questions for him to answer.

After a moment's thought she said that she did. "Does reading the Bible help you before or after you operate on a patient?" she wondered.

"Oh, no," came his quick reply. "During," he answered with a smile.

Paul wrote to Timothy about the importance of studying God's Word. He informed his young friend that when we study the Bible, "It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do."

God gave us the His Word to learn how to "live life and face death." As we read and study its message it becomes the standard for everything He wants us to do, the thoughts He would have us to think and our source of strength for life's demands.

His Word gives us His guidance. It gives us insight on how we are to treat others. It gives us peace when we are overwhelmed with unexpected tragedies. It gives us wisdom when choices are difficult, and our options limited. It gives us the assurance of His peace and presence when we feel alone and abandoned. Most importantly, however, it gives us His plan for salvation.

Prayer: We thank You, Father, for Your Word: a lamp for our feet and light for our pathway. May we grow to love it, learn from it, lean on it and live it confidently. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. 2 Timothy 3:17

*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: 03.21.25

15 22 31 52 57 2

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$344,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[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: 15 Hrs 36 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.21.25

7 25 28 40 45 7

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 51 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.19.25

7 15 22 25 26

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$71,000**

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 51 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.19.25

7 15 36 40 56 8

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 20 Mins 10 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: 16 Hrs 20 Mins 10 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

### Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

#### **BOYS PREP BASKETBALL**

##### **SDHSAA Class A State Playoffs**

Consolation Semifinal

Hill City 68, Clark-Willow Lake 63

West Central 59, Groton 40

Semifinal

Hamlin 57, Rapid City Christian 42

Sioux Falls Christian 71, Lennox 51

##### **SDHSAA Class AA State Playoffs**

Consolation Semifinal

Huron 49, Spearfish 35

Sioux Falls Jefferson 68, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 65

Semifinal

Brandon Valley 46, Harrisburg 31

Mitchell 55, Sioux Falls Lincoln 51

##### **SDHSAA Class B State Playoffs**

Consolation Semifinal

Freeman 52, Aberdeen Christian 44

Wall 59, Lyman 55

Semifinal

Castlewood 64, Wessington Springs 45

Viborg-Hurley 56, Dell Rapids St Mary 49

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

### **South Dakota governor signs anti-transgender bathroom bill**

By SARAH RAZA The Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A new law in South Dakota will restrict transgender people's use of communal facilities in public schools and state-owned buildings starting July 1.

Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden signed bill HB 1259 into law on Friday, which prohibits transgender people from using changing rooms and restrooms that align with their gender identity. The bill also allows people who encounter transgender people in these facilities to seek declaratory and injunctive relief against the school or state if officials did not take reasonable steps to prevent the transgender person from using that facility.

"South Dakota is a place where common-sense values remain common," Rhoden said in a statement, adding that the bill promotes "freedom from the 'woke' agenda like what has happened in too many other places."

This is the first time South Dakota has had a state law restricting transgender people's bathroom access, thanks to the overwhelmingly conservative state legislature this session. A bill had previously passed through both chambers of the state legislature in 2016 before it was vetoed by then Gov. Dennis Daugaard.

Samantha Chapman, advocacy manager at the ACLU of South Dakota, said the organization is exploring its options against the law.

"This is a really painful law," Chapman said. "It's really disheartening and kind of heartbreaking, frankly, to see Rhoden take this position and sign this bill into law."



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South Dakota is at least the 13th state to adopt a law barring transgender girls and women from girls and women's bathrooms at public schools, and in some cases other government facilities. A similar measure was sent Thursday to the governor in Tennessee; a bill is also on the governor's desk in Montana.

Most of the bans in other states face court challenges, but those haven't had final rulings. Courts have struck down some school district-level bathroom bans across the country. But this week, a federal appeals panel ruled 3-0 that a district judge was not wrong to allow Idaho's ban to be enforced while the case is considered.

Since he returned to office in January, President Donald Trump has signed a series of executive orders intended to curtail the rights of transgender people. President Joe Biden's administration had sought to apply the federal barring of gender discrimination at schools to gender identity, but the courts put the brakes on that.

## **UConn's Auriemma and South Dakota State's Johnston have been in it for the long haul**

By JIM FULER Associated Press

STORRS, Conn. -- (AP) — There were no thoughts of winning national championships or making annual trips to the Final Four when Geno Auriemma left his job as an assistant coach at Virginia to take over a UConn women's basketball program that had a 27-56 record in the previous three seasons.

Fourteen years later, Aaron Johnston took over a South Dakota State team that was still playing at the Division II level.

Now, they are together at the NCAA Division I women's basketball subregional hosted by UConn.

They are two of the seven women's Division I head coaches in the same role as the year that Johnston was hired. If coaching experience counts for anything, perhaps the Huskies and Jackrabbits will both come away with wins in the first round on Saturday. UConn plays Arkansas State on Saturday followed by the matchup between Oklahoma State and South Dakota State.

"There certainly aren't a lot of us left, right?" said Auriemma, the NCAA women's basketball all-time leader with 1,244 career victories and 11 national titles. "I guess we missed the note on the portal. We have to find out if there's a portal for coaches.

"I'm sure when he started and when I started, once you find a place that's comfortable and they like you, you like them and you have some success, you reach a point where there is nowhere to go. There is nowhere to go because you don't want to."

With All-American guard Paige Bueckers leading the way, the only place Auriemma is looking to go is to the Final Four in Tampa.

South Dakota State is in the tournament for the 13th time in the last 17 seasons. Johnston could have moved onto a bigger program but he has found a home with the Jackrabbits.

"There are a lot of things that go into these things, at least for us," Johnston said. "It is not always specifically the job or what the next job is. There are a lot of things on the court and off the court that are important. South Dakota State has been a great place to be for my family and our extended families. Watching our team compete, there have been so many really great players. We just haven't had players in the transfer portal very often so it is just a place where we all try to figure out what's best for us and gives us the most joy. South Dakota State has been a great home for me but also the players over the years."

### **Red Wolves Keeping It All In The Family**

Wynter Rogers couldn't help but laugh when asked about any home visits from the Arkansas State women's basketball coach when she landed in the transfer portal following her freshman season at West Virginia.

The Red Wolves head coach is none other than her older sister Destinee. No there was no drawn-out recruiting process to navigate. Wynter knew that nobody could get more out of her than the person who inspired her to become a basketball player.

"She is just a winner and I just wanted to play for her," Wynter Rogers said. "I would say our relationship has gotten closer and closer. She is such a great coach. She has always pulled the best out of us and

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pushed us to be the best version of ourselves on and off the court.”

Destinee Rogers is 13 years older than Wynter. Little did they know during their days growing up in Little Rock, Arkansas that they would make history by becoming the first set of siblings to be head coach and star player in more than 40 years.

“This is a moment that we’ve talked about since she decided to come to Arkansas State,” Destinee Rogers said. “When she entered the transfer portal, immediately she said, I want to come play for you, and I want to help you win a championship.

“When we got an opportunity to raise that (Sun Belt tournament) trophy together and embrace each other and cry together, it just made it all worthwhile.”

**Griffin Could Return For UConn**

Redshirt senior forward Aubrey Griffin had to wait until Jan. 19 to make her season debut for UConn. With three double-digit scoring games, she finally looked to get some good news in an injury-plagued career.

However, some pain in her knee resulted in Griffin missing the Big East tournament. Griffin was back on the court at Friday’s practice and could play in the Huskies’ NCAA tournament opener.

“It has been a little better than a couple of weeks ago,” said Griffin, who averaged 5.5 points and 3.9 rebounds in 11 games this season. “The season has been a roller coaster but I am grateful to still be playing. I am taking it day by day and soaking it in.

## **As Israeli bombs fell, wounded children overwhelmed this Gaza hospital. Dozens died**

By SAMY MAGDY and LEE KEATH Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — When the first explosions in Gaza this week started around 1:30 a.m., a visiting British doctor went to the balcony of a hospital in Khan Younis and watched the streaks of missiles light up the night before pounding the city. A Palestinian surgeon next to him gasped, “Oh no. Oh no.”

After two months of ceasefire, the horror of Israeli bombardment was back. The veteran surgeon told the visiting doctor, Sakib Rokadiya, they’d better head to the emergency ward.

Torn bodies soon streamed in, carried by ambulances, donkey carts or in the arms of terrified relatives. What stunned doctors was the number of children.

“Just child after child, young patient after young patient,” Rokadiya said. “The vast, vast majority were women, children, the elderly.”

This was the start of a chaotic 24 hours at Nasser Hospital, the largest hospital in southern Gaza. Israel shattered the ceasefire in place since mid-January with a surprise barrage that began early Tuesday and was meant to pressure Hamas into releasing more hostages and accepting changes in the truce’s terms. It turned into one of the deadliest days in the 17-month war.

The aerial attacks killed 409 people across Gaza, including 173 children and 88 women, and hundreds more were wounded, according to the territory’s Health Ministry, whose count does not differentiate between militants and civilians.

More than 300 casualties flooded into Nasser Hospital. Like other medical facilities around Gaza, it had been damaged by Israeli raids and strikes throughout the war, leaving it without key equipment. It was also running short on antibiotics and other essentials. On March 2, when the first, six-week phase of the ceasefire technically expired, Israel blocked entry of medicine, food and other supplies to Gaza.

**Triage**

Nasser Hospital’s emergency ward filled with wounded, in a scene described to The Associated Press by Rokadiya and Tanya Haj-Hassan, an American pediatrician — both volunteers with the charity Medical Aid for Palestinians. Wounded came from a tent camp sheltering displaced that missiles set ablaze and from homes struck in Khan Younis and Rafah, further south.

One nurse was trying to resuscitate a boy sprawled on the floor with shrapnel in his heart. A young man with most of his arm gone sat nearby, shivering. A barefoot boy carried in his younger brother, around 4 years old, whose foot had been blown off. Blood was everywhere on the floor, with bits of bone and tissue.

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"I was overwhelmed, running from corner to corner, trying to find out who to prioritize, who to send to the operating room, who to declare a case that's not salvageable," said Haj-Hassan.

"It's a very difficult decision, and we had to make it multiple times," she said in a voice message.

Wounds could be easy to miss. One little girl seemed OK – it just hurt a bit when she breathed, she told Haj-Hassan -- but when they undressed her they determined she was bleeding into her lungs. Looking through the curly hair of another girl, Haj-Hassan discovered she had shrapnel in her brain.

Two or three wounded at a time were squeezed onto gurneys and sped off to surgery, Rokadiya said.

He scrawled notes on slips of paper or directly on the patient's skin – this one to surgery, this one for a scan. He wrote names when he could, but many kids were brought in by strangers, their parents dead, wounded or lost in the mayhem. So he often wrote, "UNKNOWN."

In the operating room

Dr. Feroze Sidhwa, an American trauma surgeon from California with the medical charity MedGlobal, rushed immediately to the area where the hospital put the worst-off patients still deemed possible to save.

But the very first little girl he saw -- 3 or 4 years old -- was too far gone. Her face was mangled by shrapnel. "She was technically still alive," Sidhwa said, but with so many other casualties "there was nothing we could do."

He told the girl's father she was going to die. Sidhwa went on to do some 15 operations, one after another.

Khaled Alserr, a Palestinian surgeon, and an Irish volunteer surgeon were doing the same. There was a 29-year-old woman whose pelvis was smashed, the webbing of veins around the bones was bleeding heavily. They did what they could in surgery, but she died 10 hours later in the intensive care unit.

There was a 6-year-old boy with two holes in his heart, two in his colon and three more in his stomach, Sidhwa said. They repaired the holes and restarted his heart after he went into cardiac arrest.

He, too, died hours later.

"They died because the ICU simply does not have the capacity to care for them," Sidhwa said.

Ahmed al-Farra, head of the pediatric and obstetrics department, said that was in part because the ICU lacks strong antibiotics.

Sidhwa recalled how he was at Boston Medical Center when the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing happened, killing three people and sending some 260 wounded to area hospitals.

Boston Medical "couldn't handle this influx of cases" seen at Nasser Hospital, he said.

The staff

Rokadiya marveled at how the hospital staff took care of each other under duress. Workers circulated with water to give sips to doctors and nurses. Cleaners whisked away the bloody clothes, blankets, tissues and medical debris accumulating on the floors.

At the same time, some staff had their own family members killed in the strikes.

Alserr, the Palestinian surgeon, had to go to the morgue to identify the bodies of his wife's father and brother.

"The only thing I saw was like a packet of meat and bones, melted and fractured," he said in a voice message, without giving details on the circumstances their deaths.

Another staffer lost his wife and kids. An anesthesiologist -- whose mother and 21 other relatives were killed earlier in the war -- later learned his father, his brother and a cousin were killed, Haj-Hassan said.

Aftermath

Around 85 people died at Nasser Hospital on Tuesday, including around 40 children from ages 1 to 17, al-Farra said.

Strikes continued throughout the week, killing several dozen more people. At least six prominent Hamas figures were among those killed Tuesday.

Israel says it will keep targeting Hamas, demanding it release more hostages, even though Israel has ignored ceasefire requirements for it to first negotiate a long-term end to the war. Israel says it does not target civilians and blames Hamas for their deaths because it operates among the population.

With Tuesday's bombardment, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also secured the return to his govern-



ment of a right-wing party that had demanded a resumption of the war, solidifying his coalition ahead of a crucial budget vote that could have brought him down.

Haj-Hassan keeps checking in on children in Nasser's ICU. The girl with shrapnel in her brain still can't move her right side. Her mother came to see her, limping from her own wounds, and told Haj-Hassan that the little girl's sisters had been killed.

"I cannot process or comprehend the scale of mass killing and massacre of families in their sleep that we are seeing here," Haj-Hassan said. "This can't be the world we're living in."

## **3 people killed in Russian attacks on Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia despite limited truce**

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia launched a drone attack on the Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia, killing three people and wounded 12, Ukrainian officials said Saturday, despite agreeing to a limited ceasefire.

Zaporizhzhia was hit by 12 drones, police said. Regional head Ivan Fedorov said that residential buildings, cars and communal buildings were set on fire in the Friday night attack. Photos showing emergency services scouring the rubble for survivors.

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

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

The dead in Zaporizhzhia included three members of one family. The bodies of the daughter and father were pulled out from under the rubble while doctors unsuccessfully fought for the mother's life for more than 10 hours, Fedorov wrote on the Telegram messaging app.

The Ukrainian air force reported that Russia fired a total of 179 drones and decoys in the latest wave of attacks overnight into Saturday. It said 100 were intercepted and another 63 lost, likely having been electronically jammed.

Officials in the Kyiv and Dnipropetrovsk regions also reported fires breaking out due to the falling debris from intercepted drones.

Russia's Ministry of Defense, meanwhile, said its air defense systems shot down 47 Ukrainian drones.

Zelenskyy told reporters after Wednesday's call with Trump that Ukraine and U.S. negotiators will discuss technical details related to the partial ceasefire during a meeting in Saudi Arabia on Monday. Russian negotiators are also set to hold separate talks with U.S. officials there.

Zelenskyy emphasized that Ukraine is open to a full, 30-day ceasefire that Trump has proposed, saying: "We will not be against any format, any steps toward unconditional ceasefire."

Russian President Vladimir Putin has made a complete ceasefire conditional on a halt of arms supplies to Kyiv and a suspension of Ukraine's military mobilization — demands rejected by Ukraine and its Western allies.

## **Israel warns of severe response to strikes from Lebanon after vowing to intensify operations in Gaza**

By BASSEM MROUE and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP) — Israel said it would respond "severely" to an attack from Lebanon after rockets were fired into northern Israel Saturday morning, a day after it vowed to increase the intensity of its operations in Gaza.

Israel's army said the intercepted rockets were targeting the Israeli town of Metula. This is the second time rockets have been fired from Lebanon into Israel since December, sparking concern about whether

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the fragile ceasefire with the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah would hold.

Hezbollah began launching rockets, drones and missiles into Israel the day after Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack out of Gaza ignited the war there. The Israel-Hezbollah conflict boiled over into an all-out war in September as Israel carried out massive waves of airstrikes and killed most of the militant group's senior leaders. The fighting killed more than 4,000 people in Lebanon and displaced about 60,000 Israelis.

Under the ceasefire reached in November, Israeli forces were supposed to withdraw from all Lebanese territory by late January. The deadline was then extended to Feb. 18 by agreement between Lebanon and Israel.

But since then, Israel's remained in five locations in Lebanon located across from communities in northern Israel and has carried out dozens of airstrikes on southern and eastern Lebanon, saying it attacked Hezbollah targets. Lebanon has appealed to the U.N. to pressure Israel to fully withdraw from the country.

On Saturday, Defense Minister, Israel Katz, said the country will not allow Lebanon to fire into Israeli communities. "We promised security to the Galilee communities and that is exactly what will happen," he said.

There was no immediate comment from Hezbollah.

In a statement, Lebanon's Prime Minister, Nawaf Salam, asked the Lebanese military to take all necessary measures in the south, but said the country did not want to return to war.

The strikes come a day after Israel said it would carry out operations in Gaza "with increasing intensity" until Hamas frees the 59 hostages it holds — 24 of whom are believed alive.

Israel's military said Friday its forces were planning fresh assaults into three neighborhoods west of Gaza City and issued warnings on social media for Palestinians to evacuate the areas.

Also on Friday, Israel blew up the only specialized cancer hospital in the war-torn territory. The Israeli military said it struck the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital, accusing Hamas militants of operating on-site. Turkey, which helped build and fund the hospital, said Israeli troops at one point used it as a base.

Around 600 Palestinians have been killed since Israel relaunched the war earlier this week. Israel had already cut off the supply of food, fuel, and humanitarian aid to Gaza's roughly 2 million Palestinians, aiming to pressure Hamas over ceasefire negotiations.

The international community has condemned the resumed attacks. In a statement Friday, the foreign ministers of the United Kingdom, France and Germany called Israel's strikes in Gaza a dramatic step backward. "We are appalled by the civilian casualties and urgently call for an immediate return to a ceasefire," they said in a joint statement.

The attack by Hamas-led militants in 2023, killed some 1,200 people and took 251 hostages. 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.

## **Detained Istanbul mayor faces 2nd day of questioning as protests intensify**

ISTANBUL (AP) — Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu appeared before police for questioning on terror-related charges on Saturday, a day after his interrogation over corruption allegations. His arrest this week has sparked widespread protests across Turkey, with demonstrators rallying in multiple cities to voice their opposition.

Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya posted on social media that 343 suspects had been detained in protests in major cities on Friday night, adding "There will be no tolerance for those who seek to violate societal order, threaten the people's peace and security, and pursue chaos and provocation." The cities listed included Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Adana, Antalya, Çanakkale, Eskişehir, Konya and Edirne.

The mayor, who is a popular opposition figure and seen as a top challenger to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was detained on Wednesday following a dawn raid on his residence over allegations of financial

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crimes and links to Kurdish militants. Dozens of other prominent figures, including two district mayors, were also detained.

Many view the arrest as a politically driven attempt to remove a popular opposition figure and key challenger to Erdogan in the next presidential race, currently scheduled for 2028. Government officials reject accusations that legal actions against opposition figures are politically motivated and insist that Turkey's courts operate independently.

On Friday, police questioned Imamoglu for four hours over the corruption accusations, during which he denied all of the charges, Cumhuriyet newspaper and other media reported. He was expected to be transferred to a courthouse later on Saturday for questioning by prosecutors and to face possible charges.

His arrest has ignited protests that have steadily increased in intensity.

On Friday, police in Istanbul used pepper spray, tear gas and rubber bullets to push back hundreds of protesters who tried to break through a barricade in front of the city's historic aqueduct while hurling flares, stones and other objects at officers. Police also dispersed groups that had rallied outside of the city hall for a third night running, after the opposition Republican People's Party leader, Ozgur Ozel, delivered a speech in support of the mayor.

Simultaneously, police broke up demonstrations in Ankara, the capital, as well as in the Aegean coastal city of Izmir, resorting to forceful measures at times, according to television images. Thousands marched in several other cities calling on the government to resign.

Earlier, Erdogan said the government would not tolerate street protests and accused the opposition party of links to corruption and terror organizations. Authorities in Ankara and Izmir meanwhile, announced a five-day ban on demonstrations, following a similar measure imposed earlier in Istanbul.

"An anti-corruption operation in Istanbul is being used as an excuse to stir unrest in our streets. I want it to be known that we will not allow a handful of opportunists to bring unrest to Turkey just to protect their plundering schemes," Erdogan said.

Imamoglu's arrest came just days before he was expected to be nominated as the opposition Republican People's Party's presidential candidate in a primary on Sunday. Ozel has said that the primary, where around 1.5 million delegates can vote, will go ahead as planned.

The opposition party has also urged citizens to participate in a symbolic election on Sunday — through improvised ballot boxes to be set up across Turkey — to show solidarity with Imamoglu.

In a message posted on his social media account Saturday, Imamoglu described his arrest as a "coup" and accused the government of exploiting the judiciary and worsening the country's troubled economy.

"With your support, we will first defeat this coup, and then we will send packing those who caused this," he wrote on the social media platform X.

## **Flights resume at London Heathrow after a daylong closure sparked travel chaos around the world**

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — London Heathrow Airport said it was "fully operational" on Saturday, after an almost daylong closure sparked by an electrical substation fire. But airlines warned that severe disruption will last for days as they scramble to relocate planes and crews and get travelers to their destinations.

The airport's boss said he was proud of Heathrow's response to the incident. But inconvenienced passengers, angry airlines and concerned politicians sought answers about how one seemingly accidental fire could shut down Europe's busiest air hub.

"We have hundreds of additional colleagues on hand in our terminals and we have added flights to today's schedule to facilitate an extra 10,000 passengers traveling through the airport," Heathrow said in a statement, advising passengers to check with their airline before going to the airport.

British Airways, Heathrow's biggest airline, said it expects to operate about 85% of its 600 scheduled flights at the airport on Saturday. It said that "to recover an operation of our size after such a significant incident is extremely complex."



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More than 1,300 flights were canceled and some 200,000 people stranded Friday after an overnight fire at a substation 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) away from the airport cut power to Heathrow, and to more than 60,000 properties.

Residents in west London described hearing a large explosion and then seeing a fireball and clouds of smoke when the blaze ripped through the substation. The fire was brought under control after seven hours, but the airport was shut for almost 18. A handful of flights took off and landed late Friday.

Police said they do not consider the fire suspicious, and the London Fire Brigade said its investigation would focus on the electrical distribution equipment at the substation.

Still, the huge impact of the fire left authorities facing criticism that Britain's creaking infrastructure is ill-prepared to deal with disasters or attacks.

The British government acknowledged that authorities had questions to answer and said a rigorous investigation was needed to make sure "this scale of disruption does not happen again."

Heathrow chief executive Thomas Woldbye said he was "proud" of the way airport and airline staff had responded.

"Remember, the situation was not created at Heathrow Airport," he told the BBC. "The airport didn't shut for days. We shut for hours."

He said Heathrow's backup power supply, designed for emergencies, worked as expected, but it wasn't enough to run the whole airport, which uses as much energy as a small city.

"That's how most airports operate," said Woldbye, who insisted "the same would happen in other airports" faced with a similar blaze.

Heathrow is one of the world's busiest airports for international travel, and saw 83.9 million passengers last year.

Passengers on about 120 flights were in the air when the closure was announced found themselves landing in different cities, and even different countries.

Friday's disruption was one of the most serious since the 2010 eruption of Iceland's Eyjafjallajökull volcano, which spewed clouds of ash into the atmosphere and shut Europe's airspace for days.

Mark Doherty and his wife were halfway across the Atlantic when the inflight map showed their flight from New York's John F. Kennedy Airport to Heathrow was turning around.

"I was like, you're joking," Doherty said before the pilot told passengers they were heading back to New York.

Doherty called the situation "typical England — got no back-up plan for something happens like this. There's no contingency plan."

## **A rare peek at the hidden waterworks behind Rome's Trevi Fountain**

By TRISHA THOMAS Associated Press

ROME (AP) — The Trevi Fountain, arguably the world's most famous, has graced screens for decades, from Fellini's "La Dolce Vita" to Netflix's "Emily in Paris." Each year, millions of visitors push through Rome's narrow streets to gaze at the towering Titan god flanked by falls cascading into a turquoise pool.

Yet, they never get to venture behind Oceanus' back to see what produces the sublime play of water in the baroque masterpiece.

Wooden doors on an adjacent street lead to the maneuvering chambers that control the fountain's water supply, coming from the Aqua Virgo — an ancient Roman aqueduct 16 kilometers (10 miles) away. Two electric pumps recycle 126 liters (33 gallons) of water per second while Rome's water management company, ACEA, carefully monitors the flow around the clock.

This precise amount is crucial for the movement of water through the statues; a little more or less, and it wouldn't work, said Davide D'Alonzo, ACEA's manager for the area.

The modern maneuvering chamber features metal tanks and lighted panels. In the original, arched chamber, water audibly rushes through a thick pipe and there is a functional, 18th-century hydrometer to

gauge the fountain's water level.

A large, rudimentary spreadsheet on the wall displays the names of rich Roman families whose homes received water from the chamber long ago; when they fell behind on their payments, their supply was cut off.

The chamber's grated windows grant views out over the fountain and its many visitors — all of whom are oblivious to its hidden waterworks. They toss coins over their shoulders into the water, a hopeful gesture based on a legend that it guarantees their return to the eternal city.

## States push to shift road funds to transit and bike projects as Trump threatens cuts

By JEFF McMURRAY Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Hundreds of bicycle advocates were at an annual summit this month in Washington, D.C., when their cellphones lit up over breakfast with an urgent email warning that President Donald Trump's transportation department had just halted federal grant funding for bike lanes.

As the administration targets green energy projects championed by former President Joe Biden that boosted transit, recreational trails and bicycle infrastructure, several states are banding together to advance those priorities on their own.

California, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New York and Pennsylvania joined forces for a national organizing effort dubbed the Clean Rides Network. The group gained momentum in various statehouses this year on environmentally friendly transportation projects it contends the federal government has abandoned.

"These are changes we need to make anyway, but they're more urgent than ever," said Justin Balik, senior state program director for the environmental advocacy group Evergreen Action and one of the organizers of the Clean Rides Network. "I've been calling the state departments of transportation the next frontier of climate advocacy."

Trading highway expansion for buses

Although Colorado wasn't among the seven charter members of the Clean Rides Network, a policy enacted there set the framework for one of its most ambitious goals.

In 2021, Gov. Jared Polis committed to a dramatic reduction in Colorado's greenhouse gas emissions and employed a novel approach to accelerate the timeline. Whenever the state's transportation department commits money to a large-scale project that increases vehicle traffic such as a new highway, it must also pursue a corresponding project to offset the environmental harms.

Two major highway expansion projects were canceled because of the policy, said Matt Frommer of the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project. The group advocated for the change.

Colorado used the savings to expand an intercity bus service that has soared in popularity for urban residents and tourists traveling to ski resorts.

Polis' vision lined up with the multimodal transportation aims under the \$1.1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure law Biden signed that year. In the final months of Biden's administration, the city of Denver won a \$150 million federal grant to build a rapid transit bus line along one of its busiest corridors.

Frommer, a transportation and land use policy manager, said there are fears that states will now have to pursue projects like that on their own.

"If your state cares about climate change, you need to take the reins and step up and direct your transportation funds to projects that are going to reduce emissions," Frommer said. "We may not be able to rely on the federal government to put that policy in place or to really help you in many ways."

Colorado's approach moves east

Minnesota followed Colorado's lead and adopted a similar rule to offset greenhouse emissions. Other states that are part of the network are pushing proposals this session.

The Maryland House recently passed its version of the Colorado law, and Senate sponsor Shelly Hettleman said she's cautiously optimistic it will win final passage before lawmakers adjourn.

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In trying to persuade her colleagues, Hettelman has focused less on the environmental benefits than what she sees as economic ones. A study commissioned by the Colorado transportation department projected up to \$40 billion in savings through improved air quality, road safety and reduced traffic congestion, among other things.

Lawmakers in the Clean Rides states of Illinois and Massachusetts have advanced similar proposals, but they've encountered resistance from some business leaders and advocates for road construction.

"This is another ill-advised piece of legislation, not based upon science, that will defer needed improvements to our crumbling transportation infrastructure in Illinois," said Mike Sturino, president and CEO of the Illinois Road and Transportation Builders Association. "Commuters will have to wait for improvements to our existing interstate system, as this bill would delay addressing unsafe conditions on our roads and bridges."

Is there any interest from red states?

Although most of the state leaders who have pushed alternative transportation options have been Democrats, the Clean Rides Network said more conservative states have shown interest in some of the topics, too.

Just as Colorado's anticipated cost savings helped spur legislation in Maryland, economic concerns continue to be foremost in the minds of residents, with some studies showing that transportation ranks second to housing in consumer costs.

"Forget about the cost of eggs. It's never been more expensive to drive a car," said Miguel Moravec with the nonprofit climate think tank RMI, which created a calculator to help states project the money they could save through policies that reduce emissions.

Virginia employs a scale that scores potential transportation projects based on factors such as safety, congestion relief, and environmental impacts.

Utah launched an ambitious transit plan for the rapidly growing state, while Montana implemented land use and zoning reforms that made cities more walkable.

Muhammed Patel, senior transportation advocate for the Natural Resources Defense Council in Chicago, said states are at least rethinking some of their policy priorities.

"We do live luckily in a country where states have authority over their own transportation systems," Patel said. "There's flexibility innately built in."

## **George Foreman, the fearsome heavyweight who became a beloved champion, dies at 76**

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

George Foreman became the heavyweight champion of the world in his 20s, only to lose his belt to Muhammad Ali in perhaps the most memorable fight in boxing history.

A full 20 years later in 1994, the 45-year-old Foreman became the oldest man to win the heavyweight championship, throwing one perfect combination to steal Michael Moorer's title in an epic upset.

Few fighters ever had more big moments than Big George Foreman — and even after he finally left the ring, he was only getting started.

The fearsome heavyweight, who lost the "Rumble in the Jungle" to Ali before his inspiring second act as a surprising champion and a successful businessman, died Friday night. Foreman was 76.

Foreman's family announced his death on social media, not saying how or where he died.

"A devout preacher, a devoted husband, a loving father and a proud grand- and great-grandfather, he lived a life marked by unwavering faith, humility and purpose," his family wrote. "A humanitarian, an Olympian and two-time heavyweight champion of the world, he was deeply respected. A force for good, a man of discipline, conviction, and a protector of his legacy, fighting tirelessly to preserve his good name— for his family."

A native Texan, Foreman began his boxing career as an Olympic gold medalist who inspired fear and awe as he climbed to the peak of the heavyweight division by stopping Joe Frazier in 1973. His formidable



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aura evaporated only a year later when Ali pulled off one of the most audacious victories in boxing history in Zaire, baiting and taunting Foreman into losing his belt.

Foreman left the sport a few years later, but returned after a 10-year absence and a self-described religious awakening.

The middle-aged fighter then pulled off one of the most spectacular knockouts in boxing history, flooring Moorer — 19 years his junior — with a surgical right hand and claiming Moorer's two heavyweight belts. Foreman's 20 years is easily the longest gap between heavyweight title reigns.

Foreman's transformation into an inspirational figure was complete, and he fought only four more times — finishing 76-5 with 68 knockouts — before moving onto his next career as a genial businessman, pitchman and occasional actor.

Outside the ring, he was best known as the face of the George Foreman Grill, which launched in the same year as his victory over Moorer. The simple cooking machine sold more than 100 million units and made him much wealthier than his sport ever did.

"George was a great friend to not only myself, but to my entire family," Top Rank president Bob Arum said. "We've lost a family member and are absolutely devastated."

In the first chapter of his boxing career, Foreman was nothing like the smiling grandfather who hawked his grills on television to great success.

Foreman dabbled in petty crime while growing up in Houston's Fifth Ward, but changed his life through boxing. He made the U.S. Olympic team in 1968 and won gold in Mexico City as a teenager, stopping a 29-year-old opponent in a star-making performance.

Foreman rose to the pinnacle of the pro game over the next five years, but was also perceived as an aloof, unfriendly athlete, both through his demeanor and through the skewed racial lenses of the time.

Jim Lampley, the veteran boxing broadcaster who worked alongside Foreman for many years at HBO, told The Associated Press on Friday night that Foreman's initial demeanor was an attempt by his camp to emulate Sonny Liston, the glowering heavyweight champ of the 1960s.

"At some point somewhere along the way, he realized that wasn't him," Lampley said.

Foreman stopped Frazier in an upset in Jamaica in January 1973 to win the belt, with his knockout inspiring Howard Cosell's iconic call: "Down goes Frazier! Down goes Frazier!"

Foreman defended his belt against Ken Norton before accepting the fight with Ali in the now-immortal bout staged in Africa by promoter Don King. Ali put on a tactical masterclass against Foreman, showing off the "rope-a-dope" strategy that frustrated and infuriated the champion. Foreman was eventually knocked down for the first time in his career, and the fight was stopped in the eighth round.

Foreman told the BBC in 2014 that he took the fight almost out of charity to Ali, who he suspected to be broke.

"I said I was going to go out there and kill him, and people said, 'Please, don't say you're going to kill Muhammad,'" Foreman said. "So I said, 'OK, I'll just beat him down to the ground.' That's how easy I thought the fight would be."

Exhausted and disillusioned, Foreman stopped fighting in 1977 and largely spent the next decade preaching and working with kids in Houston after his religious awakening. He returned to boxing in 1987 in his late 30s with a plan to defy time through frequent ring appearances, and he racked up a lengthy series of victories before losing to Evander Holyfield in a surprisingly competitive title fight in 1991.

Three years later, Foreman got in the ring with Moorer in Las Vegas, more for his celebrity than for his perceived ability to beat Moorer. The champion appeared to win the first nine rounds rather comfortably, with Foreman unable to land his slower punches. But Foreman came alive in the 10th, hurting Moorer before slipping in the short right hand that sent Moorer to the canvas in earth-shaking fashion.

Lampley, who was calling the fight, named his upcoming autobiography — which includes a prologue about Foreman — after his famous call of that moment: "It Happened!"

Foreman quit the ring for good in 1997, although he occasionally discussed a comeback. He settled into a life as a boxing analyst for HBO and as a pitchman for the grills that grew his fame and fortune. Much

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of the world soon knew Foreman as both a lovable friend and a ferocious fighter.

"He started performing as this pitchman, this product pitchman with the big, ever-present giant grin on his face," Lampley recalled. "When I was working with him, people would say, 'George is a big clown.' And I would say, 'Well, you can call him a clown, but he's actually a genius. He may be the greatest genius I've ever met.' And people would say, 'Well, genius, what do you mean?' I'd say, 'Well, check the bank account. If that isn't proof enough, I don't know what is.' So, he was a genius. He was a human genius."

Foreman briefly starred in a sitcom called "George" in the 1990s, and he even appeared on the reality singing competition "The Masked Singer" in 2022. A biographical movie based on his life was released in 2023.

Foreman had 12 children, including five sons who are all famously named George Edward Foreman.

"Legendary boxing champion, life-changing preacher, husband, father, grand- and great-grandfather and the best friend you could have," WBC President Mauricio Sulaiman wrote on social media. "His memory is now eternal, may Big George rest in peace."

## **A weak Pope Francis is wielding power and rewriting the narrative of how popes exercise authority**

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — During his first foreign trip in 2013, Pope Francis made headlines when he carried his own black leather briefcase as he boarded the Alitalia charter bound for Brazil, since popes never carry bags and until the 1970s were themselves carried on thrones.

Asked what was in the bag, Francis joked that it wasn't the nuclear codes. But he seemed baffled that something as normal as an airplane passenger carrying a briefcase could create such a fuss.

"I have always taken a bag with me when travelling – it's normal," he told his first news conference as pope. "We must get used to being normal. The normality of life."

Over 12 years, Francis has sought that kind of normality for the papacy with his informal style and disdain for pomp while ensuring that he still wields the awesome power held by Christ's vicar on Earth and Europe's last absolute monarch.

The way Francis has managed his five-week hospitalization for pneumonia has followed that same playbook: He has allowed the public to follow the very normal ups and downs of an 88-year-old man battling a complex lung infection through spare but regular medical bulletins, while also continuing to run the 1.3-billion strong Catholic Church.

Francis has stayed in control, remotely

In between respiratory crises, prayer and physiotherapy, Francis has appointed over a dozen bishops, approved a handful of new saints, authorized a three-year extension of his signature reform process and sent off messages public and private. Vatican cardinals have stood in for him at events requiring his presence.

That's not as easy a balancing act as it sounds, since there are few positions of power that are both as absolute as the papacy and, during times of illness, as seemingly fragile: According to the church's canon law, the pope possesses "supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary power in the church." He answers to no one but God, and there is no appeal of his decisions.

And while popes aren't subject to re-election campaigns or no-confidence votes, they essentially owe their jobs to the 120 men who elected them. While those same cardinals swear obedience to the pope, they will ultimately choose his successor from within their own ranks. It's no surprise then that talk of conclaves, papal contenders and challenges facing a future pope has been a constant buzz in Rome ever since Francis was admitted to Gemelli hospital Feb. 14.

Francis is well aware that anytime he has gone into the hospital, the plotting has begun for electing the next pope, contributing to a certain lame duck status. "Some wanted me dead," he said after his 2021 hospitalization, when he learned that secret meetings had already been held to plan the conclave. He knows as well that even before his current hospitalization, an anonymous cardinal had circulated a seven-point memo listing priorities for the next pope to correct the "confusion, division and conflict" sowed by Francis.

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But he's not shy about showing weakness

And yet Francis has never been shy about showing his weaknesses, age or infirmities in ways that seem unthinkable for public figures for whom any sign of fragility can threaten their authority and undermine their agenda.

Within months of being elected, for example, Francis reached out to an Argentine doctor and journalist, Dr. Nelson Castro, and suggested he write a book about the health of popes, himself included.

"My hypothesis is that he wanted first of all to show himself as a human being," Castro said in an interview. "We tend to see popes like saints, but the way he talked about his diseases showed me, 'I'm like you and me, being exposed to diseases.'"

Francis had read and appreciated Castro's earlier book, "The Sickness of Power," about the ailments that have afflicted Argentina's leaders and how power itself had afflicted them. He invited Castro to research and write about past popes and his own case in a similar light.

"The Health of Popes" was published in 2021. Castro said what struck him most was that Francis disclosed not only his physical ailments, but his mental health challenges too: Francis revealed that he had gone to a psychiatrist when he was the Jesuit provincial during Argentina's military dictatorship in the 1970s to help him cope with fear and anxiety.

"Pope Francis is a man of power," Castro said. "Only a man of power, feeling quite sure of himself, would dare to talk about his diseases so openly."

The balance of strength in weakness is very Jesuit

For the Rev. John Cecero, who was Jesuit provincial for the northeast United States from 2014-2020, Francis' willingness to show his weaknesses while exercising supreme authority is consistent with his Jesuit training and the biblical teaching of St. Paul that "when I am weak, then I am strong."

"A chief virtue on the part of everyone in the practice of Jesuit authority is humility," Cecero said in an interview. "On the part of the individual Jesuit (that means) thinking beyond my own self-interest to the common good."

"I know it's something that drives Francis: that you have that same humility," he said.

And yet Francis' critics often complain that he's authoritarian, that he takes decisions in a vacuum and without regard to the law, and wields power like a "Dictator Pope," the title of a book written by a traditionalist critic early in Francis' papacy.

Many recite the joke about the way Jesuit superiors exercise power, which is supposed to be a process of joint discernment between the superior and the underling but, the joke goes, it can be anything but: "I discern, you discern, we discern ... I decide."

Those same conservative critics, of course, have been keenly watching Francis' hospitalization and wondering if the end of his papacy is near.

Even if he is absent, and even if he has to cut back his public activities going forward, Francis is very much still in power and leading the church, said Kurt Martens, a canon lawyer at Catholic University of America in Washington D.C.

"We're used to seeing a pope who is everywhere all the time," he said. "But don't forget that in the past, not that long ago, popes would show up only rarely."

He may be absent, but he's still in control

Francis' disappearance from public view has led some to doubt the authenticity of the first, and so far only photograph of Francis released by the Vatican since his hospitalization. It was shot from behind and showed Francis at prayer in his private hospital chapel, his face hidden.

Avvenire, the newspaper of the Italian bishops' conference, said the photo was not only real but showed Francis controlling the image that he wants the faithful to have of the papacy and his illness. Francis wants viewers to focus not on the spectacle of a sick pope, but on what should actually matter more to a Catholic anyway.

"If we cannot see his face ... what we must look at is precisely what he himself is facing: the altar and the crucifix," Avvenire wrote.



## After breaking fast, volunteers use Ramadan as an opportunity to give in Detroit

By MIKE HOUSEHOLDER Associated Press

DEARBORN, Mich. (AP) — After a nightly iftar meal with family members breaking fast together during Ramadan, Nadine Daoud noticed full pots and trays of untouched leftover food lining the shelves of her grandmother's refrigerator. Too often, she felt the food was quickly forgotten and then wasted.

The observations inspired her 2017 creation of The Helping Handzzz Foundation that brings volunteers together each year during the Islamic holy month. They round up spare food from families in Dearborn — where nearly half the 110,000 residents are of Arab descent — and bring it to people without homes in neighboring Detroit.

Daoud said the group's efforts are emblematic of Islam's emphasis on respecting and valuing resources such as food and matches Ramadan's focus on "self-discipline and empathy toward those less fortunate."

"Every family cooks a lot of food to end the night when you're breaking your fast," Daoud said. "And a lot of food gets left over. And we noticed that a lot of this food was just getting stored in the fridge and forgotten about the next day."

"What I decided to do was instead of sticking it in the fridge and forgetting about it or throwing it in the trash, I said, 'Let me take it. I always see people on the corners. Let me help out and give it to them instead with a drink and a nice treat on the side.'"

One recent night, Helping Handzzz board members Hussein Sareini and Daoud Wehbi and four others enjoyed an iftar prepared by Sareini's mother.

When the meal ended, several attendees said some of the daily prayers. Then, Wehbi hopped in Sareini's truck, and they stopped at several area homes to pick up untouched dishes. From there, they drove to the parking lot of a nearby mosque, where Nadine Daoud and others organized the food.

A caravan of vehicles then visited several spots in Detroit where people without housing regularly can be found.

Board member Mariam Hachem approached a man bundled up in blankets and lying on the sidewalk.

"Hi, we have a meal for you," she said. "We're going to set it right here, OK?"

"OK," came the response.

Other volunteers added bottled water and a sweet treat alongside the food container.

The Helping Handzzz team goes through the same process six nights each week during the sacred month, taking off Sundays. And it comes after going without food or water from sunrise to sunset.

Wehbi, 27, is a design engineer at Toyota. Sareini demolishes bathrooms and kitchens and rebuilds them as part of his residential remodeling business.

The 25-year-old Dearborn resident said he gladly stays out until 9 p.m. or 10 p.m. each day to put some "good out into the world."

"It's all about appreciating what you have," he said.

Wehbi said it's no coincidence he and his friends undertake their annual effort during Ramadan.

"It's not just a 'no food, no drink' time," he said. "It's a lot about growing and coming together as a community and bettering ourselves and bettering each other."

## US decision to limit Canadian access to border-straddling library prompts outpouring of emotion

STANSTEAD, Quebec (AP) — For more than 100 years, people in Stanstead, Quebec have been able to walk into Derby Line, Vermont to enter the border-straddling Haskell Free Library and Opera House — no passport required.

But municipal and library officials said on Friday that U.S. authorities have unilaterally decided to end the

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century-old unwritten agreement. Coming at a time of heightened tensions between the two countries, the decision is prompting an outpouring of emotion in communities on both sides of the border, which in places has been marked simply by flower pots.

Inside the library celebrated as a symbol of international friendship, Pauline Lussier and Chris Blais put their arms around each other's shoulders Friday as they stood on either side of the line taped down the floor marking the border. Lussier, a Canadian, and Blais, an American met for the first time that day.

"A line doesn't separate us, it never has," said Blais, who held an American flag in her hands while Lussier held a Canadian one.

"Our kids have gone back and forth over this border without any problem at all ... this is all going to change now, and there's no reason for this," Blais added.

Once inside the library, Canadian and American citizens have been able to mingle freely across the border line drawn on the floor – as long as they return to the proper country afterward. In 2016, then-president Barack Obama hailed the symbolic importance of the library, built in 1901. "A resident of one of these border towns once said, 'We're two different countries, but we're like one big town,'" Obama said.

A spokesperson for U.S. Customs and Border Protection, CBP, confirmed that the divide is about to become more pronounced. Starting in the coming days, only library card holders and employees will be able to cross over from Canada to enter the building through the main door on the U.S. side.

And as of Oct. 1, no Canadians will be able to enter the library via the United States without going through the border checkpoint, though there will be exceptions for law enforcement, emergency services, mail delivery, official workers and those with disabilities.

The statement acknowledged the library as a "unique landmark," but said the border agency was phasing in a new approach for security reasons.

"Due to the library's location, and convenience of local populations, CBP has allowed customers of the library to access its sidewalk, without inspection, for decades," the agency said in a statement. "However, during that time, this area has witnessed a continued rise in illicit cross-border activity."

It noted there have been a number of incidents in and around the library that resulted in apprehensions in recent years, including a person attempting to smuggle firearms in the past year.

Town and library officials say Canadian visitors without a library card will have to enter by a back door on the Canadian side, across a muddy stretch of grass. The library announced Friday that it was launching a GoFundMe to raise the estimated \$100,000 Canadian (US\$69,000) it will cost to build a sidewalk, new parking lot and wheelchair access.

Stanstead Mayor Jody Stone said the U.S. decision "makes no sense." However, he said the decision from U.S. President Donald Trump's administration would not affect the close bond between the communities, which share municipal services and facilities.

"No matter what this administration does, it will not change the fact that Stanstead and Derby Line are partners and friends forever," he said.

Several residents, some in tears, gathered at the border to denounce the decision. Penny Thomas stood on the American side, holding up a sign with a maple leaf on it that said "Keep Haskell open."

In February, the Boston Globe reported that the U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem visited the library and repeated Trump's taunts about making Canada the 51st state as she stepped back and forth across the line that marks the border.

According to the library's website, Canadian visitors had been allowed to enter the library by the main entrance on the U.S. side. While passports or visas were not necessary, library officials had warned that U.S. Border Patrol and RCMP would monitor movements and could request to see identification.

## **A federal lawsuit says the Trump administration has unlawfully shuttered the Voice of America**

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

A lawsuit filed late Friday accuses the Trump administration of unlawfully shutting down the Voice of

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America and asks a federal court to restore the outlet that for decades has supplied news about the United States to nations around the world — including many that lack a free press of their own.

The case, filed in U.S. District Court in New York, was brought by Voice of America reporters, Reporters Without Borders and a handful of unions against the U.S. Agency for Global Media and Kari Lake, the failed Arizona candidate who is President Trump's representative there.

"In many parts of the world, a crucial source of objective news is gone, and only censored state-sponsored news media is left to fill the void," the lawsuit said.

Lake has described the broadcast agency as a "giant rot" that needs to be stripped down and rebuilt.

Voice of America dates to World War II as a source of objective news, often beamed into authoritarian countries. Funded by Congress, it is protected by a charter that guarantees its product pass muster for journalistic rigor.

Suit accuses the administration of taking a 'chainsaw' approach

The lawsuit charges that the Trump administration has effectively shut it down unlawfully in the past week. Republicans have complained that the news source is infected by left-wing propaganda, a contention its operators say isn't backed up factually.

"The second Trump administration has taken a chainsaw to the agency as a whole in an attempt to shutter it completely," the lawsuit said. There was no immediate response Friday to a request for comment from the U.S. Agency for Global Media, which oversees Voice of America and a handful of sister networks.

In an interview with Newsmax earlier this week, Lake described Voice of America as "like having a rotten fish and trying to find a portion that you can eat."

In a post on X, she said the Agency for Global Media is "a giant rot and burden to the American taxpayer — a national security risk for the nation — and irretrievably broken. While there are bright spots within the agency with personnel who are talented and dedicated public servants, this is the exception rather than the rule."

Clayton Weimers, executive director of Reporters Without Borders in the United States, said his organization was compelled to act to protect Voice of America and the broader press freedom community.

There are other media-related actions, too

At VOA's sister operation, Radio Free Asia, unpaid furloughs took effect on Friday for roughly 240 people in the operation's Washington office, or 75% of the staff members, spokesman Rohit Mahajan said. Radio Free Asia has also moved to cancel freelance contracts with people who helped the agency gather news overseas.

Radio Free Asia also expects to file a lawsuit to keep congressionally-appropriated funding flowing, Mahajan said.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty filed suit on Tuesday, asking the U.S. District Court in Washington to compel the U.S. Agency for Global Media to make its next payment. RFE/RL currently broadcasts in 23 countries across Europe and Asia, in 27 different languages.

In its lawsuit, the organizations called the denial of funding unprecedented and said it has already forced operations to be significantly scaled back. "Without its congressionally appropriated funds, RFE/RL will also be forced to stop the vast majority of its journalistic work and will be at risk of ceasing to exist as an organization," they argued.

## **Influencer brothers Andrew and Tristan Tate arrive in Romania after weeks in the United States**

By STEPHEN McGRATH and ANDREEA ALEXANDRU Associated Press

BUCHAREST, Romania (AP) — After weeks in the United States, influencer brothers Andrew and Tristan Tate arrived early Saturday back in Romania, where they face charges of human trafficking and forming a criminal gang to sexually exploit women.

The Tates, who are dual U.S. and British citizens, were arrested in Romania in late 2022 and formally indicted last year on charges that they participated in a criminal ring that lured women to Romania, where



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they were allegedly sexually exploited. Andrew Tate was also charged with rape. They deny all of the allegations against them.

The brothers' plane — which Andrew Tate said earlier in a post on X cost \$185,000 to "jet across the Atlantic to sign one single piece of paper" — landed at Bucharest Henri Coanda International Airport shortly before 1.00 a.m. local time Saturday morning (2300 GMT, Friday).

After arriving at their residence near the capital, Bucharest, Andrew Tate told reporters they returned because "innocent men don't run from anything" and he vowed to clear his name in court.

"After all we've been through, we truly deserve the day in court where it is stated that we've done nothing wrong and that we should have never been in court in the first place. We should have never gone to jail. We should have never had our assets seized. We should have never had our names slandered," he said. "Anyone who believed any of this garbage has a particularly low IQ."

Their return to Romania comes nearly a month after a travel ban imposed on the brothers was lifted, after which they flew on a private jet to the U.S., landing in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

The brothers remain under judicial control, which requires them to appear before judicial authorities in Romania when summoned. Eugen Vidineac, one of the Tate brothers' lawyers in Romania, told The Associated Press that the Tates are due to check in with a surveillance officer on Monday.

Days after the Tates arrived in the U.S., on March 4, Florida's Attorney General James Uthmeier said his office had opened a criminal investigation into Andrew and Tristan Tate. He said in a social media post that he directed his office to work with law enforcement to conduct a preliminary inquiry into the brothers.

A day after the investigation was opened, Andrew Tate said in a post on X: "I didn't commit any crime and they're trying to find one because they don't like me."

The lifting of their two-year travel ban came after a Bucharest court in December ruled that a case against the brothers could not go to trial because of multiple legal and procedural irregularities on the part of the prosecutors. The case, however, remained open.

For his part, Tristan Tate said after returning to Romania, "I think it's very telling that we were investigated for two and a half years, and we were dragged ... in front of the media, into prison, out of prison, all this time, and in December last year, a judge said ... there's not evidence enough for this to even go to trial."

Last August, Romania's anti-organized crime agency DIICOT also launched a second case against the brothers, investigating allegations of human trafficking, the trafficking of minors, sexual intercourse with a minor, influencing statements and money laundering. They have denied those charges as well.

Andrew Tate, 38, a former professional kickboxer and self-described misogynist who has amassed more than 10 million followers on X, has repeatedly claimed that prosecutors in Romania have no evidence against him and that there is a political conspiracy to silence him.

"There are a lot of people in the world today that do not have faith in Romanian institutions ... but we're going to restore that faith by coming home, as American citizens, going to court, and getting the not guilty that we deserve," Andrew Tate said. "If a court needs to speak to us, we'll be there because we're innocent."

The Tate brothers' legal battles are not limited to Romania.

Four British women who accused Andrew Tate of sexual violence and physical abuse are suing him in the U.K. after the Crown Prosecution Service decided not to prosecute him.

In March last year, the Tate brothers appeared at the Bucharest Court of Appeal in a separate case after U.K. authorities issued arrest warrants over allegations of sexual aggression in a case dating back to the period from 2012 to 2015.

The appeals court granted the U.K. request to extradite the Tates, but only after legal proceedings in Romania have concluded.

## **Homeland Security revokes temporary status for 532,000 Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans**

By GISELA SALOMON Associated Press

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MIAMI (AP) — The Department of Homeland Security said Friday that it will revoke legal protections for hundreds of thousands of Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans, setting them up for potential deportation in about a month.

The order applies to about 532,000 people from the four countries who came to the United States since October 2022. They arrived with financial sponsors and were given two-year permits to live and work in the U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said they will lose their legal status on April 24, or 30 days after the publication of the notice in the Federal Register.

The new policy impacts people who are already in the U.S. and who came under the humanitarian parole program. It follows an earlier Trump administration decision to end what it called the "broad abuse" of the humanitarian parole, a long-standing legal tool presidents have used to allow people from countries where there's war or political instability to enter and temporarily live in the U.S.

During his campaign President Donald Trump promised to deport millions of people who are in the U.S. illegally, and as president he has been also ending legal pathways for immigrants to come to the U.S. and to stay.

DHS said parolees without a lawful basis to stay in the U.S. "must depart" before their parole termination date.

"Parole is inherently temporary, and parole alone is not an underlying basis for obtaining any immigration status," DHS said.

Before the new order, the beneficiaries of the program could stay in the U.S. until their parole expires, although the administration had stopped processing their applications for asylum, visas and other requests that might allow them to remain longer.

The administration decision has already been challenged in federal courts.

A group of American citizens and immigrants sued the Trump administration for ending humanitarian parole and are seeking to reinstate the programs for the four nationalities.

Lawyers and activists raised their voices to denounce the government's decision.

Friday's action is "going to cause needless chaos and heartbreak for families and communities across the country," said Karen Tumlin, founder and director of Justice Action Center, one of the organizations that filed the lawsuit at the end of February. She called it "reckless, cruel and counterproductive."

The Biden administration allowed up to 30,000 people a month from the four countries to come to the United States for two years with eligibility to work. It persuaded Mexico to take back the same number from those countries because the U.S. could deport few, if any, to their homes.

Cuba generally accepted about one deportation flight a month, while Venezuela and Nicaragua refused to take any. All three are U.S. adversaries.

Haiti accepted many deportation flights, especially after a surge of migrants from the Caribbean country in the small border town of Del Rio, Texas, in 2021. But Haiti has been in constant turmoil, hampering U.S. efforts.

Since late 2022, more than half a million people have come to the U.S. under the policy, also known as CHNV. It was a part of the Biden administration's approach to encourage people to come through new legal channels while cracking down on those who crossed the border illegally.

## **Major League Baseball removes references to 'diversity' from MLB Careers home page**

NEW YORK (AP) — Major League Baseball removed references to "diversity" from its MLB Careers home page following an executive order by President Donald Trump that could lead to possible federal action against organizations using DEI programs in violation of his administration's interpretation of civil rights law.

"Our values on diversity remain unchanged," MLB said in a statement Friday. "We are in the process of evaluating our programs for any modifications to eligibility criteria that are needed to ensure our programs are compliant with federal law as they continue forward."

The removal of the references was first reported by the website cupofcoffeenews.com.

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Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred, who launched a Diversity Pipeline Program in 2016, said following an owners meeting in Palm Beach, Florida, last month that MLB was evaluating the interpretation of law coming from the federal government.

"Our values, particularly our values on diversity, remain unchanged, but another value that is pretty important to us is we always try to comply with what the law is," he said. "There seems to be an evolution going on here. We're following that very carefully. Obviously, when things get a little more settled, we'll examine each of our programs and make sure that while the values remain the same that we're also consistent with what the law requires."

## **Under threat from Trump, Columbia University agrees to policy changes**

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Columbia University agreed Friday to put its Middle East studies department under new supervision and overhaul its rules for protests and student discipline, acquiescing to an extraordinary ultimatum by the Trump administration to implement those and other changes or risk losing billions of dollars in federal funding.

As part of the sweeping reforms, the university will also adopt a new definition of antisemitism and expand "intellectual diversity" by staffing up its Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies, according to a letter published Friday by the interim president, Katrina Armstrong.

The announcement drew immediate condemnation from some faculty and free speech groups, who accused the university of caving to President Donald Trump's largely unprecedented intrusion upon the school's academic freedom.

"Columbia's capitulation endangers academic freedom and campus expression nationwide," Donna Liberman, the executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, said in a statement.

Earlier this month, the Trump administration pulled \$400 million in research grants and other funding over the university's handling of protests against Israel's military campaign in Gaza. As a precondition to restoring those funds — along with billions more in future grants — federal officials last week demanded the university immediately enact nine separate reforms to its academic and security policies.

In her response Friday, Armstrong indicated Columbia would implement nearly all of them. As ordered, it will hire new public safety personnel and empower them to make arrests on campus, bar students from protesting in academic buildings and revamp its long-standing process for student discipline.

Students will no longer be permitted to wear face masks on campus "for the purposes of concealing one's identity." An exception would be made for people wearing them for health or religious reasons.

The university will also appoint a new senior provost to review the leadership and curriculum of several international studies departments to "ensure the educational offerings are comprehensive and balanced."

The appointment appeared to be a concession to the Trump administration's most contentious demand: that the university place its Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies Department under "academic receivership for a minimum of five years."

The Trump administration has repeatedly accused Columbia University of letting antisemitism go unchecked at protests against Israel that began at the university last spring and quickly spread to other campuses — a characterization disputed by those involved in the demonstrations.

In her letter, Armstrong said the university had worked hard to "address the legitimate concerns raised both from within and without our Columbia community, including by our regulators, with respect to the discrimination, harassment, and antisemitic acts our Jewish community has faced."

"The way Columbia and Columbians have been portrayed is hard to reckon with," she added. "We have challenges, yes, but they do not define us."

The Trump administration has ratcheted up its attacks on Columbia in recent weeks, thrusting the campus into crisis and sparking fears of additional reprisals at colleges across the country.

On March 8, federal immigration officials arrested Mahmoud Khalil, a prominent Palestinian activist and



legal permanent resident in his university-owned apartment building — the “first of many” attempted deportations, according to Trump.

Justice Department leaders say they are also investigating whether Columbia hid students sought by the U.S. over their roles in the demonstrations.

While Trump has made Columbia the most visible target of his crackdown on higher education, he has put other universities on notice that they will face cuts if they do not embrace his agenda.

His administration has announced investigations into 52 universities for their diversity, equity and inclusion programs. And it has suspended approximately \$175 million in federal funding for the University of Pennsylvania over a transgender swimmer who last competed for the school in 2022.

On Friday, free speech groups warned Columbia’s response to Trump’s threat would reverberate far beyond the Manhattan campus.

“Shaking under government pressure, Columbia crumbled,” said Tyler Coward, the lead counsel for government affairs at the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. “If Columbia — with its immense resources and influence — can’t stand up to government demands that threaten free speech, what are other colleges to do?”

## **Eyeing China threat, Trump announces Boeing wins contract for secretive future fighter jet**

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump announced Friday that Boeing will build the Air Force’s future fighter jet, which the Pentagon says will have stealth and penetration capabilities that far exceed those of its current fleet and is essential in a potential conflict with China.

Known as Next Generation Air Dominance, or NGAD, the manned jet will serve as quarterback to a fleet of future drone aircraft designed to be able to penetrate the air defenses of China and any other potential foes. The initial contract to proceed with production on a version for the Air Force is worth an estimated \$20 billion.

The 47th president, who announced the award at the White House with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Air Force leadership, said with a grin that the new fighter would be named the F-47.

Gen. David Allvin, chief of staff of the Air Force, said, “We’re going to write the next generation of modern aerial warfare with this.” And Hegseth said the future fleet “sends a very clear, direct message to our allies that we’re not going anywhere.”

Critics have questioned the cost and the necessity of the program as the Pentagon is still struggling to fully produce its current most advanced jet, the F-35, which is expected to cost taxpayers more than \$1.7 trillion over its lifespan. In addition, the Pentagon’s future stealth bomber, the B-21 Raider, will have many of the same cutting edge technologies in advanced materials, AI, propulsion and stealth.

More than 1,100 F-35s have already been built for the U.S. and multiple international partners.

A fleet of about 100 future B-21 stealth bombers at an estimated total cost of at least \$130 billion is also planned. The first B-21 aircraft are now in test flights.

With evolving drone and space warfare likely to be the center of any fight with China, Dan Grazier, a military procurement analyst, questions whether “another exquisite manned fighter jet really is the right platform going forward.” Grazier, director of the national security reform program at the Stimson Center, said \$20 billion is “just seed money. The total costs coming down the road will be hundreds of billions of dollars.”

Few details of what the new NGAD fighter would look like have been public, although Trump said early versions have been conducting test flights for the last five years. Renderings by both Lockheed Martin and Boeing have highlighted a flat, tail-less aircraft with a sharp nose.

The selection of Boeing, which has faced intense pressure from Trump over cost overruns and program delays on Air Force One, came after an independent analysis by the Air Force, an official said on the con-

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dition of anonymity to provide additional details on the selection. The Boeing offer was still determined to be the "best overall value to the government," the official said.

The Air Force has not specified how many aircraft will be produced. In a statement, however, Allvin said there would be more F-47s produced than F-22s, the advanced fighter jet it's replacing. There are now about 180 F-22 fighter jets in service.

The Air Force later issued a statement saying the number 47 was chosen for a number of reasons: "It honors the legacy of the P-47, whose contributions to air superiority during World War II remain historic. Additionally, the number pays tribute to the founding year of the Air Force, while also recognizing the 47th President's pivotal support for the development of the world's first sixth-generation fighter."

A separate Navy contract for its version of the NGAD fighter is still under competition between Northrop Grumman and Boeing.

Last year, the Biden administration's Air Force secretary, Frank Kendall, ordered a pause on the NGAD program to review if the aircraft was still needed or if the program, which was first designed in 2018, needed to be modified to reflect the past few years of warfighting advances.

That review by think tanks and academia examined what conflict with China would look like with NGAD and then without it — and determined that NGAD was still needed. Kendall then left the decision on which firm would build the fighter jet to the incoming Trump administration, a defense official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to provide details on the decision-making.

NGAD will bring "an entirely different level of low observability," the official said. It will also have a much longer range than the F-35 or other current fighter jets, so it will require less refueling. A future unmanned version of NGAD also is planned as the Pentagon improves the AI for the aircraft, the official said.

## **Texas measles outbreak expected to last for months, though vaccinations are up from last year**

By DEVI SHASTRI and KASTURI PANANJADY AP Health Writers

As measles cases in West Texas are still on the rise two months after the outbreak began, local public health officials say they expect the virus to keep spreading for at least several more months and that the official case number is likely an undercount.

But there's a silver lining, officials say: More people have received a measles, mumps and rubella vaccination this year in Texas and New Mexico, which also has an outbreak, compared to last year — even if it's not as high as they would like. And pharmacies across the U.S., especially in Texas, are seeing more demand for MMR shots.

As of Friday, the outbreak in Texas was up to 309 cases and one measles-related death, while New Mexico's case count was up to 42 and also one measles-related death. Forty-two people have been hospitalized across the two states.

Texas' outbreak, which has largely spread in undervaccinated Mennonite communities, could last a year based on studies of how measles previously spread in Amish communities in the U.S. Those studies showed outbreaks lasted six to seven months, said Katherine Wells, director of the public health department in Lubbock, Texas. Lubbock's hospitals have treated most of the outbreak's patients and the public health department is closely assisting with the response.

"It being so rural, now multistate, it's just going to take a lot more boots on the ground, a lot more work, to get things under control," Wells said during a media briefing this week. "It's not an isolated population."

The outbreak includes 14 Texas counties, two New Mexico counties and four probable cases in Oklahoma, where health officials said the first two were "associated" with the West Texas and New Mexico outbreaks.

Measles is one of the world's most contagious diseases. The way it spreads makes it especially hard to contain and outbreaks can have multiple peaks, said Justin Lessler, an epidemiologist at the University of North Carolina's Gillings School of Global Public Health.

Many people spread the measles virus unknowingly for days before the telltale rash appears. The virus also can hang in the air for up to two hours after a sick person has left a room.

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"Within this community, it'd be perfectly reasonable to think probably another couple months before things die out," Lessler said. "But if it gets into another community, you just potentially start that clock over again."

If the outbreak goes on until next January, it would end the United States' status of having eliminated measles, which is defined as 12 months without local virus transmission, said Dr. William Moss, a pediatric infectious disease specialist at Johns Hopkins University and executive director of the International Vaccine Access Center.

"We're only three months in. I think if we had a strong response where the messaging was clear that measles vaccination is the way to stop this outbreak, I would be surprised if it went for 12 months or more," said Moss, who has worked on measles for 25 years, mostly in Africa. "But we're not seeing that type of response, at least from the federal government."

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. instead has sown doubt about the measles vaccine, which has been safely used for more than 60 years and is 97% effective after two doses. In an interview with Fox News last week, Kennedy said MMR shots cause "deaths every year," although he later added that vaccinations should be encouraged.

Vaccinations are up in Texas and New Mexico

Still, there are signs the outbreak has had an effect on vaccinations, especially locally.

Between Feb. 1 and March 18 last year, New Mexico Department of Health registered 6,500 measles vaccines. During that timeframe this year, more than 11,600 measles vaccines were administered in New Mexico — about half given to adults and half to children.

Southeast New Mexico, where the outbreak is located, represents a large portion of the count, with 2,369 doses administered.

In Texas, at least 173,000 measles doses were given from Jan. 1 to March 16, compared to at least 158,000 over the same timeframe last year, according to the state health department. That includes more than 340 doses in given by public health in the West Texas outbreak area as of March 11.

Texans must opt-in to the state's immunization registry, so most people's vaccinations are not captured in the Texas Department of State Health Services numbers, department spokeswoman Lara Anton said.

"We don't know if more people are opting in or if this is a true reflection of an increase in vaccinations," Anton wrote in an email. "It may be both."

Pharmacy chains Walgreens and CVS told The Associated Press that they're seeing higher demand for MMR vaccines across the U.S., especially in the outbreak areas.

Texas health officials say they'd like to see more uptake in the communities at the epicenter of the outbreak, especially in Gaines County — where the childhood vaccination rate against measles is 82%. That's far below the 95% level needed to prevent community spread, and likely lower in the small religious schools and homeschooling groups where the early cases were identified.

Prasad Ganji is a pharmacist in Seminole, the biggest town in Gaines County. He said he ordered a 10-dose box of the MMR vaccine as cases started to spread.

He can give vaccines to people older than 14. But he still has doses left.

"The uptake for vaccines been definitely been a struggle," Wells said of Gaines County, "I want to be honest with that."

## London's Heathrow slowly resumes flights after a fire cut power to Europe's busiest airport

By BRIAN MELLEY, DANICA KIRKA and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A fire at an electrical substation knocked out power to Heathrow Airport for most of Friday, forcing Europe's busiest hub to shut down for roughly 18 hours, causing widespread cancellations and rerouting headaches, and stranding roughly 200,000 passengers.

The blaze started just before midnight on Thursday at a substation about 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) from the airport and took firefighters around seven hours to bring under control. Authorities said they found



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no evidence that it was suspicious, and the London Fire Brigade said its investigation would focus on the electrical distribution equipment at the substation.

The fire knocked out power to Heathrow and thousands of homes in the area. It affected at least 1,350 flights to and from the airport, according to flight tracking service FlightRadar 24, and the impact was expected to last several days, as passengers try to reschedule their trips and airlines work to reposition their planes and crews.

After power was restored, a British Airways jet touched down just before sunset on Friday after Heathrow lifted its closure order. Further arrivals followed, including a short flight from Manchester in northwest England.

A British Airways flight to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia departed from Heathrow just before 9 p.m. (2100GMT). British Airways says it will run eight long-haul flights on Friday night. The airport plans to operate full schedule on Saturday.

Residents in west London described hearing a large explosion, followed by a fireball and clouds of smoke, when the blaze ripped through the substation.

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

Lawrence Hayes was most of the way to London from New York when Virgin Atlantic announced the plane was 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 (station in London), but it's going to be an incredibly long day."

Heathrow is one of the world's busiest airports for international travel, and saw 83.9 million passengers last year.

Friday's disruption was one of the most serious since the 2010 eruption of Iceland's Eyjafjallajokull volcano, which spewed clouds of ash into the atmosphere and shut Europe's airspace for days.

Foul play isn't suspected

It's too early to know for sure what sparked the blaze, but the Metropolitan Police force said counter-terrorism detectives were leading the investigation because of their ability to find the cause quickly and because of the location of the electrical substation fire and its impact on critical national infrastructure.

The force said that "after initial assessment, we are not treating this incident as suspicious."

Heathrow said its backup power supply designed for emergencies worked as expected, but it wasn't enough to run the whole airport. It said it had no choice but to close the airport for most of the day.

The airport's CEO, Thomas Woldbye, rejected suggestions that Heathrow didn't have adequate contingency plans, saying the incident was "unprecedented."

"Contingencies of certain sizes we cannot guard ourselves against 100% and this is one of them," he said.

Nevertheless, the fallout from the fire led to criticism that Britain is ill-prepared to deal with disasters.

"The U.K.'s critical national infrastructure is not sufficiently hardened for anywhere near the level it would need to be at to give us confidence this won't happen again," said Alan Mendoza, the executive director of the Henry Jackson Society, a security think tank.

Tom Wells, a spokesperson for Prime Minister Keir Starmer, acknowledged that authorities had questions to answer and said a rigorous investigation was needed to make sure "this scale of disruption does not happen again."

Disruption could last days

Heathrow originally said it expected to reopen just before midnight Friday, though with "significant disruption over the coming days."

Even after flights resume, it will take several days to mobilize planes, cargo carriers, and crews and rebook passengers, said aviation consultant Anita Mendiratta.

"It's not only about resuming with tomorrow's flights, it's the backlog and the implications that have

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taken place," she said.

Diverted, canceled and in limbo

Mark Doherty and his wife were halfway across the Atlantic when the inflight map showed their flight from New York's John F. Kennedy Airport to Heathrow was turning around.

"I was like, you're joking," Doherty said before the pilot told passengers they were heading back to New York.

Doherty called the situation "typical England — got no back-up plan for something happens like this. There's no contingency plan."

At Heathrow, a family of five traveling to Dallas showed 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."

Travelers who were diverted to other cities found themselves trying to book travel onward to London. Qantas airlines sent flights from Singapore and Perth, Australia, to Paris, where it said it would bus people to London, a process likely to also include a train shuttle beneath the English Channel.

Blaze lit up the sky and darkened homes

Matthew Muirhead was working Thursday night near Heathrow when he stepped outside with a colleague and noticed smoke rising from an electrical substation and heard sirens.

"We saw a bright flash of white, and all the lights in town went out," he said.

The London Fire Brigade sent 10 engines and around 70 firefighters to control the blaze and about 150 people were evacuated from their homes near the power station.

The blaze knocked out power to 67,000 customers, though most of it was restored by daybreak, the fire brigade said.

Flights normally begin landing and taking off at Heathrow at 6 a.m. due to nighttime flying restrictions. But the skies were silent Friday morning.

"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 the airport for more than 20 years. "Today is different, you can hear the birds singing."

## **Legal experts say Trump official broke law by saying 'Buy Tesla' stock but don't expect a crackdown**

By BERNARD CONDON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — When a White House adviser in the first Trump administration told TV viewers to "Go buy Ivanka stuff," top government lawyers sprang into action, telling her she had violated ethics rules and warning her not to do it again.

Government ethics experts have varying opinions on whether the 2017 criticism of Kellyanne Conway went far enough, but many agree such violations now might not even draw an official rebuke.

A week after President Donald Trump turned the White House lawn into a Tesla infomercial for Elon Musk's cars, a second sales pitch by a U.S. official occurred, this time for Tesla stock.

"It will never be this cheap," U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said Wednesday. "Buy Tesla."

Government ethics experts say Lutnick broke a 1989 law prohibiting federal employees from using "public office for private gain," later detailed to include a ban on "endorsements." Although presidents are generally exempt from government ethics rules, most federal employees are not and are often punished for violations, including rebukes like the one Conway got.

As of Friday, no public action had been taken against Lutnick and it was unclear whether he would suffer a similar fate.

"They're not even thinking of ethics," said Trump critic and former Republican White House ethics czar

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Richard Painter of administration officials.

Painter has equally low expectations of that other possible brake to future violations — public opinion: “I don’t know if people care.”

In his first term, Trump opened his hotel near the Oval Office to foreign ambassadors and lobbyists in what many legal scholars argued was a violation of a constitutional ban against presidents receiving payments or gifts that could distort public policy for private gain. His company launched a new hotel chain called “America Idea” in hopes of cashing in on his celebrity. Trump even once proposed holding a G-7 meeting of world leaders at his then-struggling Doral golf resort.

The ‘Buy Ivanka’ rebuke

But the reaction to Conway’s “Ivanka stuff” comment suggested certain lines couldn’t be crossed.

Within days of Conway’s TV comments, the head of the federal ethics agency, the Office of Government Ethics, wrote a letter to the White House saying Trump’s adviser may have broken the law and urging a probe. A White House lawyer then met with Conway to remind her of the law and reported to the ethics office that she had assured him she would abide by it in future.

But this time, there is no head of the Office of Government Ethics. He was fired by Trump. Ditto for the inspector generals of various agencies who would head any investigation.

“What is likely to happen now? I really don’t know,” said Kedric Payne, chief lawyer at the Campaign Legal Center, a non-profit watchdog that sent a letter to the government ethics office on Friday calling for an investigation. “We no longer have the head of the Office of Government Ethics to push the Commerce Department to make sure the secretary acknowledges the law.”

Payne said Lutnick’s comment on TV may seem like a small transgression but it could snowball into a bigger problem if not punished.

“It starts with one TV appearance, but can develop into multiple officials asking people to support companies and products,” Payne said. “If there are no consequences, you get into a danger zone of a corruption.”

Trump critics point to other signs that Trump is careless with the law and ethical norms, citing his pardons for Jan. 6 Capitol rioters, a decision to allow his Trump Organization to strike business deals abroad and his attack on the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act banning U.S. company bribes abroad to win business.

Jelly beans and airlines

When it comes endorsing products, presidents used to be far more circumspect.

Their comments were mostly quick asides expressing opinions of taste, such as when Harry Truman called Pillsbury flour the “finest” or John F. Kennedy said United Airlines was “reliable.”

Ronald Reagan famously enthused about his jelly beans habit, remarking that they were the “perfect snack.”

Trump had five Teslas lined up in the White House driveway last week as he praised Musk’s company. Then he slipped into a red Model S he had targeted for personal purchase, exclaiming, “Wow. That’s beautiful.”

“Presidents are allowed to have personal opinions on products they like and dislike,” said ethics lawyer Kathleen Clark, referring to the Truman through Reagan examples. “But what Trump did was transform the White House into a set for advertising the products of a private company.”

“It’s the difference between holding an extravaganza and holding an opinion.”

Calls for Musk investigation

In the aftermath of the Tesla White House event, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren and three other senators wrote a letter to the Office of Government Ethics saying that, while presidents are exempt from ethics law banning endorsements, Elon Musk isn’t and calling for an investigation.

A spokeswoman from Warren’s office said the government ethics office had not yet responded about what it planned to do about the White House Tesla endorsement. The Office of Government Ethics itself said it would not comment on either the Warren letter or Lutnick’s TV appearance.

The Commerce Department did not respond to Associated Press requests for comment.

Asked whether Lutnick would be reprimanded or an investigation opened, White House spokesman Kush Desai defended Lutnick, lauding “his immensely successful private sector career” and his “critical role on



President Trump's trade and economic team."

Former White House ethics chief Painter says Democrats have also played loose with the ethics law.

He is harshly critical of the Clinton charity, the Clinton Foundation, which was taking donations from foreign governments when Hillary Clinton was the country's chief diplomat as secretary of state. Painter also blasts former President Joe Biden for not removing his name from a University of Pennsylvania research institute when he was in office even though it appeared to be helping draw donations overseas.

But Painter says the slide from caring about ethics laws and norms to defiance has hit a new low.

"There's been a deterioration in ethics," he said. "What Biden did wasn't good, but this is worse."

## Israeli forces push deeper into Gaza and destroy its only cancer hospital

By IBRAHIM HAZBOUN, SAM MEDNICK and DAVID RISING Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli forces advanced deeper into the Gaza Strip on Friday and blew up the only specialized cancer hospital in the war-torn territory, as Israeli leaders vowed to capture more land until Hamas releases its remaining hostages.

The hospital was located in the Netzarim Corridor, which splits Gaza in two and was controlled by Israeli troops for most of the 17-month-long war. Israel moved to retake the corridor this week shortly after breaking the ceasefire with Hamas. The truce delivered relative calm to Gaza since late January and facilitated the release of more than two dozen hostages.

The Israeli military said it struck the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital, which was inaccessible to doctors and patients during the war, because Hamas militants were operating in the site. Turkey, which helped build and fund the hospital, said Israeli troops at one point used it as a base.

Dr. Zaki Al-Zaqzouq, head of the hospital's oncology department, said a medical team visited the facility during the ceasefire and found that, while it had suffered damage, some facilities remained in good condition.

"I cannot fathom what could be gained from bombing a hospital that served as a lifeline for so many patients," he said in a statement issued by the aid group Medical Aid for Palestinians.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry condemned the hospital's destruction and accused Israel of deliberately "rendering Gaza uninhabitable and forcibly displacing the Palestinian people."

Hospitals can lose their protected status under international law if they are used for military purposes, but any operations against them must be proportional. Human rights groups and U.N.-backed experts have accused Israel of systematically destroying Gaza's health care system.

Israel warns it will escalate military operations

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.

Defense Minister Israel Katz said Friday that his country would carry out operations in Gaza "with increasing intensity" until Hamas frees the 59 hostages it holds — 24 of whom are believed alive.

"The more Hamas continues its refusal to release the kidnapped, the more territory it will lose to Israel," Katz said.

The Israeli military said Friday its forces were planning fresh assaults into three neighborhoods west of Gaza City, and issued warnings on social media for Palestinians to evacuate the areas.

The warnings came shortly after the military said it intercepted two rockets fired from northern Gaza that set off sirens in the Israeli coastal city of Ashkelon. Hamas had also fired three rockets the previous day in its first attack since Israel ended the ceasefire.

A long-range missile fired by Yemen's Houthi rebels set off air raid sirens over Jerusalem and central Israel for the fourth day in a row Friday, with the military saying it was intercepted.

Israeli forces advance in Gaza's north and south

Israeli troops had moved Thursday toward the northern town of Beit Lahiya and the southern border city of Rafah, and resumed blocking Palestinians from entering northern Gaza, including Gaza City.

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Displaced Palestinians fled northern Gaza along a coastal road Friday carrying their belongings, firewood and other items on horse-drawn carts.

A strike east of Gaza City on Friday killed a couple and their two children, plus two additional children who weren't related to them, according to witnesses and a local hospital. The Israeli army said it struck a militant in a Gaza City building and took steps to minimize civilian harm. It was not immediately clear if the army was referring to the same strike.

And in the southern city of Rafah, Palestinian municipal officials said Israeli bombardments forced residents to move outdoors in rainy weather, deepening their suffering.

Court delays Netanyahu's firing of Israeli security official

In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's push to fire the country's domestic security chief has deepened a power struggle focused largely over who bears responsibility for the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attack that sparked the war in Gaza. It also could set the stage for a crisis over the country's division of powers.

Hours after Netanyahu's Cabinet unanimously approved the firing Ronen Bar, head of the Shin Bet security service, the Supreme Court ordered a temporary halt to his dismissal until an appeal can be heard no later than April 8. Netanyahu's office had said Bar's dismissal was effective April 10, but that it could come earlier.

Israel's attorney general has ruled that the Cabinet has no legal basis to dismiss Bar. However, Netanyahu sounded defiant in a social media post Friday evening, saying: "The State of Israel is a state of law and according to the law, the Israeli government decides who will be the head of the Shin Bet."

Critics say the move is a power grab by the prime minister against an independent-minded civil servant, and tens of thousands of Israelis have demonstrated in support of Bar, including outside Netanyahu's residence on Friday.

Netanyahu has resisted calls for an official state commission of inquiry into the attack and has tried to blame the failures on the army and security agencies.

Hundreds killed in Gaza since ceasefire collapsed

Around 600 Palestinians have been killed since Israel relaunched the war with a wave of predawn air-strikes across Gaza on Tuesday, which came as many families slept or prepared to start the daily fast for the holy month of Ramadan.

Israel had already cut off the supply of food, fuel and humanitarian aid to Gaza's roughly 2 million Palestinians, aiming to pressure Hamas over the ceasefire negotiations.

The attack by Hamas-led militants on Oct. 7, 2023, killed some 1,200 people and took 251 hostages. 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.

## Judge vows to determine if Trump administration ignored order blocking deportation flights

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge examining the Trump administration's use of an 18th-century war-time law to deport Venezuelan immigrants to El Salvador vowed Friday to "get to the bottom" of whether the government defied his order to turn the planes around.

Chief Judge James Boasberg is trying to determine if the administration ignored his turnaround order last weekend when at least two planeloads of immigrants were still in flight.

"I will get to the bottom of whether they violated my order, who ordered this and what the consequences will be," Boasberg said during a hearing for a lawsuit challenging the deportations.

Earlier Friday, the Justice Department informed the judge that top leaders in President Donald Trump's administration are debating whether to invoke a "state secrets privilege" in response to the district judge's

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questions about the deportation flights.

Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche said in a court filing that there are "ongoing Cabinet-level discussions" about Boasberg's demand for more information. Boasberg ordered the Trump administration to either provide more details about the flights or assert a claim that disclosing the information would harm "state secrets."

The Republican administration has largely resisted the judge's request, calling it an "unnecessary judicial fishing" expedition. Boasberg dismissed its response as "woefully insufficient," increasing the possibility that he may hold administration officials in contempt of court.

The Trump administration has transferred hundreds of Venezuelan immigrants to El Salvador under the 18th century law. Flights were in the air last Saturday when Boasberg, orally from the bench, issued an order temporarily barring the deportations and ordered planes to return to the U.S.

The Justice Department has said that the judge's oral 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.

Trump and some Republican allies have called for impeaching Boasberg, who was nominated by President Barack Obama, a Democrat. In a rare statement earlier this week, Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts said "impeachment is not an appropriate response to disagreement concerning a judicial decision."

During Friday's hearing, Boasberg said the Trump administration's invocation of the Alien Enemies Act to deport Venezuelan immigrants carries "incredibly troublesome" policy ramifications.

The act allows noncitizens to be deported without the opportunity to go before an immigration or federal court judge. Trump's Saturday proclamation called the Tren de Aragua gang an invading force.

"Why was this law essentially signed in the dark and these people essentially rushed onto planes?" Boasberg asked. "It seems to be that you only do that if you know it's a problem and you want to get them out of the country before lawsuits can be filed."

Boasberg pressed Justice Department attorney Drew Ensign to explain how Venezuelan immigrants covered by Trump's proclamation can challenge their deportations before they are removed from the U.S. The judge pointed to the U.S. Supreme Court's finding that people imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks were entitled to challenge whether they had any ties to al-Qaida.

Ensign said the Department of Homeland Security is complying with the law during deportations, and people could file challenges individually in Texas, where they were held before being sent to El Salvador.

American Civil Liberties Union attorney Lee Gelernt said the government set up an administrative hearing board during World War II to give people a chance to contest their removal.

"There was not these kind of summary removals," added Gelernt, an attorney for the deported immigrants.

## **Weekslong lockups 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 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.



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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's US-Mexico border program, a non-profit that aids migrants, said in the 22 years he has worked on the border he's 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.

Of course, tourists from countries where the U.S. requires visas — many of them non-Western nations — have long encountered difficulties entering the U.S.

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

Weekslong lockups fuel anxieties about tourist travel to US

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 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 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, U.S. authorities have wide discretion to still deny entry. Following the detentions, Britain and Germany updated their travel advisories to alert people about the strict U.S. border enforcement. The United Kingdom warned "you may be liable to arrest or detention if you break the rules."

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.

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

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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.

'A blatant abuse' of US border authorities' power, victims say

"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 traveling 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 on a U.S. work visa, 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 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.

## **Trump acknowledges concerns over Musk's business interests and says he shouldn't get war plans**

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Friday that war plans should not be shared with his adviser Elon Musk because of his business interests, a rare suggestion that the billionaire entrepreneur's expansive role in the administration will face limits.

Trump made the comments during an Oval Office meeting on developing a new fighter jet, and he rejected reports that Musk would be briefed on how the United States would fight a hypothetical war with China.

"Elon has businesses in China," the Republican president said. "And he would be susceptible, perhaps, to that."

Trump praised Musk as a patriot. However, the reference to his businesses — which include Tesla, an electric vehicle manufacturer trying to expand sales and production in China — is an unusual acknowledgment of concerns about Musk balancing his corporate and government responsibilities.

Trump had previously brushed off questions about Musk's potential conflicts of interest, simply saying that he would steer clear when necessary.

The president said that Musk visited the Pentagon on Friday morning to discuss reducing costs, which he's been working on through the Department of Government Efficiency.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Musk was there "to talk about efficiencies, to talk about innovations."

Musk said while leaving the Pentagon that he was ready to do "anything that could be helpful," according to a CNN video. He also refused to answer questions as to whether he received a classified briefing

on China as part of the visit.

Musk has played an integral role in the Trump administration's push to dramatically reduce the size of the government. He's 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 on Tuesday that roughly 50,000 to 60,000 civilian jobs will be cut in the Defense Department.

## **Trump has ordered the dismantling of the US Education Department. Here's what that means**

By BIANCA VÁZQUEZ TONESS AP Education Writer

President Donald Trump's order calling for the dismantling of the U.S. Education Department has complex implications.

The Republican president has argued the federal office hasn't improved student outcomes and is unnecessary in a country where states and local districts primarily control education from funding to hiring and curriculum.

For decades, right-wing activists have called for eliminating the agency, which was created by Congress in 1979. As Trump remakes the federal government, he has assailed the department as wasteful and responsible for spreading "woke" ideas such as programs to support diversity, equity and inclusion and protections for transgender students.

The department has been largely responsible for oversight, enforcing discrimination laws and distributing aid money for schools with low-income students and students with disabilities. Federal funding makes up a relatively small portion of public school budgets, roughly 14%.

What Trump's order means for American children and teachers

In the short term, students, teachers and parents likely won't see much impact. Long term, it's harder to predict.

It depends how Education Secretary Linda McMahon distributes the mandated functions of the department to other parts of government, including the states.

The biggest question is how the states will distribute the federal money the department sends to help educate students who are poor, disabled or still learning English and need extra support. School systems with weak property tax bases, including those in rural areas, depend on that money to pay teachers, pay for buses and buy classroom technology.

States such as Mississippi and Alaska depend on this money to fund more than 20% of school districts' costs. Advocates worry that without federal oversight, state leaders could spend the money on anything they want, including vouchers to attend private school.

What about student loans? Should college hopefuls still fill out the FAFSA?

Cuts the Trump administration has made already to the Education Department have eliminated hundreds of staff members and contracts dedicated to maintaining the Free Application for Student Aid, or FAFSA, website and helping users navigate the complicated form. But McMahon has said the federal programs will be maintained.

On Friday, Trump said the Small Business Administration would take over the \$1.6 trillion federal student loan portfolio. Conservatives, including former Trump Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, have talked about setting up a quasi-private bank to administer loans.

Users should expect some hiccups. The StudentAid.gov website was down for several hours last week as the remaining department staff tried to troubleshoot an outage.

Will public schools still feed children meals?

School meal programs are funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture so they are not affected by Trump's move to eliminate the Education Department. However, the USDA has cut a \$1 billion coronavirus pandemic-era measure that helped schools and food banks to buy local farm-fresh food.

How soon could the Education Department go away?



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States and other organizations are vowing to bring lawsuits to halt the dismantling of the department, which could slow things down.

Eliminating the department entirely would require an act of Congress. Republicans in Congress are planning legislation to eliminate the agency, but they face heavy opposition from Democrats.

In the meantime, Trump still has plans for the department. Even as he ordered its closure, Trump has tasked the department with rooting out and punishing schools that have diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

## **Democrats' new digital 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 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

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"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 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."

## Colleges cut ties with a little-known nonprofit targeted by the Trump administration over DEI

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.

The Trump administration asked colleges to explain ties to The PhD Project

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.

Colleges tread carefully on inquiries that threaten federal funding

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



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

A campaign against the nonprofit's work began on social media

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."

## **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 on Friday 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, was a major symbolic victory for Sudan's military against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces — though 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 Sudanese soldiers inside the palace, 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 in ruins, with soldiers' stepping on broken tiles. Troops 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.

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"Today the flag is raised, the palace is back and the journey continues until victory is complete," he wrote. Later, curious residents wandered through the palace. Walls stood pockmarked by rifle rounds. Smears of blood led to dead bodies, covered haphazardly with blankets.

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, which has made steady advances in recent months under army chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan.

It also means that the rival RSF fighters, under Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, have been mostly expelled from the capital, Khartoum. 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, said its troops are holding the palace, surrounding ministry buildings and the Arab Market to the south of the complex.

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 in April 2023.

Suleiman Sandal, a politician associated with the RSF, acknowledged the military 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 with 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 besieging RSF.

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

"Commercial supplies and humanitarian aid have been blocked for more than three months due to on-going 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 became the seat of power during the British colonization of Sudan. It also saw some of the first flags of independent Sudan raised in 1956. The complex had also 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 began fighting each other in 2023.

Since the start of the year, Burhan's forces, including Sudan's military and allied militias, have advanced against the RSF. They retook a key refinery north of Khartoum, pushed in on RSF positions around Khartoum 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 militia, the RSF precursor. Rights groups and the U.N. accuse the RSF and allied Arab militias of again attacking ethnic African groups in this latest war.

Since the war began, both the Sudanese military and the RSF have faced allegations of human rights

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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.

## Jonathan Majors is on a redemption tour. For what, he won't say

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Throughout the implosion of his once-skyrocketing Hollywood career, from his arrest almost exactly two years ago to his harassment and assault conviction, Jonathan Majors has maintained that he has never struck a woman.

But on Monday, as Majors was in the midst of a comeback attempt and a PR push that returned him to magazine covers, Rolling Stone published an audio recording of a conversation between Majors and Grace Jabbari. Majors was found guilty of one misdemeanor assault charge and one harassment violation for striking Jabbari in the head with an open hand and breaking her middle finger by squeezing it.

"I aggressed you," Majors acknowledges in the recording, confirming her description of him strangling her and pushing her against a car. The recording appeared to contradict Majors' previous claims and upend his redemption tour just as his film "Magazine Dreams" opens in theaters Friday.

In an interview with The Associated Press on Wednesday, Majors declined to address the recording, and whether he has assaulted women.

"I can't answer that," Majors responded. "I can't speak to that."

Majors says he's changed, but not everyone is convinced

Majors, who was sentenced to probation and settled a lawsuit with Jabbari in November, is striving for an unusually swift rebound following a precipitous downfall. Before his March 2023 arrest, Majors was steering toward years of Marvel stardom and a possible Oscar nomination for Elijah Bynum's "Magazine Dreams," in which he plays a disturbed aspiring bodybuilder prone to violent outbursts.

Two years later, Majors returns to the public eye with a pledge that he's changed just months after completing a year of court-ordered domestic violence counseling. At the same time, he's not directly addressing any of the allegations against him — including those from two previous partners, Emma Duncan and Maura Hooper, who in statements submitted pretrial, detailed physically violent and emotionally abusive incidents that bear some similarities to the Jabbari case.

"It's not something I can talk about legally," Majors says. "I said to my wife the other day, I've changed. I don't recognize myself. I don't recognize that guy. I'm in a completely different place. There's no doubt that I was in turmoil. That guy then didn't have any tools to deal with things. I don't know if I liked the guy then. He was accomplished, he was doing great things in certain ways. But I don't know if I would have hung out with him."

Majors, who sat for an interview at a Manhattan hotel without a publicist present, spoke reflectively about his experience of the past two years — with the exception of anything specifically related to the conviction, the additional abuse allegations or the women who say he harmed them. Despite never naming a misdeed, Majors says he is reformed.

"I'd say to anyone who cares to listen: I've had two years of deep thought and mediation and rumination on myself and my actions, my community, my industry," he said. "I'm stronger now. I'm wiser now. I'm better now."

Not everyone is convinced. Hooper, who met Majors at Yale Drama School and dated him from 2013 to 2015, described a traumatizing and controlling relationship. A year after their relationship ended, Majors learned of her having a relationship with someone he knew, she said. According to Hooper's statement, Majors called her and shamed her for having an abortion, which he had encouraged, and told her to kill herself.

"The level of anger that I experienced from this man, I don't know you exorcise that from your life or your behavior in only 52 weeks," Hooper told the AP. "People go to therapy for years. I went to therapy for years after Jonathan Majors just to get my mind back."



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Hooper and Duncan's statements were ultimately not allowed as evidence during the trial, but they remain public record. Attorneys for Majors have denied some of their claims, describing both relationships as "toxic."

Duncan, who dated and was engaged to Majors from 2015 to 2019, described at least eight physical or threatening encounters in her statement. During an argument in 2016 while driving in Chautauqua, New York, he threatened to strangle and kill her, she said. At a spa in Santa Fe, New Mexico, she discovered text messages between Majors and another woman and began packing to leave. He pushed her into couch and began choking her while saying he was going to kill her, Duncan said. (She didn't respond to an email from the AP seeking comment. Attorneys for Jabbari also didn't respond to emails.)

"There is a documented history of 10 years of abuse of women where he calls women 'sluts,' he calls us 'fat whores,' he tells us to kill ourselves," Hooper says. "When I hear people say, 'Come on, how come he can't come back into the fold?' I don't know that those people have read this or understand that we're talking about a pattern."

Another test of #MeToo in Hollywood

A changed political climate and several recent cases, including the overturning of Harvey Weinstein's New York sexual assault conviction, have suggested Hollywood has entered a new chapter in the #MeToo movement. Majors' attempted comeback is one of the most conspicuous tests to the fraying curbs of cancellation and #MeToo vindication.

"We're suffering a period of tremendous political retrenchment and backlash in this movement," says Debra Katz, the civil rights attorney who represented Christine Blasey Ford, accuser of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, along with Weinstein accusers. "Much of what we've fought for seems to be on the line."

But women are still coming forward, and Katz believes companies and industries will hold the accused accountable. For his part, Majors, who was dropped from all projects following his conviction, has no new films announced. "Magazine Dreams," which debuted at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival before his arrest and was subsequently dropped by Searchlight Pictures, is being released by Briarcliff Entertainment, the indie distributor of "The Apprentice."

"Jonathan made a mistake. There was due process. Justice was served. And then we move on, which I think is generally how we like to think this country operates," Tom Ortenberg, chief executive of Briarcliff, said Thursday. "We're faced with two choices: Should 'Magazine Dreams' be allowed to be seen? Or should we burn the negative?"

Numerous A-listers, including Michael B. Jordan and Matthew McConaughey, have advocated for Majors' return to Hollywood. Still, Katz believes Majors' comeback will ultimately sputter because it hasn't gone beyond the strategy of what she describes as "get a good PR firm and show my soft side."

"I think he's going to suffer a significant comeuppance," says Katz. "He hasn't owned up to the behavior. He hasn't apologized. The only thing he appears to be sorry about is that he got caught."

Majors' past, and where he goes next

For Majors, his self-examination has focused more on an earlier experience he suggests was at the root of what he calls his turmoil.

"There was a lot of trauma that was piled up and ignored. The best way to describe it is it as an energy that unfortunately was there," says Majors. "I was feeding the wrong wolf. And that wolf became unignorable. And I was really good at moving fast and outrunning the rabid wolf of trauma. The best thing that could have happened to me — not to my career but to me — was to have to face it."

Majors, who was raised by his pastor mother in Texas after his father left, says from the age of 9 to about 13, he was the victim of multiple incidents of sexual abuse, from, he says, "two male family members and my sisters' friends who were older than me — they were older than her."

"It felt like kids being kids and then it became something different very quickly," Majors says. "And then it became a pattern."

Majors only recently began wrestling with this past, he says, working through it in therapy and in conversations with his family. A phone call with his sister, he says, reawakened memories.

"It was an experience that I just killed in my head," Majors says, tearing up.

"It's not a boo-hoo-bro, so-sad-for-you situation," he says, wiping away tears. "It's life. It's the hand you're dealt, and I didn't know how to play those cards. I'm learning how to play those cards."

Now, Majors says, he's never been happier. On Tuesday, he and Meagan Good were wed in a small, impromptu ceremony in Los Angeles officiated by his mother. "We called the family and said, 'Hey, jump on FaceTime,'" he says, calling it the best day of his life.

"Magazine Dreams," he thought, would never see the light of day. Now, though, he's hopeful he can act again.

"I now understand that acting is in many ways my ministry. It's in many ways my calling," Majors says. "If it's not, I'm waiting for someone to tell me it's not. I'm waiting for God to tell me it's not. He's not said that."

## **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 strikes even as it agreed to temporarily halt strikes on energy facilities.

The head of the Odesa region, Oleh Kiper, said the city suffered "local emergency power outages" in three of its districts, an indication that the energy infrastructure of the city could have been damaged.

Reacting to the attack, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that "joint pressure on Russia, strengthening sanctions and defense support for our state ... is the way to stop such terror and Russia's prolongation of the war."

"We expect real pressure on Russia from the U.S., Europe and all our partners," Zelenskyy said in a statement on Telegram. "This is what will allow diplomacy to work."

Russia, meanwhile, accused Ukraine of blowing up a gas facility in the Kursk region, where Ukrainian forces have launched an incursion, in violation of the ceasefire deal. Ukraine denies the accusations.

Russian drone attack sparks massive blazes in Odesa

The strike came shortly before Czech Republic President Petr Pavel visited Odesa on Friday morning, meeting 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," Kiper said in a statement. He said there were 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."

Russia accuses Ukraine of blowing up natural gas facility in the Kursk region

Russia's Defense Ministry accused Ukrainian forces of blowing up a gas metering station near the town of Sudzha in Russia's Kursk region, in what it described as a "deliberate provocation by the Kyiv regime, which is part of a series of recent strikes on Russia's energy infrastructure in order to discredit the U.S. president's peaceful initiatives."

Ukraine's military General Staff rejected Moscow's accusations and blamed the Russian military for shelling the Sudzha gas metering station as part of Russia's "discrediting campaign."

The gas metering station serves a major pipeline that had pumped Russia's natural gas to Europe until supplies were halted last year.

Views differ on what is covered by the truce

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.

The three sides appeared to hold starkly different views about what the deal covered. While the White

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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.

Zelenskyy told reporters after Wednesday's call with Trump that "technical" talks in Saudi Arabia this weekend would seek to resolve what types of infrastructure would be protected from attack under the agreement.

Zelenskyy said Ukraine and U.S. negotiators will discuss technical details related to the partial ceasefire during a meeting in Saudi Arabia on Monday. Russian negotiators are set to hold separate talks with U.S. officials there.

I can't tell you how the meeting will end," Zelenskyy said, speaking talking with the Czech leader. "It will be good if the meeting ends with a result that brings us closer to a full ceasefire"

Zelenskyy emphasized that Ukraine is open to a full, 30-day ceasefire that Trump has proposed, saying "we will not be against any format, any steps toward unconditional ceasefire."

Russian President Vladimir Putin has made a complete ceasefire conditional on a halt of arms supplies to Kyiv and a suspension of Ukraine's military mobilization — demands rejected by Ukraine and its Western allies.

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.

Other attacks reported by both sides

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.

## **Best friends Ben McCollum of Drake, Grant McCasland of Texas Tech square off for spot in Sweet 16**

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Basketball Writer

WICHITA, Kan. (AP) — The coaching fraternity is much closer than most people realize. Friendships are formed and relationships kept through all the hirings and firings, and paths cross and cross again as coaches climb and fall on the professional ladder.

Every once in a while, they cross on a stage so big that everybody notices.

So it will be on Saturday night, when Grant McCasland leads third-seeded Texas Tech against Ben McCollum and his team full of Division II transfers from No. 11 seed Drake. At stake for the best friends: a spot in the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament.

"It's just like playing pick-up with your teammates," McCollum said after beating No. 6 seed Missouri in the first round. "When you're playing pick-up, sometimes you kind of get after each other a little bit, but afterwards it's all love."

The 48-year-old McCasland certainly is no stranger to facing familiar faces. The Red Raiders play Big 12 games against his alma mater, Baylor, where he spent five years on the staff of longtime coach Scott



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Drew. And they regularly play Kansas State, which is coached by Jerome Tang, who was on that staff in Waco, Texas, at the same time.

Yet his friendship with the 43-year-old McCollum goes back even farther, way back to their very origins in coaching.

It was the early 2000s and McCasland had just been hired for his first real job, as an assistant at Northeastern Junior College in Sterling, Colorado, where the pay was so modest he felt fortunate to live in the dorms. It was there that McCasland came across Jeff Linder, an assistant at Emporia State, a Division II school in Kansas, who was recruiting some of his guys.

Linder, by the way, is now an assistant on McCasland's staff at Texas Tech.

So fast-forward a couple of years and McCasland gets his first head-coaching job at Midland, a junior college in Texas. One of his first calls was to Linder, who joined his staff, and together they went to the national tournament their first year.

The guy that replaced Linder at Emporia State: Ben McCollum, a young man happy to land a first full-time job of his own.

The three of them grew close — they were all just starting out, after all. They'd spend hours discussing offensive and defensive strategy, and how to build a winning culture. They leaned on each other when times got hard and applauded every success.

"We were young," McCasland said, "and we didn't make any money, and we all loved ball. We loved being around each other."

McCasland eventually got the head job at North Texas, the one he parlayed into his current position at Texas Tech, and McCollum got his shot as a head coach at Northwest Missouri State, which he quickly turned into a Division II juggernaut. But even as their professional paths diverged, their personal relationship only grew closer through the years.

Their families get together in offseasons. They call each other up when they're in a rut. They go trout fishing together.

McCasland remembers one year at North Texas that he thought his team had a pretty good offense. It was the nation's No. 1 team when it came to scoring out of timeouts. He had installed some creative movements, and McCasland was proud of it.

"Ben watched film of our team," he recalled, "and straight-up told me our offense sucked."

"You know, that's the kind of relationship we have," continued McCasland, who on at least one occasion tried to hire McCollum to his staff. "I love him, but you know, when you play him, it's going to be different."

McCasland may have missed his chance to hire him, by the way.

In McCollum's first year leading the Bulldogs, and with a team relying heavily on the four transfers he brought with him from Northwest Missouri State, McCollum has already set a school record with 31 wins. They won Missouri Valley regular- and postseason titles, snapped a four-game losing streak in NCAA Tournament first-round games, and on Saturday, McCollum will be trying to get Drake to the Sweet 16 for the first time since 1971.

Not surprisingly, his name has been linked to just about every coaching vacancy in the game. One in particular keeps surfacing: Iowa. He was born in Iowa City, in the shadows of the university, and grew up in the small western Iowa town of Storm Lake. He spent a stint playing ball at North Iowa Area Community College.

McCollum batted back any talk of other jobs this week. He insisted that his only focus is on what Drake is doing right now.

Right now, the Bulldogs are getting ready to play his old friend and his Red Raiders in the NCAA Tournament.

"We'll always be friends," McCasland said, "but tomorrow, I guess, it will be on."

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## **Today in History: March 22, The Beatles release their first album**

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, March 22, the 81st day of 2024. There are 284 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 22, 1963, The Beatles' debut album, "Please Please Me," was released in the United Kingdom on the Parlophone record label.

Also on this date:

In 1765, the British Parliament passed the Stamp Act to raise money from the American colonies, which fiercely resisted the tax. (The Stamp Act was repealed a year later.)

In 1894, ice hockey's first Stanley Cup championship game was played, in which the Montreal Hockey Club defeated the Ottawa Hockey Club, 3-1.

In 1933, during the Prohibition Era, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Cullen-Harrison Act, which allowed the sale of beer and wine with an alcohol content of 3.2%. (Prohibition would be fully repealed nine months later with the ratification of the 21st Amendment.)

In 1941, the Grand Coulee hydroelectric dam in Washington state officially went into operation; it remains the largest capacity power station in the United States.

In 1945, the Arab League was formed with the adoption of a charter in Cairo, Egypt.

In 1972, in the Eisenstadt vs. Baird decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that unmarried people had the same right to possess and use contraception as did married people.

In 1978, Karl Wallenda, the 73-year-old patriarch of "The Flying Wallendas" high-wire act, fell to his death while attempting to walk a cable strung between two hotel towers in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

In 1993, Intel Corp. unveiled the original Pentium computer chip.

In 2019, former President Jimmy Carter became the longest-living chief executive in American history; at 94 years and 172 days, he exceeded the lifespan of the late former President George H.W. Bush. (Carter would die at age 100 in December 2024.)

In 2021, 10 people were killed in a mass shooting at a King Soopers supermarket in Boulder, Colorado. (The shooter, Ahmad Alissa, was sentenced to life in prison without parole in September 2024.)

Today's Birthdays: Artist Yayoi Kusama is 96. Actor William Shatner is 94. Former U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins is 84. Musician George Benson is 82. Writer James Patterson is 78. TV journalist Wolf Blitzer is 77. Composer Andrew Lloyd Webber is 77. Sportscaster Bob Costas is 73. Actor Lena Olin is 70. Singer-actor Stephanie Mills is 68. Actor Matthew Modine is 66. Football Hall of Famer Jim Covert is 65. Actor-comedian Keegan-Michael Key is 54. Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Calif., is 52. Actor Reese Witherspoon is 49. Actor Constance Wu is 43. Former NFL defensive end J.J. Watt is 36.