

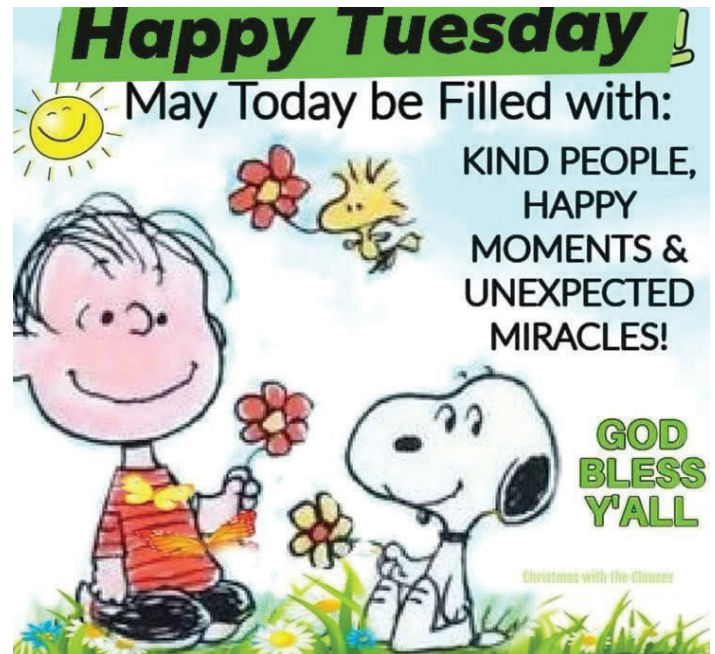
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Tuesday, March 25

Senior Menu: Sloppy joe on bun, oven roasted potatoes, corn, fruited Jell-O.
School Breakfast: Waffles.
School Lunch: Chicken strips, tri taters.
Milbank FFA CDE
NSU Indoor Track Meeting, 1 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Lenten Supper (Host-Nigeria Circle), 6 p.m.; Worship, 7 p.m.
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.



Wednesday, March 26

Senior Menu: Pork chop, scalloped potatoes, winter blend, oranges, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Muffins.
School Lunch: Quesadilla, southwest corn.
Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.
Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Lenten Service, 7 p.m.
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Thursday, March 27

Senior Menu: Beef noodle stroganoff, mixed vegetables, pineapple, cookie, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.
School Lunch: Old school chili, cornbread.

Friday, March 28

Senior Menu: Meatballs, mashed potato and gravy, carrots, strawberry ambrosia, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Egg wraps.
School Lunch: Garlic cheese bread, cooked carrots.

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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.

Trump Targets Venezuela

President Donald Trump yesterday announced 25% tariffs on any trade with countries that buy oil or gas from Venezuela to pressure Venezuela over alleged Tren de Aragua ("the train of Aragua") gang infiltration into the US. The tariffs will begin April 2, though it is unclear how they will work. China is Venezuela's largest buyer of oil and gas.

In related news, a federal judge upheld a temporary order blocking the Trump administration from deporting accused Venezuelan gang members under the 1798 Alien Enemies Act. The judge said the order should remain in place to allow Venezuelan migrants the chance to challenge claims that they belong to the Tren de Aragua gang. A federal appeals court also heard arguments on the issue yesterday afternoon. The legal developments come after Venezuela agreed over the weekend to accept deportation flights of undocumented migrants in the US.

Tren de Aragua was founded in 2014 in Venezuela's Tócoron prison and has since expanded its operations across Latin America and into the US.

23andMe Goes Bankrupt

23andMe has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and announced the resignation of CEO and cofounder Anne Wojcicki. The move follows months of turmoil for the genetic testing giant and raises concerns for over 15 million customers about what happens to their personal health data.

Founded in 2006, 23andMe attracted millions of consumers seeking insight into their ancestry and genetic profiles, having sold more than 12 million saliva-based testing kits globally. The company's valuation peaked in 2021 at nearly \$6B after going public and has since fallen to under \$50M. Struggles to create a viable business model have caused 23andMe's shares to decline significantly in recent years. Profitability plummeted after a 2023 data breach that impacted nearly 7 million users, decreasing demand and harming the business's reputation. The company plans to continue operations and seeks new ownership to cut costs and resolve liabilities.

23andMe claims it won't change its current data protection policies, yet critics warn about potential privacy risks and suggest consumers delete their data.

SCOTUS Leaves Libel Standard

The US Supreme Court yesterday declined to hear a case brought by casino mogul Steve Wynn asking for the justices to overturn or narrow *New York Times v. Sullivan*, a 1964 case that established the nation's strict threshold for what constitutes libel.

Wynn originally sued the Associated Press in 2018 after a story referenced a pair of police reports regarding sexual misconduct in the 1970s, accusing the reporters of libel (the suit was dismissed by a Nevada court). The six-decade-old *Sullivan* ruling established a high threshold for libel, requiring "actual malice" be demonstrated—generally meaning plaintiffs must show the authors either knew the content was false or acted with reckless disregard to its veracity. Legal analysts said a reexamination of the decision may ultimately lower that standard, removing protections for reporting on public figures.

Separately, the court heard oral arguments yesterday challenging Louisiana's updated congressional map, which was redrawn last year to include a second majority-Black district. The state—whose population is roughly one-third Black—previously only had one (of six) majority Black districts.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Ari Emanuel steps down as CEO of Endeavor, the talent agency he founded in 1995, as part of deal to take the company private; Emanuel will remain as CEO of TKO Group, which owns WWE and UFC.

NCAA women's basketball tournament Sweet 16 field set; see latest bracket.

University of Virginia women win record-tying fifth straight NCAA swimming and diving championship.

French actor Gérard Depardieu's sexual assault trial begins; Depardieu is accused of sexually assaulting two crew members on a movie set in 2021.

Science & Technology

UK officials report world's first known case of H5N1, also known as the bird flu, in sheep; risk to general public remains low, health officials express concern the strain could mutate into more dangerous strain.

Marathon runners metabolize brain-cell insulation known as myelin as fuel during races; MRI study shows brain recovers over the course of around two months.

Mathematicians decode patterns of how people walk in large crowds; model allows predictions of when crowd movement transitions from orderly to chaotic.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +1.8%, Dow +1.4%, Nasdaq +2.3%) as President Donald Trump signals he might exempt some countries from reciprocal tariffs expected April 2.

South Korean conglomerate Hyundai announces \$21B US investment, which includes \$5.8B steel plant in Louisiana.

Georgia jury orders Monsanto parent Bayer to pay nearly \$2.1B in damages to man who says Roundup weed killer caused his cancer; Bayer faces more than 177,000 lawsuits involving the weed killer.

Politics & World Affairs

Atlantic Editor-in-Chief Jeffrey Goldberg says US National Security Adviser Mike Waltz mistakenly included him in Signal group chat where Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth shared details of military plans against Yemen's Houthi rebels.

US Postmaster General Louis DeJoy resigns after five years in the role.

Turkey detains more than 1,100 people following mass protests after Istanbul's Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu was arrested over corruption charges; İmamoğlu had emerged as a key rival to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Oscar-winning Palestinian director of "No Other Land" documentary reportedly attacked by Jewish settlers in the West Bank and detained by Israeli military.

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Two Groton Area DI teams advance to state

The East Region Destination Imagination Tournament was held Saturday in Webster with two Groton Area teams taking first place. These two teams will advance to the state competition April 5 in Pierre.

The Improvisational Challenge Team "Triple As" composed of Ava Strom, Aryanna Cutler, Freddy Cole, Aschar Warrington and Conrad Rix took first. Their team manager is Julie Milbrandt.

The Fine Arts Challenge Team "The Seven Pentagoni Pickles" also took first with team members Jernie Weig, Willow Cowan, Taylor Fliehs, Calvin Locken, Rowan Hanson, Titan Johnson and Gideon Rix, Their team manager is Julie Milbrandt.

Two non-competing teams took part in the tournament as they presented their solutions to their challenges.



Two Groton Area DI Alumni came back to help volunteer at the East Region South Dakota Destination Imagination Tournament. Katie Groebelinghoff was the Head Appraiser for the Improv Challenge and stepped in as Head Appraiser for the Early Learning challenge also. Nathan Fjelstad helped as an Instant Challenge Appraiser. (Photo from Groton Area

Destination Imagination Facebook Page)

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Early Learning Challenge Team "Go Lightning"-Landon Buntrock, Ivy Cole, Emme Fliehs, Zoey Strom, not pictured Roscoe Rix, Team Manager Becah Fliehs. (Photo from Groton Area Destination Imagination Facebook Page)



Early Learning Challenge Team "Funtunz"-Aspen Cowan, Laker Hanson, Sunny Washenberger, Nova Washenberger, Mya Fliehs, Jorie Locken, not pictured Team Manager Laura Arth. (Photo from Groton Area Destination Imagination Facebook Page)

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These Groton Area DI teams are state bound

Fine Arts Challenge Team "The Seven Pentagoni Pickles"- Receiving 1st Place: Jernie Weig, Willow Cowan, Taylor Fliehs, Calvin Locken, in front-Rowan Hanson, not pictured Titan Johnson, Gideon Rix, Team Manager Julie Milbrandt. (Photo from Groton Area Destination Imagination Facebook Page)



Improvitational Challenge Team "Triple A's"-Receiving 1st Place: Ava Strom, Aryanna Cutler, Freddy Cole, Aschar Warrington, not pictured Conrad Rix and Team Manager Julie Milbrandt. (Photo from Groton Area Destination Imagination Facebook Page)

Prioritizing building projects, classroom space issues discussed during Monday's school board meeting

by Elizabeth Varin

The Groton Area School District board held vague discussion about evaluating and prioritizing building projects at Monday's meeting.

A recent Buildings, Grounds and Transportation Committee meeting between board members Tigh Fliehs, TJ Harder, Grant Rix and Superintendent Joe Schwan rekindled discussion about turning the football field into a multi-use sports complex.

If the district wants to move forward with projects like changing out the ground to turf or leveling the field, it's going to have to be a board decision, Fliehs said.

Harder added he thinks they should put a timeline together for fundraising efforts and see what interest there is.

While a bulk of discussion at the committee meeting was about the athletic complex, the board will have to lead a multi-year discussion and plan on retrofitting areas of the middle/high school, said Superintendent Schwan. It's important to start looking at what the scope of that will be, what the public will support, what a modern school design looks like, what technology should be included and what needs the district may face.

The biggest need through multiple areas of the district is a lack of space, he said. The board will have to look at what to do with older parts of the building in the not-to-distant future.

It will be at least two years of planning, plus maybe a year to discuss it with local stakeholders, Schwan said. Something like that would have to go to a bond vote.

Middle/high school Principal Shelby Edwards added the district will start having problems that are going to force the board to make decisions.

It's a great idea to start planning, said board member Nick Strom. Interest rates may be on a downward slope after recent historically high rates.

"You can't take advantage of any of that stuff if you're not planning," he said. "I think it's a good idea to start, even if we're not doing anything for years. We'd be ready to act if there's a time there is something financing-wise."

Board member Fliehs asked Business Manager Becky Hubsch to share how much is available in the capital outlay fund. She replied that administrators are working on the budget now, including reviewing some of the capital outlay five-year plan.

Schwan asked the board to give them a couple of days to finish reviewing those funds and see what impacts may come as the state legislation session ends.

Problems with space coming

Middle and high school English/language arts teachers presented an overview of their curriculum and issues on the horizon.

Sarah Hanten, high school English teacher; Diane Kurtz, middle school/high school English teacher; and Mary Johnson, middle school reading/social studies teacher, presented an overview of their classes and upcoming challenges they face. One major concern is a lack of classroom space, especially with larger classes moving to the middle/high school.

Kurtz said she currently has 36 seventh graders, 38 eighth graders and 41 ninth graders, with each grade level split into two sections. The current sixth-grade class is quite a bit larger, with about 55 students.

There's not enough room in her classroom for more desks, Kurtz said. It's going to be a huge issue.

The issue stems from a decade ago when English teacher positions were cut, she said. Now, instead of three sections per grade, students are split between two sections, and Kurtz's and Johnson's classrooms are small.

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Yeigh resigns as instrumental music teacher

The board accepted the resignation of Desiree Yeigh, 5-12 instrumental music teacher, at the end of the 2024-2025 school year.

In a letter to the board, Yeigh said she has accepted a teaching position in Aberdeen, where her family currently lives.

The district is now accepting applications for the 5-12 instrumental music teacher, as well as other open positions including first grade teacher, maintenance team member, activity trip bus driver and more.

- Groton resident Beverly Sombke addressed the board during the public comment session of the meeting. Sombke fell in December 2023 because of an issue with a grate near the school arena. She thanked the board for fixing the problem that caused her fall. "I don't want anyone else to go through that," she said. She also thanked the board for taking care of her medical bills from that incident.

- Middle school/high school Principal Shelby Edwards reported the last day for seniors will be May 8. Also, prom is scheduled for April 12.

- The board approved volunteer track coaches Carla Tracy and Bruce Babcock.

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Superintendent's Report to the Groton Area School District 06-6 Board of Education

March 24, 2025

State Accreditation Review. Our accreditation review is officially completed and approved. We received our accreditation certificate last week. Our next review is scheduled for the 2029-2030 school year.

Property/Liability Insurance. Dissinger Reed is not able to provide us a quote for property liability insurance. We'll continue to work through CorInsurance to get renewal rates through EMC and alternative options, if there are any.

Staff Vacancies. We currently have the following vacancies on staff:

First Grade Teacher [Close Date: Wednesday, March 26]

5-12 Instrumental Music Teacher [Close Date: Wednesday, April 16]

Full-Time Maintenance Team Member

Staff Negotiations. As a reminder, we'll be holding staff negotiations meetings next week with the certified staff (Wednesday, April 2) and the auxiliary staff (Thursday, April 3).

Legislative Session. Veto day is scheduled for Monday, March 31.

HB1039 An Act to repeal the programs reimbursing a teacher or school counselor for earning national board certification [Signed by Governor].

HB1040. An Act to reduce the state's contribution to a subsidized high school dual credit program [Signed by Governor].

HB1059. An Act to clarify the meaning of teleconference for purposes of open meeting requirements [Waiting Governor's Signature].

HB1068. An Act to allow a student to wear certain military decorations at a school graduation ceremony [Signed by Governor].

HB1092. An Act to make an appropriation for a student teacher stipend grant program [Signed by Governor].

HB1093. An Act to require the board of a school district to hold a bond election at the primary or general election [Signed by Governor].

HB1094. An Act to modify laws regarding school bus safety and to provide a penalty therefor [Signed by Governor].

HB1130. An Act to provide permissible dates for municipal and school district elections [Waiting Governor's Signature].

HB1222. An Act to expand the authorized carrying, possession, and storage of a concealed pistol [Waiting Governor's Signature].

HB1239. An Act to revise certain affirmative defenses to dissemination of material harmful to minors and obscenity defenses-provisions related to the restriction of access to obscene materials in a public library or public school library [Signed by Governor].

HB1259. An Act to prohibit unauthorized access to multi-occupancy rooms and to provide a penalty therefor [Signed by Governor].

SB55. An Act to revise property tax levies for school districts and to revise the state aid to general and special education formulas [Waiting Governor's Signature].

General Fund Levies for taxes payable in 2026: Other/Commercial: \$5.211

Ag: \$1.125

Owner Occupied: \$2.518

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SB70. An Act to modify the maximum sparsity benefit a sparse school district is eligible to receive [Signed by Governor].

SB71. An Act to revise provisions pertaining to the compulsory age for school attendance [Signed by Governor].

SB74. An Act to require the publication and review of an explanation of the open meeting laws of this state [Signed by Governor].

SB113. An Act to provide protections for parental rights [Passed Conference Committee].

SB216. An Act to reduce the growth in the assessed value of owner-occupied property tax assessments [Signed by Governor].

SB219. An Act to require the acceptance of cash payment for admission to a school-affiliated event [Signed by Governor].

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School Board Meeting Principal Report

MS/HS- Shelby Edwards

03/24/2025

Class Counts-

6th- 54

7th- 38

8th- 42

9th- 45

10th- 37

11th- 44

12th- 44

New Total- 303 Students

- Prom **April 12th**- Will be handing out forms this week
- Last day for seniors will be **May 8th**
- Scheduling and Completing Spring Formal Teacher Evaluations

Spring 2025 State Testing Dates

- Grades 6-8 & 11 ELA & Math: April 7-11
- Grades 5, 8 & 11 Science: April 14-17
- Grades 3-5 ELA & Math: April 22-25
- Spring ACT tomorrow March 25th
- Congratulations to boys basketball in their 7th place finish at state
- Congratulations to our cheerleaders on the Spirit of Six Award, second year in a row!

Social Security Increases Transparency and Accountability

Shares More Information Online

The Social Security Administration (SSA) announced today several new initiatives and resources to promote greater transparency and accountability.

"President Trump has been clear that good government must serve the People. This begins with being transparent in how its government makes decisions and operates as good stewards of the resources entrusted to it," said Lee Dudek, Acting Commissioner of Social Security. "With this guiding principle in mind, Social Security is taking several important steps to increase transparency and accountability in order to help others understand our agency's work and the complexities we navigate."

What to Know about Proving Your Identity: SSA recently announced it is strengthening identity proofing requirements for people who do not use a personal my Social Security account to apply for cash benefits or to change direct deposit information for benefits. To help the public understand the new policy, SSA today published a new webpage, What to Know about Proving Your Identity | SSA.

Weekly Operational Report Meetings: Acting Commissioner Dudek meets with his senior leadership team throughout the week to tackle a range of challenges facing the agency. During the Weekly Operational Report (WOR) meeting, leaders focus on specific topics, the options presented to the acting commissioner, and the resulting decisions made during these meetings. Beginning March 14, 2025, each WOR is recorded and published to SSA's YouTube channel. The WOR Playlist is available here: SSA Weekly Operational Report Meetings

Agency Actions: Acting Commissioner Dudek also published online a summary of select agency challenges, options presented, and the Acting Commissioner's ultimate decisions. SSA plans to update this page periodically to include notable matters the current Administration is solving. Agency Actions | SSA

National 800 Number Wait Times: The American people do not receive the prompt customer service they deserve when calling the agency's 800 number. Despite the knowledge, dedication, and experience of SSA's telephone representatives, customers wait too long to speak with a representative. People deserve to know the wait time challenges they will face if unable to use the agency's secure and convenient online services. Acting Commissioner Dudek is increasing the level of detail shared with the public to provide an honest and transparent view of wait times. Social Security Performance | SSA and Contact Social Security By Phone

Efficiencies and Cost Avoidance: SSA works closely with the General Services Administration to identify unused and underutilized office space. SSA published its Efficiencies and Cost Avoidance webpage that lists soft-term lease terminations, including an explanation for each location and whether any change affects the public or not. For nearly all locations, the space being terminated is only a small room within the larger Social Security office location.

Workforce Update: SSA identified opportunities to optimize its workforce by offering voluntary opportunities to depart the agency or move to a frontline customer service position. The Workforce Update | News | SSA webpage briefly explains each voluntary option and how many employees accepted that option.

Lincoln County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash
Where: US Highway 18, mile marker 429, near Lennox, SD
When: 10:29 a.m., Thursday, March 20, 2025
Driver 1: 21-year-old male from Viborg, SD, fatal injuries
Vehicle 1: 2003 Honda Civic
Seat belt Used: Under investigation
Driver 2: 57-year-old male from Parker, SD, no injuries
Vehicle 2: Semi with oversize load/farm equipment
Seat belt Used: Yes
Passenger 2a: 75-year-old female from Sioux Falls, SD, no injuries
Seat belt Used: Yes

Lincoln County, S.D.- A Viborg, SD man passed away Saturday evening from injuries sustained in a two-vehicle crash Thursday, March 20 near Lennox, SD.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2003 Honda Civic was traveling eastbound on US Highway 18 and drifted into the westbound lane, colliding with an oncoming semi hauling farm equipment. The driver and a passenger in the semi were not injured. The driver of the Civic was taken to a Sioux Falls hospital and passed away as a result of those injuries on the evening of March 22.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

Bridge Replacement Project Scheduled to Begin on U.S. Highway 12 East of Mina

ABERDEEN, S.D. – Beginning on Monday, April 7, 2025, a bridge replacement project is scheduled to begin over Snake Creek on U.S. Highway 12 east of Mina. Traffic on Highway 12 will be directed to use the on-site diversion around the construction project area.

The primary contractor for this \$5.7 million project is RR Schroeder Construction, Inc. of Glenwood, MN. The overall project completion date is Nov. 7, 2025.

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**SOUTH DAKOTA
NEWS WATCH**

Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

Bird flu in SD: Millions of birds dead, worry shifts to humans

Bart Pfankuch - South Dakota News Watch

BRIDGEWATER, S.D. – As bird flu ravages poultry farms across the country – including in South Dakota – fears are growing that the highly contagious avian influenza virus could mutate and begin to spread widely among the world's human population.

The virus already has caused devastating effects in the state, which has seen the second-highest number of outbreaks in commercial poultry flocks in the nation.

The 114 commercial outbreaks in South Dakota, along with another 26 backyard flock infections, have led to the death or intentional killing of more than 6 million turkeys, chickens and other birds, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Many of the outbreaks in the state, the latest coming in January, have been at turkey farms operated by Hutterite colonies in the eastern half of the state, including at the Oaklane Hutterite Colony near Bridgewater.

But in 2024, the virus was detected in a flock of farm-raised pheasants in South Dakota, leading to the killing of about 30,000 of the birds that draw hunters from around the world each fall. As in other states, the virus has also spread to mammals in the state, causing the death of a handful of cattle and more than a dozen domestic cats.

So far, no human cases have been reported in South Dakota. Nationally, however, about 70 people have been sickened by the virus, mostly farm workers or veterinarians who were exposed to infected birds or cattle. In January, an elderly resident of Louisiana with underlying medical conditions became the first person to die of bird flu in the U.S. after being exposed to sick birds.

166 million birds destroyed

The current outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, or H5N1 virus, began in the U.S. in February 2022. Since then, the virus has been detected in all 50 states, causing more than 1,600 individual outbreaks in commercial and backyard poultry flocks and leading to the death or euthanasia of 166 million chickens, turkeys and other birds.

While the most tangible outcome of bird flu for consumers has been the rising cost of eggs and chicken breasts, a different, more ominous concern is rising among scientists and public health officials who closely monitor bird flu and study ways to prevent its spread.

There has been no known human-to-human spread of bird flu so far in the U.S, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And yet, numerous scientists are becoming concerned that bird flu could become the next pandemic and potentially cause devastating consequences to human populations across the world.

"We're afraid this virus could cause a human pandemic because humans have very little immunity against this particular avian flu virus," Scott Hensley, a leading bird flu researcher at the University of Pennsylvania, said in a January video presentation. "The problem is that flu viruses acquire mutations all the time. And we know that the virus is only one or two mutations away from being able to cause severe disease in humans."

The current risk to humans, especially those outside the agriculture industry, remains "very low," according to the CDC. So far, the bird flu virus has not been found to bind well to human cells or take hold in the human respiratory system.

But the virus has already shown a ready ability to mutate, not unlike how the Influenza A and B and COVID-19 viruses show slight mutations each year. Bird flu can be spread through direct contact, by breathing airborne particles or through shared water sources.

The spread of infection from wild migrating birds to captive poultry flocks, and the subsequent mutations from birds to bovines and now cats is a cause for alarm, said Todd Tetrow, the director of veterinary

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services at Dakota Provisions, a large turkey processing company in Huron.

"It can jump species, so anytime there's virus out there, and other species can be exposed, it can sure jump," Tetrow told News Watch. "Anytime it jumps into a new species, there's more concern and thoughts that this thing is getting to where it's scary for humans."

Turkey farms hit hard by bird flu

South Dakota has been a hotbed for bird flu infections for two reasons.

The state is along the flyway for many species of migratory birds, which are the known carriers of the virus.

Also, South Dakota is a major producer of turkeys that are mainly raised indoors within concentrated animal feeding operations. The state also has smaller chicken and pheasant breeding operations that can be susceptible to bird flu outbreaks.

The 41 Hutterite turkey producers who make up the farmer-owned Dakota Provisions cooperative have suffered so many bird flu outbreaks in the past three years that the group has purchased its own industrial firefighting foam system. Firefighting foam, which eliminates oxygen when dispensed, is the current preferred method of quickly and efficiently "depopulating" a flock of infected birds.

The Oaklane Hutterite Colony west of Sioux Falls has endured two bird flu outbreaks in the past two years, which in total required the killing of about 21,000 adult turkeys and poults, said colony director John Wipf.

On both occasions, Wipf said, he noticed that water consumption among his turkeys had fallen, and some birds showed signs of malaise and a few died. Both times, birds were sent to South Dakota State University for confirmation that bird flu was the cause.

When any bird is infected, all birds from that barn must be destroyed, he said. The USDA sends in experts to monitor the killing, which was done by a local firefighting agency.

Watching his flocks be depopulated is heart wrenching, he said.

"The smallest ones really wanted to live and they tried to climb on top of the foam, but it wouldn't hold them up," he said.

Dead birds are then composted in a landfill onsite, and the barns must then be sanitized and approved by the USDA before reopening.

The value of the lost birds was likely about \$300,000, though the federal government indemnifies farms for bird flu and pays farmers an adjusted amount to cover most losses.

Wipf said he takes precautions to prevent further infection, such as requiring staff to wear boots and other protective clothing, and by keeping things clean and disinfected.

He isn't sure how his flocks became infected, but he believes migratory birds are the likely culprits.

"It's a bad luck situation for sure because it's very difficult to diagnose where it came from and how it got in here," Wipf said. "We have no clue, but I think part of it was bird migration, geese and ducks that fly over and poop on the barn and our materials. Or it could have been brought in by wild birds that get into the barns."

Pheasant farmers lose major flock

The bird flu outbreak that struck the Gisi Pheasant Farm near Ipswich, 30 miles west of Aberdeen, began with a single bird testing positive in December 2023, according to farm co-owner Loretta Omland. Ultimately, three positive tests for bird flu were confirmed, she said.

To the family members that run the farm, the flu cases appeared isolated to one of six barns at their breeding operation at nearby Craven. No other birds appeared to be sick or dying in those barns or at other locations in Wessington Springs and Miller, Omland said.

Suddenly, the family found itself embroiled in a difficult, emotionally draining effort to save their other breeders and hens. Gisi Farms in 2022 provided about 480,000 ringneck pheasants to a large number of customers that mostly include South Dakota hunting resorts and preserves.

In the days following the positive tests, they ran up against USDA officials who were unwilling to make exceptions to rules stating that entire flocks of birds must be destroyed quickly, even if only one or a few birds test positive for bird flu.

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"We told them, 'We don't care about indemnification,' because those were our birds," Omland told News Watch. "I had to call all these customers and tell them that we can't get your birds, and that affects the restaurants, the grocery stores, the preserves and all these people in the hospitality and hunting industries."

The family sought the help of the South Dakota state veterinarian and the state congressional delegation to ask for an exception that would allow them to mitigate the loss of birds and investment.

"The USDA came back and said that if we didn't kill those birds, we'd be in jeopardy of losing indemnification and that South Dakota could be in violation of international trade laws," Omland said.

The family ultimately relented and agreed to the killing of about 30,000 pheasants, later receiving roughly \$1 million in indemnification that did not cover their full losses and cleanup costs, Omland said.

"It was horrible, just horrible because those were all healthy birds," she said.

Since then, Gisi Farms has enhanced its biosecurity efforts to prevent further outbreaks, Omland said.

"We test and test and test and clean and clean and clean, but you can only get so far in what you do," she said. "You do everything you can, but at the end of the day, you just say more prayers."

Research and prevention steps underway

News is breaking almost weekly about the impacts of bird flu and the efforts of the scientific community to slow or stop its spread and to reduce its ability to infect humans.

In January, a new strain of bird flu called H5N9 was determined to be the source of infection of a commercial duck farm in California. While that new strain was not seen as more infectious or dangerous to birds or humans, scientists said it shows how quickly the virus is mutating.

In mid-March, thousands of geese were found dead in and along Lake Byron in Beadle County and state game officials said they believe bird flu was the cause of the mass die-off.

Some experts worry that if separate viruses intermingle – such as a person who has influenza A is then exposed to H5N1 – that a cross-virus mutation could occur and open the door to greater human infections or birth of a virus that can spread among humans.

In December, the USDA launched its National Milk Testing Strategy, which among other things tests milk held in silos for H5N1 prior to distribution to humans. South Dakota is one of 45 states to sign up for silo testing.

The CDC, USDA and Food and Drug Administration are all working to monitor bird flu outbreaks and spread. The USDA has created an easy-to-navigate website where bird flu data is tracked by state and the CDC has a bird flu information page.

The farm-level response to bird flu in South Dakota has centered around close monitoring of bird health and behavior and through testing of poultry flocks prior to slaughter, Tetrow said.

Some farmers in South Dakota and other states have used cannons or fireworks to scare away migratory birds or have tried to eliminate ponds where migratory birds congregate near their barns.

Tetrow said he hopes the agricultural, governmental and scientific communities can work together to take more steps to evaluate the causes and effects of bird flu and take preventative methods to slow its spread.

"I'd like to see us reevaluate what we're going to see if there are more approaches and tools we can add to our toolbox to fight this," he said.

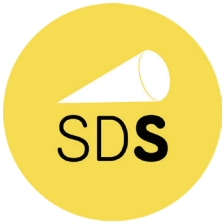
The USDA in February gave conditional approval to a bird flu vaccine for poultry, made by the firm Zoetis. But to date, the U.S. has not followed the path of other countries such as China, Mexico and some European countries where use of poultry vaccines is widespread.

Tetrow, who spent more than a decade working in the South Dakota state veterinarian's office, said he supports the concept of vaccinating poultry in order to protect both bird and human populations.

"It won't prevent infection, but it decreases mortality and the amount of virus that is shed," he said. "If we can find a vaccine that can do those things, I think we need to figure out how to employ that."

Hensley, the University of Pennsylvania biologist, said a major goal of ongoing research is to develop a human vaccine. "We want to be able to respond if this virus acquires the mutations that are needed to effectively transmit from human to human," he said.

This story was produced by South Dakota News Watch, an independent, nonprofit organization. Read more stories and donate at sdnewswatch.org and sign up for an email to get stories when they're published. Contact Bart Pfankuch at bart.pfankuch@sdnewswatch.org.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

South Dakota governor signs bills allowing concealed handguns at bars and colleges

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 24, 2025 2:47 PM

South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden signed bills into law Monday that allow concealed pistols in bars and on public college campuses, among other gun rights-related changes.

"One of my favorite things about South Dakota is how much we respect freedom — especially our Second Amendment freedom," Rhoden said during a bill-signing ceremony at Boyds Gunstocks in Mitchell.

One bill allows people with an enhanced concealed-carry permit, or a reciprocal permit from another state, to carry concealed pistols on state university and technical college campuses. Requirements for an enhanced permit include a background check and completion of a handgun course. Types of enhanced permits are available to people as young as 18.

Pistols and ammunition must be stored in a locked case or safe when not being carried. Institutions may restrict firearms and ammunition in air-quality-controlled labs, locations requiring a security clearance, special events with metal detectors and armed security, and labs with flammable liquids, dangerous chemicals and hazardous gases.

The bill received few no votes but was the subject of impassioned testimony, including from Rep. Jim Halverson, R-Winner, a former state trooper who expressed concerns to his House colleagues about gun safety amid teenagers.

"A locked box in a dorm room just doesn't seem like a good plan," Halverson said.

Another bill prevents local governments from adopting any policy that restricts the concealed carry of firearms by their employees, officers and volunteers. It applies to government buildings, facilities and vehicles.

The portion of that bill that received the most pushback from opponents was a last-minute addition repealing a section of state law that bans concealed carry in bars.

"It's unfortunate that this change didn't even get a committee hearing," said Nathan Sanderson of the South Dakota Retailers Association, in response to South Dakota Searchlight questions. "Small business owners deserved the opportunity to share how this law would impact them."

Rhoden said the concerns raised about the bills are the same ones raised in the recent past about "constitutional carry," which allows people to carry a concealed handgun without a permit. Rhoden's predecessor, Kristi Noem, signed that bill into law in 2019.

"There was a lot of wringing of the hands and speculation about what could happen with constitutional carry," Rhoden said. "None of that proved to be true."

A report from the state Department of Health shows gun deaths in South Dakota increased three years in a row after constitutional carry became law, rising to a high of 138 in 2022 before falling to 112 in 2023, the most recent year of available data. Suicide was the most common manner of firearm deaths each year.

Lastly, Rhoden signed a bill allowing concealed carry permit holders to keep their pistols inside a motor vehicle while on school property.

Rhoden additionally said Monday that he sent a letter to the U.S. attorney general and director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, asking them to eliminate the seven-day waiting period to purchase a firearm or associated accessories, including silencers, over state lines.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining

South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Death row inmate loses bid to link U.S. Supreme Court bureaucracy ruling to his case

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 24, 2025 11:45 AM

A U.S. Supreme Court case on regulatory rulemaking doesn't give South Dakota's only death row inmate a chance to renew and re-litigate the appeals that could spare his life, a federal judge has ruled.

U.S. District Judge Roberto Lange's Friday decision in a case involving Briley Piper came as part of a 71-page ruling. The ruling also denied the inmate's claims that his defense lawyers performed poorly enough to warrant an overturning of his death sentence.

Piper was one of the three men who tortured and killed 19-year-old Chester Alan Poage near Spearfish in 2000.

In a press release, South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley said Lange's ruling "is a step forward in carrying out the jury's verdict and assuring that the Poage family receives justice."

Piper can appeal the decision to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit.

His most recent appeal zeroed in on the Loper Bright decision issued last summer by the U.S. Supreme Court. Prior to that ruling, federal courts were expected to defer to the expertise of agency rulemakers in disputes over the constitutionality of things like Environmental Protection Agency requirements for wetlands, Labor Department guidance on workplace safety or, in the Loper Bright situation that upended the 40-year precedent on rulemaking, whether a commercial fishing boat is obliged to pay the salary of an on-board federal inspector.

Loper Bright opened the door to more court scrutiny of such agency rules. Its animating logic is that Congress makes laws, courts interpret laws' legality, and rulemaker expertise should not dilute judges' rights to ascertain the legality of bureaucrat-written regulations. Piper's lawyers argued that the same logic applies to the federal law that draws lines around a death row inmate's right to appeal a sentence.

The law limits how closely a federal judge can scrutinize a state judge's decisions in death row appeals. Piper's legal team argued that federal judges have the right to review constitutional questions, and that a congressionally authorized federal death penalty law that ties their hands shouldn't stand.

Lange, they said, should be able to review everything the state Supreme Court said in upholding Piper's death sentence.

Lange disagreed. The Loper Bright ruling, he wrote, "provides no support for Piper's argument that Congress lacks the authority to limit lower federal courts' power."

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.

Youth gun deaths in the US have surged 50% since 2019

Firearms killed 2,581 children in 2023. Black children died disproportionately.

BY: AMANDA HERNÁNDEZ - MARCH 24, 2025 8:00 AM

Firearm-related deaths among children and teenagers in the United States have risen sharply in recent years, increasing by 50% since 2019.

In 2023, firearms remained the leading cause of death among American youth for the third year in a row, followed by motor vehicle accidents, according to the latest mortality data released by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The data shows 2,581 children aged 17 and under died from firearm-related incidents in 2023, including

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accidents, homicides and suicides, with a national rate of nearly four gun deaths per 100,000 children.

Young people in the United States were killed by firearms at a rate nearly three times higher than by drowning. This means that for every child who died from drowning in 2023, nearly three died from gun violence.

"Every single number is a life lost — is a kid that won't go back home," said Silvia Villarreal, the director of research translation at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Center for Gun Violence Solutions.

Children, she added, are an inherently vulnerable population, and this vulnerability is even more pronounced among children of color.

Black children and teens in 2023 were more than eight times as likely to die from firearm homicide than their white peers. Since 2015, firearms have been the leading cause of death for Black youth, according to CDC data.

Since 2018, firearm suicide rates have been highest among American Indian or Alaska Native and white children and teens. In 2023, American Indian and Alaska Native youth had the highest firearm suicide rate of any racial group.

Youth gun deaths don't just affect family members, close loved ones and friends; they ripple through entire communities, making it difficult for people to heal, Villarreal told Stateline.

"Communities that have suffered really high-impact losses are never the same, and I don't know if it's possible to be ever the same as it was before," Villarreal said.

One of the major policies championed by gun control and safety groups to address youth gun violence is safe storage laws, which establish guidelines for how firearms should be stored in homes, vehicles and other properties. In recent years, some states also have proposed and adopted measures to create tax credits for purchasing gun safes.

Twenty-six states have child access prevention and secure storage laws on the books, according to Everytown for Gun Safety, a gun control research and advocacy group.

A report released in July by RAND, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, found that laws designed to limit children's access to stored firearms may help reduce firearm suicides, unintentional shootings and firearm homicides among youth.

This year, lawmakers in states across the country — including in Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Utah, Washington and Wisconsin — have considered gun storage policies.

Stateline reporter Amanda Hernández can be reached at ahernandez@stateline.org.

Amanda Hernández covers criminal justice for Stateline. She has reported for both national and local outlets, including ABC News, USA Today and NBC4 Washington.

Judge bars DOGE access to sensitive personal information at 3 federal agencies

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - MARCH 24, 2025 2:33 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Personnel Management and Treasury Department were temporarily barred by a federal judge on Monday from disclosing the "personally identifiable information" of a lawsuit's plaintiffs and organization members to Elon Musk's U.S. DOGE Service.

U.S. District Judge Deborah Boardman, who issued the preliminary injunction, wrote in her opinion that "no matter how important or urgent the President's DOGE agenda may be, federal agencies must execute it in accordance with the law" and "that likely did not happen in this case."

The Maryland federal judge had earlier issued a temporary restraining order in the case, though she declined to include the Treasury Department in that due to a federal judge in New York granting a preliminary injunction that blocked DOGE from accessing that department's payment systems.

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DOGE access

The American Federation of Teachers, as well as a group of labor unions, membership organizations and several U.S. military veterans, filed a lawsuit in February over allegations that the three government entities gave the Department of Government Efficiency access to systems with sensitive and private data, in violation of the Privacy Act.

According to the Justice Department, the 1974 law “establishes a code of fair information practices that governs the collection, maintenance, use, and dissemination of information about individuals that is maintained in systems of records by federal agencies.”

The Department of Government Efficiency — which is not an actual department — has sought to drastically reduce federal government spending and go after what its staffers see as waste.

“The plaintiffs have shown that Education, OPM, and Treasury likely violated the APA by granting DOGE affiliates sweeping access to their sensitive personal information in defiance of the Privacy Act,” Boardman wrote in her opinion.

She asked both parties to submit a joint status report by close of business on March 31 after meeting to discuss “whether the government intends to file a notice of appeal or whether the Court should enter a scheduling order.”

‘Running roughshod’

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said “Musk’s operatives have been running roughshod over Americans’ privacy, and today the court correctly decided to uphold the firewall between their activities and the personal data of tens of millions of people” in a Monday statement.

Weingarten, who leads one of the country’s largest teachers unions, added that “Musk and DOGE must be held to account, and this preliminary injunction is a significant and important step forward.”

Meanwhile, the Education Department continues to see drastic changes.

Last week, President Donald Trump directed Education Secretary Linda McMahon to “take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure” of the department to the maximum extent that is legally permissible.

The agency also announced that it would be cutting more than 1,300 employees through a “reduction in force” process.

“Waste, fraud, and abuse have been deeply entrenched in our broken system for far too long. It takes direct access to the system to identify and fix it,” Harrison Fields, White House principal deputy press secretary, said in a statement to States Newsroom.

“DOGE will continue to shine a light on the fraud they uncover as the American people deserve to know what their government has been spending their hard earned tax dollars on,” Fields said.

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

Teachers union, NAACP set to sue over Trump dismantling of Department of Education

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - MARCH 24, 2025 11:22 AM

WASHINGTON — A coalition of advocacy and labor groups says it plans to file suit against the Trump administration Monday over its sweeping efforts to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education.

The National Education Association, NAACP, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Maryland Council 3 and public school parents are set to file a lawsuit asking a court to “immediately halt” the administration’s attempts to shutter the agency, the coalition members said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the American Federation of Teachers, its Massachusetts chapter, AFSCME Council 93, the American Association of University Professors, the Service Employees International Union and two school districts in Massachusetts sued the administration in U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts

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on Monday over the executive order and recent mass layoffs at the department.

Trump direction to McMahon

President Donald Trump last week directed Education Secretary Linda McMahon to “take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure” of the department to the maximum extent that is legally permissible.

Only Congress, which established the 45-year-old department, has the power to abolish it.

The following day, Trump announced that some of the department’s key responsibilities — including its handling of the massive student loan portfolio and special education services — would be housed in the Small Business Administration and the Department of Health and Human Services, respectively.

The president also said HHS would handle “nutrition programs,” though it was unclear what he was referring to as the Department of Agriculture manages school meal and other major nutrition programs.

In a Monday statement, NEA’s president Becky Pringle said “gutting the Department of Education will hurt all students by sending class sizes soaring, cutting job training programs, making higher education more out of reach, taking away special education services for students with disabilities, and gutting student civil rights protections.”

“Parents, educators, and community leaders know this will widen the gaps in education, which is why we will do everything in our power to protect our students and their futures,” Pringle said.

Layoffs, cuts

Prior to the executive order, the agency already saw significant changes in the weeks since Trump took office, including mass layoffs, contract cuts, staff buyouts and major policy changes.

The department also announced earlier this month that more than 1,300 employees would be cut through a “reduction in force” process, calling into question how those mass layoffs would affect the agency’s abilities to carry out its main responsibilities.

The cuts prompted a lawsuit from a coalition of 21 Democratic attorneys general — who are trying to block the department from implementing the “reduction in force” action and Trump’s “directive to dismantle the Department of Education.”

“The NEA and NAACP have done nothing to advance the educational outcomes of America’s students and the latest NAEP scores prove that,” Harrison Fields, White House principal deputy press secretary, said in a statement shared with States Newsroom.

The latest data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress found that average math and reading scores in 2024 for pupils in fourth grade and eighth grade were lower compared to before the coronavirus pandemic, in 2019.

“Instead of playing politics with baseless lawsuits, these groups should ditch the courtroom and work with the Trump administration and states on improving the classroom,” Fields said.

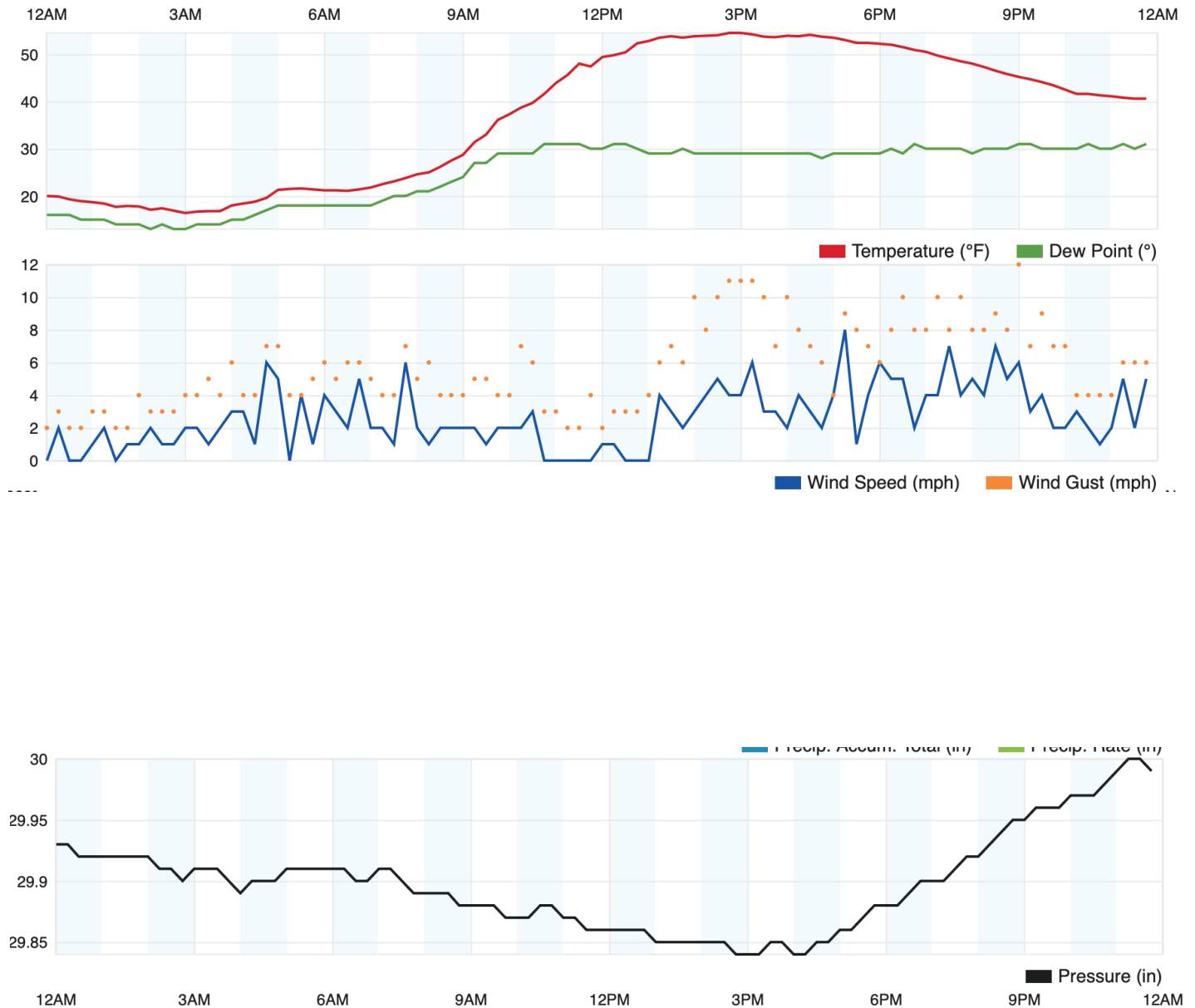
The Education Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment Monday.

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.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 57 °F

Partly Sunny
then Mostly
Sunny and
Breezy

Tonight



Low: 27 °F

Mostly Clear

Wednesday



High: 59 °F

Partly Sunny

Wednesday
Night



Low: 32 °F

Partly Cloudy

Thursday



High: 68 °F

Mostly Sunny

March 25, 2025 3:25 AM

Today



Highs: 51-60°

Lows: 26-35°

**High to Very High
grassland fire danger**

Wednesday



Highs: 54-70°

Lows: 30-37°

Temperatures will continue to warm through the week with highs in the 50s to around 60 expected today and mid 50s to around 70 expected Wednesday. With wind gusts of 30-35 mph between the Missouri River and the Sisseton Hills, grassland fire danger is in the very high category. Outdoor burning is not recommended in this area.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 55 °F at 3:04 PM

Low Temp: 16 °F at 2:58 AM

Wind: 13 mph at 2:13 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 29 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 81 in 1925

Record Low: -10 in 1894

Average High: 47

Average Low: 23

Average Precip in March.: 0.67

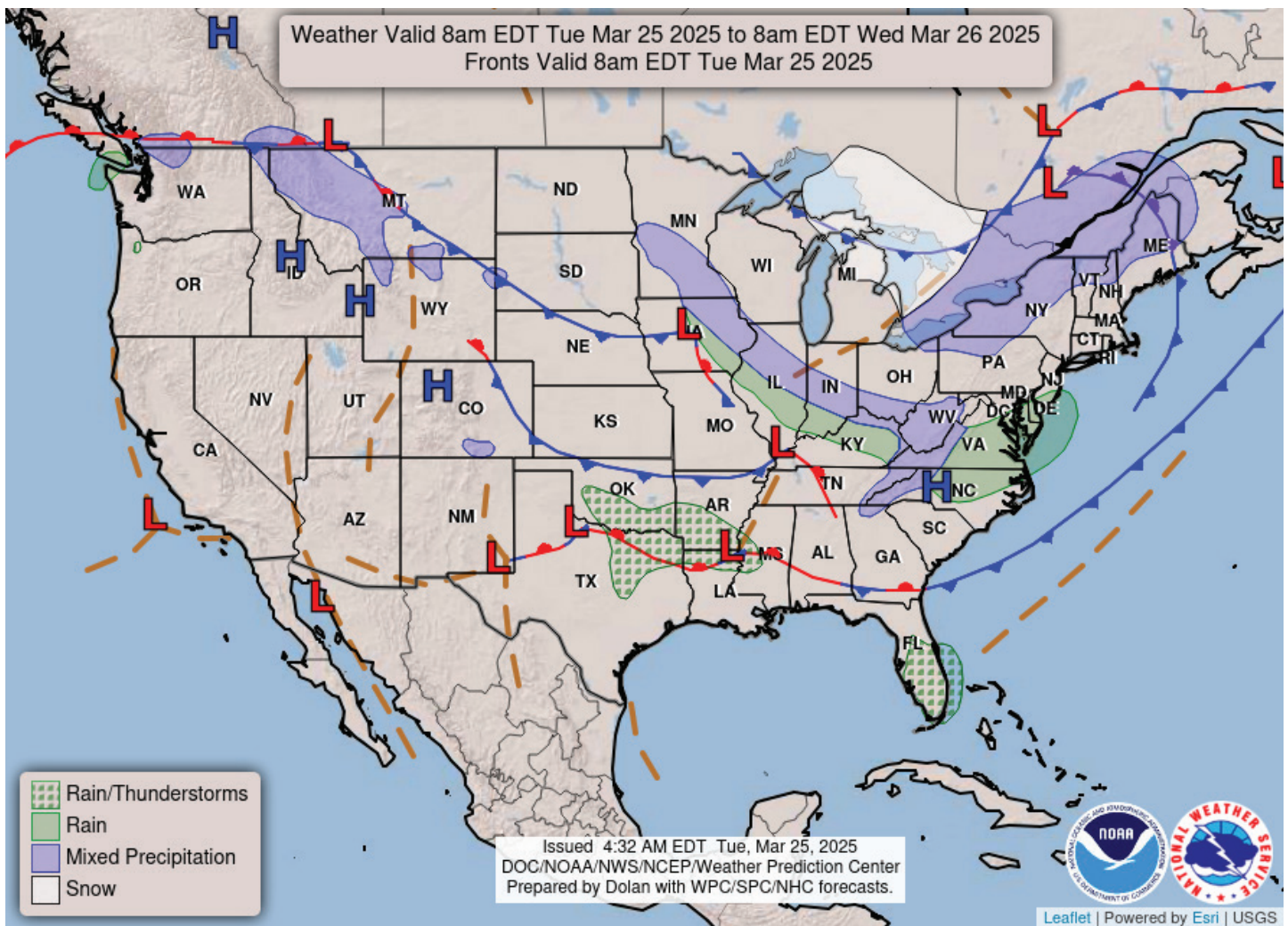
Precip to date in March.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.84

Precip Year to Date: 0.45

Sunset Tonight: 7:53:09 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:21:20 am



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Today in Weather History

March 25th, 2009: Rapid snowmelt and ice jamming caused the Elm River near Westport to rise -above flood stage on March 20th. The Elm River reached an all-time record level of 22.69 feet on March 25th, almost 9 feet above flood stage. The previous record was 22.11 feet, set on April 10th, 1969. The flood stage for the Elm River at Westport is 14 feet. The city of Westport was evacuated, and the flood waters caused damage to many homes and roads in and around Westport. Also, many other highways and agricultural and pastureland along the river were flooded. The Elm River slowly receded and fell below flood stage on March 30th. The flood waters from the Elm River flowed south and into the northern portion of Moccasin Creek. Subsequently, the Moccasin Creek rose as the water flowed south into Aberdeen. Flooding became a concern for Aberdeen and areas along the creek north of Aberdeen. The Governor signed an emergency declaration that allowed the state to help with flood response efforts, including sending 50,000 sandbags to the area. Also, the National Guard was activated to move various heavy equipment. Some sandbagging and a falling Elm River kept the Moccasin Creek from causing any significant flooding in and north of Aberdeen. The creek flooded some township and county roads.

1843 - A second great snowstorm hit the northeastern U.S. The storm produced snow from Maine all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. Natchez MS received three inches of snow, and up to 15 inches buried eastern Tennessee. Coastal Maine received 204 inches of snow that winter. (David Ludlum)

1914 - Society Hill, SC, was buried under 18 inches of snow, establishing a state record. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1934 - A spring storm produced 21 inches of snow at Amarillo TX in 24 hours. However, much of the snow melted as it fell, and as a result, the snow cover was never any deeper than 4.5 inches. (David Ludlum)

1948 - For the second time in less than a week airplanes were destroyed by a tornado at Tinker AFB in Oklahoma City OK. A March 20th tornado destroyed fifty planes at Tinker AFB causing more than ten million dollars damage, and the March 25th tornado destroyed another thirty-five planes causing six million dollars damage. The first tornado struck without warning, and caused more damage than any previous tornado in the state of Oklahoma. The second tornado was predicted by Fawbush and Miller of the United States Air Force, and their accurate tornado forecast ushered in the modern era of severe weather forecasting. (The Weather Channel) (Storm Data) (The National Severe Storms Forecast Center)

1975 - The town of Sandberg reported a wind gust to 101 mph, a record for the state of California. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Heavy rain left rivers and streams swollen in Kansas and Nebraska, causing considerable crop damage due to flooding of agricultural areas. The Saline River near Wilson Reservoir in central Kansas reached its highest level since 1951. March rainfall at Grand Island NE exceeded their previous record of 5.57 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - An early season heat wave prevailed in the southwestern U.S. The high of 93 degrees at Tucson, AZ, was a new record for March. Windy conditions prevailed across the central and eastern U.S. Winds gusted to 60 mph at Minneapolis MN, and reached 120 mph atop Rendezvous Peak WY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A Pacific storm brought wet weather to much of the western third of the country, with heavy snow in some of the higher elevations. La Porte CA was drenched with 3.56 inches of rain in 24 hours. Up to 24 inches of snow blanketed the Sierra Nevada Range. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Temperatures dipped below zero in the Northern Rocky Mountain Region. Hardin MT was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 10 degrees below zero. Freezing drizzle was reported in the Southern Plains Region, with afternoon highs only in the 30s from the Southern High Plains to Missouri and Arkansas. (The National Weather Summary)

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DON'T BLAME US!

Over much opposition from members of the community, a man opened a large night club. One of the local churches came to the logical conclusion that the most important responsibility they had in the matter was to ask God to intervene and close the club. They called an all-night prayer meeting and asked God to honor their request.

During the prayer meeting, lightning struck the club, and it burned to the ground. The club owner, learning of the church's prayer meeting, became angry and sued the church. In response to the lawsuit, the church denied all responsibility.

After hearing the case, the judge said, "Wherever the guilt may lie, the night club owner believes in prayer but the church, obviously, does not."

What at first may appear to be humorous may be an indictment on our faith and trust in the power of God. In His teaching on prayer, Jesus said that we are to ask Him for "anything" and "everything" - two "all-inclusive" words. When we take them literally and seriously, they will give us the right and responsibility to ask for "whatever" is within the will of God.

Could it be that we do not believe that God can and will answer our prayers? Do we really believe that God is listening, is willing, and is certainly able to respond if we truly believe?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, You clearly and convincingly said that "everything is possible with God" if only we believe! In Your name, please remove any and all of our doubts. Thank You! Amen.

Scripture For Today: Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God." Mark 10:27

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: 17 Hrs 12 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.24.25

14 34 35 40 44 4

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$27,200,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 27 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.24.25

14 20 30 31 39 1

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 42 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.22.25

9 10 13 17 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$76,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 42 Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.24.25

2 54 59 65 68 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 11 Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.24.25

6 23 35 36 47 12

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$484,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 11 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

03/22/2025 Spring Vendor Fair at the GHS Gym 10am-2pm
03/29/2025 Men's Singles Bowling Tournament at the Jungle 10am, 1pm & 4pm
04/05/2025 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39, 6-11:30pm
04/06/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp
04/12/2025 Groton Firemens Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
05/12/2025 High School Girls Golf Meet at Olive Grove
05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm
06/07/2025 Day of Play
06/13/2025 SDSU 4 Person Scramble at Olive Grove
06/21/2025 Groton Triathlon
06/23/2025 Ladies 2 Person Scramble at Olive Grove
07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm
07/11-13/25 2025 VFW 12U Class B State Baseball Tournament
07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
07/16/2025 Men's Pro Am Golf at Olive Grove
07/25/2025 Ferney Open Scramble Golf at Olive Grove
08/01/2025 Wine on Nine Fundraiser at Olive Grove
08/09/2025 2nd Annual Celebration in the Park/Rib Cook-Off 1-9:30pm
08/14/2025 Family Fun Fest, Downtown Main Street 5:30-7:30pm (2nd Thursday)
08/23/2025 Glacial Tournament at Olive Grove
09/05/2025 Homecoming Parade 1pm
09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
09/07/2025 Sunflower Classic Couples Scramble at Olive Grove
10/10/2025 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
10/11/2025 Pumpkin Fest 10am-3pm City Park
10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1:30pm
12/06/2025 Olive Grove Holiday Party and Silent Live Auction Fundraiser

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Paige Bueckers scores 34 in final home game, UConn tops SDSU 91-57 to reach 31st straight Sweet 16

By JIM FULLER Associated Press

STORRS, Conn. (AP) — Paige Bueckers' scoring and KK Arnold's defense powered UConn into its 31st consecutive Sweet 16 of the women's NCAA Tournament.

Bueckers matched her career high with 34 points in her final home game before leaving to a standing ovation from the sellout crowd at Gampel Pavilion. Arnold came off the bench to impact the game with defensive pressure, helping second-seeded UConn turn its meeting with No. 10 seed South Dakota State into a 91-57 runaway on Monday night.

"Paige was Paige," UConn coach Geno Auriemma said. "It was a great way to finish your (home) career. There is no better way than with a game like that, a performance like that."

Bueckers grabbed a microphone and addressed the adoring crowd before walking off the Gampel floor for the last time. She is expected to be the top pick in the WNBA draft. Before that, she wants to lead UConn to four more victories and the program's record 12th national title.

"I haven't had a wave or rush of emotions hit me yet because we're so locked in and focused on the task at hand and being present in the moment," Bueckers said. "We didn't look at it as our last game as Gampel. We looked at it as the second-round NCAA Tournament game that we're trying to win and trying to keep advancing."

Azzi Fudd scored 17 points and Sarah Strong finished with 15 points, seven rebounds, five assists, three steals and two blocks for the Huskies (33-3), who will face Oklahoma in a regional semifinal in Spokane, Washington.

Paige Meyer had 16 points for South Dakota State (30-4).

Brooklyn Meyer, the Jackrabbits' leading scorer who is not related to Paige Meyer, went down with an ankle injury in 30.9 seconds left in the first half and had to be helped to the locker room. She returned for the second half and finished with four points in 28 minutes.

The Jackrabbits led by six points twice in the first quarter behind the strong play of Paige Meyer, the program's single-season leader in assists. UConn responded by bringing in Arnold, whose ball pressure helped stifle the South Dakota State offense.

"We were just trying to find her weak points and creating havoc," said Arnold, who finished with six points, five rebounds, five assists and two steals in 19 minutes. "We were trying to limit her shots. It was very fun because my defense creates a lot of (opportunities). I get so excited."

Bueckers took care of the rest. The All-America guard scored UConn's last 10 points of the first quarter, including a buzzer-beating 3-pointer.

Bueckers had seven points in a 16-2 run in the second quarter to push the lead to 21. UConn made 10 shots in a row at one point in the second quarter and eight in a row in the third quarter.

Up next

The landscape of the Spokane 4 Region changed Monday night when star JuJu Watkins of top-seeded Southern California went down with a right knee injury in the first quarter against Mississippi State in Los Angeles. UConn beat USC in a regional final last year, and the teams would get a rematch if the seeding holds.

Middle East latest: Israeli strikes on Gaza killed at least 23 people overnight

By The Associated Press undefined

Israeli strikes killed at least 23 people in the Gaza Strip overnight into Tuesday, Palestinian medics said, as hospitals are flooded with dead and wounded since Israel resumed heavy bombardment last week, shattering the ceasefire that had halted the 17-month war.

The dead include three children and their parents who were killed in a strike on their tent near the southern city of Khan Younis, according to Nasser Hospital.

Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed more than 50,000 Palestinians and wounded more than 113,000, according to the Health Ministry, which does not say how many were civilians or combatants. Israel says it has killed around 20,000 militants, without providing evidence.

Israel launched the campaign vowing to destroy Hamas after its Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 people and abducted 251. Israel says it only targets militants and blames Hamas for civilian deaths because it operates in densely populated areas.

Here's the latest:

A 9-member Palestinian paramedics team still missing

Palestinian first responders say a nine-member ambulance crew is still missing days after being surrounded and targeted by Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said the team was responding to airstrikes in the Tel al-Sultan neighborhood of the southern city of Rafah when Israeli forces encircled the area early Sunday. It said Israel has refused access to the area since then.

The military said troops had fired on ambulances and fire trucks that it said had raised suspicion by moving without prior coordination and without headlights or emergency signals. It said those inside were militants, without providing evidence.

Israel says a Palestinian journalist killed in a strike was also a Hamas sniper

The Israeli military says a well-known Palestinian journalist killed in a strike on the Gaza Strip was also a Hamas sniper.

It shared what it said were internal Hamas documents purportedly showing that Hossam Shabat was a sniper in a Hamas battalion in northern Gaza and had received military training in 2019. The military said he had carried out attacks during the war, without providing evidence.

Qatar-based Al Jazeera said Shabat, a freelance reporter, was covering the war for the satellite news network when he was killed in an Israeli strike on Monday. It said he had been wounded in an Israeli strike in November.

Shabat, in his early 20s, was prolific on social media, sharing videos and other reports with more than 170,000 followers on the X platform.

Israel has banned Al Jazeera and accused several of its journalists in Gaza of being Palestinian militants. A number of them have been killed or wounded in Israeli strikes. The channel denies the accusations and says Israel is trying to silence journalists covering the war.

Palestinian co-director of Oscar-winning film is missing after being detained by Israeli military

One of the Palestinian co-directors of the Oscar-winning documentary "No Other Land" was still missing on Tuesday after being beaten by Jewish settlers and detained by the Israeli military.

Attorney Lea Tsemel told The Associated Press she had no information on filmmaker Hamdan Ballal's whereabouts early Tuesday, around 12 hours after witnesses said he was attacked and detained in the occupied West Bank.

Ballal was one of three Palestinians detained in the village of Susiya late Monday, according to Tsemel, who is representing them. Police told her they're being held at a military base for medical treatment, and she said she hasn't been able to speak with them.

Basel Adra, another co-director, witnessed the detention and said around two dozen settlers — some

masked, some carrying guns, some in Israeli uniform — attacked the village. Soldiers who arrived pointed their guns at the Palestinians, while settlers continued throwing stones.

The Israeli military said it detained three Palestinians suspected of hurling rocks at forces and one Israeli civilian involved in a “violent confrontation” between Israelis and Palestinians — a claim witnesses interviewed by the AP disputed.

The military said it had transferred them to Israeli police for questioning and had evacuated an Israeli citizen from the area to receive medical treatment.

Israeli strikes in Gaza kill 23

Palestinian medics say Israeli strikes killed at least 23 people in the Gaza Strip overnight into Tuesday.

Nasser Hospital said it received four additional bodies from two other strikes in addition to the family of five.

In central Gaza, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital said it received the bodies of six people who were killed in three separate strikes. Three others were killed in a strike on a house in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp, according to Al-Awda Hospital.

In Gaza City, an Israeli strike on a residential building killed 5 people, according to the Health Ministry’s emergency service. Another 12 people were wounded, it said.

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.

“I was overwhelmed, running from corner to corner, trying to find out who to prioritize, who to send to

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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 government 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."

What is the Unification Church and why did a Japanese court order it dissolved?

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — A controversial South Korean church with powerful political connections faces dissolution in Japan after a Tokyo court ordered a revocation of its legal status after the government accused it of manipulative fundraising and recruitment tactics that sowed fear among followers and harmed their families.

The Tokyo District court's ruling would end the Unification Church's tax-exempt status in Japan and force it to liquidate its assets. The church said it is considering an immediate appeal to the country's highest court.

The Unification Church has faced hundreds of lawsuits in Japan from families who say that it manipulated members into draining their savings to make donations, but for decades it largely escaped official scrutiny and maintained close links with the governing Liberal Democratic Party.

That changed in 2022, when former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated. The man accused of shooting Abe allegedly was motivated by the former prime minister's links to the church and blamed it for bankrupting his family. The killing drew public attention and prompted investigations into the church's practices and its links to powerful politicians.

What is the Unification Church?

The church was founded in Seoul in 1954, a year after the end of the Korean War, by the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the self-proclaimed messiah who preached new interpretations of the Bible and conservative, family-oriented value systems.

The church, which officially calls itself the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, champions anti-communism and the unification of the Korean Peninsula, which has been split between the totalitarian North and democratic South.

The church is perhaps best known for mass weddings where it paired off couples, often from different countries, and renewed the vows of those already married, at places like stadiums and gymnasiums. The group is said to have a global membership of millions, including hundreds of thousands in Japan.

The church faced accusations in the 1970s and '80s of using devious recruitment tactics and brainwashing adherents into turning over huge portions of their salaries to Moon. The church has denied the allegations, saying many new religious movements face similar accusations in their early years.

Experts say Japanese followers are asked to pay for sins committed by their ancestors during Japan's 1910-1945 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula, and that the majority of the church's worldwide funding comes from Japan.

Why was the church ordered dissolved?

The Education Ministry asked a Tokyo court to dissolve the church in October 2023, accusing it of trying to steer its followers' decision-making, using manipulative tactics, making them buy expensive goods and donate beyond their financial ability, and causing fear and harm to them and their families.

On Tuesday, the Tokyo District court granted the request, writing that the church's problems were extensive and continuous, and a dissolution order is necessary because it is not likely it could voluntarily reform, according to NHK television.

The Unification Church is the first religious group to face a revocation order under Japan's civil code. Two earlier case involved criminal charges — the Aum Shinrikyo doomsday cult, which carried out a sarin nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway system, and Myokakuji group, whose executives were convicted of fraud.

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The Japanese branch of the church has criticized the request as a serious threat to religious freedom and the human rights of its followers. In a statement Tuesday, it called the court order “truly regrettable” and “unjust,” adding that the decision is based on “a wrong legal interpretation and absolutely unacceptable.”

How did the church come under scrutiny in Japan?

The 2022 assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and subsequent investigations unearthed decades of cozy ties between the Unification Church and Japan’s governing Liberal Democratic Party and triggered public outrage.

The man accused of shooting Abe at a campaign event allegedly told police he was motivated by the former prime minister’s links to the church, which he said bankrupted his family due to his mother’s excessive donations.

Abe was known for his arch-conservative views on security and history issues and appeared at events organized by church affiliates.

What are the church’s links to world leaders?

Throughout his life, Moon worked to make his church into a worldwide religious movement and expand its business and charitable activities. Moon was convicted of tax evasion in 1982 and served a prison term in New York. He died in 2012.

The church has developed relations with conservative world leaders including U.S. presidents Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush and more recently Donald Trump.

Moon also had ties with North Korea’s founder Kim Il Sung, the late grandfather of current ruler Kim Jong Un.

Moon said in his autobiography that he asked Kim to give up his nuclear ambitions, and that Kim responded that his atomic program was for peaceful purposes and he had no intention to use it to “kill (Korean) compatriots.”

A court orders the Unification Church in Japan dissolved

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — The Unification Church in Japan was ordered dissolved by a court Tuesday after a government request spurred by the investigation into the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

The church said it was considering an immediate appeal of the Tokyo District Court’s revocation of its legal status, which would take away its tax-exempt privilege and require liquidation of its assets.

The order followed a request by Japan’s Education Ministry in 2023 to dissolve the influential South Korea-based sect, citing manipulative fundraising and recruitment tactics that sowed fear among followers and harmed their families.

The Japanese branch of the church had criticized the request as a serious threat to religious freedom and the human rights of its followers.

The church called the court order regrettable and unjust and said in a statement the court’s decision was based on “a wrong legal interpretation and absolutely unacceptable.”

The investigation into Abe’s assassination revealed decades of cozy ties between the South Korea-based church and Japan’s governing Liberal Democratic Party. The church obtained legal status as a religious organization in Japan in the 1960s during an anti-communist movement supported by Abe’s grandfather, former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi.

The man accused of killing Abe resented the church and blamed it for his family’s financial troubles.

The church, which officially calls itself the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, is the first religious group subject to a revocation order under Japan’s civil code. Two earlier cases involved criminal charges — the Aum Shinrikyo doomsday cult, which carried out a sarin nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway system, and Myokakuji group, whose executives were convicted of fraud.

To seek the church’s dissolution, the Education Ministry had submitted 5,000 documents and pieces of evidence to the court, based on interviews with more than 170 people.

The church tried to steer its followers’ decision-making, using manipulative tactics, making them buy

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expensive goods and donate beyond their financial ability and causing fear and harm to them and their families, seriously deviating from the law on religious groups, officials and experts say.

The Agency for Cultural Affairs said the settlements reached in or outside court exceeded 20 billion yen (\$132 million) and involved more than 1,500 people.

The church, founded in Seoul in 1954, a year after the end of the Korean War, by the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the self-proclaimed messiah who preached new interpretations of the Bible and conservative, family-oriented value systems.

It developed relations with conservative world leaders including U.S. President Donald Trump, as well as his predecessors Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush.

The church faced accusations in the 1970s and 1980s of using devious recruitment tactics and brainwashing adherents into turning over huge portions of their salaries to Moon. In Japan, the group has faced lawsuits for offering "spiritual merchandise" that allegedly caused members to buy expensive art and jewelry or sell their real estate to raise donations for the church.

The church has acknowledged excessive donations but says the problem has lessened since the group stepped up compliance in 2009.

Experts say Japanese followers are asked to pay for sins committed by their ancestors during Japan's 1910-1945 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula, and that the majority of the church's worldwide funding comes from Japan.

Gaza's child amputees struggle with recovery, especially after Israel's cutoff of aid

By FATMA KHALED and ABDEL KAREEM HANA Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Five-year-old Sila Abu Aqlan curled her lip in concentration as she practiced walking for the first time on a prosthetic leg at a clinic in Gaza City. The foot of the new leg had a little pink sneaker with a lacy frill, matching her pink hoodie.

It has been nearly 15 months since the little girl's leg was amputated after it was left severely burned from an Israeli airstrike. Finally, she is being fit for a prosthetic.

One of the most shocking sights in Gaza's war has been the thousands of children with amputated limbs from Israel's bombardment. The U.N.'s humanitarian aid organization OCHA called it the "largest cohort of child amputees in modern history."

Throughout the 17-month war, supplies and services for children and adults with amputations have fallen far short of demand. Gaza's ceasefire that began in mid-January offered a window for aid agencies to bring in an increased number of prosthetic limbs, wheelchairs, crutches and other devices.

Still, it only covered about 20% of the total need, said Loay Abu Saif, head of a disability program run by the aid group Medical Aid for Palestine, or MAP.

The window slammed shut when Israel barred entry of all medical supplies as well as food, fuel and other aid on March 2. Israel's resumption of its military campaign last week, killing hundreds of Palestinians, has only added to the ranks of amputees.

Children struggle with multiple traumas

With help limited, children wrestle with the psychological pain of losing a limb along with other traumas.

Sila's mother, father and sisters were all killed in an airstrike on her home in December 2023. Sila suffered severe burns to her right leg. A month of treatment had little effect, and Sila would scream in excruciating pain, her aunt Yasmine al-Ghofary said. Doctors amputated her leg above the knee.

"I try as much as I can to make her happy. But the truth is, there's only so much she can be happy. Pain is pain, and amputation is amputation," al-Ghofary said.

Sila sees other girls playing and tries to keep up with them using her walker but falls down. "She says, 'Why am I like this? Why am I not like them?'" said al-Ghofary.

In October 2023, 11-year-old Reem lost her hand when an airstrike hit nearby as her family fled their home in Gaza City.

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Reem can no longer dress on her own, brush her hair or tie her shoes. She gets angry and hits her siblings if she can't find someone to help her, her mother said. Other times, she isolates herself and just watches other children playing.

"Once Reem told her dad that she wished to die," said her mother, who goes by the traditional name, Umm Reem. "In another instance, we were talking about meat, and she said, 'Slaughter me like a sheep,' and she was laughing."

Thousands need help

Some 3,000 to 4,000 children in Gaza had suffered amputations as of November 2024, according to Jamal al-Rozzi and Hussein Abu Mansour, two prominent experts with rehabilitation programs in the territory who spoke with The Associated Press.

Up to 17,500 adults and children suffered severe limb injuries, leaving them in need of rehabilitation and assistance, the World Health Organization estimated in September.

Throughout the war, hospitals lacked medicines that could have averted amputations. Doctors describes cutting off limbs because of infections that should have been easily treated.

In its campaign in Gaza, Israel has struck homes and shelters with families inside almost daily.

Gaza's Health Ministry on Monday put out a list of the names of more than 15,000 children, 17 and younger, killed by Israel's offensive. The list included nearly 5,000 children younger than 6, including 876 infants who had not reached a year in age.

Israel's offensive has killed more than 50,000 Palestinians of all ages and wounded more than 113,000, according to the ministry, which does not say how many were civilians or combatants. Nearly 90% of the population of some 2.3 million have been displaced, and vast areas of Gaza have been destroyed.

Israel launched the campaign vowing to destroy Hamas after its Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted 251 others. Israel says it is targeting Hamas and blames the group for civilian deaths because it operates in residential areas.

Conditions in camps make it even harder for children

Last May, 13-year-old Moath Abdelaal's leg was amputated above the knee after an Israeli airstrike in the southern city of Rafah.

The family had to flee to a tent camp outside the neighboring city of Khan Younis. During the ceasefire, they moved back to their hometown Jabaliya in northern Gaza, but their home had been destroyed, so they live in a tent by the ruins, said his father, Hussein Abdelaal.

Moath's psychological state is worsening, his father said. Moving with crutches around the rubble is difficult. Doctors had to amputate more from his leg, almost up to his hip, because of complications. The boy learned that a number of his friends in the neighborhood had been killed, Abdelaal said.

"He has been having a hard time coping with his new situation. He's not sleeping well next to his siblings. It's difficult to see our son like that," said Abdelaal.

Aid agencies provide some services

Sila is being treated at the Artificial Limbs and Polio Center in Gaza City, a program launched by the International Committee of the Red Cross that has provided physical therapy, wheelchairs and prosthetics to hundreds of Palestinians suffering from amputations or paralysis.

But supplies are limited. Wheelchairs are urgently needed, with 50 to 60 people a day asking for them in northern Gaza alone, said Mahmoud Shalabi with MAP.

Al-Rozzi, executive director of the National Rehabilitation Society in the Gaza Strip, said Israel blocks materials to manufacture prosthetics from entering Gaza on grounds they could have dual or military uses.

COGAT, the Israeli military body overseeing aid, said there have never been limitations on medical supplies to Gaza, including wheelchairs, prosthetics and crutches.

Some hope for treatment abroad

Some child amputees have been evacuated out of Gaza for treatment. But the pace of medical evacuations has remained slow, at a few dozen a day, and was reduced after Israel's strikes last week. As many as 13,000 patients of all kinds are waiting their chance to get out.

Asmaa al-Nashash wants nothing more than for her 11-year-old son Abdulrahman to go abroad for a

prosthetic leg.

The boy was selling items from a stand at a U.N. school-turned-shelter in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp when an airstrike hit, she said. Shrapnel tore through his leg, and doctors couldn't save it.

Since then, he often sits alone playing games on her phone because he can't play football with other children, she said. Other kids bully him, calling him the "one-legged boy."

"My heart gets torn into pieces when I see him like this and I can do nothing for him," she said.

This Ramadan, relief and hope bump against violence and uncertainty in the new Syria

By MARIAM FAM Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Sahar Diab had visited Damascus' famed Umayyad Mosque previously. But as the Syrian lawyer went there to pray during her country's first Ramadan after the end of the Assad family's iron-fisted rule, she felt something new, something priceless: A sense of ease.

"The rituals have become much more beautiful," she said. "Before, we were restricted in what we could say. ... Now, there's freedom."

As Diab spoke recently, however, details were trickling in from outside Damascus about deadly clashes. The bloodshed took on sectarian overtones and devolved into the worst violence since former President Bashar Assad was overthrown in December by armed insurgents led by the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).

This Ramadan — the Muslim holy month of daily fasting and heightened worship — such are the realities of a Syria undergoing complex transition. Relief, hope and joy at new openings — after 53 years of the Assad dynasty's reign, prolonged civil war and crushing economic woes — intermingle with uncertainty, fear by some, and a particularly bloody and worrisome wave of violence.

Some are feeling empowered, others vulnerable.

"We're not afraid of anything," Diab said. She wants her country to be rebuilt and to get rid of Assad-era "corruption and bribery."

At the Umayyad Mosque, the rituals were age-old: A woman fingering a prayer bead and kissing a copy of the Quran; the faithful standing shoulder-to-shoulder and prostrating in prayer; the Umayyad's iconic and unusual group call to prayer, recited by several people.

The sermon, by contrast, was fiery in delivery and new in message.

The speaker, often interrupted by loud chants of "God is great," railed against Assad and hailed the uprising against him.

"Our revolution is not a sectarian revolution even though we'd been slaughtered by the sword of sectarianism," he said.

This Ramadan, Syrians marked the 14th anniversary of the start of their country's civil war. The conflict began as one of several popular uprisings against Arab dictators, before Assad crushed what started as largely peaceful protests and a civil war erupted.

It became increasingly fought along sectarian lines, drawing in foreign powers and fighters. Assad, who had ruled over a majority Sunni population, belongs to the minority Alawite sect and had drawn from Alawite ranks for military and security positions, fueling resentment. That, Alawites say now, shouldn't mean collective blame for his actions.

Many Syrians speak of omnipresent fear under Assad, often citing the Arabic saying, "the walls have ears," reflecting that speaking up even privately didn't feel safe. They talk of hardships, injustices and brutality. Now, for example, many celebrate freedom from dreaded Assad-era checkpoints.

"They would harass us," said Ahmed Saad Aldeen, who came to the Umayyad Mosque from the city of Homs. "You go out ... and you don't know whether you'll return home or not."

He said more than a dozen cousins are missing; a search for them in prisons proved futile.

Mohammed Qudmani said even going to the mosque caused anxiety for some before, for fear of getting

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on security forces' radar screen or being labeled a "terrorist."

Now, Damascus streets are bedecked with the new three-starred flag, not long ago a symbol of Assad's opponents. It flutters from poles and is plastered to walls, sometimes with the words "God is great" handwritten on it.

One billboard declares this the "Ramadan of victory." On a government building, the faces of former presidents Bashar and Hafez Assad are partly cut off from a painting; in their place, "The Freedom" is scribbled in Arabic.

Haidar Haidar, who owns a sweets shop, said he was touched that new security force members gave him water and dates while he was out when a call to prayer signaled that those fasting can eat and drink.

"We never saw such things here," he said, adding that he used to recite Quranic verses for protection before passing through Assad's checkpoints.

He said his business was doing well this Ramadan and ingredients have become more available.

Still, challenges — economic, geopolitical and otherwise — abound.

Many dream of a new Syria, but exactly how that would look remains uncertain.

"The situation is foggy," said Damascus resident Wassim Bassimah. "Of course, there's great joy that we've gotten rid of the cancer we had, but there's also a lot of wariness."

Syrians, he added, must be mindful to protect their country from sliding back into civil war and should maintain a dialogue that is inclusive of all.

"The external enemies are still there," he said. "So are the enemies from within."

The war's scars are inescapable.

Just outside of Damascus, death and destruction are seared into some landscapes littered with pock-marked and ruined structures. Many Syrians grieve the missing and killed; many families have been divided by the exodus of millions as refugees.

Ramadan typically sees festive gatherings with loved ones to break the daily fast. Some Syrians huddle around food and juices at restaurants or throng to Ramadan tents to break their fast and smoke water-pipes as they listen to songs.

But this month's violence in Syria's coastal region has stoked fears among some.

The bloodshed began after reports of attacks by Assad loyalists on government security forces. Human rights and monitoring groups reported revenge killings in the counteroffensive, which they said saw the involvement of multiple groups. According to them, hundreds of civilians, or more, were killed; figures couldn't be independently confirmed. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said most of the killed civilians were Alawites in addition to a number of armed Alawites and security forces. Syrian authorities have formed a committee tasked with investigating the violence.

Even before the bloodshed, while many celebrated the new government, others questioned what the ascent of the former insurgent forces would mean for freedoms, including of minorities and of those in the majority who are secular-minded or adhere to less conservative interpretations of Islam. The new authorities have made assurances about pluralism.

Sheikh Adham al-khatib, a representative of Twelver Shiites in Syria, said many from the Shiite minority felt scared after Assad's ouster and some fled the country. Some later returned, encouraged by a relative calm and the new authorities' reassurances, he said, but the recent violence and some "individual transgressions" have rekindled fears.

As the violence unfolded earlier this month, crowds gathered in Damascus.

Some rallied to support security forces. Others, like Malak al Shanawani, participated in a different gathering, against the killing of the security forces and civilians. The bloodshed brought tears to her eyes.

"It's nightmarish," said the feminist and political activist. "It's one of the worst moments."

Under Assad, al Shanawani was arrested more than once. Among those killed in the violence, she said, were three brothers of an Alawite friend who was also arrested under Assad.

"When we used to hear that the Alawites would get slaughtered, we'd say: 'No, we can protect you; we wouldn't allow this to happen,'" said al Shanawani, who's from the Sunni community. "But it has happened."

At the silent vigil, activists raised signs that called for de-escalation and denounced "sectarian incitement."

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One read: "Neither religion, nor sect will divide us." Another declared: "The Syrian revolution doesn't accept injustice."

But the gathering quickly deteriorated into shouting and shoving matches as some on the street appeared provoked by it.

One man angrily asked participants where they were when it was the Sunnis who were suffering. Another furiously ripped a sign. A third insulted Alawites.

Here and there, some attempted to discuss, to find common ground. Occasionally, people who started off arguing would agree on something and join each other in chants.

"One. One. One," they yelled. "The Syrian people are one."

As the chaos and friction continued, however, gunshots were fired into the air to disperse the crowds.

USC star JuJu Watkins goes down and Trojans rout Mississippi State in March Madness

By BETH HARRIS AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — JuJu Watkins was carried off the floor with a season-ending knee injury in the first quarter of top-seeded Southern California's game against Mississippi State in the NCAA Tournament on Monday night.

Watkins, one of the biggest stars in women's basketball, was streaking to the basket chased by two defenders when her knee bent awkwardly as she planted her right leg, the non-contact injury causing her to crumple to the floor. She grabbed her knee and writhed in pain as her teammates surrounded her.

"I'd be lying if I told you I wasn't rattled seeing JuJu lying on the floor and crying," coach Lindsay Gottlieb said.

Later on, a team spokesperson said Watkins will undergo surgery and then begin rehabilitation.

The crowd in Galen Center went silent as Gottlieb and two other USC staffers attended to the 19-year-old Watkins, a 6-foot-2 sophomore who averages 24.6 points. She was carried off by multiple people with the Trojans leading 13-2.

The Trojans won 96-59 to reach the Sweet 16.

"My prayers and thoughts are with JuJu," MSU coach Sam Purcell said. "Obviously, we're competitors and you never want to see that, especially what she means for women's basketball."

Watkins has enjoyed good health in her brief college career. She started all 34 of USC's games as a freshman, when she was second in scoring nationally with 27.1 points a game. Her 920 points set a national record for freshman scoring.

USC reached the Elite Eight last year, losing to Paige Bueckers and UConn. The teams could meet again in a regional final in Spokane, Washington, this year.

After Watkins was hurt, the crowd loudly booed Mississippi State every time it had the ball. The school's cheerleaders were booed during their halftime routine and the crowd got on the team again as it warmed up for the second half.

"They're gonna stand behind their home team. They're gonna go hard for JuJu," said MSU guard Jerkaila Jordan, who scored 17 points. "I couldn't do nothing but respect them."

Watkins had three free throws, one rebound and two assists in five minutes.

In the second quarter, USC guard Malia Samuels went down hard on the baseline. She held her head in her hands as the crowd booed and Gottlieb again came rushing out to check on the sophomore, who ran the offense in Watkins' absence.

"I was relieved to hear her say, 'I'm good,'" Gottlieb said.

The Trojans appeared undaunted by the injury to their star. They rushed the floor in celebration after senior Rayah Marshall banked in a 3-pointer to beat the halftime buzzer and extend the lead to 50-27.

"They gave us a lot of energy, especially when things weren't going our way at the beginning," said Kiki Iriafen, who scored a season-high 36 points.

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Watkins hurt her left hand after the ball jammed her fingers in USC's first-round blowout win over UNC Greensboro. She later came up limping on her left leg and winced.

"It's the end of the season, body is a little banged up," she said afterward. "On to the next. Nobody cares. I'm all good."

US holds separate talks with Russians after meeting Ukrainians to discuss a potential ceasefire

By JON GAMBRELL and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — U.S. negotiators worked on a proposed partial ceasefire in the 3-year-old war in Ukraine on Monday, meeting representatives from Russia one day after holding separate talks with a team from Kyiv.

It has been a struggle to reach even a limited, 30-day ceasefire — which Moscow and Kyiv agreed to in principle last week -- with both sides continuing to attack each other with drones and missiles.

One major sticking point is what targets would be off-limits to strike, even after U.S. President Donald Trump spoke with the countries' leaders, because the parties disagree.

While the White House said "energy and infrastructure" would be covered, the Kremlin declared that the agreement referred more narrowly to "energy infrastructure." Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said he would also like to see infrastructure like railways and ports protected.

Talks Monday in the Saudi capital of Riyadh were expected to address some of those differences, as well as a potential pause in attacks in the Black Sea to ensure the safety of commercial shipping. Russian state media reported late Monday local time that the talks had ended.

In an exchange with reporters at the White House, Trump said territorial lines and the potential for U.S. ownership of a key nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine have been part of the talks.

Last week, Trump floated the idea of the U.S. taking control of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. The six-reactor facility — one of the world's largest — was seized by Russia early in the war.

"Some people are saying the United States should own the power plant — work it that way because we have the expertise" to get the plant operating, Trump said. "Something like that would be fine with me."

Since falling under Russian control, the plant's conditions have deteriorated. While its reactors have been shut down for years, they still require power and staff to maintain cooling systems and safety features. The facility is connected to Ukraine's energy grid without producing electricity.

U.S. and Russian representatives met in the morning in Riyadh, Russia's state Tass and RIA-Novosti news agencies reported. The U.S. and Ukrainian teams met Sunday.

Serhii Leshchenko, an adviser to the Ukrainian presidency, said the delegation remained in Riyadh on Monday and expected to meet again with the Americans. In his nightly address Monday, Zelenskyy said representatives from Ukraine and the U.S. will meet again, although he did not specify when.

Grigory Karasin, head of the foreign affairs committee in the Russian parliament's upper house and a participant in Monday's talks, told the Interfax news agency the negotiations were going on in a "creative way" and that the U.S. and Russian delegations "understand each other's views."

Meanwhile, both Russia and Ukraine continued to launch attacks across their borders.

The Russian Defense Ministry said Monday a Ukrainian drone attacked an oil pumping station in southern Russia that serves a pipeline carrying Kazakhstan's Caspian Sea oil to the Russian port of Novorossiisk for export. It said the drone was downed before it could reach the pumping station.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Monday the Russian military has been fulfilling President Vladimir Putin's order to halt attacks on energy facilities for 30 days. He has accused Ukraine of derailing the partial ceasefire with attacks on Russia's energy facilities, including a gas metering station in Sudzha in Russia's Kursk region.

Ukraine's military General Staff rejected Moscow's accusations and blamed the Russian military for shelling the station, a claim Peskov called "absurd."

Zelenskyy said Sunday evening that "since March 11, a proposal for an unconditional ceasefire has been

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on the table, and these attacks could have already stopped. But it is Russia that continues all this.”

He added that Ukraine’s partners — “the U.S., Europe, and others around the world” — should increase pressure on Russia “to stop this terror.”

Zelenskyy has emphasized that Ukraine is open to Trump’s proposal of a full, 30-day ceasefire. 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 Kyiv and its Western allies.

Speaking on “Fox News Sunday,” Trump’s special envoy Steve Witkoff said he expected “some real progress” at talks and that a pause in hostilities by both countries in the Black Sea would “naturally gravitate into a full-on shooting ceasefire.”

China rules out supplying peacekeeping forces

Asked about reports speculating that China might send peacekeepers to Ukraine to enforce any peace deal, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun responded Monday with an unequivocal no.

“Let me stress that the report is completely false. China’s position on the Ukraine crisis is clear and consistent,” Guo said at a briefing.

China has provided Russia with trade earnings from oil and other natural resources, along with diplomatic backing, but has not given any weapons or sent any personnel. China is, however, on close terms with North Korea, which has sent troops to fight alongside the Russian army.

Ukrainian railways hit by cyberattack

A “massive targeted cyberattack” hit Ukrainian state railway operator Ukrzaliznytsia on Sunday, the company wrote on Telegram, adding that it was working to restore its systems on Monday. The company said the attack did not affect train movements or schedules but disrupted its online booking system.

“The railway continues to operate despite physical attacks on the infrastructure, and even the most vile cyberattacks cannot stop it,” the company wrote.

Meanwhile, Ukraine’s Special Operations Forces claimed Monday it destroyed four military helicopters in Russia’s Belgorod region with the use of U.S.-supplied HIMARS rocket systems. It published drone footage on its Telegram page of what it said was the attack.

The strikes occurred at a concealed “jumping-off point” for Russian aircraft used in surprise attacks on Ukrainian forces, the group said.

A Russian missile struck the northern city of Sumy, across the border from Russia’s Kursk region, hitting residential buildings and a school, said regional head Volodymyr Artiukh. Children at the school were being evacuated at the time, and all were safe, he added.

But the regional prosecutor’s office said 65 people were injured, including 14 children.

Earlier, Russia fired 99 attack and decoy drones into Ukraine overnight, according to Ukraine’s air force, of which 57 were shot down.

Sierra Leone debates decriminalizing abortion as women and girls endanger their lives

By CAITLIN KELLY Associated Press

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone (AP) — When she got pregnant at 16, Fatou Esther Jusu was terrified that it would derail her future.

Abortion is illegal in Sierra Leone. Fearing judgment from her family, she took friends’ advice and bought misoprostol, a drug whose uses include abortion, from a local pharmacy. It didn’t work. Desperate, she tried again and miscarried.

“I went to the toilet... and the baby came out,” she said. She fainted and was taken to a hospital, where she pleaded with doctors not to tell her parents.

Now 21, Jusu considers herself lucky. One friend died after taking an expired version of the medication.

With those experiences in mind, the nursing student is mobilizing others in support of a bill that would decriminalize abortion in the West African country.

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"Even though I made a mistake, this mistake is saving other people," Jusu said.

Sierra Leone could become the second country in West Africa to decriminalize abortion, which health workers say would significantly improve the safety of pregnant women, decrease the number of preventable deaths and bring an end to the current colonial-era law.

Tens of thousands of women and girls attempt to self-terminate their pregnancies every year in Sierra Leone, where abortion is illegal in all circumstances.

Supporters of the bill say unsafe abortions account for around 10% of maternal deaths. Healthcare workers are known to perform terminating procedures when the situation is "incompatible with life" of the woman, usually in the case of "incomplete" abortions. Because abortion is illegal, they cite other reasons for the termination.

Sierra Leone's President Julius Maada Bio pointedly introduced the Safe Motherhood Bill after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, stripping away women's constitutional protections for abortion.

"At a time when sexual and reproductive health rights for women are either being overturned or threatened, we are proud that Sierra Leone can once again lead with progressive reforms," Bio said.

If approved, the bill would have been West Africa's most progressive legislation on abortion, allowing the procedure for up to 14 weeks.

But Sierra Leone since then has been torn apart by debate. Following opposition from religious leaders, the bill has been amended and now limits abortion to cases of life-threatening risk, fatal fetal abnormalities, rape or incest.

The government says it expects a vote in parliament in the coming weeks. It is not clear whether it will be approved.

'They go to any length'

An estimated 90,000 abortions are performed annually in Sierra Leone, a country of more than 8 million people, according to research by the African Population and Health Research Center. About 10% of the country's maternal deaths — affecting 717 of every 100,000 births — are due to unsafe abortions, the center said.

Health workers say the true number is likely much higher.

Due to cost and stigma, many women and girls resort to unsafe methods like expired medication, laundry detergent, hangers or sharp instruments.

On a recent morning at a clinic run by the MSI Sierra Leone nonprofit, dozens of women and girls waited nervously for consultations with nurse Hewanatu Samura.

MSI offers "post-abortion care," including terminations in cases of "incomplete" miscarriage, often when people have tried and failed abortions themselves. The nonprofit is the largest individual service provider of family planning services in the country.

If patients want an abortion, "they go to any length," Samura said. She often sees damage caused by unsterilized instruments, leading to severe hemorrhages, especially in underage girls.

Over 20% of girls between 15 and 19 in Sierra Leone get pregnant, according to the U.N. Population Fund, one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the world.

Samura said a 13-year-old — already mother to a 10-month-old — recently arrived with severe pain after secretly taking unidentified pills to try to abort her pregnancy.

"In Sierra Leone, people are afraid of the stigma ... so they would prefer to die silently," she said. The patient did not understand her body, Samura said, and her dead fetus resulted in dangerous septicemia.

The clinic has at least one such case a month, the nurse said.

A debate over tradition and values

Many women and girls who have had abortions fear speaking out, and the push for the bill in Sierra Leone has been led by women's rights groups and medical professionals.

"If you aren't listening to your doctors, then who are you listening to?" said lawyer and advocate Nicky Spencer-Coker. She has fought for reproductive rights alongside a coalition of women's rights organisa-

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tions since 2015.

At the time, parliament unanimously passed a first version of a bill allowing abortions for up to 12 weeks. But then-President Ernest Bai Koroma blocked the bill amid pressure from anti-abortion and religious groups.

Some Muslim and Christian leaders have denounced the current bill as “ungodly” and “hellish.” Archbishop Edward Tamba Charles, head of the country’s Inter-Religious Council, said it contradicts citizens’ “religious values and sensibilities.”

Sierra Leone’s current president has faced opposition from his own party members, including lawmaker Rebecca Yei Kamara.

“In our communities, children don’t get pregnant ... they talk to them, they teach them how to grow up into womanhood,” she said, and accused supporters of the bill of exaggerating the country’s abortion statistics.

Government officials have called the bill a necessary response to the reality of high numbers of deaths among pregnant women.

“The number of girls that die every year ... that’s the demonstration of people’s will,” Chernor Bah, the information minister, told The Associated Press.

Officials also say the bill is needed to strengthen gender reforms in Sierra Leone, which include last year’s ban on child marriage.

The bill also would allow wider access to family planning and reproductive health services. Activists fear those will be lost if the bill fails.

Allegations of foreign interference

Both sides in the debate have accused each other of being sponsored by foreign governments.

Some conservative U.S. media have framed the bill in Sierra Leone as a “Biden-backed push” for abortion rights in Africa.

The U.S. embassy in Freetown denied involvement in the bill.

Sierra Leone’s Inter-Religious Council has cited the recent changes on abortion access in the U.S. as reference points in their position papers opposing the bill.

Meanwhile, the reality for some pregnant women and girls remains harrowing.

Many healthcare practitioners told the AP they want the bill to pass so they can save lives without fear.

Samura the nurse recalled a mother who had traveled for hours in agony to the capital after drinking a concoction given to her by a traditional healer. Samura accompanied the patient to a hospital to seek treatment for a distended abdomen, severe septicemia and anemia.

The mother of six died in the waiting room.

“Right there on the couch everybody was crying,” Samura said. “Anytime I think of her, I wish the bill had been long passed.”

You’re an American in another land? Prepare to talk about the why and how of Trump 2.0

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The urgent care doctor cocked an eyebrow at Mari Santos and her American accent.

It was four days after President Donald Trump’s inauguration, and Santos was a student with a stomach bug in the first weeks of an overseas semester in Glasgow, Scotland. A doctor arrived to see her after a six-hour wait. But before asking what ailed her, he said this: “Interesting time to be an American, I suppose.”

Until then, Santos, 20, had not been thinking about Trump — just her 104-degree fever and concern about being sick while abroad. But the president and his triumphant return to the White House, she says, were on her physician’s mind, giving the American University student an instant education in geopolitics. The lesson, as she sees it: “There’s a kind of chilling in the air.”

“I knew that maybe that Europe is not in general big fan of American politics,” Santos said, “but I didn’t expect it to be such like a personal thing.”

The United States and its center of gravity occupy a unique space in the international conversation.

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People the world over talk about America — its policies, its proclivities, its place in the world. They have for generations. They did it during the Iraq War. They did it during the first Trump administration.

And two months into Trump 2.0, at least in many European and English-speaking countries, it's happening again — sometimes even more intensely.

People from other countries have questions about Trump — and trust

Answering for America under the new Trump administration is becoming a delicate experience for some of the estimated 5 million U.S. citizens living in other countries.

From Santos in Scotland to others in New Zealand, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Canada, Republican and Democratic expats alike told The Associated Press in recent weeks that the moment they are revealed to be American changes virtually every conversation to, in essence, "What about Trump?"

At its root, this change is about whom to trust among those thought until now to be allies, in world politics and in life. Trump, known for insisting the truth is what he says it is, is now the voice of America — not VOA, the independent news service that told the nation's story for eight decades until he silenced it March 16. The president himself has set an example in which trust is almost beside the point.

"Who do I trust? I mean, who do you trust? Do you trust anybody?" he said during an interview last month with The Spectator, when asked how much he trusts people like Jeff Bezos, owner of The Washington Post.

What comes after the revelation that someone is American, U.S. citizens overseas say, are awkward questions, pauses and euphemisms — but almost always a reference to America under Trump in 2025.

"Before this year, the typical follow-up would be asking where exactly I'm from and what brought me to France," said Anthony Mucia, 31, a Nebraska native who lives in Toulouse, France and has been overseas for six years. "Twice now, the first thing someone asked me was, 'Are you glad to be in France now?'" He also gets looks that he interprets as "a bit of 'shock' or 'uneasiness.'" Almost like it automatically turned into an embarrassing topic."

What's bending these interactions, expats say, is Trump's flurry of orders and statements that have upended 80 years of international order and spooked markets.

He's talked about how the U.S. will "one way or the other" capture Greenland from Denmark, "take back" Panama and make Canada the 51st U.S. state. He wants to empty and develop war-battered Gaza, and has cut off U.S. aid to the world's neediest people. He's falsely blamed President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for starting the Russian invasion and ended a White House meeting with Zelenskyy after berating the Ukrainian leader. Trump has let Europe's leaders know that the U.S. is not a staunch ally in facing the Russian threat. And he's set off tariff wars with China, Canada and Mexico.

Not smoothing the American experience overseas is the backlash developing against Trump's association with Elon Musk and Tesla, which has fueled growing boycott movements. People are joining Facebook groups to exchange ideas about how to avoid U.S. products. Feelings are especially strong across the Nordic region — particularly Denmark, where Trump's moves have set "the Danish Viking blood boiling," one man told The Associated Press.

So far, the interactions are less hostile than wary, Americans overseas say. But anti-U.S. sentiment is emerging as a concern on the cusp of what's expected to be a record-setting international travel season for Americans.

Prepare to talk about 'what's going on'

Jake Lamb, 32, moved from Colorado to Auckland, New Zealand in 2023. He said says he's "noticed a significant shift in the types and frequency of questions I'm asked" over the past year. Kiwis remain friendly about it, but they've been saying they might have to "hide" Lamb or vouch that he's "one of the good ones" if Trump escalates conflicts with former allies. He thinks that the good humor belies wariness.

"I am concerned that it may become difficult for some not to hold individual Americans responsible," Lamb, a volunteer coordinator for a charity and who voted for Democrat Kamala Harris, said in an email.

Elizabeth Van Horne, 33, has lived in France since 2013. For years, she said, people would ask "why on Earth I'd come to live in France if I could live in the U.S: 'It's so beautiful, there's so much potential, so much opportunity, like living in a TV show.'"

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"Now, that romanticized image has completely changed," Van Horne, a Democrat, said in an email. Early in March, a postal worker told her it's sad to watch.

"For me," she said, "that conversation summed it up: 'Je suis desole pour vous' — 'I'm sorry for you.'"

For Trump supporters abroad, it can be complicated

Georganne Burke, a Syracuse, N.Y., native living in Ottawa, supported Trump in all three elections and is the chairwoman of Republicans Overseas in Canada. She's a dual citizen, which makes her something like the Peace Bridge that links the two nations in Buffalo, N.Y.

Trump's tariff war, his manner and his provocative talk about how Canada "only works" as the 51st U.S. state "has everybody's hair on fire," she said in an interview. Burke, 77, says she's received threats and had a tense talk with an anti-Trump co-worker. People ask her, "How could anyone vote for him?"

An invitation to speak about trade near the end of March, she says, came with the organizer saying that he was "pretty sure that most of the people will be polite." Burke accepted the invitation.

She says anti-American sentiment was bad during the Iraq war under President George W. Bush in 2003. But now it's different.

"Then, it was kind of more on the politicians," as the targets of public ire, Burke said in a recent interview. "Now, it's much more personal."

Burke's counterpart in London, Greg Swenson of Republicans Overseas UK, says walking around as an American in another country remains more positive than negative. In interviews with media outlets, he readily acknowledges Trump can be "obnoxious." But Swenson, 62, is an investment banker, and he says the president and America remain good for business.

"In the private capital world, which is not affected by day-to-day (market) volatility, there is just a huge amount of optimism," Swenson said. That means, he says, that investors want to work with U.S. vendors and customers, seeking American "credibility" through "an affiliation with the president."

As for what people overseas think of Americans right now: A survey of social media, neighbors and others shows plenty are curious and concerned. When an American dad posted on Reddit his worry that his family won't be welcomed in Ireland, an Irish dad who asked the AP to identify him by his Reddit handle responded this way:

"A lot of people like me are really, really alienated and angry at the US and Americans," wrote MDMB13. "But the good news is we're Irish so you'll never know because (we) bury our feelings in a far-off place and let them fester over decades." He ended his comment with a smile emoji.

International students weigh new risks of pursuing higher education in the US under Trump

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

Since plunging during the COVID-19 pandemic, international student enrollment in the U.S. has been rebounding — a relief to American universities that count on their tuition payments. Two months into the new Trump administration, educators fear that could soon change.

Unnerved by efforts to deport students over political views, students from other countries already in the U.S. have felt new pressure to watch what they say.

A Ph.D. student at the University of Rochester from South Asia said it feels too risky to speak about LG-BTQ+ causes she once openly championed or even be seen near a political demonstration. With reports of travel bans circulating, she likely won't fly home for the summer out of fear she would not be allowed back into the U.S.

"You're here for an education so you've got to keep moving forward on that end," said the student, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of being targeted by authorities. "But also it's very hard to, say, 'OK, I'm at work. I've got to zone out. I can't be thinking about the news.'"

Educators worry it's a balancing act that will turn off foreign students. As the U.S. government takes a harder line on immigration, cuts federal research funding and begins policing campus activism, students are left to wonder if they'll be able to get visas, travel freely, pursue research or even express an opinion.

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"It has a chilling effect," said Clay Harmon, executive director of AIRC, a membership organization focused on recruiting and enrolling international students. "Even if there's no direct consequence or direct limitation right now, all of this cumulatively produces an impression that the U.S. is not welcoming, it's not open or that you may be in some kind of danger or jeopardy if you do come to the U.S."

During a recent trip to India, the biggest sender of students to the U.S., the consensus among recruiting agencies was that far fewer of that country's students are interested in American colleges than in recent years, Harmon said.

Some students are waiting to see how policy changes will play out, while others already have deferred admission offers for fall 2025, he said. Student social networks are active, and news about immigration-related developments in America — like a Republican proposal to prevent Chinese students from studying in the U.S. — spreads quickly.

Students in Canada, China, India and elsewhere have been seeking answers and advice on Reddit and other social media sites, wondering whether to move forward with U.S. plans, or choose a college in the United Kingdom, Germany or elsewhere in Europe.

International students are coveted as an antidote to declining domestic enrollment and source of full-price tuition payments. In the 2023-2024 academic year, 1.1 million international students at U.S. colleges and universities contributed an all-time high \$43.8 billion to the nation's economy and supported more than 378,000 jobs, according to data released by NAFSA, an agency that promotes international education.

International graduate students also play a large role in advancing research, said Fanta Aw, who heads NAFSA.

Aw said universities must work to remind prospective students that detentions like those of a pro-Palestinian activist Columbia University and, more recently, a scholar at Georgetown University, still are not the norm, despite the attention they receive.

"We have international students at lots of universities," she said, and news coverage has focused on consequences for international students at just a couple of colleges. "So we have to also put into perspective the fact that the vast majority of students are in universities where we're not hearing anything."

The messaging from colleges and universities on the changing political climate has varied. Some, including Northeastern University in Boston, have responded to Trump's directives with webpages to keep current and prospective students informed.

"Our global community will continue to be a welcoming place for admitted students from all corners of the world," spokeswoman Renata Nyul said via email.

Others have gone further. Bunker Hill Community College in Boston has suspended its one- to two-week study abroad programs, citing concerns about potential travel restrictions. Administrators at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism have warned students who are not U.S. citizens about their vulnerability to arrest or deportation.

Brown University has advised international students and staff, including visa holders and permanent residents, to postpone travel after a Brown professor was deported to Lebanon despite having a U.S. visa. Homeland Security officials later said she "openly admitted" to supporting a Hezbollah leader and attending his funeral.

Greenlanders unite to fend off the US as Trump seeks control of the Arctic island

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

NUUK, Greenland (AP) — Lisa Sólrún Christiansen gets up at 4 a.m. most days and gets to work knitting thick wool sweaters coveted by buyers around the world for their warmth and colorful patterns celebrating Greenland's traditional Inuit culture.

Her morning routine includes a quick check of the news, but these days the ritual shatters her peace because of all the stories about U.S. President Donald Trump's designs on her homeland.

"I get overwhelmed," Christiansen said earlier this month as she looked out to sea, where impossibly

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blue icebergs floated just offshore.

The daughter of Inuit and Danish parents, Christiansen, 57, cherishes Greenland. It is a source of immense family pride that her father, an artist and teacher, designed the red-and-white Greenlandic flag.

"On his deathbed he talked a lot about the flag, and he said that the flag is not his, it's the people's," she said. "And there's one sentence I keep thinking about. He said, 'I hope the flag will unite the Greenlandic people.'"

Island of anxiety

Greenlanders are increasingly worried that their homeland, a self-governing region of Denmark, has become a pawn in the competition between the U.S., Russia and China as global warming opens up access to the Arctic. They fear Trump's aim to take control of Greenland, which holds rich mineral deposits and straddles strategic air and sea routes, may block their path toward independence.

Those fears were heightened Sunday when Usha Vance, the wife of U.S. Vice President JD Vance, announced she would visit Greenland later this week to attend the national dogsled race. Separately, National Security Adviser Michael Waltz and Energy Secretary Chris Wright will visit a U.S. military base in northern Greenland.

The announcement inflamed tensions sparked earlier this month when Trump reiterated his desire to annex Greenland just two days after Greenlanders elected a new parliament opposed to becoming part of the U.S. Trump even made a veiled reference to the possibility of military pressure, noting the U.S. bases in Greenland and musing that "maybe you'll see more and more soldiers go there."

News of the visit drew an immediate backlash from local politicians, who described it as a display of U.S. power at a time they are trying to form a government.

"It must also be stated in bold that our integrity and democracy must be respected without any external interference," outgoing Prime Minister Múte Borouup Egede said.

Greenland, part of Denmark since 1721, has been moving toward independence for decades. It's a goal most Greenlanders support, though they differ on when and how that should happen. They don't want to trade Denmark for an American overlord.

The question is whether Greenland will be allowed to control its own destiny at a time of rising international tensions when Trump sees the island as key to U.S. national security.

David vs. Goliath

While Greenland has limited leverage against the world's greatest superpower, Trump made a strategic mistake by triggering a dispute with Greenland and Denmark rather than working with its NATO allies in Nuuk and Copenhagen, said Otto Svendsen, an Arctic expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

Trump's actions, he says, have united Greenlanders and fostered a greater sense of national identity.

"You have this feeling of pride and of self-determination in Greenland that the Greenlanders are not, you know, cowed by this pressure coming from Washington," Svendsen said. "And they're doing everything in their power to make their voices heard."

Denmark recognized Greenland's right to independence at a time of its choosing under the 2009 Greenland Self-Government Act, which was approved by local voters and ratified by the Danish parliament. The right to self-determination is also enshrined in the United Nations charter, approved by the U.S. in 1945.

U.S. national security

But Trump is more focused on the economic and security needs of the U.S. than the rights of smaller nations. Since returning to office in January, he has pressured Ukraine into giving the U.S. access to valuable mineral resources, threatened to reclaim the Panama Canal and suggested that Canada should become the 51st state.

Now he has turned his attention to Greenland, a territory of 56,000 people, most from indigenous Inuit backgrounds.

Greenland guards access to the Arctic at a time when melting sea ice has reignited competition for energy and mineral resources and attracted an increased Russian military presence. The Pituffik Space Base on the island's northwest coast supports missile warning and space surveillance operations for the

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U.S. and NATO.

Before Trump's re-election, Greenlanders hoped to leverage this unique position to help the country achieve independence. Now they fear it has made them vulnerable.

Cebastian Rosing, who works for a water taxi firm that offers tours around the Nuuk fjord, said he's frustrated that Trump is trying to take over just as Greenland has begun to assert its autonomy and celebrate its Inuit origins.

"It's so weird to defend (the idea) that our country is our country because it's always been our country," he said. "We're just getting our culture back because of colonialism."

Strategic importance

It's not that Greenlanders don't like the U.S. They have welcomed Americans for decades.

The U.S. effectively occupied Greenland during World War II, building a string of air and naval bases.

After the war, President Harry Truman's government offered to buy the island because of "the extreme importance of Greenland to the defense of the United States." Denmark rejected the proposal but signed a long-term base agreement.

When Trump resurrected the proposal during his first term, it was quickly rejected by Denmark and dismissed as a headline-grabbing stunt. But now Trump is pursuing the idea with renewed energy.

During a speech earlier this month he told a joint session of Congress that the U.S. needed to take control of Greenland to protect its national security. "I think we're going to get it," Trump said. "One way or the other."

A model in the Marshall Islands?

Even so, Trump has his admirers in Greenland.

And there is no greater fan than Jørgen Boassen. When he spoke to The Associated Press, Boassen wore a T-shirt featuring a photo of Trump with his fist in the air and blood streaming down his face after an assassination attempt last year. Underneath was the slogan, "American Badass."

Boassen works for an organization called American Daybreak, which was founded by former Trump official Thomas Dans and promotes closer ties between the U.S. and Greenland.

The former bricklayer, who describes himself as "110%" Inuit, has a litany of complaints about Denmark, most stemming from what he sees as mistreatment of local people during colonial rule. In particular, he cites Inuit women who say they were fitted with birth control devices without their permission during the 1970s.

Trump must act to secure America's back door, Boassen says, because Denmark has failed to guarantee Greenland's security.

But even he wants Greenland to be independent, a U.S. ally but not the 51st state.

What he has in mind is something more like the free-association agreement the Marshall Islands negotiated with the U.S. when it became independent in 1986. That agreement recognizes the Pacific archipelago as a sovereign nation that conducts its own foreign policy but gives the U.S. control over defense and security.

"We're in 2025," Boassen said. "So I don't believe they can come here and take over."

Whatever happens, most Greenlanders agree that the island's fate should be up to them, not Trump.

"We have to stand together," Christiansen said, her knitting needles clicking and clacking.

Trump administration invokes state secrets privilege in case over deportations under wartime law

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration on Monday invoked a "state secrets privilege" and refused to give a federal judge any additional information about the deportation of Venezuelan migrants to El Salvador under an 18th century wartime law — a case that has become a flashpoint amid escalating tension with the federal courts.

The declaration comes as U.S. District Judge James Boasberg weighs whether the government defied

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his order to turn around planes carrying migrants after he blocked deportations of people alleged to be gang members without due process.

Boasberg, the chief judge of the federal district court in Washington, has asked for details about when the planes landed and who was on board, information that the Trump administration asserts would harm "diplomatic and national security concerns."

Government attorneys also asked an appeals court on Monday to lift Boasberg's order and allow deportations to continue, a push that appeared to divide the judges.

Circuit Court Judge Patricia Millett said Nazis detained in the U.S. during World War II received better legal treatment than Venezuelan immigrants who were deported to El Salvador this month under the same statute.

"We certainly dispute the Nazi analogy," Justice Department attorney Drew Ensign responded during a hearing of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.

Millett is one of three appellate judges who will decide whether to lift a March 15 order temporarily prohibiting deportations under the Alien Enemies Act of 1798. They didn't rule from the bench Monday.

A second judge appeared open to the administration's argument that the migrants should be challenging their detention in Texas rather than the nation's capital. The third judge on the panel didn't ask any questions.

The administration has transferred hundreds of Venezuelan immigrants to El Salvador, invoking the Alien Enemies Act for the first time since World War II.

Also on Monday, attorneys representing the Venezuelan government filed a legal action in El Salvador to free 238 Venezuelans who are being held in a Salvadoran maximum-security prison after the U.S. deported them.

President Donald Trump's administration appealed after Boasberg blocked those deportations and ordered planeloads of Venezuelan immigrants to return to the U.S. That did not happen.

The Alien Enemies Act allows noncitizens to be deported without the opportunity to go before an immigration or federal court judge. Trump issued a proclamation calling the Tren de Aragua gang an invading force.

Ensign argued that Boasberg's ruling was an "unprecedented and enormous intrusion upon the powers of the executive branch."

"The president has to comply with the Constitution and the laws like anyone else," said Millett, who was nominated by Democratic President Barack Obama in 2013.

Judge Justin Walker, whom Trump nominated in 2020, seemed to be more receptive to the administration's arguments based on his line of questioning. Walker pointed to the government's arguments that the plaintiffs should have filed their lawsuit in Texas, where the immigrants were detained.

"You could have filed the exact same complaint you filed here in Texas district court," Walker told American Civil Liberties Union attorney Lee Gelernt.

"We have no idea if everyone is in Texas," Gelernt said.

Walker also pressed the plaintiffs' lawyer to cite any prior case in which a judicial order blocking "a national security operation with foreign implications" survived appellate review.

Gelernt accused the administration of trying to use the law to "short circuit" immigration proceedings. Plaintiffs' attorneys had no way to individually challenge all the deportations before planeloads of Venezuelans took off on March 15, he added.

"This has all been done in secret," Gelernt said.

Judge Karen LeCraft Henderson, who was nominated by Republican President George H.W. Bush in 1990, was the third judge on the panel. She didn't ask any questions during a hearing that lasted roughly two hours.

Boasberg, an Obama nominee, ruled that immigrants facing deportation must get an opportunity to challenge their designations as alleged gang members. He said there is "a strong public interest in preventing the mistaken deportation of people based on categories they have no right to challenge."

"The public also has a significant stake in the Government's compliance with the law," the judge wrote.

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Trump and his allies have called for impeaching Boasberg. In a rare statement, Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts said "impeachment is not an appropriate response to disagreement concerning a judicial decision."

Just after midnight Monday, Trump posted a social media message questioning Boasberg's impartiality and calling for him to be disbarred.

During a hearing Friday, Boasberg vowed to determine whether the government defied his oral order from the bench to turn planes around. 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.

Come back or move on? Fired federal workers face choices now that a judge wants them rehired

By MARTHA BELLISLE Associated Press

Sam Peterson is one of thousands of fired federal workers who was offered his job back under a judge's order, but he didn't jump at the chance to go back to his park ranger position at Washington state's Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area.

Instead, he quickly turned it down, opting to move with his wife to start a career outside the government at an Oregon museum.

"We signed a lease Monday and who knows what the next few months would bring if I were to return to federal employment," said Peterson, 26.

Whether to return to the federal workforce is a decision confronting thousands of fired employees after two judges this month found legal problems with how President Donald Trump is carrying out a dramatic downsizing of the U.S. government. One ruling by a California federal judge would reinstate 16,000 probationary employees.

On Monday, the Trump administration sought to stop giving fired workers any choice by asking the U.S. Supreme Court to halt the rehiring orders. It was not clear how quickly the nation's high court could rule on the emergency appeal, which argued that U.S. District Judge William Alsup, who was appointed by Democratic President Bill Clinton, went beyond his legal authority.

Although it is unknown how many federal workers are taking up the offers to return to work, some employees have already decided to move on, fearing more reductions down the road.

Others who were asked to return were immediately put on administrative leave, with full pay and benefits, or offered early retirement. For those who chose to return, some say the decision came down to their dedication to the work and a belief that what they do is important.

Eric Anderson, 48, got word last week that he can return to his position as a biological science technician at the Indiana Dunes National Park. He said he's excited to go back on Tuesday, where he'll lead a crew conducting prescribed burns to limit wildland fire impacts, but is concerned about the uncertainty.

"I've heard that some people's positions have changed from doing what they normally do to doing something completely weird and different," Anderson said. "It'll be interesting going back and seeing if stuff still changes by the day."

Trump's Department of Government Efficiency, overseen by billionaire Elon Musk, has not disclosed how many probationary workers were cut, how many were reinstated or how many rehired workers were placed on leave.

Democratic U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts asked the Government Accountability Office to seek answers to those questions and to study the impacts of the firings, arguing that removing people from critical areas of government — such as air travel, wildland firefighting, infectious disease control, nuclear security and veterans' health care — has put the country's health and safety at risk. In a letter to Warren and other Democratic senators, the federal office said it accepted their request to review the firings.

One agency, the National Park Service, was authorized to rehire 1,000 workers, according to the National Parks Conservation Association. The group celebrated the reversal but criticized the process.

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"This chaotic whiplash is no way to manage the Park Service, especially as they are welcoming millions of visitors right now," said association president and CEO Theresa Pierno. "This administration needs to stop playing games with the future of our national parks."

Brian Gibbs, who was fired from his environmental educator job at the Effigy Mounds National Monument in Iowa in February, returned to work Monday. In a widely shared Facebook post, Gibbs said he's committed to serving the American public "to the best of my abilities as long as I am authorized to" and leading field trips at the park.

Some Department of Interior workers were given their jobs back only to be offered an early retirement package, according to a letter reviewed by The Associated Press.

Other returning workers were placed on administrative leave as the Trump administration appeals the court rulings on mass firings. That means some workers were fired as part of an effort to eliminate government waste only to be rehired and paid, at least for a time, to not work.

Sydney Smith, 28, was a probationary employee with the Forest Service who was on a temporary assignment to the Library of Congress when she was terminated. She was rehired but was immediately placed on administrative leave with backpay. Smith said she's ready to get back to work and hopes others get back too.

"It's not clear at what point they would have me return to work," she said. "So I am being paid but not working. That feels inefficient."

Mangione wants a laptop in jail while he awaits trial in killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Luigi Mangione is asking for a laptop in jail, but just for legal purposes — not for communicating with anyone — as he awaits trial in the killing of UnitedHealthcare's CEO.

In a court filing made public late Monday, Mangione's lawyers proposed that he get a laptop configured solely to let him view a vast amount of documents, video and other material in the case surrounding the shooting of Brian Thompson. Similar limited-laptop provisions have been made for some other defendants in the federal lockup where Mangione is being held.

The Manhattan district attorney's office, which is prosecuting Mangione on a rare New York state charge of murder as an act of terrorism, didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. According to Mangione's lawyers, prosecutors are frowning on the laptop request, saying that some witnesses have been threatened.

Defense lawyer Karen Friedman Agnifilo wrote that there's "no connection to Mr. Mangione for any of said alleged threats."

Mangione, 26, is accused of gunning down Thompson in December outside a Manhattan hotel where UnitedHealthcare was about to hold an investor conference. Thompson, who was 50 and had two children in high school, worked for decades within UnitedHealthcare and its parent company.

Mangione, an Ivy League computer science graduate from a Maryland real estate family, has pleaded not guilty to the New York state charges. He also faces a parallel federal case that carries the possibility of the death penalty. He hasn't entered a plea to the federal charges or to state-level gun possession and other charges in Pennsylvania, where he was arrested days after Thompson's death.

Thompson's killing alarmed the corporate world, where some health insurers hastily switched to remote work or online shareholder meetings.

But at the same time, the case channeled some Americans' frustrations with health insurance companies. Mangione's writings and words on bullets recovered from the scene reflected animus toward health insurers and corporate America, authorities have said.

Some people have lionized the accused killer, donated money to his defense and even flocked to his court appearances. Others, including elected officials, have deplored the praise for what they cast as ideological violence and vigilante justice.

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Through his lawyers, Mangione has released a statement thanking supporters.

If he does get a laptop, it would be unable to connect to the internet, run video games or play movies or other entertainment, his lawyers said in Monday's filing. But it would let him examine, from his jail cell, more than 15,000 pages of documents and thousands of hours of video that prosecutors gathered and were required to turn over to his attorneys.

Otherwise, he can view the material when meeting with his lawyers. But they say there aren't enough visiting hours in the day for him to do that and properly help prepare his defense.

Trump officials texted war plans to a group chat in a secure app that included a journalist

By TARA COPP, AAMER MADHANI and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Top national security officials for President Donald Trump, including his defense secretary, texted war plans for upcoming military strikes in Yemen to a group chat in a secure messaging app that included the editor-in-chief for The Atlantic, the magazine reported in a story posted online Monday. The National Security Council said the text chain "appears to be authentic."

Trump initially told reporters he was not aware that the highly sensitive information had been shared, 2 1/2 hours after it was reported. He later appeared to joke about the breach.

The material in the text chain "contained operational details of forthcoming strikes on Iran-backed Houthi-rebels in Yemen, including information about targets, weapons the U.S. would be deploying, and attack sequencing," editor-in-chief Jeffrey Goldberg reported.

It was not immediately clear if the specifics of the military operation were classified, but they often are and at the least are kept secure to protect service members and operational security. The U.S. has conducted airstrikes against the Houthis since the militant group began targeting commercial and military vessels in the Red Sea in November 2023.

Just two hours after Goldberg received the details of the attack on March 15, the U.S. began launching a series of airstrikes against Houthi targets in Yemen.

The National Security Council is looking into the matter

The National Security Council said in a statement that it was looking into how a journalist's number was added to the chain in the Signal group chat. In addition to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, it included Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Tulsi Gabbard, Trump's director of national intelligence.

Goldberg said he received the Signal invitation from Mike Waltz, Trump's national security adviser, who was also in the group chat.

Hegseth in his first comments on the matter attacked Goldberg as "deceitful" and a "discredited so-called journalist" while alluding to previous critical reporting of Trump from the publication. He did not shed light on why Signal was being used to discuss the sensitive operation or how Goldberg ended up on the message chain.

"Nobody was texting war plans and that's all I have to say about that," Hegseth said in an exchange with reporters after landing in Hawaii on Monday as he began his first trip to the Indo-Pacific as defense secretary.

In a statement late Monday, White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt said the president still has the "utmost confidence" in Waltz and the national security team.

Earlier Monday, Trump told reporters: "I don't know anything about it. You're telling me about it for the first time." He added that The Atlantic was "not much of a magazine."

By early evening, the president jokingly brushed it aside. He amplified a social media posting from Elon Musk spotlighting a conservative satirical news site article with the cutting headline: "4D Chess: Genius Trump Leaks War Plans to 'The Atlantic' Where No One Will Ever See Them."

Government officials have used Signal for organizational correspondence, but it is not classified and can be hacked. Privacy and tech experts say the popular end-to-end encrypted messaging and voice call app

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is more secure than conventional texting.

Reaction poured in quickly

The sharing of sensitive information comes as Hegseth's office has just announced a crackdown on leaks of sensitive information, including the potential use of polygraphs on defense personnel to determine how reporters have received information.

Sean Parnell, a spokesman for Hegseth, did not immediately respond to requests for comment on why the defense secretary posted war operational plans on an unclassified app.

The administration's handling of the highly sensitive information was swiftly condemned by Democratic lawmakers. Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer called for a full investigation.

"This is one of the most stunning breaches of military intelligence I have read about in a very, very long time," Schumer, a New York Democrat, said in a floor speech Monday afternoon.

"If true, this story represents one of the most egregious failures of operational security and common sense I have ever seen," said Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, in a statement.

He said American lives are "on the line. The carelessness shown by Trump's Cabinet is stunning and dangerous. I will be seeking answers from the Administration immediately."

Rep. Jim Himes of Connecticut, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said in a statement that he was "horrified" by the reports.

Himes said if a lower-ranking official "did what is described here, they would likely lose their clearance and be subject to criminal investigation. The American people deserve answers," which he said he planned to get at Wednesday's previously scheduled committee hearing.

Some Republicans also expressed concerns.

Sen. Roger Wicker, the Mississippi Republican who chairs the Senate Armed Services Committee, told reporters Monday, "We're very concerned about it and we'll be looking into it on a bipartisan basis."

Reed said he would be speaking with Wicker about what the committee will do to "follow up" on the Signal leak.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune said he wants to learn more about what happened.

"Obviously, we got to run it to the ground, figure out what went on there," said Thune, a South Dakota Republican.

Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson offered a notably forgiving posture.

"I think it would be a terrible mistake for there to be adverse consequences on any of the people that were involved in that call," Johnson said. "They were trying to do a good job, the mission was accomplished with precision."

There are strict laws around handling defense information

The handling of national defense information is strictly governed by law under the century-old Espionage Act, including provisions that make it a crime to remove such information from its "proper place of custody" even through an act of gross negligence.

The Justice Department in 2015 and 2016 investigated whether former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton broke the law by communicating about classified information with her aides on a private email server she set up, though the FBI ultimately recommended against charges and none were brought.

In the Biden administration, some officials were given permission to download Signal on their White House-issued phones, but were instructed to use the app sparingly, according to a former national security official who served in the Democratic administration.

The official, who requested anonymity to speak about methods used to share sensitive information, said Signal was most commonly used to communicate what they internally referred to as "tippers" to notify someone when they were away from the office or traveling overseas that they should check their "high side" inbox for a classified message.

The app was sometimes also used by officials during the Biden administration to communicate about scheduling of sensitive meetings or classified phone calls when they were outside the office, the official said.

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The use of Signal became more prevalent during the last year of the Biden administration after federal law enforcement officials warned that China and Iran were hacking the White House as well as officials in the first Trump administration, according to the official.

The official was unaware of top Biden administration officials — such as Vice President Kamala Harris, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and national security adviser Jake Sullivan — using Signal to discuss sensitive plans as the Trump administration officials did.

Some of the toughest criticism targeted Hegseth, a former Fox News Channel weekend host. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, an Iraq War veteran, said on social media that Hegseth, “the most unqualified Secretary of Defense in history, is demonstrating his incompetence by literally leaking classified war plans in the group chat.”

Leak reveals internal debate on Houthi operation

Vance in the chain of the messages questioned whether Americans would understand the importance of strikes that came with the risk of “a moderate to severe spike in oil prices” and if the timing of the operation might be a “mistake.”

“I am willing to support the consensus of the team and keep these concerns to myself,” Vance argued. “But there is a strong argument for delaying this a month, doing the messaging work on why this matters, seeing where the economy is, etc.”

Vance also made the case that Europe would benefit much more than the U.S. by the action aimed at decimating the Houthis and securing Red Sea shipping lanes.

“If you think we should do it let’s go. I just hate bailing Europe out again,” Vance said in a back-and-forth with Hegseth.

“I fully share your loathing of European free-loading. It’s PATHETIC,” Hegseth replied. He added, “I think we should go.”

The vice president’s communications director, William Martin, released a statement downplaying the debate. He said Vance “unequivocally supports this administration’s foreign policy.”

UN to reduce staff in Gaza, blaming Israel for a strike that killed its employee

By WAFAA SHURAF, EDITH M. LEDERER and LEE KEATH Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — The United Nations said Monday it will “reduce its footprint” in the Gaza Strip after an Israeli tank strike hit one of its compounds last week, killing one staffer from Bulgaria and wounding five other employees.

The world body will temporarily remove about a third of its approximately 100 international staffers working in Gaza, U.N. Secretary-General spokesman Stéphane Dujarric. He pointed to the increased danger after Israel relaunched its military campaign last week with bombardment that has since killed hundreds of Palestinians. Israel has also cut off all food, medicine, aid and other supplies to Gaza’s population for the past three weeks.

Dujarric’s statement was the U.N.’s first to point the finger at Israel in the March 19 explosion at the U.N. guesthouse in central Gaza. He said that “based on the information currently available,” the strikes on the site “were caused by an Israeli tank.”

The Israeli military repeated its denial that it was responsible for the strike, which took place a day after Israel shattered Gaza’s 2-month-old ceasefire with a surprise bombardment across the Gaza Strip.

Dujarric said the U.N. “has made taken the difficult decision to reduce the Organization’s footprint in Gaza, even as humanitarian needs soar.” He said the U.N. “is not leaving Gaza,” pointing out that it still has about 13,000 national staff in Gaza, mainly working for UNRWA, the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees.

New strikes killed dozens in Gaza

New Israeli strikes over the past 24 hours killed more than 60 Palestinians around Gaza, the territory’s Health Ministry said. The ministry’s count does not distinguish between civilians and militants.

The ministry on Monday put out a list of the names of more than 15,000 children, 17 and under, killed by

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Israel's campaign since it began more than 17 months ago. The list included nearly 5,000 children under the age of 6 who had been killed, including 876 infants who had not reached a year in age,

Israel, which launched its campaign in retaliation for Hamas' October 2023 attack, says it has restarted its bombardment and cut off food to Gaza to force Hamas to accept new terms for the ceasefire and release more hostages. It says it targets Hamas members and positions, blaming the group for civilian deaths because it operates among the population.

Air raid sirens sound in Israel after a missile attacks from Yemen and Gaza

Air raid sirens and explosions were heard over Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and central Israel on Monday evening as the military said it intercepted a missile launched from Yemen.

There were no immediate reports of casualties. Israel's Magen David Adom emergency rescue service said "teams are en-route to search areas where reports of rocket strikes have been received."

Yemen's Houthi rebels have fired a handful of long-range missiles at Israel in the days since it resumed the war in Gaza. There was no immediate claim of responsibility from the Houthis.

Two rockets from the Gaza Strip were also intercepted after crossing into Israeli territory earlier Monday evening, setting off sirens, the Israeli military said. There were no immediate reports of injuries.

Al-Quds Brigades, the military arm of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant group, claimed responsibility. Medical workers are under fire in Gaza

The U.N. reduction comes as aid workers and medical staff have come under fire.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said its office in the southern city of Rafah in the Gaza Strip was damaged by an explosive projectile Monday. It said no staff were hurt but the damage has a direct impact on its ability to operate. It did not specify who was behind the explosion.

ICRC also said that on Sunday, contact was lost with emergency medical technicians from the Palestine Red Crescent Society and their whereabouts remain unknown. Last week, humanitarian workers in Gaza were killed and injured, it said.

On Sunday, Israel struck the surgery ward at southern Gaza's biggest hospital, killing two people and wounding others, many of whom were already injured by earlier strikes. One of those killed at Khan Younis' Nasser Hospital was a teenage boy recovering from surgery.

The other was a Hamas official that Israel says was the target of the strike, Ismail Barhoum. Hamas said Barhoum was undergoing treatment at the time. The Israeli military denied that, saying he oversaw Hamas' finances in Gaza, including transferring money to its armed wing, and was working out of the hospital.

The strike last week on the U.N. compound outside Deir al-Balah killed a 51-year-old staffer, Marin Valev Marinov. He worked with the U.N. Office for Project Services, which carries out infrastructure and development projects around the world.

In the two days before the deadly blast, strikes hit next to and then directly in the compound, UNOPS chief Jorge Moreira da Silva said earlier. He said the agency had contacted the Israeli military after the first strike and confirmed that the military was aware of the facility's location.

Full impact of the UN reduction is not immediately known

Olga Cherevko, spokesperson for the U.N.'s humanitarian office, known as OCHA, said the U.N. and its partners have already suspended a number of activities, many in education, protection and water and sanitation services. The reason, she was, was safety concerns and the impact of Israeli evacuation orders.

"A lot things are constrained right now because of the security situation," she told AP before Dujarric's announcement. "The challenges are massive. We have had a lot of our activities affected by the situation and a lot of our partners have had to suspend operations because it is just not safe."

Movement of trucks, including those distributing water, have been affected, she said. Only 29 out of 237 temporary learning spaces have resumed their activities since the ceasefire collapse, she said.

Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed more than 50,000 Palestinians and wounded more than 113,000, according to the Health Ministry. Nearly 90% of the population of some 2,3 million have been driven from their homes. Israel launched the campaign vowing to destroy Hamas after its Oct. 7, 2023 attack on southern Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 people and kidnapped 250 others.

Postmaster General Louis DeJoy resigns after 5 years in the position

By LISA BAUMANN Associated Press

The head of the beleaguered U.S. Postal Service, Louis DeJoy, resigned Monday after nearly five years in the position, leaving as President Donald Trump and Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency have floated the idea of privatizing mail service.

DeJoy had said last month he planned to step down but hadn't set a date. He leaves an agency with an uncertain future. Trump has said he is considering putting USPS under the control of the Commerce Department in an attempt to stop losses at the \$78 billion-a-year agency, which has operated as an independent entity since 1970. It has struggled at times to balance the books with the decline of first-class mail.

Deputy Postmaster General Doug Tulino will take on the role until the Postal Service Board of Governors names a permanent replacement for DeJoy, who became postmaster general in the summer of 2020 during Trump's first term. He was a Republican donor who owned a logistics business and was the first person to hold the position in nearly two decades who was not a career postal employee.

DeJoy's tenure was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, surges in mail-in election ballots and efforts to stem losses through cost and service cuts.

"I believe strongly that the organization is well positioned and capable of carrying forward and fully implementing the many strategies and initiatives that comprise our transformation and modernization, and I have been working closely with the Deputy Postmaster General to prepare for this transition, DeJoy said in a statement.

He added that "much work remains that is necessary to sustain our positive trajectory."

The National Association of Letter Carriers' president, Brian L. Renfroe, said in a statement Monday that the union stands ready to work with whomever the board selects as the next postmaster general.

"The future of the Postal Service is on the line, and choosing someone with innovative ideas and appreciation for our Constitutionally mandated service is essential," Renfroe said.

The Postal Service Board of Governors said in a statement Monday evening that they had retained global search firm Egon Zehnder to help find the agency's next leader. There's no established timeline for when the announcement of the next postmaster general will be made, the statement said.

Earlier this month, DeJoy said he planned to cut 10,000 workers and billions of dollars from the USPS budget and he'd do that working with DOGE, according to a letter sent to members of Congress.

USPS workers, including mail carriers, have gathered over the past week to protest the cuts and the plan they say will dismantle the service.

Critics of the plan fear negative effects of the cuts will be felt across the country. Democratic U.S. Rep. Gerald Connolly, of Virginia, has said in response that turning over the service to DOGE would result in it being undermined and privatized.

USPS employs about 640,000 workers who deliver mail, medicine, election ballots and packages across the country, from inner cities to rural areas and far-flung islands.

The USPS has been largely self-funded since 1970. The bulk of its annual \$78.5 billion budget comes from customer fees, according to the Congressional Research Service. Congress provides a relatively small annual appropriation — about \$50 million in fiscal year 2023 — to subsidize free and reduced-cost mail services.

Venezuela-hired lawyers file petition in El Salvador aimed at freeing Venezuelans deported by US

By MARCOS ALEMÁN Associated Press

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — Lawyers hired by the Venezuelan government filed a legal action Monday in El Salvador aimed at freeing 238 Venezuelans deported by the United States who are being held in a Salvadoran maximum-security prison.

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Jaime Ortega, who says he represents 30 of the imprisoned Venezuelans, said they filed the habeas corpus petition with the Supreme Court's Constitutional Chamber. He said that by extension they requested that it be applied to all Venezuelans detained in El Salvador.

The maneuver essentially compels the government to prove someone's detention was justified.

The Salvadoran government has been silent about the status of the Venezuelan prisoners since the U.S. government sent them more than a week ago, despite a U.S. federal judge's verbal order to turn the planes around.

The Trump administration is using an 18th-century wartime law to justify sending the Venezuelans, who it says were members of the Tren de Aragua gang, which the administration declared an invading force.

"We represent at this moment 30 Venezuelans who have given us the power to act, but by extension, we are asking for habeas corpus for the rest of the Venezuelan citizens who are detained in our country," Ortega said.

Salvador Ríos, another lawyer with the firm, said they were contracted by the Venezuelan government and the Families of Immigrants Committee in Venezuela. He said the Venezuelans they represent are not members of the Tren de Aragua and had migrated from their country and "don't have any criminal record."

In February, El Salvador President Nayib Bukele offered to U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio to imprison U.S. deportees or even U.S. citizens serving prison sentences. The U.S. is paying El Salvador to hold them for what both governments say is a cost savings.

But lawyers in both countries have questioned the legal justification for sending migrants who have not been convicted or in many cases even charged with a crime to prison in a foreign country.

What is glioblastoma, the aggressive brain cancer that killed former US Rep. Mia Love?

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — The death Sunday of former U.S. Rep. Mia Love, the first Black Republican woman elected to the U.S. House, has brought renewed attention to an aggressive form of brain cancer that killed her at age 49.

The former lawmaker from Utah had undergone treatment for glioblastoma, a malignant brain tumor, and received immunotherapy as part of a clinical trial. Her daughter said earlier this month that she was no longer responding to treatment.

Love died at her home in Saratoga Springs, Utah, according to a statement shared by the family.

Who was Mia Love?

Love, born Ludmya Bourdeau, was a daughter of Haitian immigrants and a pioneering Republican congresswoman who represented Utah on Capitol Hill from 2015 to 2019.

She entered politics in 2003 after winning a seat on the city council in Saratoga Springs, 30 miles (48 kilometers) south of Salt Lake City, and later became the city's mayor. While in that role, Love spoke at the 2012 Republican National Convention and drew rousing cheers with her criticisms of then-President Barack Obama.

That year, she narrowly lost a bid for the House against the Democratic incumbent. She ran again two years later and defeated a first-time candidate by about 7,500 votes, becoming the first Black Republican woman elected to Congress.

Love was briefly considered a rising star in the GOP, but her power within the party petered out as President Donald Trump took hold. Love kept her distance from Trump and called him out in 2018 for vulgar comments he made about immigrants from Haiti, El Salvador and some African nations. Later that year, she lost in the midterm elections as Democrats surged.

How did Love die?

Love was diagnosed with glioblastoma in 2022. She said her doctors estimated she had only 10-15 months to live, but she surpassed that.

She described during a speaking engagement in Salt Lake City how she discovered the tumor. Love said

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she was on vacation with her family and developed a bad headache when the plane landed. When she went to the beach, the sun's reflection on the water made her headache unbearable. Her husband brought her to the hospital, and a series of X-rays revealed a tumor in her brain.

Love rushed home to Utah and had surgery to remove about 95% of the tumor. Biopsy results revealed it was cancerous and likely to spread to surrounding brain tissue.

She entered a clinical trial at Duke University's Preston Robert Tisch Brain Tumor Center in Durham, North Carolina, that involved using her body's immune system to attack the tumor. At first, the tumor shrank, but eventually it stopped responding to treatments.

What is glioblastoma?

"Glioblastoma is the most aggressive primary brain tumor that's known to mankind, and there is no cure for it," said Dr. Yasmeen Rauf, a neuro-oncologist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who treats the disease. "It keeps mutating. No matter what you do, it always comes back."

A glioblastoma is a fast-growing glioma, a type of tumor that arises from glial cells, which protect nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord.

While there is no known cure, aggressive treatments such as surgery, radiation, chemotherapy and other targeted therapies may slow the growth of the tumor. Even if a surgeon is able to remove all that can be seen, Rauf said there are typically still some tumor cells left in the brain that cannot be seen and will multiply quickly.

How common is it?

About 13,000 Americans are diagnosed with glioblastoma each year, accounting for almost half of all cancerous brain tumors, according to the Cleveland Clinic. More than 10,000 people in the U.S. will succumb to the disease every year, the National Brain Tumor Society reports.

Glioblastoma can occur at any age but is more commonly found in older adults. The average age at diagnosis is 64.

It's the same type of brain cancer that killed former President Joe Biden's son Beau Biden in 2015 and Sen. John McCain in 2018.

Can it be prevented?

Researchers have not found a way to prevent glioblastoma, and the cause of most of these tumors is unknown. Glioblastoma occurs when glial cells in the brain or spinal cord mutate, altering their genetic makeup.

It does not run in families, and you won't pass it on to your children, Rauf explained.

People who have been exposed to significant amounts of radiation have an increased risk of developing glioblastoma.

How long can you live with it?

People diagnosed with glioblastoma typically have about 15-18 months to live, with only a 10% chance of survival after five years, according to the MD Anderson Cancer Center.

With aggressive treatments, Love lived for about three years after receiving her diagnosis.

"My life has been extended by exceptional medical care, science and extraordinary professionals who have become dear friends," Love wrote in a recent op-ed in the Deseret News. "My extra season of life has also been the result of the faith and prayers of countless friends, known and unknown."

Trump administration asks Supreme Court to halt judge's order to rehire probationary federal workers

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration asked the Supreme Court on Monday to halt a ruling ordering the rehiring of thousands of federal workers let go in mass firings aimed at dramatically downsizing the federal government.

The emergency appeal argues that the judge can't force the executive branch to rehire more than 16,000 probationary employees. The California-based judge found the firings didn't follow federal law, and he

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ordered reinstatement offers be sent as a lawsuit plays out.

The appeal also calls on the conservative-majority court to rein in the growing number of federal judges who have slowed President Donald Trump's sweeping agenda.

"Only this Court can end the interbranch power grab," the appeal stated.

The nation's federal court system has become ground zero for pushback to Trump with the Republican-led Congress largely supportive or silent, and judges have ruled against Trump's administration more than three dozen times after finding violations of federal law.

The rulings run the gamut from birthright citizenship changes to federal spending to transgender rights.

Trump's unparalleled flurry of executive orders seems destined for several dates at a Supreme Court that he helped shape with three appointees during his first term, but so far the majority on the nine-member court has taken relatively small steps in two cases that have reached it.

The latest order appealed to the high court was one of two handed down the same day. While acknowledging the president can lay off employees, two judges found separate legal problems with the way the Republican administration's firings of probationary employees were carried out.

U.S. District Judge William Alsup in San Francisco ruled that the terminations were improperly directed by the Office of Personnel Management and its acting director. He ordered rehiring at six agencies: the departments of Veterans Affairs, Agriculture, Defense, Energy, the Interior and the Treasury.

His order came in a lawsuit filed by a coalition of labor unions and nonprofit organizations that argued they'd be affected by the reduced manpower.

Alsup, who was appointed by Democratic President Bill Clinton, expressed frustration with what he called the government's attempt to sidestep laws and regulations by firing probationary workers with fewer legal protections.

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

Attorney Norm Eisen, one of the attorneys representing the plaintiffs, vowed to defend the order. "Our coalition remains committed to ensuring that justice prevails for every affected probationary worker," he said.

The federal government, on the other hand, said the sweeping order requiring the employees to be rehired goes beyond the judge's legal authority. The plaintiffs never had legal standing to sue and did not prove that the Office of Personnel Management wrongly directed the firings, the Justice Department argued on appeal.

"The district court has compelled the government to embark on the massive administrative undertaking of reinstating, and onboarding to full duty status, thousands of terminated employee in the span of a few days," Acting Solicitor General Sarah Harris wrote. "The ensuing financial costs and logistical burdens of ongoing compliance efforts are immense."

Military veterans are becoming the face of Trump's government cuts and Democrats' resistance

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As congressional lawmakers scramble to respond to President Donald Trump's slashing of the federal government, one group is already taking a front and center role: military veterans.

From layoffs at the Department of Veterans Affairs to a Pentagon purge of archives that documented diversity in the military, veterans have been acutely affected by Trump's actions. And with the Republican president determined to continue slashing the federal government, the burden will only grow on veterans, who make up roughly 30% of the over 2 million civilians who work for the federal government and often tap government benefits they earned with their military service.

"At a moment of crisis for all of our veterans, the VA's system of health care and benefits has been disastrously and disgracefully put on the chopping block by the Trump administration," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, the top Democrat on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, at a news conference last week.

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Blumenthal on Monday announced a series of so-called shadow hearings by Senate Democrats to spotlight how veterans are being impacted. Blumenthal invited VA Secretary Doug Collins to the first meeting next week, though the Cabinet secretary is under no compulsion to attend and is unlikely to appear at an unofficial proceeding.

Most veterans voted for Trump last year — nearly 6 in 10, according to AP Votecast, a nationwide survey of more than 120,000 voters. Yet congressional Republicans are standing in support of Trump's goals even as they encounter fierce pushback in their home districts. At a series of town halls last week, veterans angrily confronted Republican members as they defended the cuts made under Trump adviser Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency.

"Do your job!" Jay Carey, a military veteran, yelled at Republican Rep. Chuck Edwards at a town hall in North Carolina.

"I'm a retired military officer," an attendee at another forum in Wyoming told Republican Rep. Harriet Hageman before questioning whether DOGE had actually discovered any "fraud."

Although Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson advised his members to skip the town halls and claimed that they were being filled with paid protesters, some Republicans were still holding them and trying to respond to the criticism.

"It looks radical, but it's not. I call it stewardship, in my opinion," Republican Rep. Gus Bilirakis of Florida said on a tele-town hall. "I think they're doing right by the American taxpayer. And I support that principle of DOGE."

Still, some Republicans have expressed unease with the seemingly indiscriminate firings of veterans, especially when they have not been looped in on the administration's plans. At a town hall on Friday, Texas Republican Rep. Dan Crenshaw told the audience, "We're learning about this stuff at the speed of light, the way you are. I think there's been some babies thrown out with the bath water here, but we're still gathering information on it."

Crenshaw, a former Navy SEAL, added, "If you're doing a job that we need you to do, you're doing it well, yeah, we've got to fight for you."

The Republican chair of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Rep. Mike Bost, assured listeners on a tele-town hall last week that he and Collins, the VA Cabinet secretary, are talking regularly. As the VA implements plans to cut roughly 80,000 jobs, Bost has said he is watching the process closely, but he has expressed support and echoed Collins' assurances that veterans' health care and benefits won't be slashed.

"They've cut a lot, but understand this: Essential jobs are not being cut," Bost said, but then added that his office was helping alert the VA when people with essential jobs had in fact been terminated.

Two federal judges this month ordered the Trump administration to rehire the probationary employees who were let go in the mass firings. At the VA, some of those employees have now been put on administrative leave, but a sense of dread and confusion is still hanging over much of the federal workforce.

"We're all kind of wondering what's next," said Dan Foster, a Washington state Army veteran who lost his job when the VA canceled a contract supporting a program that educates service members on how to access their benefits and VA programs.

Others are angry they have been portrayed as deadweight and cut from jobs they felt played a direct role in helping veterans get health care.

"For somebody to go on the news and say we are incompetent or lazy — that is just false," said Future Zhou, an Army veteran who had a job managing medical supply inventories for operating rooms at the VA facility in Puget Sound, Washington, before she was fired in February.

As Democrats search for their political footing and a rallying point to unify them, they have zeroed in on the cause of protecting veterans. In both the House and the Senate, Democrats have introduced legislation that would shield veterans from the mass layoffs. And when Trump spoke to Congress this month, many lawmakers invited veterans as their guests.

"They are outraged," Sen. Tammy Duckworth, an Illinois Democrat who is an Iraq War veteran and former assistant secretary at the VA. "They said Donald Trump promised to watch out for them. And the

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first thing he does is fire them.”

Democrats are already pressing their Republican colleagues to show their support for veterans. In negotiations to allow passage of a Republican-backed government funding bill this month, Democrats secured a vote to amend the package to include language that would protect veterans from the federal layoffs. But it failed on party lines in part because the last-minute change would have ensured that Congress missed the deadline to avert a shutdown.

With an eye on the midterm elections, VoteVets, a left-leaning veterans’ advocacy group, is already launching video ads that feature veterans sharing their stories of being fired and accusing congressional members of doing “absolutely nothing.” The ads are directed to five potential swing districts held by Republicans who are veterans themselves.

Sen. Ruben Gallego, an Arizona Democrat who is also a veteran, said he was unsure whether veterans would shift their political allegiance.

But he said it is at least clear veterans are “pissed.”

Gallego said there’s an opportunity for Democrats to hammer home the message that “Elon Musk and his buddies would rather just deal with the bottom line and try to save billions of dollars so they can have more tax cuts at the expense of veterans.”

Canada’s leader laments lost friendship with US in town that sheltered stranded Americans after 9/11

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney on Monday lamented Canada’s lost friendship with the United States as he visited the town that sheltered thousands of stranded American airline passengers after the 9/11 attacks.

Carney’s visit to Gander, Newfoundland on the second day of a national election campaign comes against the backdrop of a trade war and sovereignty threats from U.S. President Donald Trump. Trump’s almost daily attacks on Canada’s sovereignty have left Canadians feeling betrayed.

“In this crisis caused by the U.S. president and those who are enabling him, we lament a friendship lost,” Carney said. “In Gander Canadians did extraordinary things for Americans when they needed it. Now, we need to do extraordinary things for ourselves.”

Gander opened its arms to nearly 6,600 airline passengers diverted there when the U.S. government shut down airspace during 9/11.

In a matter of a few hours, the town population of 10,000 in 2001 was overwhelmed by 38 planeloads of travelers, yet locals went to work in their kitchens and cleaned up spare rooms to offer space and food to the newcomers.

When more than 200 flights were diverted to Canada following the attacks on the United States, the Canadians shunted the traffic away from Toronto and Montreal to the eastern seaboard.

Obscure, little-used Gander got to relive its glory days as a stopover point for trans-Atlantic aviation before long-distance flights became possible. Built in 1938 in anticipation of the coming world war, it had the world’s longest runway, and on 9/11 it was the second busiest, taking in 38 flights to Halifax, Nova Scotia’s 47.

‘When people needed help, you gave it’

Flight crews quickly filled Gander’s hotels, so passengers were taken to schools, fire stations and church halls. The Canadian military flew in 5,000 cots. Stores donated blankets, coffee machines, barbecue grills. Unable to retrieve their luggage, passengers became dependent on the kindness of strangers, and it came in the shape of clothes, showers, toys, banks of phones to call home free of charge, an arena that became a giant walk-in fridge full of donated food.

Once all the planes had landed or turned back to Europe, Gander’s air traffic controllers switched to cooking meals in the building nonstop for three days.

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"More than 6,000 passengers. Overnight, the town's population almost doubled," Carney said during a speech to residents. "You showed friendship to people who were fearful. In a crisis, you showed your character. When people needed help, you gave it."

On Monday, Carney visited the home of Beulah Cooper, who opened her home and comforted many, including Dennis and Hannah O'Rourke, an elderly couple whose New York firefighter son, Kevin, went missing at the World Trade Center and was later confirmed to have died there.

The O'Rourkes remained friends with Cooper long after and went back to Gander, saying they felt eternally indebted.

Now, Cooper says she feels betrayed by America, though she remains friends with Hannah O'Rourke, whose husband passed away. She also feels bad for her American friends.

"There's too many bad words for me to say on the phone about what I think of Trump," Cooper said. "Canada was the best ally they had."

Carney noted the Gander story of that day became legend, immortalized in the Canadian-made Broadway hit musical "Come from Away."

Carney says he's just looking for respect from the Americans, not friendship

Carney said Canadians have always been by Americans' side whether it was during the Iran hostage crisis, or more recently during the California wildfires or in Afghanistan, where Canada lost 158 members of the armed forces and seven civilians.

Trump has declared a trade war on his northern neighbor and continues to call for Canada to become the 51st state, a position that has infuriated Canadians. The American president has threatened economic coercion in his annexation threats and suggested the border is a fictional line.

Trump put 25% tariffs on Canada's steel and aluminum and is threatening sweeping tariffs on all Canadian products — as well as all of America's trading partners — on April 2.

Carney said Canadians are over the shock of the betrayal but now have to look out for themselves. He said Canadians and Americans have traditionally been like brothers.

"But that's changed. And it wasn't us who did the changing. Unfortunately, President Trump's actions have put that kinship under greater strain today than at any point in our storied history," Carney said.

Carney, at the start of a five-week election campaign before the vote on April 28, said he's not looking for friendship from the Americans. "I am just looking for respect at this point," he said.

The new prime minister, sworn in March 14, still hasn't had a phone call with Trump and suggested that might not happen until after the election. "I'm available for a call. But you know we are going to talk on our terms as a sovereign country, not as what he pretends we are," Carney said.

He said the Americans are making a "fundamental mistake" in the trade war.

"They think they will weaken us. They think that they can own us quite frankly, that's what they think," he said. "We are going to get stronger. We are going to wait this out. They are going to come to the table and we are going to negotiate a good deal for Canadians."

Body camera footage is released showing scene outside Gene Hackman's home

By SUSAN MONTROYA BRYAN Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Authorities have released body camera footage from outside the home of Gene Hackman, where the actor and wife Betsy Arakawa were found dead in late February.

The redacted footage shows deputies talking with the two workers who called authorities to report seeing someone lying on the floor inside the home. With no signs of forced entry or other evidence of suspicious circumstances, the deputies asked about the possibility of a gas leak or carbon monoxide poisoning, and the workers said they didn't see how that could have been the case.

"Something's not right," one of the workers said.

Authorities soon determined there were no leaks that could have been fatal, further fueling a mystery that captured the public's attention.

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It was solved about a week later when medical investigators confirmed that Hackman died of heart disease with complications from Alzheimer's about a week after hantavirus pulmonary syndrome — a rare, rodent-borne disease — took the life of his wife.

The Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office released only some of the footage from the investigation.

A New Mexico court last week granted a temporary restraining order against the release of any photographs and video showing Hackman and his wife the inside of their home. Hackman's estate had filed the petition to withhold images, citing the need to protect the family's constitutional right to privacy in grief under the 14th Amendment.

Workers who had maintained the property talked to investigators about respecting Hackman and Arakawa's privacy. One worker described Arakawa as a private person.

The body camera footage also shows brief sightings of one of the couple's dogs running in the wooded hills on their property on the edge of Santa Fe. A man who identified himself to officers as a dog trainer who cared for the couple's pet dogs said the couple were "nuts" about their dogs.

"There's toys everywhere around the property," he said.

In a separate video, Arakawa's hairdresser told investigators that his client took the dogs with her everywhere and that the smallest one would often hang out inside the salon with them during her visits.

That dog was found inside a crate, not far from Arakawa's body. A report obtained by The Associated Press from the state Department of Agriculture's veterinary lab states the dog likely died from dehydration and starvation.

The actor's daughter, Elizabeth Hackman, told authorities she wanted the dog that died to be cremated. Authorities put her in touch with the local animal shelter to talk about the options.

Firefighters in the Carolinas battle multiple wildfires as New Jersey crews contain a forest blaze

By The Associated Press undefined

Firefighters in North and South Carolina were battling multiple wind-driven wildfires Monday in rugged terrain that complicated containment efforts, officials said.

Millions of trees knocked down by Hurricane Helene last year combined with long stretches of dry weather this spring are making for a long and active fire season in the Carolinas, North Carolina State University forestry and environmental resources professor Robert Scheller said.

"Helene just dropped tons of fuel on the ground," Scheller said. "Then these flash droughts allow that fuel to dry out very fast."

Both South Carolina and North Carolina have issued statewide bans on outdoor burning.

North Carolina fires

Mandatory evacuations continue for about 165 properties in parts of Polk County in western North Carolina, about 80 miles (129 kilometers) west of Charlotte, according to county spokesperson Kellie Cannon.

Three fires burned at least 7.5 square miles (19.5 square kilometers) in the county and the two larger blazes were completely uncontained, Cannon said in a social media update Monday morning. The Black Cove Fire, one of the larger ones, was moving toward neighboring Henderson County, Cannon said.

Kim Callaway, who lives near one of the evacuated areas in Polk County, has prepared her home, WLOS-TV reported.

"We've already actually evacuated everything that we thought that was important," Callaway said. "And now we're just staying at the house and trying to do what we can to get our house prepared if the firemen need to show up and hold the line."

A downed power line sparked the Black Cove Fire, but the causes of the other two fires in Polk County were under investigation, according to North Carolina Forest Service spokesperson Jeremy Waldrop.

A number of other wildfires burning across the state including one that damaged 500 vehicles at a salvage yard in Burke County, officials said.

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South Carolina fires

Two fires in the South Carolina mountains have led Gov. Henry McMaster to declare a state of emergency. One fire was in Table Rock State Park in Pickens County and the other was on Persimmon Ridge in Greenville County. Winds and difficult mountainous terrain allowed blazes to grow, the South Carolina Forestry Commission said.

The Table Rock Fire expanded to more than 2 square miles (5.3 square kilometers), including several hundred acres that firefighters intentionally burned to try to contain the flames, officials said.

The Persimmon Ridge Fire, which started Saturday, spread to more than 1.25 square miles (3.2 square kilometers) despite many dozens of water drops, the commission said.

Human activity ignited both the Table Rock and Persimmon Ridge fires. No injuries had been reported, and while no structures were imminently threatened, voluntary evacuations of about 100 homes remained in place.

How a September hurricane is creating March fires

Scheller, the North Carolina State University professor, predicted this busy fire season if the region saw dry weather following Helene.

Scientists saw something similar in 2022 when a fire burned more than 51 square miles (133 square kilometers) of timberland in the Florida Panhandle. The Bertha Swamp Road Fire almost directly followed the eye pattern from 2018's Hurricane Michael and the fallen pine trees left behind.

Pines and their waxy needles dry out and become very flammable, Scheller said. The fallen trunks can also block roads and paths used to fight fires, experts said.

The last ingredient to fuel wildfires is dry weather. Despite recent rain, the Carolinas are undergoing an extreme drought, according to federal monitors.

The common denominator for many fires on the East Coast is human activity, whether people burn debris, light a campfire that isn't well watched or toss out cigarette, Scheller said.

And more people living next to areas that can burn make fires a bigger threat, he said.

New Jersey fire

A forest fire burning in New Jersey's million-acre Pinelands region was 100% contained on Monday morning, the New Jersey Forest Fire Services said in a post on X. The fire was first spotted Saturday and burned through about 3.5 square miles (5.8 kilometers).

That blaze led authorities to evacuate two campgrounds in Wharton State Forest, officials said. The cause was under investigation.

Fire forecast

A front moving off the East Coast brought rain and more humidity to the area, helping firefighters Monday.

But not much rain fell and temperatures are expected to get warmer and the air drier as the week goes on, likely meaning another round of wildfires unless people follow burn bans and fire safety.

"It is absolutely paramount that folks respect the statewide ban on all open burning," North Carolina Forest Service spokesperson Philip Jackson. said.

What to know about Wisconsin's Supreme Court race

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

Wisconsin's upcoming Supreme Court race is just entering its final stretch and it's already breaking records as the most expensive judicial election in the nation's history. The April 1 contest between liberal Dane County Judge Susan Crawford and conservative Waukesha County Judge Brad Schimel has drawn millions of dollars in outside money — most notably from billionaire Elon Musk, who is leading the administration's efforts to dramatically slash the size of the federal government.

As the first election since Donald Trump returned to the White House and unleashed his agenda on the country, the race will serve as a crucial early barometer of how voters are feeling about his second term — testing the mood of the electorate and the enthusiasm of both parties in a critical battleground state.

Here's what to know about the race:

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What's at stake?

The April 1 election will determine whether liberals maintain control of the state's highest court as it prepares to rule on a series of high-profile cases, including one involving the validity of a 1849 law that would effectively outlaw abortion, and others involving public sector unions' collective bargaining rights and voting rules.

The makeup of the court could have major implications for the 2026 midterms and 2028 presidential election in the battleground state.

The court could, for instance, hear challenges to the state's congressional maps, which could theoretically swing the balance of power in Washington if they are redrawn considerably.

But beyond local issues, the race is serving as an early test of Democratic enthusiasm heading into the midterm elections — as well as how Republicans will perform without Trump on the ballot.

It's also providing a preview of how both parties may position themselves in elections next year. Republicans have focused on Trump and his agenda, while Democrats have tried to turn the race into a referendum on Musk, whom polling shows is unpopular in the state.

How much money has been spent?

More than \$73 million has already been spent the race, according to a tally by the liberal Brennan Center for Justice. That breaks the previous record, which was set in 2023 when candidates and outside groups spent more than \$51 million in the last Wisconsin Supreme Court race that became a referendum on abortion rights after the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*.

The biggest spender, by far, has been Musk. Groups funded by the world's richest man have so far spent more than \$14 million to boost Schimel's candidacy, according to the Brennan Center.

Musk donated another \$2 million to the Wisconsin Republican Party on Thursday, the same day the party gave \$1.2 million to Schimel's campaign.

Crawford has also received her own support from billionaires, including philanthropist George Soros and Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker.

How are both sides running?

For supporters of Schimel, the Republican-backed candidate and former Republican attorney general, it's all about Trump. Conservatives have cast the race as a chance for the president's loyal supporters to back him once more, ensure his agenda is enacted and push back against liberal judges they accuse of working to stymie his plans.

Mailers from Musk's America PAC, for instance, feature photographs of the president and plead that, "President Donald Trump needs your vote." Others warn that "Liberal Susan Crawford will stop President Trump's agenda."

Schimel, who was endorsed by Trump on Friday night, has also aligned himself with the president. He posed recently with a giant Trump inflatable and joined the president's eldest son on stage at a get-out-the-vote rally.

Democrats, meanwhile, are hoping to channel their voters' outrage and anger by casting the race as an opportunity to stand up to Musk.

Crawford repeatedly invoked Musk during a recent debate, going as far as to refer to her opponent as "Elon Schimel." The state Democratic Party has branded the race "The People v. Musk" and has hosted a series of anti-Musk town halls, including one featuring former vice presidential candidate Tim Walz.

"Don't let Elon buy the Supreme Court," read billboards that depict Musk as Schimel's puppeteer.

Who is expected to win?

Both sides say the race is extremely close and will depend on who can best turn out their voters in an off-year so soon after a presidential race.

Wisconsin is one of the nation's evenly divided states. Trump won by less than a percentage point, or fewer than 30,000 votes.

In 2023, the conservative candidate lost by more than 10 points, putting liberals in charge of the court for the first time in 15 years.

The year's first major political test in Wisconsin becomes a referendum on Elon Musk

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

The election to fill a Wisconsin Supreme Court seat has become a referendum not only on the new administration, but on Elon Musk, the billionaire who has become one of President Donald Trump's top financial backers and the architect of his efforts to slash the federal workforce.

The April 1 election is the first major test in American politics since Trump secured a second term in November. It will serve as a crucial barometer of enthusiasm in both parties heading into next year's midterm elections and is happening in a critical battleground state that Trump won by less than a percentage point.

It's also a test for Musk himself. The Tesla CEO's nascent political operation, which spent more than \$200 million to help Trump win in November, is canvassing and advertising in Wisconsin on behalf of the conservative candidate. A win would cement his status as a conservative kingmaker, while a loss could give license to Republicans distancing themselves from his efforts to stymie government functions and eliminate tens of thousands of jobs.

"This is the first major election held since Donald Trump took office," said Anthony Chergosky, a political science professor at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. "And I think notably Democrats are concentrating more on Elon Musk than Donald Trump."

Musk, who is the race's biggest donor by far, has also inserted himself into the race, holding a get-out-the-vote event on his X platform Saturday.

"It might not seem important, but it's actually really important. And it could determine the fate of the country," he said. "This election is going to affect everyone in the United States."

April 1's election will determine majority control of a court facing critical issues: abortion rights, collective bargaining and voter access. They include decisions that could have major implications for the 2026 midterms and 2028 presidential election, particularly if they end up hearing challenges to the state's congressional maps, which could theoretically swing the balance of power in Washington if they are considerably redrawn.

In 2020, the court rejected Trump's attempts to overturn his election loss in the battleground state in a 4-3 ruling. Trump had sought to have 221,000 ballots disqualified in the state's two most Democratic counties.

Trump inflatables and America PAC petitions

The Supreme Court race is officially nonpartisan, but the campaign has been anything but. Brad Schimel, the Republican-backed candidate, has openly courted Trump's endorsement, which he received on Friday night, as he campaigns against Dane County Judge Susan Crawford, the Democrat-backed candidate.

The Waukesha County judge and former Republican attorney general attended the president's inauguration in January, has said that he would be part of a "support system" for Trump. Earlier this month, he attended a "Mega MAGA rally" where he posed for a picture in front of a giant inflatable version of the president, which had a "Vote Brad Schimel Supreme Court" poster plastered on its chest.

He spoke on Musk's get-out-the-vote call on Saturday. And he joined the president's eldest son on stage at a get-out-the-vote rally, where Donald Trump Jr. said a Schimel win would protect his father's agenda and keep up GOP momentum.

"We can't just show up when Trump's on the ticket," he said at a brewery in the Milwaukee suburbs. "You have to engage because it's not just about now, it's about that future. This presidency could be put to a halt with this vote."

Schimel has also resurfaced long-debunked conspiracies about voter fraud that Trump has embraced, urging his supporters to vote early to "make this too big to rig so we don't have to worry that at 11:30 in Milwaukee, they're going to find bags of ballots that they forgot to put into the machines."

Still, he pledged to judge any case that comes before him on its merits — including potential cases involving Trump and Musk.

Republicans have cast the race as a chance for Trump's loyal supporters to rally around their leader and

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push back against liberal judges they accuse of working to stymie his agenda.

Mailers from Musk's America PAC feature photographs of the president. "President Donald Trump needs your vote," they read. Others warn that "Liberal Susan Crawford will stop President Trump's agenda."

America PAC is also offering Wisconsin voters \$100 to sign a petition in opposition to "activist judges" — and another \$100 for each signer they refer.

Republicans have argued that if even 60% of the voters who cast ballots for Trump in November turn out, Schimel can win, helping to drive momentum for the party heading into next year's midterms.

"In theory, the opposition party should be energized, but we're feeling very good about the energy on our side of the aisle," said Andrew Iverson, Wisconsin GOP executive director.

Andrew Romeo, senior adviser to the Musk-backed group Building America's Future, which has spent millions on the race, issued a recent memo advising Schimel's campaign to remind voters that he is "a strong conservative and Trump ally."

Two groups funded by Musk have so far spent more than \$14 million on the race, according to a tally by the liberal Brennan Center for Justice — with plans to spend around \$20 million total.

Musk donated another \$2 million to the Wisconsin Republican Party on Thursday, the same day the party gave \$1.2 million to Schimel's campaign.

Under Wisconsin law, contributions to candidates are capped, but candidates can accept unlimited cash from state parties, which in turn can accept unlimited cash from donors.

His spending has helped make the race the most expensive judicial election in the nation's history, with more than \$73 million spent so far, according to the Brennan Center, breaking the record set by another Wisconsin Supreme Court race two years ago.

Crawford has also received her own support from billionaires, including philanthropist George Soros and Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker.

Democrats want the race to be 'The People vs. Musk'

Democrats are hoping to channel their voters' outrage at the Trump administration by casting the race as an opportunity to stand up to Musk. After nearly a decade of running against the president, they see Musk as a potentially more divisive figure who can motivate their base voters to turn out.

"This race is the first real test point in the country on Elon Musk and his influence on our politics, and voters want an opportunity to push back on that and the influence he is trying to make on Wisconsin and the rest of country," said Crawford campaign spokesperson Derrick Honeyman.

State Democrats have hosted a series of anti-Musk town halls, including one featuring former vice presidential candidate Tim Walz, and featured Musk heavily in ads.

Crawford has also seized on Musk, going as far as to refer to her opponent as "Elon Schimel" during a recent debate.

"Don't let Elon buy the Supreme Court," read billboards paid for the state Democratic party that depict Musk as Schimel's puppeteer.

"There's so many people who are desperate for a way to fight back against what Trump and Musk are doing nationally," said Ben Wikler, the Wisconsin Democratic Party chair, and see the race as an "opportunity to punch back."

Wikler said the party had seen an "explosive surge" in grassroots and small-donor fundraising from across the country tied to Musk's involvement. Both in Wisconsin and nationally, Democrats are packing town halls and angrily protesting the Trump administration's firings of thousands of workers and shutdown of agencies. They have also show disillusionment with their party's own leaders.

"Most voters still don't know who Crawford and Schimel are, but they have extremely strong feelings about Musk and Trump," he said.

What's at stake for Musk

Musk said Saturday that he became involved in the race because it "will decide how the Congressional districts are drawn in Wisconsin," echoing Schimel's claims that Crawford would push through new congressional maps that could favor Democrats.

Schimel's campaign has relentlessly attacked Crawford for participating in a call with Democratic donors

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that was advertised in an email as a “chance to put two more House seats in play for 2026,” a reference to the state’s redistricting fights that have played out for years.

Crawford has said that she didn’t know that that was how the call had been billed when she joined and that nothing of that nature had been discussed while she was on the line.

“In my opinion, that’s the most important thing, which is a big deal given that the Congressional majority is so razor-thin,” Musk said. “It could cause the House to switch to Democrat if that redrawing takes place, and then we wouldn’t be able to get through the changes that the American people want.”

Musk has also been giving money to Republican members of Congress who have echoed his calls to impeach federal judges whose decisions he doesn’t like.

He has other interests at play.

Democrats and Crawford have noted that, just days before Musk’s groups started spending on the race, Musk’s electric car company Tesla sued Wisconsin over a rule banning car manufacturers from operating dealerships — forcing buyers to purchase Teslas out of state.

The case could ultimately go before the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

No. 1 seed Duke’s opening-week offense in March Madness was a display of elite efficiency

By AARON BEARD AP Basketball Writer

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Baylor coach Scott Drew knew beating No. 1 seed Duke would be a tough task considering the Blue Devils’ elite efficiency rankings at both ends of the court.

“The analytics showed they didn’t have any weaknesses,” Drew said Sunday after a 89-66 loss to Duke in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

And the Blue Devils have lived up to that heading into the Sweet 16.

Sure, the point margins are impressive enough. But the underlying data for teams still alive in the Sweet 16 can indicate which teams fit the profile of those that reach the Final Four or cut down the nets, and the Blue Devils have been absolutely dominant — notably at the offensive end behind junior Tyrese Proctor going on a sudden outside-shooting tear.

“First of all it helps when Tyrese is on the heater he was on,” graduate guard Sion James quipped.

“But we’ve built this throughout the year. This isn’t something that just kind of came on. We’ve been building toward this for the season. And now we’re hoping for the next few weeks that we can keep it sustained.”

Profiles of a winner

Going back to the 2001 tournament, 16 of 23 national champions were ranked inside the top 25 in both adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency for KenPom entering March Madness, with six owning top-10 status at both ends.

Take a step back, and more than half of the Final Four teams (51 of 92) were inside the top 25 at both ends, with 18 of those being top 10 in both areas.

As for the others, slightly more than half of the remaining teams held at least top-10 status at one end of the floor to offer one commonality.

The tiers

That creates three tiers of Sweet 16 teams for this week:

—Five favorites who entered the tournament with top-25 rankings for both ends: the Blue Devils, fellow 1-seeds Florida, Houston and Auburn; and 2-seed Tennessee. Of that group, the Blue Devils are top 5 at both ends, while the Gators and Cougars are in the top 10.

—Six teams that ranked in the top 10 to offer elite play at one end of the court: 2-seeds Alabama and Michigan State; 3-seeds Kentucky and Texas Tech; and 4-seeds Purdue and Maryland. Of that group, the Spartans were the only top-10 defense and also flirted with joining the aforementioned top tier by entering the tournament ranked 27th offensively (118.1 points per 100 possessions).

—Five outliers: 4-seed Arizona, 5-seed Michigan, 6-seeds BYU and Mississippi; and 10-seed Arkansas.

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Of that group, BYU and Arizona were slightly outside of the top-10 offensively, while Michigan flirted with top-10 status defensively.

Duke's start

The Blue Devils entered the tournament ranked third in KenPom's adjusted offensive efficiency (128.0 points per 100 possessions) and fourth in defense (89.8). They have started their push for a sixth national title with home-state romps against Mount St. Mary's and Baylor as the headliner in the East Region, led by an offense exceeding its own elite season-long performance.

Duke has scored on 79 of 123 possessions (64.2%) through two games and is averaging 1.48 points per possession. By comparison, UConn began its blowout-filled march last year to a second straight NCAA title by averaging 1.29 points per possession and scoring on 59.7% of its possessions in the opening weekend.

Defensively, Duke has allowed 0.927 points per possession, a slight downtick from its regular-season numbers.

When it comes to this year's Sweet 16 teams, Duke's effective field-goal percentage — which factors in the added value of 3-point shots — was 67% through two games, according to Sportradar, with the Crimson Tide (61%) as the next-best team. The Blue Devils also have a Sweet 16-low eight turnovers through two games while posting a nearly 5:1 assist-to-turnover ratio.

And Duke's 67-point victory margin through two games is 24 points better than Houston's as the next closest team, with the Blue Devils standing as the only member of the Sweet 16 to win both tournament games by at least 20 points.

Tournament tests

The other 1-seeds offer statistical profiles close to Duke, but they also have faced something the Blue Devils haven't: a test.

The Gators entered the tournament ranked No. 1 in adjusted offensive efficiency (128.6) and No. 10 in defense (92.4), while the Cougars were the inverse by ranking 10th in offense (123.2) and second in defense (87.8). And No. 1 overall seed Auburn was slightly outside of that group by ranking third and 12th, respectively.

Yet all three have encountered a bit more resistance, notably with Florida having to take over down the stretch to end UConn's two-year title reign and Houston fending off Gonzaga in Round 2.

There's value in that, too, beyond the numbers.

"If you're going to make a deep run in March, you've got to catch some breaks, and you've got to win some games like this to be able to push through and stay alive," Florida coach Todd Golden said. "Theoretically, beating a team like UConn, that's used to winning this time of year, in the fashion that we did should be really good for us moving forward."

Congo rebel leader says sanctions, any minerals deal with the US won't stop fighting in the east

By CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — The leader of the rebels who captured two key cities in eastern Congo tells The Associated Press that international sanctions and Congo's proposed minerals deal with the United States in search of peace will not stop the fighting.

With a \$5 million bounty placed on the rebel leaders by Congo's government, "we will fight like people who got nothing to lose in order to secure the future of our country," said Corneille Nangaa, leader of the Congo River Alliance that includes the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group.

Nangaa dismissed Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi's comments last week that his country — whose mineral resources are estimated to be worth \$24 trillion and critical to much of the world's technology — is looking for a minerals partnership with the U.S.

The U.S. government has not publicly spoken about any such deal, which local observers say could be similar to the Trump administration's recent offer to Ukraine to help end the war with Russia.

"This problem can be better resolved by the concerned Congolese, not foreigners with different geopo-

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litical agendas," Nangaa told the AP over the weekend. "Trying to bribe U.S. with mines can undermine U.S. credibility."

The rebel leader also rejected the outcome of last week's meeting between Congolese and Rwandan leaders in Qatar, saying such a move to achieve peace without his group's involvement would fail. He said the rebels can only have a dialogue with Congo's government if the country acknowledges their grievances and the root causes of the conflict.

"Anything regarding us which are done without us, it's against us," Nangaa said.

Since launching a major escalation of their decadelong fighting with Congolese forces in January, the M23 rebels have captured the cities of Goma and Bukavu and several towns in eastern Congo, prompting fears of regional war involving neighbors whose militaries are also on the ground.

Efforts to achieve a ceasefire collapsed last week after the rebels pulled out of talks facilitated by Angola, condemning European Union sanctions on its leaders. Angola on Monday said its president and chairperson of the African Union, Joao Lourenco, was withdrawing as the key mediator to focus on Africa's general peace and security. Another country will take over mediation efforts, it said.

Also Monday, the M23 rebels said their planned withdrawal from the strategic town of Walikale, which they captured last week, is delayed because Congolese forces are allegedly still positioned in the area with attack drones. M23 spokesman Lawrence Kanyuka said their presence "compromises" peace initiatives. The AP has reached out to Congo's military.

Holding Walikale gives the rebels control of a road linking four provinces in eastern Congo — North Kivu, South Kivu, Tshopo and Maniema — effectively cutting off Congolese army positions.

The M23 is the most potent of about 100 armed factions vying for control in eastern Congo. It is mainly made up of ethnic Tutsis who failed to integrate into the Congolese army. The group says it is defending ethnic Tutsis and Congolese of Rwandan origin from discrimination.

Although U.N. experts estimate there are up to 4,000 forces from neighboring Rwanda supporting the rebels in Congo, Nangaa asserted that the rebel alliance is independent and seeks to address "the root cause of more than 30 years of instability in our country."

Heathrow defends its response as questions grow about why a fire shut the airport for so long

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Heathrow Airport executives on Monday defended their response to a fire that shut down Europe's busiest air hub for almost a day, after Britain's energy system operator suggested that the facility had enough electricity from other sources to keep running.

More than 1,300 flights were canceled on Friday after a fire knocked out one of the three electrical substations that supply Heathrow with power. More than 200,000 passengers had journeys disrupted, and industry experts say the chaos will cost airlines tens of millions of dollars.

The airport reopened after about 18 hours when Heathrow had reconfigured its power supply — something Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander said that "required hundreds of systems to be safely powered down and then safely powered up with extensive testing."

Heathrow said that it ran a full schedule on Saturday and Sunday, with 400,000 passengers passing through on 2,500 weekend flights.

The fire's huge impact raised concern about the resilience of Britain's energy system to accidents, natural disasters or attacks. The government has ordered an investigation into "any wider lessons to be learned on energy resilience for critical national infrastructure."

Counterterrorism police initially led the investigation into the fire, which came as authorities across Europe gird against sabotage backed by Russia. The head of Britain's MI6 spy agency has accused Moscow of mounting a "staggeringly reckless" sabotage campaign against allies of Ukraine, which has been trying to repel Russia's full-scale invasion for more than three years.

Police say they have found "no indication of any foul play," and the London Fire Brigade said that it's

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leading the investigation, which is focused on the substation's electrical distribution equipment.

Gareth Bacon, the transport spokesman of the opposition Conservative Party, said that "malicious actors ... will undoubtedly have taken note of this weekend's events."

"This episode underlines the urgent need to ensure that our critical infrastructure is safeguarded against both accidental incident and deliberate acts of sabotage by malign actors," he said in the House of Commons.

Meanwhile, the utility company and airport executives are trading blame.

John Pettigrew, chief executive of energy-supply network National Grid, told the Financial Times that "each substation individually can provide enough power to Heathrow" for the airport to stay open.

"Losing a substation is a unique event — but there were two others available," he said. "So that is a level of resilience."

Heathrow said it had worked to reopen "as soon as safely and practically possible."

"Hundreds of critical systems across the airport were required to be safely powered down and then safely and systematically rebooted," the airport said in a statement. "Given Heathrow's size and operational complexity, safely restarting operations after a disruption of this magnitude was a significant challenge."

Heathrow CEO Thomas Woldbye is also facing questions about why he put the airport's chief operating officer, Javier Echave, in charge of decision-making as the fire raged early Friday.

Alexander declined to back Heathrow management's decision-making, saying, "I don't have all the information that they had available when they made the decision."

"Safety should always be paramount, but, as I say, it was not my decision," she told the BBC.

With March Madness underway, it's game time for newly opened women's-sports bars across the US

By TERRY TANG and BRITTANY PETERSON Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — When you walk into Title 9 Sports Grill in Phoenix's Melrose District, its mission to be a haven for watching women's sports permeates every nook and cranny. From the over dozen TVs mounted on pink and orange walls to the "Play Like a Girl!" neon sign against a giant image of retired WNBA star Diana Taurasi.

It's an impressive turnaround for co-owners Audrey Corley and Kat Moore. Just before Christmas, the space was still Moore and her husband Brad's hot dog restaurant. But last summer they sold the business and the new owners didn't want to stay in the property. That's when Corley, who owns a popular lesbian bar on the next block, proposed partnering on the city's first women's sports-centric bar. She had been mulling the idea since reading about the Sports Bra in Portland, Oregon, which opened in 2022, and then seeing a half-dozen similar bars emerge in the last year.

"Then I see, you know, another one popped up here and another one. And then I was like, it's just time. It has to be," Corley said before Title 9's grand opening earlier this month.

Several new bars dedicated to women's sports have made the mad dash to open in time to capitalize on March Madness, now in full swing. From San Francisco to Cleveland, there will be more than a dozen across the country before the year is over. The femme-focused bar scene has made huge strides from three years ago when The Sports Bra was the only one. It comes during an exciting first year during which teams in the women's bracket will finally be paid for playing in the NCAA tourney. Many credit stars like Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese for increasing the marketability of female players.

Last season, Reese and Clark's teams never saw a dollar. Now, the women's teams will finally earn individual revenue, known as "units." A unit is money paid to conferences when one of its teams appears in the NCAA Tournament. Teams earn another with every game played.

The most seamless part of transforming her old restaurant into Title 9 has been the built-in community anticipation of having a place to view women's sports, Moore said.

"The only question I've gotten from quite a few men, especially when we first started telling people, was, 'Are men allowed?' Yeah!" Moore said, with a chuckle.

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Named for the landmark 1972 law that forbids discrimination based on sex in education, including athletics, Title 9 is filled with tributes to female athletes, from framed photos with QR codes to a cocktail roster with drinks such as the Pat Summitt Sour and Taurasi Goat-Tail. However, the owners emphasize a family-friendly atmosphere where young girls can come celebrate after a school game.

"Even some of the little girls, they could come here and dream of being on the TV someday and actually getting paid for it," Corley said.

Debra Hallum and Marlene du Plessis were also inspired by the Sports Bra. They made their targeted opening in Austin last week of 1972 ATX Women's Sports Pub across from the University of Texas campus. The day included a rainbow ribbon cutting and officials from the Austin LGBT Chamber of Commerce.

While they are in a conservative state, the women have been emphasizing the bar's LGBTQ-friendliness. "We want to be very clear that we will be a very welcoming and inclusive space for all women sports fans," Hallum said. "We want to invite everyone to grow the interest and the viewership, because that's the only way we're going to fix that gap for women, including the pay gap."

Neither woman has hospitality experience. Hallum has a corporate background and du Plessis' is in education. But, they researched running a business like this and hired a talented chef and staff. It's clear both are passionate.

"It is so hard to find a bar or a pub that will show women's sports," du Plessis said. "You always have to call around, ask around to find where they going to show it. And then most of the time you know they will not have the sound on. And we will."

They've been touched by the reactions from residents, even parents of boys.

"We had a mom and dad, two daughters and their son show up and (the mom) was all about, 'This is exactly what we need,'" Hallum said. "We want our son to be raised knowing that this is just as great and just as wonderful as men's sports."

In Denver, Annie Weaver and Miranda Spencer met playing on opposing flag football teams. A month later, they began drafting a business plan for a similar concept, also inspired by The Sports Bra. Open since December, the 99ers Sports Bar is now hosting its first March Madness crowds.

They were first mulling a name that would play off of Mia Hamm, the 1990s soccer icon who inspired Weaver's Halloween costume for years. They settled on a name that honors the 1999 U.S. Women's World Cup soccer team, filled with names and faces that didn't get as much attention as Hamm.

On a recent Sunday, the bar was standing room only as the TVs aired an NWSL game, Unrivaled semifinal games, and the Selection Sunday broadcast announcing the brackets for the NCAA Tournament.

The city doesn't even have any women's teams in the major national leagues, but it was recently awarded the 16th NWSL expansion team, to begin play in 2026.

A tri-fold bracket covered one table, and an impromptu friendship bracelet-making station occupied another.

"I wish I would have had this space growing up," Spencer said.

These new bar operators agree this is not a trend but an indicator of a market that hasn't been served. But hopefully, anyone looking to open a women's sports bar isn't doing it "just to be trendy," said Moore, of Title 9.

Corley's most important advice for any would-be barkeep: "The same way you play sports for the love, open this up for the love."

Judge blocks DOGE from accessing sensitive information at US agencies

By LEA SKENE Associated Press

A federal judge on Monday blocked billionaire Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency from accessing people's private data at the Education Department, the Treasury Department and the Office of Personnel Management.

U.S. District Judge Deborah Boardman issued a preliminary injunction in a case filed last month by a

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coalition of labor unions in federal court in Maryland. Led by the American Federation of Teachers, the plaintiffs allege Trump's administration violated federal privacy laws when it gave DOGE access to systems with personal information on tens of millions of Americans without their consent.

Boardman, who was nominated to the federal bench by former President Joe Biden, had previously issued a temporary restraining order. The preliminary injunction offers longer-term relief blocking DOGE access as the case plays out.

The judge found the Trump administration likely violated the law. She said the government failed to adequately explain why DOGE needed access to "millions of records" to perform its job duties.

She also said the Trump administration can still carry out the president's agenda without receiving unfettered access to a trove of personal data on federal employees and people with student loans and government benefits. That includes their income and asset information, Social Security numbers, birth dates, home addresses and marital and citizenship status.

"They trusted the federal government to safeguard their information. That public trust likely has been breached," Boardman wrote in her opinion.

The lawsuit accused the Trump administration of handing over sensitive data for reasons beyond its intended use, violating the Privacy Act. Instead of carrying out the functions of the federal student loan program, the lawsuit says, DOGE has been accessing loan data "for purposes of destroying" the Education Department.

President Donald Trump signed an executive order last week to dismantle the department, saying that student loans will be handled by the Small Business Administration and programs involving students with disabilities will be shifted to the Department of Health and Human Services.

His administration says DOGE is targeting waste across the federal government by addressing alleged fraud and upgrading technology.

One of the nation's largest teachers unions, the American Federation of Teachers says it represents 1.8 million workers in education, health care and government. Also joining the suit were six people with sensitive information stored in federal systems, including military veterans who received federal student loans and other federal benefit payments.

The suit also was backed by the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association, and the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers.

The injunction, which could be challenged on appeal, is limited to protecting the personal information of the individual plaintiffs and members of the groups.

"No matter how important or urgent the President's DOGE agenda may be, federal agencies must execute it in accordance with the law," Boardman wrote. "That likely did not happen in this case."

In a separate Maryland case last week, a judge temporarily blocked DOGE from accessing Social Security databases that similarly contain vast amounts of personal information.

Will Smith channels his post-slap introspection into music on 'Based on a True Story'

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Will Smith could have let his infamous Oscar slap be his cinematic fade out with a career bruised, marriage dissected and reputation in a free fall. But instead of retreating, he turned inward for self-reflection.

In the process, Smith rediscovered a long-neglected creative outlet in music, using the mic as a vessel to voice his thoughts after years of prioritizing his Hollywood dominance.

"I've taken the last couple of years to really do a deep dive on the parts of me that may or may not been in that level of certainty and asking those deep scary internal questions," said Smith, an Oscar and Grammy winner, who will release his fifth studio album "Based on a True Story" on Friday. It's his first music project in two decades since "Lost and Found."

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"It really is the result of my initial self-examination," he said. "Every song is about some part of myself that I discovered or wanted to explore, something I wanted to share. It's the most full musical offering that I've ever created."

Smith's new offering features guest appearances from Big Sean, Teyana Taylor, DJ Jazzy Jeff, his son Jaden Smith, Jac Ross and Kanye West's Sunday Service Choir. His album weaves in gospel melodies and messages, but he doesn't call it a full-blown gospel project, despite the success of "You Can Make It," which soared to No. 1 on the Billboard Gospel Airplay chart.

Still, Smith let his renewed faith take the lead, steering his creative direction. He plans to release three albums this year, shaping each project into what he calls seasons.

The first season, *Rave in the Wasteland*, plays out across the 14 tracks of "Based on True Story" and represents his willingness to learn from life's lessons.

"I've come to some really beautiful answers for myself," Smith said. "My perception of God and reality."

Embracing adversity to fuel creativity

Though Smith, 56, is still a bankable global star, rebuilding trust and momentum has been an uphill battle. He's grappled with harsh realities while trying to move past the backlash from slapping Chris Rock at the Oscars in 2022 and his 10-year ban from the ceremony.

Several entertainers — including Zoë Kravitz, Wanda Sykes and Rob Reiner — criticized Smith's actions. Jim Carrey was particularly vocal, stating that Smith had been "living beyond the bandwidth" and cracked under the pressure.

When asked about Carrey's "bandwidth" remark, Smith agreed but reiterated that he needed to step back to gain a deeper understanding of himself and move beyond his own limitations.

"There's a small self that — the small concept of myself - can get to the end of his bandwidth," he said. "And then, if I back up, there's like an infinite space, where my bandwidth is the bandwidth of life itself. It's like trying to not get stuck in having to be only a narrow band of things, to give myself permission to be wider in the truth of who and what I actually am."

Smith's road to redemption grew tougher when Rock's comedy special reignited the controversy and his wife Jada Pinkett Smith's memoir "Worthy" put their marriage under fresh scrutiny, sparking headlines and endless social media memes.

Smith said the adversity not only tested him but fueled his creativity.

"There's a certain psychological and emotional fortitude that you cultivate from, leaning into the difficulty, not trying to run away," said Smith, who added he sought to build "spiritual confidence" inspired by the resilience of his late grandmother and Nelson Mandela. Along the way, he found Tibetan Buddhist Pema Chödrön's teachings, embracing her mantra of "leaning into the sharp points."

These influences became pillars as Smith explored himself more deeply. The way his grandmother, Mandela and Chödrön approached life pushed him to channel his journey back into music.

"It is essentially learning how to accept and celebrate my challenges, recognizing that my challenges and my obstacles and my difficulties are actually divine curriculum," said Smith, a four-time Grammy winner, who is known for rap classics such as "Summertime," "Men in Black," "Gettin' Jiggy Wit It" and "Parents Just Don't Understand."

Those tracks had a laid-back feel, but his new album strikes a more serious tone.

"It's what I've been given to learn the truth," he continued. "There's a way that I'm learning to be with hard times when things arise. It's like 'Good, yes, thank you.' I'm willing to learn these lessons."

Will Smith: 'Greatest creative run'

Believe it or not, Smith is set to embark on his first-ever headline tour this summer.

He is structuring the shows around different phases of his life and career: One featuring Smith and DJ Jazzy Jeff, another highlighting his film and TV journey and third act he calls the "new phase, new energy," where Jeff and others will return to the stage.

Smith will kick off his tour including festivals starting June 25 at the Mawazine festival in Morocco and expected to wrap up early September in Paris. He'll perform his past hits from "Miami" to "Summertime"

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along with songs from the new album across England, France and Germany.

As Smith gears up for his tour, he also has several films in pre-production, including "Fast and Loose," "Hancock 2," "I Am Legend 2" and "Planes, Trains and Automobiles," according to IMDb. He's embracing this next phase of his career with renewed energy.

"This is about to be the greatest creative run of my entire career," he said. "The things that I'm about to do in music and cinema, and just artistic expression and exploration. It's like, I can't sleep at night. I'm so ready to go."

Bold new rules have reshaped baseball. Could more changes save starting pitching?

By STEVE MEGARGEE AP Sports Writer

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. (AP) — Bold decisions to change Major League Baseball's longstanding rules quickened the pace of games and revived the popularity of stealing bases over the last few years.

A similarly creative move may be needed to help starting pitching regain the relevance it enjoyed as recently as a decade ago.

Only four pitchers (Seattle's Logan Gilbert, Kansas City's Seth Lugo, San Francisco's Logan Webb and Philadelphia's Zack Wheeler) threw as many as 200 innings last season, down from 34 in 2014.

During that same 2014 season, all 30 major league teams got over 900 innings from their starting pitchers and five had over 1,000. Last year, only four teams had their starters pitch at least 900 innings, led by Seattle with 942 2/3.

While this shift has been years in the making, the numbers themselves provide a cold slap of reality to longtime fans who remember seeing Bob Gibson throw three complete games in the 1967 World Series or Jack Morris pitching 10 shutout innings in Game 7 of the 1991 Fall Classic.

Going back to the days of Cy Young and Walter Johnson, part of the game's beauty was watching a pitcher work his way through a lineup three or four times.

With every team having multiple relievers who can come out of the bullpen and throw in the high 90s, what could prompt teams to let their starters work deeper into games?

Managers and players struggle to come up with a solution.

"Outside of just changing rules to incentivize managers to keep guys in games longer," Los Angeles Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said.

Roberts' Dodgers exemplified the bullpen emphasis during their run to the 2024 World Series title. Their starting pitchers worked as many as six innings in just two of their 16 postseason games.

Texas' Nathan Eovaldi went 5-0 with five postseason quality starts (defined as going at least six innings while allowing no more than three earned runs) a year earlier while helping the Rangers win their first World Series championship. Yet even he understands how much things have changed for starting pitchers since he made his big-league debut in 2011.

"Bullpens are a lot different now than they were back then," Eovaldi said. "You've got a lot more guys who aren't just eight- and ninth-inning guys. They can come in, in the sixth or seventh, go multiple innings. They all have multiple pitches now as well. I think that's one of the fascinating things about the bullpen. You don't have guys who are just a two-pitch mix anymore. They've got three or four pitches coming out, and two of them are really, really elite."

And that's why there seems only one way to get starters working more innings.

"Putting in rules that you have to," San Francisco Giants manager Bob Melvin said. "We've created our own monster. It is what it is."

What rules could MLB create to promote starting pitching?

MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred says it's too early to explore rules changes.

"Our focus right now is training methods, particularly offseason training methods," Manfred said. "It's going to be somewhere between education and recommendations. It's very hard to tell people you can't

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do X, Y and Z, right? They're grown men and there's no way to monitor it during the offseason."

One problem is the lack of a clear consensus on what rule changes could work best.

For instance, MLB had the Atlantic League experiment in 2021 and 2023 with a rule change that would force a team to lose its designated hitter if its starting pitcher didn't finish at least five innings.

Instituting that kind of rule could be a tough sell in the majors, where some of the league's most bankable stars such as Shohei Ohtani and Bryce Harper have received ample playing time at DH the last few years. Fans paying to see those stars likely wouldn't be happy to see them get removed as collateral damage from an early pitching change.

MLB hasn't announced any similar types of rules experimentations in the minors this season.

The maximum number of pitchers allowed on MLB rosters was lowered from 14 to 13 in 2022, though that limit rises to 14 when rosters expand from 26 to 28 on Sept. 1. A more extreme rule change would be to require starters to work at least five or six innings unless they get injured, throw a certain number of pitches or allow a particular number of runs.

Rangers manager Bruce Bochy said he wouldn't mind seeing the minor leagues try out more rule changes designed at lengthening starting pitchers. He wants those pitching prospects to get accustomed to working deeper into games.

"That's the way it used to be with starters," Bochy said. "Now I think the mentality can be, 'Hey, I've done my job. I've thrown four or five innings.'"

Giants pitcher Robbie Ray says the history of the game shows that starters can adapt to longer outings.

"I think starting pitchers are capable of doing it," said Ray, who won the 2021 AL Cy Young Award with Toronto. "It's just a matter of kind of training our bodies to do that again because what's been expected of us has changed over the years."

Restoring endurance as a valued skill

A 62-page MLB study released in December showed how the focus on rising velocities and maximum effort on each pitch had resulted in more injuries among pitchers. That study also revealed that starts of five or more innings dropped from 84% to 70% in the majors from 2005-24 and from 68.9% to 36.8% in the minors.

"Because we're trying to create this engine and this repetitive thought of just pure stuff each and every pitch, yeah, starters are going to fatigue sooner," Cleveland Guardians pitching coach Carl Willis said. "And at the same time, we're training them that way. We're training them to do so."

"Everybody still talks about wanting to go out for the sixth, wanting to go out for the seventh and getting deep into games. I don't know that we're training them to do that, and I don't know how we are kind of teaching nowadays can allow that to happen."

A change in approach could allow those starters to get that endurance. Right now, it's the older guys who seem more used to that workload.

The MLB leader in quality starts last season was the 34-year-old Wheeler, who had 26. Lugo, 35, had 22 quality starts to tie for second place.

Even so, the 2024 season did offer some encouraging signs for the future of starting pitching.

MLB pitchers threw 5.22 innings per start last season. That represented the most since 2018, though it was still far off the 2014 average of 5.97.

The 2024 season also featured an MLB average of 85.5 pitches per start, the highest since 2019. Starters haven't thrown as many as 90 pitches per appearance since 2017.

Perhaps it's inevitable that the pendulum swing at least a little more toward getting starters to work longer. The recent focus on relievers puts more pressure on them, causing bullpens to break down.

There's one obvious method to change that.

"I don't think necessarily the game is going to all of a sudden turn back the other way, but there's a huge push to understand how you can keep a bullpen healthy," Milwaukee Brewers manager Pat Murphy said. "And one of the biggest ways is those starters getting through that first bulk and getting you into the sixth or seventh."

Now it's just a matter of figuring out how those starters can pitch deeper into games more often.

Former Utah Rep. Mia Love, the first Black Republican woman elected to the US House, has died

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Former U.S. Rep. Mia Love of Utah, a daughter of Haitian immigrants who became the first Black Republican woman elected to Congress, died Sunday.

She was 49.

Love's family posted news of her death on Love's X account.

She had undergone recent treatment for brain cancer and received immunotherapy as part of a clinical trial at Duke University's brain tumor center. Her daughter said earlier this month that the former lawmaker was no longer responding to treatment.

Love died at her home in Saratoga Springs, Utah, according to a statement posted by the family.

"With grateful hearts filled to overflowing for the profound influence of Mia on our lives, we want you to know that she passed away peacefully," her family said. "We are thankful for the many good wishes, prayers and condolences."

Utah Gov. Spencer Cox referred to Love as a "true friend" and said in a statement that her legacy of service inspired all who knew her.

Love entered politics in 2003 after winning a seat on the city council in Saratoga Springs, a growing community about 30 miles (48 kilometers) south of Salt Lake City. She later became the city's mayor.

In 2012, Love narrowly lost a bid for the House against the Democratic incumbent, former Rep. Jim Matheson, in a district that covers a string of Salt Lake City suburbs. She ran again two years later and defeated first-time candidate Doug Owens by about 7,500 votes.

Love didn't emphasize her race during her campaigns, but she acknowledged the significance of her election after her 2014 victory. She said her win defied naysayers who had suggested that a Black, Republican, Mormon woman couldn't win a congressional seat in overwhelmingly white Utah.

She was briefly considered a rising star within the GOP and she kept her distance from Donald Trump, who was unpopular with many Utah voters, while he was running for president ahead of the 2016 election.

In an op-ed published earlier this month in the Deseret News, Love described the version of America she grew up loving and shared her enduring wish for the nation to become less divisive. She thanked her medical team and every person who had prayed for her.

Love said her parents immigrated to the U.S. with \$10 in their pocket and a belief that hard work would lead to success. She said she was raised to believe passionately in the American dream and "to love this country, warts and all." America at its roots is respectful, resilient, giving and grounded in gritty determination, she said.

Her career in politics exposed Love to America's ugly side, but she said it also gave her a front row seat to be inspired by people's hope and courage. She shared her wish for neighbors to come together and focus on their similarities rather than their differences.

"Some have forgotten the math of America — whenever you divide you diminish," Love wrote.

She urged elected officials to lead with compassion and communicate honestly with their constituents.

"In the end, I hope that my life will have mattered and made a difference for the nation I love and the family and friends I adore," Love wrote. "I hope you will see the America I know in the years ahead, that you will hear my words in the whisper of the wind of freedom and feel my presence in the flame of the enduring principles of liberty. My living wish and fervent prayer for you and for this nation is that the America I have known is the America you fight to preserve."

In 2016, facing reelection and following the release of a 2005 recording in which Trump made lewd comments about groping women, Love skipped the Republican National Convention and released a statement saying definitively that she would not vote for Trump. She instead endorsed Texas Sen. Ted Cruz in the

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GOP race, but he dropped out months later.

While seeking a third term in 2018, Love tried to separate herself from Trump on trade and immigration while still backing her party's positions on tax cuts. Despite Republican voters outnumbering Democrats by a nearly three-to-one margin in her district, though, she lost by fewer than 700 votes to Democrat Ben McAdams, a former Salt Lake County mayor.

Trump called out Love by name in a news conference the morning after she lost, where he also bashed other Republicans who didn't fully embrace him.

"Mia Love gave me no love, and she lost," Trump said. "Too bad. Sorry about that, Mia."

After her loss, Love served as a political commentator on CNN and as a fellow at the University of Sydney. Following Trump's election in November, Love said she was "OK with the outcome."

"Yes, Trump says a lot of inconsiderate things that are unfortunate and impossible to defend," Love wrote in a social media post. "However, his policies have a high probability of benefiting all Americans."

Georgia jury orders Monsanto parent to pay nearly \$2.1 billion in Roundup weedkiller lawsuit

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A jury in Georgia has ordered Monsanto parent Bayer to pay nearly \$2.1 billion in damages to a man who says the company's Roundup weed killer caused his cancer, according to attorneys representing the plaintiff.

The verdict marks the latest in a long-running series of court battles Monsanto has faced over its Roundup herbicide. The agrochemical giant says it will appeal the verdict, reached in a Georgia courtroom late Friday, in efforts to overturn the decision.

The penalties awarded include \$65 million in compensatory damages and \$2 billion in punitive damages, law firms Arnold & Itkin LLP and Kline & Specter PC said in a statement. That marks one of the largest verdicts in a Roundup-related case to date.

Plaintiff John Barnes filed his lawsuit against Monsanto in 2021, seeking damages related to his non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Arnold & Itkin attorney Kyle Findley, the lead trial lawyer on the case, said the verdict will help put his client in a better position to get the treatment he needs going forward.

"It's been a long road for him ... and he was happy that the truth related to the product (has) been exposed," Findley told The Associated Press on Sunday. He called the verdict an "important milestone" after "another example of Monsanto's refusal to accept responsibility for poisoning people with this toxic product."

Germany-based Bayer, which acquired Monsanto in 2018, has continued to dispute claims that Roundup causes cancer. But the company has been hit with more than 177,000 lawsuits involving the weedkiller and set aside \$16 billion to settle cases.

In a statement, Monsanto said Friday's verdict "conflicts with the overwhelming weight of scientific evidence and the consensus of regulatory bodies and their scientific assessments worldwide." The company added that it continues "to stand fully behind the safety" of Roundup products.

For a variety of crops — including corn, soybeans and cotton — Roundup is designed to work with genetically modified seeds that resist the weedkiller's deadly effect. It allows farmers to produce more while conserving the soil by tilling it less.

Some studies associate Roundup's key ingredient, glyphosate, with cancer, although the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has said it is not likely to be carcinogenic to humans when used as directed. Still, numerous lawsuits over the weedkiller allege glyphosate does cause non-Hodgkin lymphoma, arguing that Monsanto has failed to warn the public about serious risks for years.

Findley said that evidence relating to Barnes' case show "many years of cover-ups" and "backroom dealings." He accused Monsanto of ignoring several scientific studies related to the toxicity of Roundup and said the company "tried to find ways to persuade and distract and deny the connection between this

product and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma."

Friday's decision marks the fourth Roundup-related verdict that Findley's team has won to date — the largest of which was awarded in Philadelphia in January 2024, with damages totaling \$2.25 billion. And he said his law firm has "many more clients who are similarly situated as Mr. Barnes."

Monsanto, meanwhile, also maintains that it "remains committed to trying cases" — and argues its wider record of Roundup-related litigation continues to reinforce the safety of its products. The company said it has prevailed in 17 of the last 25 related trials and "jury verdicts were reduced 90% overall" in past cases that have been finalized.

Bayer has recently renewed and expanded an effort across a handful of U.S. states to protect pesticide companies from claims they failed to warn that a product causes cancer, if labeling otherwise complies with EPA regulations. The company and other industry supports argue that litigation costs are unsustainable and could impact Roundup's future availability. But opponents stress that such legislation would limit accountability.

Caught in the middle, this US oddity at the border is grappling with Trump's trade war with Canada

By SALLY HO The Associated Press

POINT ROBERTS, Wash. (AP) — In the northwest corner of Washington state lies a quirky U.S. exclave so dependent on Canada's goodwill that the strain of President Donald Trump's tariff war is inescapable — in the sole grocery store, at any of the three eateries, and for the many residents who never voted for him.

Locals and visitors alike in Point Roberts, Washington, are increasingly worried about how this unusual waterfront border town that has embodied the two countries' interdependency can survive the hostility brewing on both sides.

"This was really devastating," said Tamra Hansen, a longtime Point Roberts resident and business owner whose eyes welled with tears as she described her two restaurants on the brink. "If we don't get the support from the Canadians, this town will die."

Known as a geographic oddity since the boundary with Canada was drawn in 1846, this detached 5-square-mile community — called an exclave because it's completely separated from mainland America — is surrounded by water on three sides. Its only land connection is to Canada and it takes one border crossing and about 25 miles north by car to get to downtown Vancouver, B.C.; or two border crossings and about 25 miles through Canada to re-enter the United States along Boundary Bay.

The beaches, marina, golf course and hiking trails have long made Point Roberts a cherished getaway destination, but today locals say business has never been worse. Canadian visitors are staying away and some American residents say they've even been harassed over their nationality.

Point Roberts Fire Chief Christopher Carleton said Point Roberts is one the last remaining untouched natural gems of the United States, but the tight-knit community with no stop lights is now under threat by politicians who know nothing about their way of life.

"We need to take care of one another and have grace for one another and not allow people who don't even know we exist to disrupt the relationships we currently have," said Carleton, whose firefighters mostly live across the border.

Tensions between the U.S. and Canada have spiked to a level not seen before in modern times thanks to Trump's on-again, off-again threat over the past two months to place taxes on a long list of goods going across the border. In response, Canada has promised retaliatory tariffs.

For a population that has famously prided itself on being nice, polite and loyal allies, Canadians aren't hiding their disgust for Trump's polarizing rhetoric, especially taking offense with the U.S. president's claim that Canada could be the "51st state."

Mark Nykolaichuk said he refuses to go to the mainland U.S. but describes Point Roberts as a unique exception because the border here has never felt like an actual divide for Canadians like him who grew

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up visiting.

Most of the property owners here are from Canada, and many of the 1,000 year-round residents have dual citizenship. Once a booming fishing town, the leading industry now, according to U.S. Census data, is retail — primarily driven from tourism because of the number of vacation properties. The unincorporated Whatcom County community is now mostly home to retirees, though this year there are seven students — nicknamed “The Borderites” — at the lone public school.

Nykolaichuk, who lives in the Vancouver, B.C. area, said he hopes he can help keep the Point Roberts International Marketplace open by shopping there, given that management reports business is down 20% to 30%. He depends on Point Roberts’ only grocery store to be able to cook at his vacation home because U.S. customs doesn’t permit raw meat to enter its borders, for example, so he must buy it in town.

“Nobody wants to see this place shut down,” Nykolaichuk said. “If this place goes, where are the U.S. citizens going to eat? Where are they going to get their food from?”

Many in Point Roberts don’t blame the Canadians for their disdain over Trump’s perceived sovereignty threat. Instead, there’s a deep sadness for both sides.

“We’ve always gotten along and it’s just nonsensical because now the U.S. is going to suffer too,” said Hansen, who is a dual citizen. “I definitely feel for the Canadian people at this time because they’ve got their backs against the wall, really, and they have to retaliate.”

Like many locals, Larry Musselwhite, owner of Larry’s Liquor Locker, is angry at Trump and blames the president for Point Roberts’ economic problems. The 75-year-old said he can’t even think about retiring right now because of the economy. His liquor store was down 40% in sales last month.

“This is because of our elected president, who really doesn’t care about the common man and the struggles that we have to go through,” Musselwhite said. “It greatly affects how I live my life.”

About 75% of the Point Roberts precinct voted for a presidential candidate other than Trump, which is a higher percentage than across Whatcom County as well as the statewide turnout, according to the 2024 election results.

Locals say one of the most frustrating things about the tit-for-tat is the way that the tariffs have abruptly started and stopped, creating an unsteady flow of changes to customs. The whiplash for residents who often cross the border multiple times a day leaves them unsure whether or when they’ll be surprised with a new penalty.

This fear over unexpected tariff fees has made people cautious about buying things in Point Roberts — if they’re coming into town at all.

Hugh Wilson, a real estate agent who also manages several local Airbnb listings, said properties have seen more cancellations than bookings lately.

“Nobody is sure of the rules at any one day here,” Wilson said. “The border agents do the best they can to stay up to date and they relay that to us as normal people crossing the border.”

With no end in sight, there’s also a high-stakes fear that the dispute could escalate with Canada possibly imposing tariffs on the water and electricity that it supplies to Point Roberts, or even turning off the utilities altogether.

“If it gets more brutal, they can cut off the water just like that, or the power,” said Brian Calder, a fourth-generation resident who was previously the president of the Point Roberts Chamber of Commerce. “And it just depends how much more confrontation is fomented by Trump’s office.”

Calder said he and other town leaders are trying to plead for help with the British Columbia premier and the governor of Washington state. He said the local Whatcom County leadership has all but abandoned this far-away community in a time of crisis.

Jed Holmes, a spokesman for the county, said they are communicating with Washington state’s congressional delegation in D.C. to address the rapid deterioration in U.S.-Canada relations that has especially affected Point Roberts.

“I understand that folks want us to do more, but it’s really challenging to identify what meaningful things a county government can do to change this dynamic at the international level,” Holmes said in an email.

For Hansen, she’s asking herself how much more can she afford to lose personally while running the

Saltwater Cafe breakfast spot and a restaurant called The Pier. She has 15 employees to pay but business was down 55% in February compared with last year. There have been times when her pub doesn't even net \$100 a day.

"There are some businesses that are going out of business right now as we speak," Hansen said. "It's very emotional for me because I care about everybody that lives here."

Families and German town mark the 10th anniversary of the Germanwings crash in the French Alps

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER and MARTIN MEISSNER Associated Press

HALTERN AM SEE, Germany (AP) — Victims' relatives traveled to the scene in the French Alps of the crash of Germanwings Flight 9525 10 years ago Monday, while hundreds of people gathered in silence to mark the anniversary in a German town that was home to an 18-member school group on board the doomed plane.

The plane took off from Barcelona, Spain on the morning of March 24, 2015, and was supposed to land in Duesseldorf, Germany. But it never arrived because, investigators said, the plane was deliberately downed by the co-pilot, Andreas Lubitz. All 150 people on board were killed.

The victims included a group of 16 students and two teachers from a high school in the western German town of Haltern am See who were flying home from an exchange trip to Spain.

Also killed were two babies, a pair of acclaimed German opera singers and a member of an Argentine rock band, three generations of the same family, a vacationing mother and son, a recently married couple, people on business trips and others going home. Most came from Germany and Spain, though the victims came from 17 different countries in total.

Many victims' families traveled to the crash site in southeastern France. In the nearby village of Le Vernet, local officials and Carsten Spohr, the chief executive of Germanwings parent Lufthansa, laid flowers.

In Haltern, students laid roses in the yard of the Joseph König high school, and hundreds of people who gathered in the rain in front of a plaque with the victims' names fell silent at 10:41 a.m., the moment of the crash.

The school's principal, Christian Krahle, said it remains important to remember the tragedy even though today's students didn't experience it, German news agency dpa reported. "We want to be close to those who are infinitely sad to this day," he said.

Wreaths were laid at the town cemetery, where there is a memorial in the form of a schoolroom and some of the students are buried.

Commemorations were also planned at the airports in Duesseldorf and Barcelona. At Duesseldorf Airport, a book of condolences was available in the so-called Room of Silence for employees and travelers.

The crash caused shock and disbelief when investigators revealed that co-pilot Lubitz locked the flight's captain out of the cockpit to deliberately set the plane on a collision course with a mountainside.

Lubitz had in the past suffered from depression, but authorities and his airline later deemed him fit to fly. In the months ahead of the crash, Lubitz suffered from sleeplessness and feared losing his vision, but he hid that from his employer.

"This state of shock, the deeply felt sympathy of all the residents for the families and the question of why this happened are still with us today," Haltern Mayor Andreas Stegemann told dpa.

"The Germanwings crash is a permanent part of our town's history," he said.

The site of the crash in France is now marked by a 5-meter (16-foot) "Solar Orb," meant to represent the sun and the five continents. The memorial, made up of 149 gilded aluminum plates — marking all those on board except the co-pilot — was erected in 2017.

Japan's cherry blossom season begins as first blooms appear in Tokyo

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's official cherry blossom spotters on Monday confirmed the first blooming of the country's favorite flower, declaring the official start of the festive season in the Japanese capital.

An official from the Japan Meteorological Agency carefully examined the specimen tree of Somei Yoshino variety at Tokyo's Yasukuni shrine and announced that more than five blossoms — the minimum required for the announcement — were flowering on it.

The opening matched the average year and was five days earlier than last year, according to the JMA.

Cherry blossoms, or "sakura," are Japan's favorite flower and usually reach their peak in late March to early April, just as the country celebrates the start of a new school and business year. Many Japanese enjoy walking or picnicking under the trees.

Sakura have deeply influenced Japanese culture for centuries and have regularly been used in poetry and literature, with their fragility seen as a symbol of life, death and rebirth.

The announcement in Tokyo, which is enjoying warmer-than-usual temperatures of around 19 Celsius (66 Fahrenheit), comes just one day after the blooming of the nation's first cherry blossom was confirmed Sunday in the southwestern city of Kochi on the island of Shikoku.

The JMA tracks more than 50 "benchmark" cherry trees across the country. The trees normally bloom for about two weeks each year from first bud to all the blossoms falling off. They are expected to reach their peak in about 10 days.

Cherry trees are sensitive to temperature changes and the timing of their blooming can provide valuable data for climate change studies.

In recent years, Japan's cherry blossom season has tended to come earlier than the average, prompting concerns of a possible impact of climate change.

Do you eat a meal in 20 minutes or less? It might be time to slow down

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — You can have your cake and eat it too — just do it slowly.

Experts tend to focus on the kinds of foods you can eat to improve your health. But the speed at which you devour your dinner matters just as much. There are risks with eating too fast — think stuck food and the potential to overeat before your brain tells you to stop. (Inhaling your food also risks annoying your slower-paced dining companions or the person who took the time to cook your meal.)

Here are some tips from scientists on how to slow down and take a more mindful approach to consuming your diet.

How fast is too fast?

If you're the kind of person who can regularly polish off breakfast, lunch or dinner in less than 20-30 minutes, you are eating too fast.

"It takes about 20 minutes for the stomach to communicate to the brain via a whole host of hormonal signals that it's full," said Leslie Heinberg, at the Center for Behavioral Health at the Cleveland Clinic. "So when people eat rapidly, they can miss these signals and it's very easy to eat beyond the point of fullness."

Why is that a problem?

People who eat quickly are likely to swallow more air, Heinberg said, which could lead to bloating or indigestion. Not chewing your food properly can also compromise digestion, meaning you won't get all of the nutrients from your food. Unchewed pieces of food also could get stuck in your esophagus.

Some previous studies have suggested that people who eat quickly have the highest risk of obesity, while the slowest eaters were the least likely to be obese.

How can you slow down when eating?

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For starters, turn off the TV and put down your phone.

"If you're eating while you watch TV, people tend to eat until there's a commercial or the show is over," Heinberg said, adding that people are less inclined to pay attention to the body's own signals that it's full. "When we do things while we're eating, we're eating less mindfully. And that often causes us to eat more."

She said that when people focus exclusively on eating, they tend to enjoy the meal more and eat less.

Heinberg also acknowledged the pace at which you eat is often an ingrained habit, but said change is still possible. She suggested things like using your non-dominant hand to eat, trying utensils you might not ordinarily use like chopsticks or taking a deliberate break to drink water when your plate is partially empty.

If you have a busy life, it might be unavoidable to eat lunch at a work meeting or snack while running errands. But Sarah Berry, chief scientist at the British nutritional company ZOE, said when possible, "be mindful of what the food tastes and feels like."

"If we're not fully present, it's very easy to eat more quickly and not notice how much we've consumed," Berry said.

Chew your food, just like mom told you to

One of the simplest things to do is to increase the number of bites you take, said Helen McCarthy, a clinical psychologist with the British Psychological Society.

"If you chew each mouthful a little bit longer, that will slow down your eating," she said.

The kind of food you eat may also make a difference, pointing out that it's much easier to eat ultraprocessed or fast foods quicker, because they typically have a softer texture.

"It's hard to eat vegetables and protein at the same rate as something that's highly processed and requires less chewing," McCarthy said.

Some of her patients also reported an unintentional side effect once they began eating more slowly, referencing one woman who often ate a tube of potato chips every evening. When McCarthy told her to slow down and eat every single chip individually, her patient told her "it was like having a mouthful of claggy chemicals."

"She didn't find (the chips) enjoyable anymore," McCarthy said.

South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo reinstated as acting president after impeachment overturned

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's Constitutional Court overturned the impeachment of Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, reinstating the nation's No. 2 official as acting leader Monday while not yet ruling on the separate impeachment of President Yoon Suk Yeol over his shocking imposition of martial law in December.

Many observers said the 7-1 ruling in Han's case did not signal much about the upcoming verdict on Yoon, as Han wasn't a key figure in imposing martial law. But the ruling could still embolden Yoon's staunch supporters and ramp up their political offensive on the opposition.

Speaking with reporters following his reinstatement, Han thanked the court for what he called "a wise decision" and promised to focus on tackling "urgent matters," including a fast-changing global trade environment, in an apparent reference to the Trump administration's aggressive tariffs policy. He also called for national unity, saying: "There's no left or right — what matters is the advancement of our nation."

South Korea has been thrown into political turmoil since Yoon, a conservative, declared martial law on Dec. 3 and sent hundreds of troops to the liberal opposition-controlled National Assembly and other places in Seoul. Yoon's decree lasted only six hours as enough lawmakers managed to enter an assembly hall where they quickly voted down the decree.

The impeachment arguments

The assembly impeached Yoon on Dec. 14, alleging he violated the Constitution and other laws by suppressing assembly activities and trying to detain politicians. Yoon's impeachment made Han acting president

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until he was impeached in late December.

The unprecedented, successive impeachments that suspended the country's top two officials intensified domestic division and deepened worries about South Korea's diplomatic and economic activities.

A major trigger for the opposition's push to impeach Han was his refusal to fill three vacant seats at the Constitutional Court's nine-member bench. That was a highly explosive issue because the court needed support from at least six justices to approve Yoon's impeachment and filling its empty posts could make such a decision more likely.

After Han was suspended, his successor as acting president, Choi Sang-mok, appointed two new justices but left the ninth seat vacant.

Han was also accused in the impeachment motion of abetting Yoon's martial law declaration and obstructing efforts to open independent investigations into Yoon's alleged rebellion in connection with his martial law decree.

On Monday, seven of the Constitutional Court's eight justices ruled to overturn or dismiss Han's impeachment. They ruled that his alleged actions weren't against the law or weren't serious enough to remove him from office or his impeachment motion didn't even meet a required quorum when it passed through the assembly. One justice upheld Han's impeachment.

The main liberal opposition Democratic Party expressed regret over the court's decision to reinstate Han and urged it to dismiss Yoon quickly. Yoon's office welcomed Monday's ruling, saying it shows again the opposition's repeated uses of impeachment motions were "reckless, malicious political offensive."

What's next?

Observers earlier had predicted the Constitutional Court would rule on Yoon's case in mid-March, but it hasn't done so, sparking varied speculation on possible reasons.

"Today's verdict will give hope to Yoon's supporters for a similar fate and hope for Yoon's opponents for his ouster," said Duyeon Kim, a senior analyst at the Center for a New American Security in Washington. "But it's too soon to predict the court's verdict on Yoon because the specific details of both cases and allegations are different."

Kim said the reinstatement of Han, a career bureaucrat, will bring more stability to South Korea compared to when his powers as acting president were suspended.

Massive rival rallies backing or denouncing Yoon have divided the streets of Seoul and other major cities in South Korea. Earlier surveys showed that a majority of South Koreans were critical of Yoon's martial law enactment, but those supporting or sympathizing with Yoon have later gained strength.

Yoon argues that his martial law introduction was a desperate attempt to bring attention to the "wickedness" of the Democratic Party which obstructed his agenda and filed many impeachment motions against senior officials. Yoon critics counter he likely tried to use military rule to frustrate possible special investigations into scandals involving him and his wife.

Senior military and police officers sent to the assembly have said that Yoon ordered them to drag out lawmakers to prevent a floor vote to overturn his decree. Yoon says the troops' deployment was designed to maintain order.

If the court upholds Yoon's impeachment, South Korea must hold a presidential election to choose his successor. If it rules for him, Yoon will regain his presidential powers.

Yoon has separately been charged with directing rebellion, a charge that carries the death penalty or a life sentence if he is convicted.

From deluges to drought: Climate change speeds up water cycle, triggers more extreme weather

By TAMMY WEBBER and DONAVON BRUTUS Associated Press

Prolonged droughts, wildfires and water shortages. Torrential downpours that overwhelm dams and cause catastrophic flooding.

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Around the globe, rising temperatures stoked by climate change are increasing the odds of both severe drought and heavier precipitation that wreak havoc on people and the environment.

Rainfall can disappear for years only to return with a vengeance, as it did in California in 2023, with record-setting rain and snowfall. That led to heavy vegetation growth that provided fuel for the devastating January wildfires in Los Angeles after drought returned.

But how can global warming cause both drier and wetter extremes? Here's what experts say.

It's all about the water cycle

Water constantly moves between the Earth and its atmosphere. But that system — called the hydrological cycle — is speeding up as global temperatures get hotter, primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels like coal and gas.

A hotter atmosphere sucks up more water vapor from bodies of water and vegetation and soil.

Over land, this atmospheric demand and loss of surface moisture leads to longer and more intense droughts, even causing some arid areas to expand. Though rain falls less often, when it does, it's often in intense and destructive deluges.

That's because the atmosphere holds 7% more water vapor for every degree Celsius.

"Basically, global warming is turning the atmosphere into a bigger sponge so it can soak up more moisture ... and then when the conditions are right for rainfall, it's like squeezing that sponge," said Jonathan Overpeck, a climate scientist at the University of Michigan. "You get more moisture coming out faster."

Oceans play outsized role

Oceans absorb most of the planet's extra heat. That causes the water to expand and ice to melt at the poles, raising sea levels. The warmer water also provides fuel for larger hurricanes and cyclones that can dump massive amounts of water in a short time.

In 2023, for example, heavy one-day rains from Mediterranean storm Daniel caused massive flooding across eastern Libya that overwhelmed two dams, sending a wall of water through the coastal city of Derna that destroyed entire neighborhoods and swept bridges, cars and people out to sea. Climate scientists say climate change made that storm far more likely.

Snowpack is diminishing

Climate change also is affecting snowpack, a critical part of the hydrological cycle.

Melting snow helps fill reservoirs and waterways, including for drinking and agriculture. But less snow is falling in general, and what does often is absorbed by thirsty soil.

What's more, because winters are becoming warmer overall, the growing season is longer, meaning snowmelt also is being lost through evapotranspiration of plants. But, just like rain, climate change also can cause more intense and sometimes damaging snowstorms.

"All this stuff is related to warming, which we know with perfect confidence is almost all due to human activity," Overpeck said. "The good news is, we know how to stop it if we want to."

Today in History: March 25

Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in New York kills 146 workers

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, March 25, the 84th day of 2025. There are 281 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 25, 1911, 146 people, mostly young female immigrants, were killed when a fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Co. garment factory in New York; the tragedy led to legal reforms for workers' rights and workplace safety.

Also on this date:

In 1894, Jacob S. Coxey began a march from Massillon (MA'-sih-luhn), Ohio, leading an "army" of as many as 500 unemployed workers to Washington to demand help from the federal government.

In 1931, in the so-called Scottsboro Boys case, nine young Black men were taken off a train in Alabama

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and accused of raping two white women; after years of convictions, death sentences and imprisonment, they were eventually vindicated.

In 1947, a coal dust explosion inside the Centralia Coal Co. Mine No. 5 in Washington County, Illinois, killed 111 miners; 31 survived.

In 1965, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. led 25,000 people to the Alabama state Capitol in Montgomery, completing a five-day march from Selma to protest the denial of voting rights to Black Americans.

In 1975, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia was assassinated by his nephew, Prince Faisal bin Musaid. (Faisal bin Musaid was executed for the killing three months later.)

In 1990, 87 people were killed when fire raced through the Happy Land social club in New York City. (The fire was set by Julio Gonzalez, who had been thrown out of the club following an argument with his girlfriend; Gonzalez died in prison in 2016.)

In 1996, an 81-day standoff by the Montana Freemen, an antigovernment militia, began at a ranch near Jordan, Montana.

Today's Birthdays: Film critic Gene Shalit is 99. Former astronaut James Lovell is 97. Activist and author Gloria Steinem is 91. Musician Elton John is 78. Actor Bonnie Bedelia is 77. Actor Marcia Cross is 63. Author Kate DiCamillo is 61. Actor Lisa Gay Hamilton is 61. Actor Sarah Jessica Parker is 60. Baseball Hall of Famer Tom Glavine is 59. Comedian-actor Alex Moffat (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 43. Actor-singer Katharine McPhee is 41. Comedian-actor Chris Redd (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 40. Rapper Big Sean is 37. Actor Mikey Madison is 26.