

Groton Daily Independent

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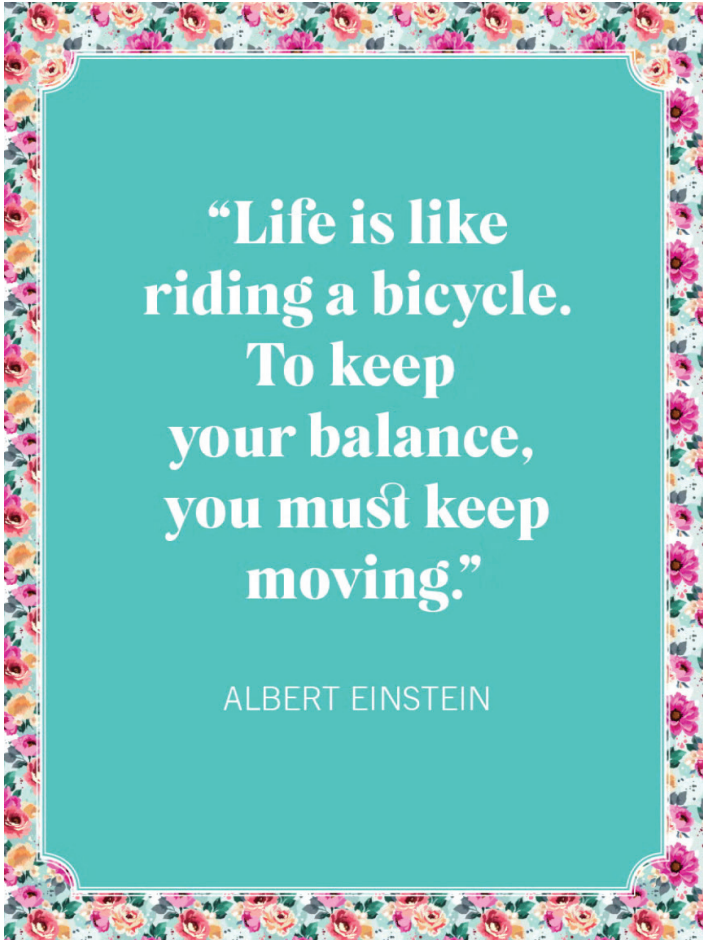
Friday, March 28

Senior Menu: Meatballs, mashed potato and gravy, carrots, strawberry ambrosia, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg wraps.

School Lunch: Garlic cheese bread, cooked carrots.

Saturday, March 29



**“Life is like
riding a bicycle.
To keep
your balance,
you must keep
moving.”**

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Sunday, March 30

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

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

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

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

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

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

Groton Daily Independent
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1440

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

Health Department Reductions

Heath Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. announced yesterday the federal agency would look to eliminate as many as 10,000 jobs as part of the Trump Administration's broader reduction-in-force efforts across the government. The figure comes in addition to an estimated 10,000 workers who previously accepted buyout packages—together, they represent roughly 25% of the department's previous workforce.

The Department of Health and Human Services has the largest budget of any federal agency at roughly \$1.7T per year, though the bulk of the spending goes toward the disbursement of mandatory spending programs, including Medicaid, Medicare, and insurance for children in low-income families. Separately, the agency oversees key regulatory and research agencies, including the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Each agency is expected to provide plans to reduce headcount in the coming months, per an executive order.

Rushdie Returns to Fiction

Renowned author Salman Rushdie will publish his first work of fiction since a 2022 knife attack left him blind in one eye and in chronic pain. "The Eleventh Hour" is five connected short stories and novellas due to be released in November by Random House and follows last year's memoir of the violent episode, "Knife."

On Aug. 12, 2022, the Booker Prize Award-winner was starting a lecture in western New York when then-24-year-old Hadi Matar ran on stage and stabbed Rushdie over a dozen times with a 10-inch blade. Rushdie spent 17 days in the hospital and lost the use of his right eye and most of the function of one hand. Last month, Matar was found guilty of attempted murder and assault and could face up to 25 years in prison.

Since the attack, the 77-year-old author of 15 novels has described fiction writing as difficult. The Indian native's 1988 novel "Satanic Verses"—whose depictions of Prophet Muhammad were seen as blasphemous by many Muslims—prompted then-Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini to call for the writer's death.

Submarine Disaster

At least six people died and a number of others were injured after a submarine carrying dozens of tourists sank off Egypt's Red Sea coast yesterday. Officials said 39 people were rescued, with reports suggesting at least two of the victims were children.

The region of the Red Sea is renowned for its coral reefs—the bottleneck-like geography has created a marine ecosystem where nearly 15% of corals, mollusks, and fishes in the sea are found nowhere else in the world. Officials believe the vessel may have lost pressure after inadvertently colliding with a reef, sinking to the seafloor about a half-mile off the coast. The operating company, Sindbad Resorts, claims to have two of just 14 tourist submarines in the world.

The accident marked the second major incident involving a seafaring tourist vessel in Egypt in recent months—a boat sank in November during a sightseeing trip, leaving 11 people dead or missing, while others were trapped in the dark for more than a day waiting for rescue teams.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Sundance Film Festival to relocate to Boulder, Colorado, beginning in 2027 after 40 years in Park City, Utah.

Netflix's "Baby Reindeer" leads all series with eight nominations for the 2025 BAFTAs, or British Academy of Film and Television Arts.

NCAA women's basketball tournament Sweet 16 round kicks off today.

Science & Technology

Researchers discover new class of antibiotic that targets drug-resistant bacteria; molecule, known as lariocidin, interrupts bacteria protein production in a previously unknown way.

OpenAI to limit rate of requests for its new image generator within ChatGPT, saying the viral uptake has overloaded servers.

New findings link neural cell death with the growth of glioblastoma, one of the most lethal types of brain cancer; the five-year survival rate for the disease is under 10%.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.3%, Dow -0.4%, Nasdaq -0.5%) as US tariffs on imported vehicles, effective April 2, weigh on stocks.

French video game maker Ubisoft spins out new unit for popular game brands, including Assassin's Creed; Chinese tech giant Tencent to take \$1.25B stake.

GameStop shares slide 22% after retailer says it plans to raise \$1.3B in debt to buy bitcoin.

The US economy grew at an annual rate of 2.4% in Q4 of 2024, per revised data; full-year US gross domestic product—the total value of goods and services produced—grew at 2.8% rate.

Politics & World Affairs

President Donald Trump withdraws Rep. Elise Stefanik's (R, NY-1) nomination as US ambassador to the UN, cites narrow Republican majority in the US House.

Tufts University student, a Turkish national on a valid visa, detained and transferred to ICE center in Louisiana; Rümeysa Öztürk is the latest international student to be arrested amid a broader crackdown on pro-Palestinian sentiment in universities.

At least 300 students have had visas revoked, state secretary says.

New York county clerk blocks Texas from filing legal action against New York doctor who sent abortion pills to a Texas woman; dispute likely to reach Supreme Court, highlights conflict between states with differing abortion laws.

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

Cow basket - \$20



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

Teenager or adult Easter basket - \$25



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

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Rainbow basket - \$25



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

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Blue basket - \$20



Pink basket - \$20



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



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

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Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #18 Results

Team Standings: Cheetahs 14, Chipmunks 13, Jackelopes 10, Coyotes 10, Shihtzus 9, Foxes 4

Men's High Games: John Sippel 204, Butch Farmen 193, Brad Waage 190

Women's High Games: Michelle Johnson 182, Hayley Johnson 173, Emily Sternhagen 170

Men's High Series: Butch Farmen 543, John Sippel 531, Brad Larson 500

Women's High Series: Hayley Johnson 453, Nancy Radke 444, Sue Stanley 534

Queen of Hearts goes out!

The Queen of Hearts went out Thursday night. Greg Bonn's name was drawn and he picked card number 9. Behind the card was the Queen of Hearts. He won \$10,704. The Olive Grove Golf Course and The Groton American Legion will each get \$5,352. Ticket sales were \$1,555. This was the 23rd week. That will conclude the Queen of Hearts.

Correcting the Record about Social Security Office Closings

Recent reports in the media that the Social Security Administration (SSA) is permanently closing local field offices are false. Since January 1, 2025, the agency has not permanently closed or announced the permanent closure of any local field office. From time to time, SSA must temporarily close a local field office for reasons such as weather, damage, or facilities issues, and it reopens when the issues are resolved. The agency has announced the permanent closure of one hearing office, in White Plains, NY.

SSA works closely with local congressional delegations before closing any office permanently. The agency also reassigns employees from an affected office to other locations to help communities access in-person services.

"SSA is committed to providing service where people need help and our local field offices are no exception," said Lee Dudek, Acting Commissioner of Social Security. "We have not permanently closed any local field offices this year."

SSA identified for the General Services Administration underutilized office space to ensure the government is spending taxpayer money as prudently as possible. The agency provided GSA a list of sites for termination. Most of these are small hearing rooms with no assigned employees. Since most hearings are held virtually, SSA no longer needs these underutilized rooms.

DANR Announces Nearly \$140 Million for Statewide Environmental Projects

Groton receives \$6.5 million

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) announced that the Board of Water and Natural Resources has approved \$139,791,400 in loans and grants for drinking water, wastewater, and solid waste projects in South Dakota.

The \$139,791,400 total consists of \$121,686,200 in low-interest loans and \$18,105,200 in grants to be administered by the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

"Safe and reliable water, wastewater, and solid waste infrastructure is essential for protecting our natural resources and building stronger communities for future generations, said DANR Secretary Hunter Roberts. "I want to thank the Board of Water and Natural Resources for approving the funding recommendations."

Funds were awarded from DANR's Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Program, Clean Water State Revolving Fund Program, Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program, Water Environment Fund, and Solid Waste Management Program to the following:

Aberdeen received a \$30,000,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to replace equipment and implement improvements to the treatment process, increasing the capacity of its wastewater treatment facility. The project previously received funding in April 2022. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Alcester received a \$2,230,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$1,260,000 in principal forgiveness to improve its water distribution system. The project will include replacing an aging water main and recoating and repairing the city's water tower. The loan terms are 3.25% for 30 years.

Bison received a \$370,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to complete improvements to its wastewater and storm sewer system. The project previously received funding in September 2022. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Box Elder received a \$12,344,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$2,000,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant to begin Phase II of a multiphase sewer main project along Old Highway 14/16. The loan terms are 3.5% for 30 years.

Brown County received a \$675,600 Solid Waste Management grant to help construct a fifth cell at the landfill.

Brown County also received a \$213,700 Solid Waste Management grant to assist in purchasing a new landfill compactor.

Bryant received a \$1,240,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to replace three blocks of the existing sanitary sewer main line and extend the sewer main an additional two blocks. The terms of the loan are 3.75% for 30 years.

Bryant also received a \$1,575,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$1,035,000 in principal forgiveness to extend the water main an additional block while replacing three existing blocks. This project also includes making improvements to the water tower. The loan terms are 3.25% for 30 years.

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Buffalo Gap received a \$1,314,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$978,000 in principal forgiveness to complete phase two of replacing cast iron pipes and drinking water mains throughout town. The loan terms are 3.25% for 30 years.

Canton received a \$1,946,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan to make utility improvements on West Street and replace the existing water main line. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Canton also received a \$1,827,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to make sanitary and storm sewer improvements, increasing capacity on West Street. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Columbia received a \$3,714,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$2,863,000 in principal forgiveness to replace sewer mains and construct a new wastewater treatment lagoon system. A lift station and a force main will also be built to reroute sewage to the new system. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Dakota Mainstream Regional Water System received a \$1,000,000 Water Environment Fund Appropriation grant to conduct a feasibility study. The study will determine the viability and costs to provide water and system interconnects throughout east central and southeastern South Dakota to assure water availability to meet current user needs and provide for future growth.

Dell Rapids received a \$2,992,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$500,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant to replace all vitrified clay sanitary sewer lines along Orleans Avenue. The project will also replace or reroute sanitary sewer lines along 5th and 6th Street. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Dell Rapids also received an additional \$2,782,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to construct a lift station to extend sanitary sewer to a previously unserved area on the community's western edge. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Dell Rapids also received a \$1,158,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan to replace outdated water main line along Orleans Avenue. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Fall River Water User District received a \$3,240,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$1,390,000 in principal forgiveness to construct a new booster station, which will increase the flow capacity and allow simultaneous operation of the new pump station, South Madison Well, and the connection to Hot Springs. The loan terms are 3.5% for 30 years.

Garden City received a \$488,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$187,000 in principal forgiveness to replace an existing lift station and improve the existing wastewater lagoon. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Gettysburg received a \$2,964,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to clean and televise all wastewater lines in town. The city will also reshape and make improvements to its existing lagoon. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Grant-Roberts Rural Water System received a \$8,300,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with 100 percent principal forgiveness to connect the town of Summit as a bulk water service customer. The town of Summit's current water source has manganese above the recommended human health limits. Connecting the town to rural water is the most cost effective and best long-term solution to meet the

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town's ongoing water needs.

Groton received a \$4,587,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$2,000,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant to replace a lift station, purchase a generator, construct a new force main, and add a new cell to the wastewater pond system. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Hecla received a \$2,500,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$2,000,000 in principal forgiveness to reconstruct a portion of the sewer collection system. This funding is for the second of three phases. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Hill City received a \$5,439,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan, a \$2,000,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant, and a \$82,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund Water Quality grant to install new wastewater treatment equipment to increase capacity and to rehabilitate the existing wastewater treatment infrastructure and equipment. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Hill City also received a \$3,520,000 Drinking Water Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$2,000,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant to make drinking water system improvements. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Huron received a \$192,500 Solid Waste Management grant to purchase a yard waste collection truck. This truck will also be used as a secondary recycling collection vehicle.

Java received a \$2,600,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$2,000,000 in principal forgiveness to improve their sanitary sewer system. Additional enhancements include new generators and SCADA improvements. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Keystone received a \$3,959,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$350,000 in principal forgiveness and a \$1,650,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant to increase the diameter of the sewer line running from the eastern side of town to the lift station. The loan terms are 3.5% for 30 years.

Mitchell received a \$2,350,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to upgrade wastewater and stormwater facilities along East Fifth Avenue from Burr Street to Foster Street. The loan terms are 3.5% for 20 years.

Mitchell also received a \$1,325,000 Drinking Water Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan to upgrade water infrastructure along East Fifth Avenue from Burr Street to Foster Street. The loan terms are 3.25% for 30 years.

Mitchell also received a \$241,500 Solid Waste Management grant to assist in purchasing a new tractor-scraper for the landfill.

Oacoma received a \$1,657,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to improve its wastewater treatment facility and collection system. This funding is for the second of five phases, which address the downtown lift station. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Oak Mountain Country Estates HOA received a Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program loan for \$143,000 and a \$302,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant to install meter pits and new meters at the curb stops. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

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Perkins County Rural Water System received a \$5,800,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$4,640,000 in principal **forgiveness** to install a new elevated 300,000-gallon reservoir in the central part of the system and replace pipe to accommodate the increased system pressure. The loan terms are 4.5% for 30 years.

Platte received a \$19,700 Solid Waste Management grant to purchase two recycling trailers. This will reduce solid waste volume at the source and increase recycling within the community, as it is not currently offered.

Roberts County received a \$68,000 Solid Waste Management grant to purchase a new loader to move daily cover, recycling material, solid waste, and snow.

South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) received a \$250,000 Solid Waste Management grant to allow DANR's Inspection, Compliance, and Remediation program to work with local entities to collect and dispose of PFAS foam or other PFAS products. Funds may also be available to regional landfills for waste tire clean-ups, or to school districts to remove old and potential chemical hazards or used for other solid waste cleanups or removals deemed necessary.

South Dakota Solid Waste Management Association received a \$39,500 Solid Waste Management grant to support hosting the Solid Waste Association of North America's Manager of Landfill Operations Certification course in Pierre, South Dakota.

Southern Missouri Recycling & Waste Management District received a \$30,000 Solid Waste Management grant and a \$120,000 Solid Waste Management loan to purchase a new loader. The loan terms are 3.5% for 20 years.

Southern Missouri Recycling & Waste Management District also received a \$719,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$180,900 Solid Waste Management grant to complete the final closure of cell #3 in conjunction with the construction of cell #4 of the facility. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Two Bit Ranch Estates HOA received a \$188,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program loan to refurbish its existing 20,000-gallon storage tank and install a new backup generator for its well booster station. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Veblen received a \$1,300,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to improve its wastewater collection system. This funding is for phase one of three. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Vermillion received a \$102,200 Solid Waste Management grant and a \$409,100 Solid Waste Management loan to assist in the purchasing of a new bulldozer for operation at the city landfill. The loan terms are 3.25% for seven years.

Viewfield Rural Water Association received a \$90,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program loan and a \$120,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant to install new water meters and a SCADA system. The loan terms are 3.5% for 20 years.

Water Investment in Northern South Dakota (WINS) received a \$2,000,000 Water Environmental Fund Appropriation grant to provide up to 42.1 million gallons per day of treated drinking water to the

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northeast South Dakota region. The project is a collaboration between the city of Aberdeen, BDM Rural Water System, and WEB Water Development Association and consists of 148 miles of pipeline and associated water treatment and storage infrastructure.

WEB Water Development Association received a \$713,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant to replace Pleasant Valley's existing water system with new water lines and install new water meters, pits and valves. WEB Water will then serve Pleasant Valley as individual members.

Webster received a \$1,129,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to reline the sanitary sewer system in their Industrial Park. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Wessington Springs received a \$1,245,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to improve their wastewater treatment system. These improvements include the drainage system around the ponds, re-shaping and stabilizing pond berms, and replacing electrical and mechanical components of the lift station. The loan terms are 3.75% for 30 years.

Wessington Springs also received a \$1,565,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$1,259,000 in principal forgiveness to replace approximately 3,800 feet of asbestos cement and cast-iron pipe. This will complete the city's ongoing transition to PVC pipe. The loan terms are 3.0% for 30 years.

White received a \$1,105,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan and a \$1,059,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant to improve its wastewater collection system. This is phase two and will include wastewater collection line replacement primarily south of Main Street and west of Hooker Ave. The loan terms are 3.5% for 30 years.

White also received a \$1,452,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$700,000 in principal forgiveness and a \$665,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program grant to improve to its water distribution system. The loan terms are 3.5% for 30 years.

Additional Details:

Appropriations from the Water Environment Fund and Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program are funded in part by revenues from the Petroleum Release Compensation Tank Inspection Fee and the sale of lotto tickets. These appropriations provide funding for water, wastewater, and watershed projects. The Legislature annually appropriates dedicated water and waste funding for the Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program through the Governor's Omnibus Water Funding Bill.

The Solid Waste Management Program provides loans and grants for solid waste disposal, recycling, and waste tire projects. The Legislature annually appropriates dedicated funding for the Solid Waste Management Program through the Omnibus Water Funding Bill.

The State of South Dakota and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency fund the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Programs, which provide low-interest loans for wastewater, stormwater, water conservation, nonpoint source projects, and public drinking water system projects. The programs are funded through a combination of federal appropriations, loan repayments, and bonds.

The board approved the funding at today's meeting in Pierre.

Names Released in Hutchinson County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: 426th Avenue and 281st Street, five miles north of Olivet, SD

When: 6:03 p.m., Monday, March 24, 2025

Driver 1: Joshua R. Hofer, 35-year-old male from Olivet, SD, no injuries

Vehicle 1: 1998 Peterbilt 379

Seat belt Used: Yes

Passenger 1a: Marvin J Hofer, 43-year-old male from Olivet, SD, no injuries

Seat belt Used: Yes

Driver 2: Rendell Lee Schelske, 73-year-old male from Olivet, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 2: 1999 Cadillac DeVille

Seat belt Used: No

Hutchinson County, S.D.- An Olivet man died in a two-vehicle crash early Monday evening five miles north of Olivet, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Rendell Lee Schelske, the driver of a 1999 Cadillac DeVille, was traveling north on 426th Avenue and slowed down at the intersection of 281st Street to attempt to make a u-turn. At the same time, Joshua R. Hofer, the driver of a 1998 Peterbilt 379 semi was traveling the same direction and attempted to maneuver around the Cadillac as it continued its u-turn. The vehicles collided and came to rest in the west ditch.

Mr. Schelske sustained fatal injuries. Joshua Hofer and a passenger in the semi, Marvin Hofer, were uninjured.

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.

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Third Quarter Groton Area Honor Roll

Seniors

4.0 GPA: Axel Warrington, Payton Mitchell, Gretchen Dinger, Elizabeth Fliehs, Emma Kutter, Faith Traphagen, Turner Thompson, Brooklyn Hansen, Kennedy Hansen, Kayla Lehr, Blake Pauli, Logan Pearson, Laila Roberts

3.99-3.50: Korbin Kucker, Diego Eduardo Nava Remigio, Kaden Kampa, Jeslyn Kosel, Brevin Fliehs, Carter Simon, Abby Yeadon, Ashley Johnson, Ashlyn Feser, Rebecca Poor, Drew Thurston

3.49-3.00: Emma Bahr, Emily Overacker, Aiden Heathcote, Easten Ekern, Blake Dennert, Christian Ehresmann, Teylor Diegel, Kellen Antonsen, Corbin Weismantel

Juniors

4.0 GPA: Nathan Unzen, Jerica Locke, Jaedyn Penning, Natalia Warrington, Carly Gilbert, Talli Wright, Karsten Fliehs, Mia Crank, Ryder Johnson, Rylee Dunker, Gage Sippel, Keegen Tracy, Raelee Lilly

3.99-3.50: Becker Bosma, Karter Moody, De Eh Tha Say, Lincoln Krause, Jayden Schwan, London Bahr, Hannah Sandness, Drake Peterson, Garrett Schultz, Olivia Stiegelmeier, Cali Tollifson, Paisley Mitchell, Benjamin Hoeft, Gentry Pigors

3.49-3.00: Aiden Meyers, Lucas Carda, Logan Warrington, Emma Davies, Cambria Bonn

Sophomores

4.0 GPA: Liby Althoff, Kira Clocksene, Teagan Hanten, Carlee Johnson, Brody Lord, Ashlynn Warrington, Colt Williamson

3.99-3.50: Halee Harder, Emerlee Jones, Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy, Brenna Imrie, Gavin Kroll, McKenna Tietz, Jackson Hopfinger, Claire Schelke, Zander Harry, Dylan Alexander Lopez Marin, Logan Clocksene, Walker Zoellner, Avery Crank, Aiden Strom, Addison Hoffman Wipf, Blake Lord

3.49-3.00: Leah Jones, Hailey Pauli, Hayden Zoellner

Freshmen

4.0 GPA: Elizabeth Cole, Makenna Krause, Sydney Locke, Thomas Schuster, Chesney Weber

3.99-3.50: Jace Johnson, Mya Feser, Ethan Kroll, Easton Weber, Rylie Rose, Taryn Thompson, Rylan Ekern, Kyleigh Kroll, Ryder Schelle, Layne Johnson, Addison Hoeft,

3.49-3.00: Brayden Barrera, John Bisbee, Brysen Sandness, Gracie Pearson, Karson Zak, Wyatt Wambach, Alex Abeln, Thomas Aalseth, Braeden Fliehs, Aimee Heilman

Eighth Graders

4.0 GPA: Wesley Borg, Abby Fjeldheim, Zachary Fliehs, Tevan Hanson, Asher Johnson, Brooklyn Spanier, Novalea Warrington

3.99-3.50: Neely Althoff, Kolton Antonsen, Jordan Schwan, Aspen Beto, Lincoln Shilhanek, Madison Herick, Logan Olson, Sydney Holmes, Connor Kroll, Aurora Washenberger, Arianna Dinger

3.49-3.00: Adeline Kotzer, Jose Fernando Nava Remigio, Samuel Crank, Wesley Morehouse, Kaedynce Bonn, Tenley Frost, Kyrie Yeigh, Raquel Tracy, May Dallaire

Seventh Graders

4.0 GPA: Axel Abeln, Hudson Eichler, Amelia Ewalt, Sophia Fliehs, Gavin Hanten, Liam Johnson, Liam Lord, Asher Zimmerman

3.99-3.50: Andi Gauer, Jameson Penning, Ryder Schwan, Trayce Schelle, Trey Tietz, Illyanna Dallaire, Elias Heilman, Kinzleigh Furman

3.49-3.00: Jace Hofer, Keegan Kucker, Major Dolan, Gavin Younger, Haden Harder, Kyson Kucker, Rowan Patterson, Nolan Bahr

Sixth Graders

4.0 GPA: Gracie Borg, Lillian Davis, Brynlee Dunker, Libby Johnson

3.99-3.50: Amara El Salahy, Victoria Schuster, Easton Larson, Mason Locke, Kinley Sandness, Rylee Stoltenburg, Ayce Warrington, Taylynn Traphagen, Ambrielle Feist, Charli Jacobsen, Knox Mulder, Bella Barrera, Maycee Moody, Zoe Olson, Kendyll Kroll, Addison Steffes, Hank Hill, Rylee Hofer, Andi Iverson, Drew Fjeldheim, Brinley Guthmiller, Hadley Heilman, Mya Moody, Ivan Schwan

3.49-3.00: Parker Zoellner, Keith Furman, Grady Rowen, Colton Morehouse, Charles Telkamp, Jaela Fliehs, Quinton Flores, Hallie Perkins, Graham Rose



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

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Changes to property tax assessment freeze program bring hope of relief from 'subsistence' living

Demand for help from older and disabled people grows as state expands eligibility

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MARCH 27, 2025 4:36 PM

Property taxes eat away larger and larger slices of 71-year-old Shirley Schumacher's fixed income each year.

She has lived in the same 900-square-foot home in the southwestern South Dakota community of Oral since she moved there in 1999. She's watched her annual taxes increase 641% from \$129.02 to \$956.40, according to the Fall River County auditor.

Her Social Security and pension benefits can't keep pace.

"The price of everything is going up," Schumacher said. "Our assessed value and property taxes go up. So does our insurance."

South Dakota offers a property tax relief program to elderly and disabled residents. But Schumacher said she was denied when she applied for the program a few years ago. Officially, she was told her income barely exceeded income eligibility, but she believes she filled the form out incorrectly.

She hopes an expansion of the program approved by the Legislature this year will make it easier for seniors like her to qualify, and allow more older South Dakotans to remain in their homes.



Shirley Schumacher stands on the front porch of her Oral home, located 16 miles southeast of Hot Springs in Fall River County. (Brett Nachtigall/Fall River County Herald-Star)

Governor's property tax law includes assessment freeze expansion

The program allows South Dakotans who meet qualifications including income and home valuation limits to freeze their home's assessed value to the year they turned 65 or the year they became disabled. Participants apply yearly to the program.

The local property tax rate is applied to a home's assessed value, so if the value doesn't go up, it holds the person's property taxes in check.

The state approved 4,705 elderly and disabled property tax assessment freeze applications in 2024, according to a records request fulfilled by the state Department of Revenue. The program reduced those properties' assessed values by a collective \$333 million.

There were 327 people denied for exceeding income limits, assessed value limits or for another reason, such as incorrect paperwork.

Gov. Larry Rhoden signed a bill into law this month that will expand eligibility in two ways. It will raise

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the limit on a home's assessed value from \$300,000 to \$500,000 and increase the program's income limit by \$20,000 — from \$35,000 to \$55,000 for a single person, and from \$45,000 to \$65,000 for a multi-person household.

Both limits will increase yearly by inflation or the annual percentage change in federal Social Security payments, whichever is greater. Eligible residents must have owned a home in South Dakota for at least five years and lived in the state for more than six months of the previous year.

The program shifts some property taxes onto other property tax payers, according to Bobi Adams, a spokeswoman with the state Department of Revenue. That impact is "minimal," she said, though it varies for each taxing district.

The proposal to expand eligibility for assessment freezes came as part of a property tax relief package with other provisions including a 3% cap on growth in countywide owner-occupied home valuations for five years.

Schumacher rushed to print out her new application for the program before the annual April 1 deadline, hoping to qualify this time.

If her application is accepted, it would freeze her home's assessed value to the year she turned 65, which was 2019. That would bring her home's assessed value down from \$104,700 to \$58,070, according to the Fall River County Equalization Office.

According to information from the county auditor, Schumacher would save \$394.38 on her taxes this year through the program.

"That money back would give me just a little bit more flexibility to meet basic needs," Schumacher said. "This is just subsistence right now."

Schumacher said she canceled her online subscriptions years ago because she could no longer afford them, started raising rabbits for food because she can't afford beef, and canceled her garbage pickup. She brings her trash to a friend for collection and burns her paper garbage.

Demand for targeted relief grows statewide

A 2024 AARP survey found that 75% of adults aged 50 and older prefer to stay in their homes as they age. Aging in place allows older people to maintain independence for as long as possible, stay in familiar surroundings, maintain relationships with friends, family and neighbors, and reduce the costs of long-term care.

Participants in South Dakota's assessment freeze program can continue to use it when their valuations increase beyond the new \$500,000 limit, if they've received assessment freezes before.

According to data from the state Department of Revenue, assessment freeze applications in Minnehaha County nearly doubled from 427 in 2021 to 849 in 2024. Statewide, applications grew by 1,485 during the same timeframe.

Auditors across the state said they've been raising awareness about the program in recent years, though the program is still underutilized in some areas.

Although fewer than 5,000 households are enrolled in the freeze program statewide, about 23,000 households are eligible, according to the Governor's Office. An estimated 11,000 additional households will be eligible under the expansion.

There were no approved applicants in 2024 in Buffalo, Oglala Lakota or Ziebach counties. Only one or two applicants were approved in Corson, Jones and Mellette counties.

Older people have visited Minnehaha County Treasurer Kris Swanson's office "shaken" by property tax increases in recent years, as home valuations increased in the Sioux Falls area.

Swanson helps them fill out applications, even if it's unlikely they're eligible for the program.

"As an older person, if I had to leave my home because I can't afford to pay my taxes, I think that'd be heartbreaking," Swanson said. "You leave something you've always known and worked so hard for in your life and you're forced out. I don't like that."

Some cities offer expanded relief

If Schumacher lived in Sioux Falls or Rapid City, she'd also be eligible for a property tax refund program through the city.

Sioux Falls refunds residents up to an additional \$500 if they participate in the state assessment freeze program, and Rapid City offers a similar program. The South Dakota Municipal League isn't aware of any other municipal property tax refund programs in the state.

Sioux Falls started its program in 2022, renewing it each year as part of the city's budget, said Shawn Pritchett, the city's director of finance, innovation and technology. Nearly 675 households participated in the program in 2024, costing the city \$232,000 to provide an average refund of \$345.

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

Iowa House votes to ban eminent domain for CO2 pipelines

Lawmakers bundle and advance other pipeline-related bills

BY: CAMI KOONS, IOWA CAPITAL DISPATCH - MARCH 27, 2025 9:12 AM

The Iowa House approved a bill Wednesday that would stop pipelines carrying liquified carbon dioxide from using eminent domain.

Six other bills related to carbon sequestration pipelines, eminent domain and the Iowa Utilities Commission were combined into one bill, which also advanced.

The bills were directed at an ongoing fight between landowners and the Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline, which would stretch more than 1,000 miles in Iowa connecting to biofuel refineries and transporting the sequestered carbon dioxide to underground storage in North Dakota.

House File 943 is similar to a law recently passed in South Dakota, another state crossed by the pipeline's proposed route.

Summit recently asked South Dakota regulators to pause proceedings on its pipeline permit due to the new law.

The Iowa bill would take effect in May and apply to any eminent domain filings made on or after that date.

Rep. Bobby Kaufmann, R-Wilton, said businesses should "expect the unexpected" if they plan to use eminent domain in Iowa.

"Expect that we're going to make changes when eminent domain is involved, and expect that we're going to make changes in favor of landowners," Kaufmann said.

Pipeline opponents advocated for the bill March 18 during a rally at the Capitol and again on Monday at a press conference with a group of Republican lawmakers opposed to the pipeline project.

The bill passed 82-12.

Iowa Renewable Fuels Association Executive Director Monte Shaw said in a press release the decision by the House was "hardly surprising, but it is still disappointing."



Iowans gathered at the Iowa State Capitol to rally against carbon dioxide pipeline projects March 18, 2025. (Photo by Cami Koons/Iowa Capital Dispatch)

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"IRFA members have been saying for three years that (carbon capture and sequestration) is the most important tool available to grow ethanol demand into new markets both here at home and around the world," Shaw said in the statement.

Shaw said he believes "cooler heads will prevail in the Senate" and said the opposition to the project has been led by a "small, though loud, minority."

"IRFA calls on the Iowa Senate to stand with the majority of impacted landowners, farmers, ethanol producers, and Iowa's economic future to ensure the state has the tools it needs to meet the brewing economic disaster in the heartland," Shaw said.

'No eminent domain for private gain bill'

House File 639 would increase the insurance requirements for liquid hazardous pipeline operators.

The five amendments to the bill would also update the definition of a common carrier, require IUC commissioners to be present at all hearings, expand who is allowed to intervene in an IUC docket, limit the pipeline permits to one term not longer than 25 years and stop the IUC from imposing sanctions on intervenors.

These were all bills that had already advanced from House committees, but Rep. Steven Holt combined into HF 639.

Holt, R-Denison, said with all of the amendments, the bill should be called the "no eminent domain for private gain" bill.

The bill passed 85-10.

A spokesperson for Summit said the company has signed easements with more than 1,320 Iowa landowners and has "adjusted the route based on feedback from stakeholders and regulatory agencies."

"Regulatory certainty is crucial for maintaining Iowa's competitive edge in business, fostering long-term opportunities for farmers, ethanol producers, and rural communities," the spokesperson said in a statement.

Concern about Senate opposition

Some representatives voiced concern because of historic opposition in the Senate.

Rep. Brian Meyer spoke in support of the bills but said he wondered if lawmakers were "wasting our time here today."

"We've done this now several years in a row, and the Senate has not acted," Meyer, D-Des Moines, said. "As far as I can tell, they have not even tried to negotiate ... Do something. Do something about this important issue."

Rep. Charley Thomson, R-Charles City, said he appreciated the concerns about the Senate on the issue and said he believes the House will "do the right thing without regard for what others may do."

Holt said the issue is not partisan and that in both the House and the Senate, the two parties disagree with one another on the issue. He disagreed with a claim that he and other lawmakers fighting for the issue are doing so performatively.

"We're doing it because it's the right thing to do," Holt said. "And regardless of whether the Senate is going to pass it or not, we're going to fight for it here because it's the right thing to do."

Cami Koons is an Iowa Capital Dispatch reporter covering agriculture and the environment. She previously worked at publications in Kansas and Missouri, covering rural affairs.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to slash 10,000 jobs, close 5 regional offices

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 27, 2025 11:45 AM



Robert F. Kennedy Jr., secretary of Health and Human Services, testifies during his Senate Finance Committee confirmation hearing at the Dirksen Senate Office Building on Jan. 29, 2025, in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Win McNamee/Getty Images)

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration announced a sweeping plan Thursday to restructure the Department of Health and Human Services by cutting an additional 10,000 workers and closing down half of its 10 regional offices.

The overhaul will affect many of the agencies that make up HHS, including the Food and Drug Administration, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. HHS overall will be downsized from a full-time workforce of 82,000 to 62,000, including those who took early retirement or a buyout offer.

HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. released a written statement along with the announcement, saying the changes would benefit Americans.

"We aren't just reducing bureaucratic sprawl. We are realigning the organization with its core mission and our new priorities in reversing the chronic disease epidemic," Kennedy said. "This Department will do more — a lot more — at a lower cost to the taxpayer."

The U.S. Senate voted to confirm Kennedy as the nation's top public health official in mid-February. Democrats immediately reacted with deep concern.

Senate Appropriations Committee ranking member Patty Murray, D-Wash., said that she was "stunned at the lack of thought about what they are doing to the American public and their health."

Murray said the committee, which controls about one-third of all federal spending, "absolutely" has an oversight role to play in tracking HHS actions.

Wisconsin Sen. Tammy Baldwin, the top Democrat on the Appropriations subcommittee that funds HHS, said she believes HHS has overstepped its authority and expects the panel will look into its actions.

"These individuals who are going to be terminated under this plan play vital roles in the health of Wisconsinites and people nationally," Baldwin said. "And I believe that they do not have the authority, the Trump administration does not have the authority to do this wholesale reorganization without working with Congress."

Maryland Democratic Sen. Angela Alsobrooks, whose constituents in suburban Washington likely hold many of the jobs in question, wrote in a statement the HHS' restructuring plans are "dangerous and deadly."

"I warned America that confirming RFK Jr. would be a mistake," Alsobrooks wrote. "His blatant distrust of science and disregard for research and advancement makes him completely unqualified."

Cuts across department

The announcement says reorganizing HHS will cut its \$1.7 trillion annual budget by about \$1.8 billion, in

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part, by lowering overall staff levels.

Staffing cuts will be spread out over HHS and several of the agencies it oversees. The restructuring plans to eliminate 3,500 full-time workers at the FDA, 2,400 employees at the CDC, 1,200 staff at the NIH and 300 workers at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

"The consolidation and cuts are designed not only to save money, but to make the organization more efficient and more responsive to Americans' needs, and to implement the Make America Healthy Again goal of ending the chronic disease epidemic," according to a fact sheet.

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, or HELP, Committee Chairman Bill Cassidy, R-La., wrote in a statement that he looks "forward to hearing how this reorganization furthers these goals."

"I am interested in HHS working better, such as lifesaving drug approval more rapidly, and Medicare service improved," Cassidy wrote.

Regional offices, divisions affected

HHS did not immediately respond to a request from States Newsroom about which five of its 10 regional offices would shutter or when those closures would take effect.

Its website shows the offices are located in Boston; New York City; Philadelphia; Atlanta; Chicago; Dallas; Kansas City, Missouri; Denver; San Francisco; and Seattle.

HHS plans to reduce its divisions from 28 to 15 while also establishing the Administration for a Healthy America, or AHA.

That new entity will combine the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, Health Resources and Services Administration, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry and National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

That change will "improve coordination of health resources for low-income Americans and will focus on areas including, Primary Care, Maternal and Child Health, Mental Health, Environmental Health, HIV/AIDS, and Workforce development. Transferring SAMHSA to AHA will increase operational efficiency and assure programs are carried out because it will break down artificial divisions between similar programs," according to the announcement.

HHS will roll the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response into the CDC.

The department plans to create a new assistant secretary for enforcement, who will be responsible for work within the Departmental Appeals Board, Office of Medicare Hearings and Appeals and Office for Civil Rights.

House speaker says HHS is 'bloated'

U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., posted on social media that he fully backed the changes in store for HHS.

"HHS is one of the most bureaucratic and bloated government agencies," Johnson wrote. "@SecKenny is bringing new, much-needed ideas to the department by returning HHS to its core mission while maintaining the critical programs it provides Americans."

Advocates shared Democrats' concern about the staff cutbacks.

Stella Dantas, president of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, released a statement saying the organization was "alarmed by the sudden termination of thousands of dedicated HHS employees, whose absence compounds the loss of thousands of fellow employees who have already been forced to leave U.S. health agencies."

"Thanks to collaboration with HHS, ACOG has been able to contribute to advances in the provision of maternal health care, broadened coverage of critical preventive care, increased adoption of vaccines, raised awareness of fetal alcohol syndrome, strengthened STI prevention efforts, and more," Dantas wrote. "This attack on public health—and HHS' ability to advance it—will hurt people across the United States every single day."

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

COMMENTARY

Revolving door of congressional term limits would handicap states like South Dakota

by Dana Hess

It only stands to reason that a bunch of elected officials who are term-limited would believe that terms limits are good for everyone. That's the case in the South Dakota Legislature, where both chambers endorsed House Joint Resolution 5002. It calls for a national constitutional convention to create an amendment that imposes term limits on members of the U.S. Congress.

HJR 5002 was approved by votes of 42-24 in the House and 25-10 in the Senate. Joint resolutions don't require the signature of the governor. The Legislature's action did earn praise from U.S. Term Limits, an organization pushing for a constitutional amendment determining how long members of Congress can serve.

It takes 34 states to call for a constitutional convention. Now South Dakota is one of 10 states that has endorsed USTL's version of the amendment. Nineteen other states have endorsed congressional term limits, but their language has to be made to conform with USTL's or the entire effort will just become a jobs program for lawyers.

USTL would like to see members of the U.S. House limited to three two-year terms and members of the U.S. Senate limited to two six-year terms. That's quite a change for an institution that has some members who make a career out of getting reelected.

"Term limits provide fresh faces with fresh ideas to elected office," USTL says on its website. "They reduce lobbyist and special interest influence and make room in Congress for the citizen legislator."

The citizen legislators in South Dakota's Legislature are limited to four two-year terms in each house, though they are allowed to try to jump to the other chamber after eight years. Legislators here became subject to term limits with the passage of an initiated constitutional amendment in 1992. Many of the faces in both chambers have changed due to term limits. However, many of the same lobbyists are still hanging in there, ready to offer their brand of guidance, expertise and institutional memory to each group of newbie lawmakers.

Chances are that congressional term limits would make lobbyists more important rather than less powerful, as claimed by USTL. Term limits would also place more emphasis on the expertise of government bureaucrats. After all, co-President Musk and DOGE can't fire them all.



From left, U.S. Sen. John Thune, U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds and U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, all Republicans of South Dakota, talk about agriculture policy at DakotaFest in Mitchell on Aug. 21, 2024. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

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The prospect of congressional term limits is worrisome for a small state like South Dakota. This is particularly true in the U.S. Senate, where longevity leads to power. If term limits were already the law of the land in Washington, D.C., there's likely no way that Sen. John Thune would rise to be the Senate majority leader.

Granted, Thune's tenure so far hasn't exactly been a profile in courage as the Senate confirmed a group of Fox News has-beens and conspiracy theorists to serve in President Trump's Cabinet. Still, it will be good to have someone from South Dakota in a position of authority to look out for the state's interests when Congress tackles the next farm bill.

The battle cry for term limits is usually based on the power of incumbents and how tough it is to kick the bums out of office. Some of the same South Dakota legislators who embraced HJR 5002 proved last year that incumbency is not all that it's cracked up to be.

The ditches of South Dakota roads are littered with Republican incumbents, tossed aside by voters in last year's GOP primary. All the new faces in this year's Legislature prove that, as they always have, voters hold the true key to term limits.

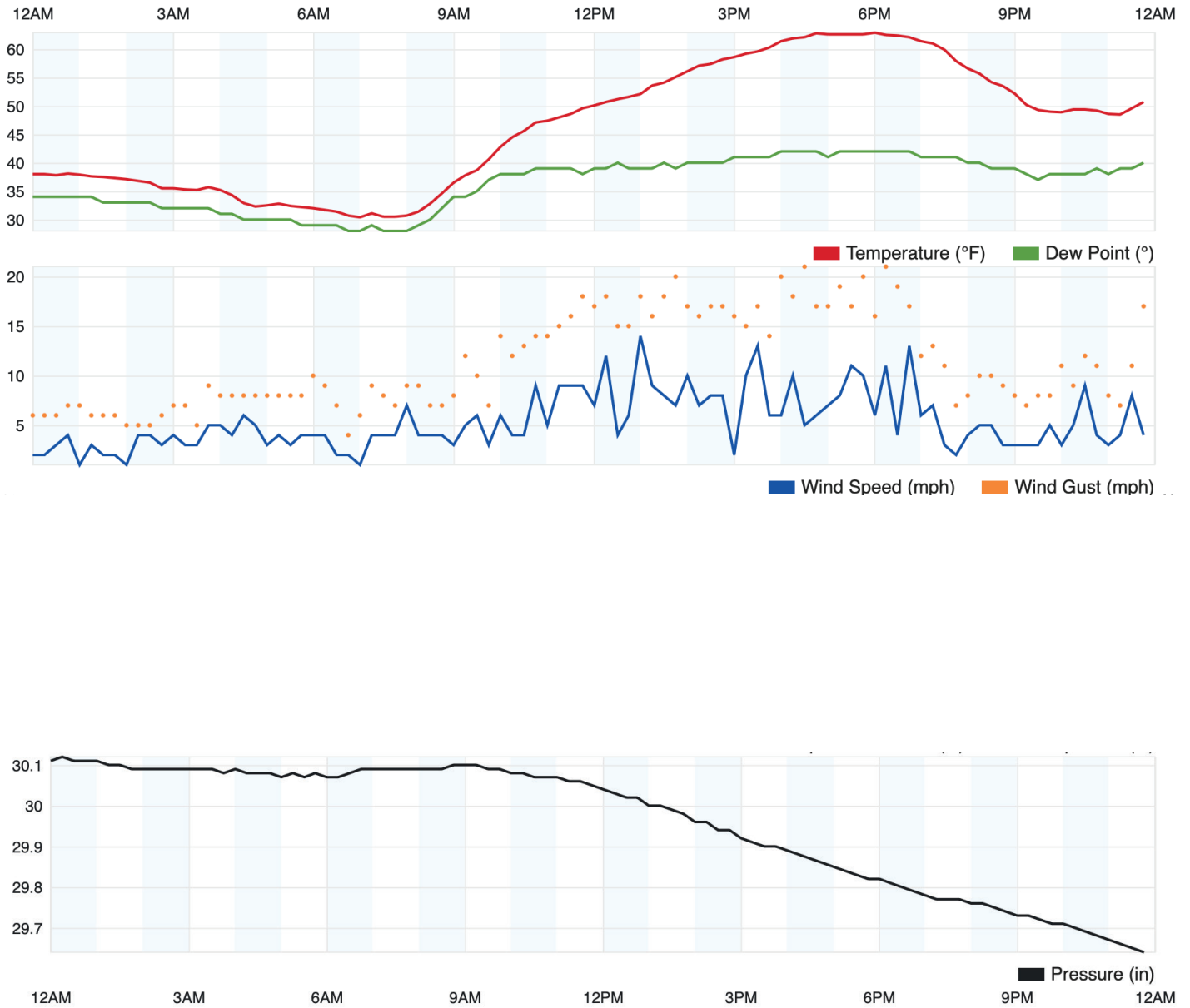
By design, amending the U.S. Constitution takes time. With just 10 states signed on for its version of the term limits amendments, USTL has a long way to go. For small states it may be best if USTL never reaches its goal. Through the years, South Dakota has enjoyed the Senate leadership of Tom Daschle and now John Thune. It's hard to see how our small state could be in that position of power if the U.S. Capitol were to install a revolving door.

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 61 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Tonight



Low: 27 °F

Mostly Cloudy
and Blustery
then Mostly
Cloudy

Saturday



High: 38 °F

Slight Chance
Wintry Mix
then Chance
Rain/Snow and
Breezy

Saturday Night



Low: 24 °F

Snow Likely

Sunday



High: 41 °F

Mostly Cloudy
and Breezy

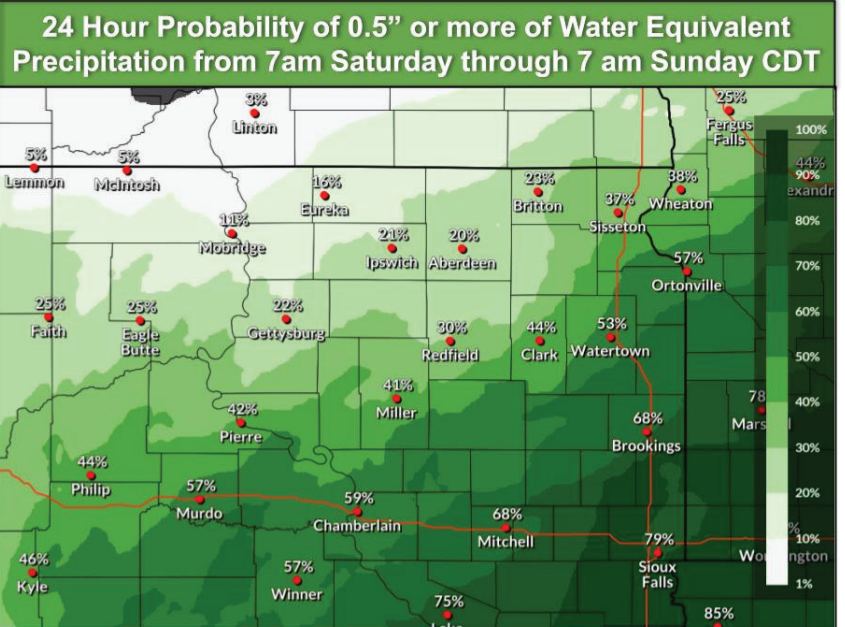


Rain, Snow, and Wintry Mix This Weekend

March 27, 2025
3:52 PM

Key Messages

- Rain developing late Friday night will transition to a wintry mix and/or freezing rain Saturday, becoming all snow by early Sunday morning
 - Probability of 24 hr water equivalent of 0.50" or more is highest (40-60%) from Murdo through Ortonville and southward
- Snow accumulations generally between a trace to 3 inches, with the highest totals along and east of the Sisseton Hills and portions of south central SD
- Ice accumulation between 0.01-0.10" possible over portions of central and northeastern SD



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Rain Friday night will transition to snow by early Sunday morning. There is the potential for a wintry mix and or freezing rain Saturday during the transitional phase.

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Precipitation Type Changeover

March 27, 2025
3:54 PM

Change from rain to snow expected, with the potential for freezing rain or a wintry mix in between.

- Rain will move in late Friday night transitioning to snow by early Sunday morning
- Potential for freezing rain and/or wintry mix during the transitional phase Saturday afternoon and evening
 - Greatest chances (60-75%) for wintry mix/freezing rain exists between Highway 12 and Interstate 90

	Weather Forecast							
	3/29 Sat		3/30 Sun					
	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm
Aberdeen	5%	30%	55%	55%	30%	15%	10%	15%
Britton	10%	25%	50%	50%	35%	15%	10%	10%
Chamberlain	35%	70%	75%	75%	35%	30%	30%	25%
Clark	10%	45%	70%	70%	40%	15%	15%	15%
Eagle Butte	25%	60%	60%	60%	30%	25%	30%	30%
Eureka	10%	30%	50%	50%	30%	20%	20%	20%
Gettysburg	15%	50%	60%	60%	30%	20%	25%	25%
McIntosh	20%	40%	50%	50%	35%	30%	30%	30%
Milbank	0%	35%	70%	70%	45%	20%	10%	10%
Miller	20%	55%	70%	70%	30%	15%	20%	20%
Mobridge	10%	35%	50%	50%	30%	20%	20%	20%
Murdo	45%	70%	70%	70%	35%	30%	35%	35%
Pierre	30%	65%	65%	65%	30%	20%	25%	25%
Redfield	15%	45%	65%	65%	30%	15%	15%	15%
Sisseton	5%	25%	55%	55%	40%	20%	10%	10%
Watertown	5%	40%	70%	70%	45%	15%	10%	15%
Webster	5%	30%	60%	60%	40%	15%	10%	15%
Wheaton	5%	20%	55%	55%	40%	25%	10%	10%

Created: 1 pm CDT Thu 3/27/2025. Shows most impactful weather for the period beginning at the time shown. Weather symbols display where Probability of Precipitation ≥ 0%.

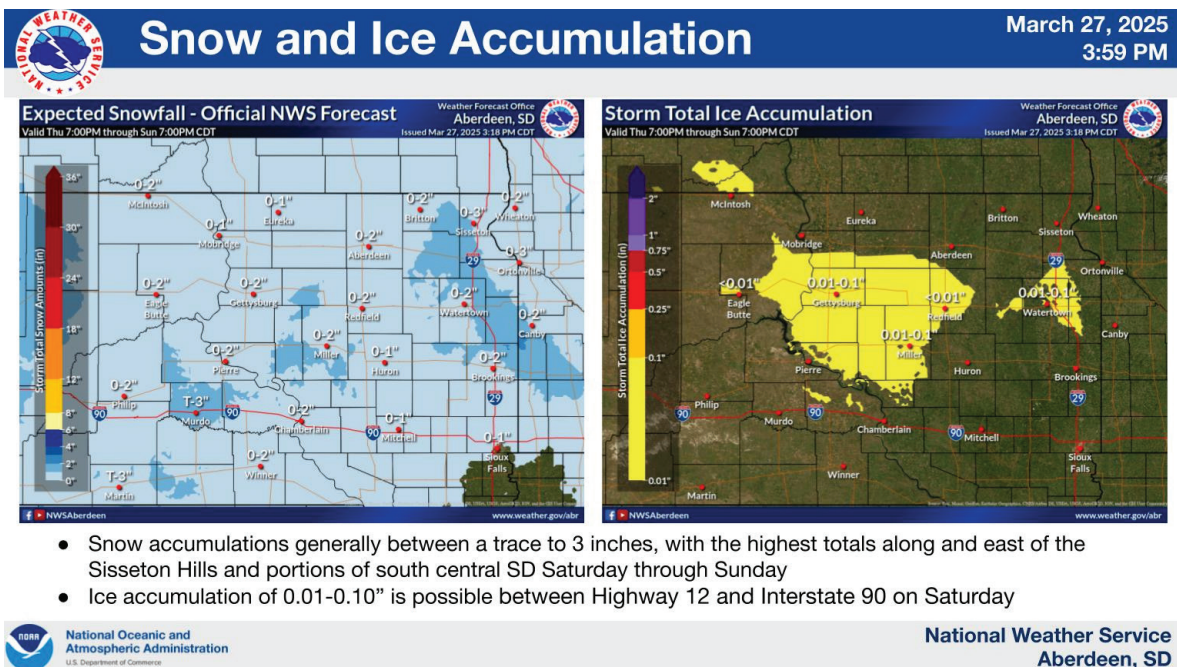
- Rain + - Fz Rain + - Wintry Mix + - Snow +

Created: 1 pm CDT Thu 3/27/2025 |



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Potential for freezing rain and/or wintry mix during the transitional phase Saturday afternoon and evening. Greatest chances (60-75%) for wintry mix/freezing rain exists between Highway 12 and Interstate 90.



- Snow accumulations generally between a trace to 3 inches, with the highest totals along and east of the Sisseton Hills and portions of south central SD Saturday through Sunday
- Ice accumulation of 0.01-0.10" is possible between Highway 12 and Interstate 90 on Saturday

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 63 °F at 5:57 PM

Low Temp: 30 °F at 6:55 AM

Wind: 21 mph at 2:01 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 39 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 82 in 1946

Record Low: -10 in 1913

Average High: 48

Average Low: 25

Average Precip in March.: 0.77

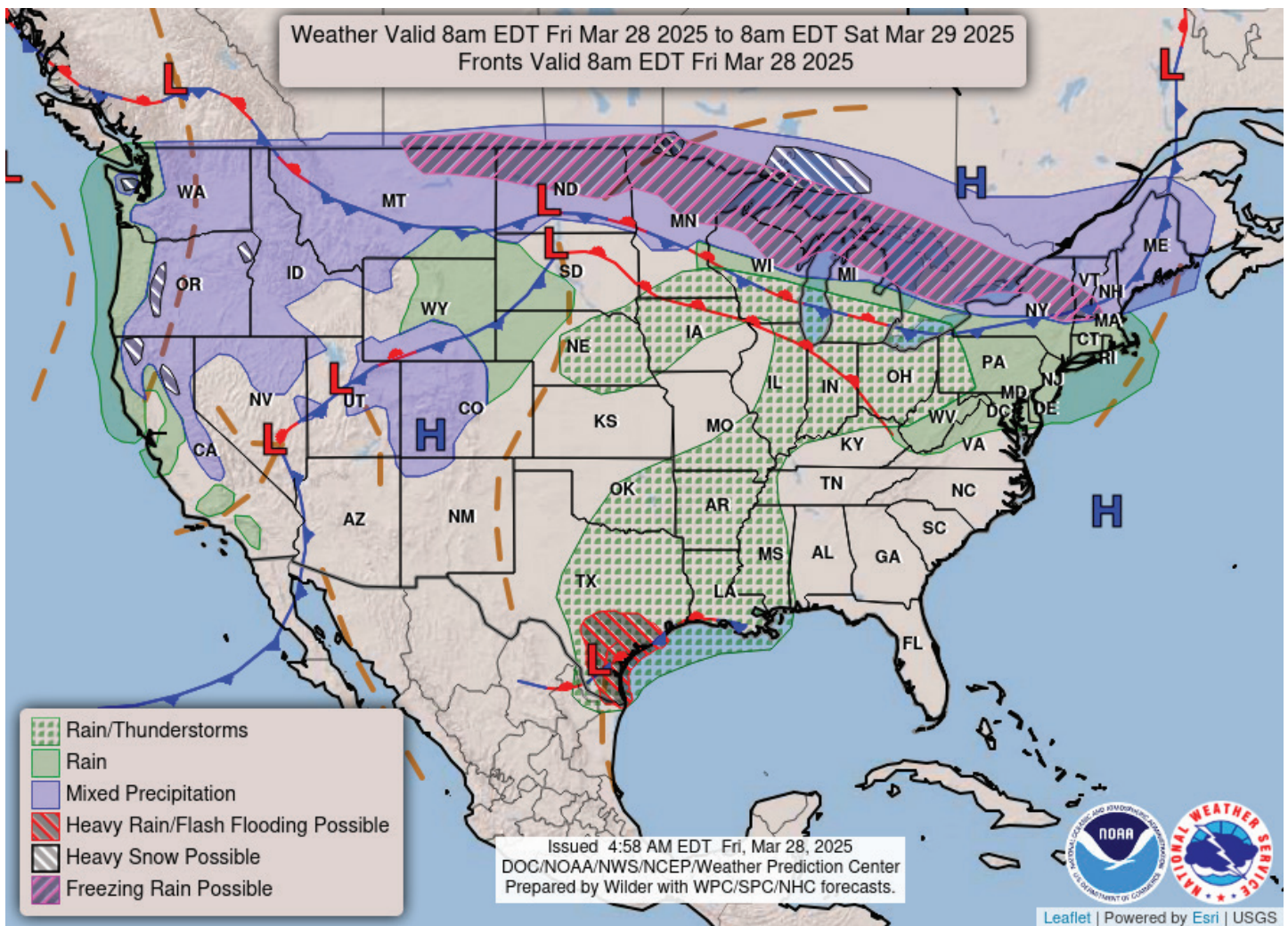
Precip to date in March.: 0.04

Average Precip to date: 1.94

Precip Year to Date: 0.49

Sunset Tonight: 7:57:02 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:15:38 am



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Today in Weather History

March 28th, 1977: A slow-moving storm system affected South Dakota from March 28th through March 30th, 1977. The storm produced heavy snow in the west and thunderstorms in the east. Northerly winds gusting to 50 miles an hour in the West created blizzard conditions as the snow totals mounted. Some areas in western Butte, Pennington, northern Shannon, and Lawrence counties received over 20 inches of snow. With drifts exceeding 6 to 8 feet, many people in western South Dakota thought it was the worst blizzard of the quarter century. A few locations in the northern Black Hills received over 4 feet of snow. Because of blocked roads, westbound traffic was halted on I-90, and many schools and businesses were forced to close for several days. Across the eastern portion of the state, rains of over 1" fell in many areas. Milbank even reported walnut size hail.

1917 - Thane Creek, AK, reported a snow cover of 190 inches. (The Weather Channel)

1920 - The worst tornado disaster of record occurred in Chicago IL as a tornado killed 28 persons and caused three million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1984 - A violent outbreak of tornadoes hit the Carolinas. Thunderstorms spawned 22 tornadoes during the late afternoon and evening hours which killed 57 persons and injured 1248 others. Nearly half the deaths occurred in mobile homes. A tornado from near Tatum SC to southern Cumberland County NC was 2.5 miles in width at times. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A blizzard raged from southern Nebraska to central Iowa. Snowfall totals ranged up to 17 inches at Blue Hill NE. Winds gusted to 68 mph at Carroll IA. High winds produced snow drifts twenty feet high in western Iowa, and produced wind chill readings as cold as 30 degrees below zero in Nebraska. The snowfall total of 9.4 inches at Omaha NE was a record for the date. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms in central Oklahoma produced hail up to four inches in diameter causing 35 million dollars in southern Oklahoma County. Baseball size hail and seven inches of rain caused another eighteen million dollars damage in Stephens County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Unseasonably warm weather prevailed from the Southern and Central Plains to the Atlantic coast. Eighteen cities reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 81 degrees at Beckley WV was a record for March, and the high of 90 degrees in downtown Baltimore MD tied their March record. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - A storm system brought heavy snow to the west central and southern mountains of Wyoming, and high winds to the Wasatch Mountains of northern Utah. Snowfall totals in Wyoming ranged up to ten inches at the Snowy Ski Range Area, and the storm pushed the snowfall total for the month at Cheyenne above 37 inches, surpassing their previous record for March of 35 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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GOD-LOVE

Perhaps there is no one word that is more confusing, more misunderstood, more diminished in its significance or abused than the word "love." Although it contains feelings, it is much more than feelings. Although it includes emotions, many times emotions are abused and misused. While it includes sentiments, it is more than sentimental desires that fluctuate from day to day.

Feelings, emotions, and sentiments change from moment to moment and day to day because life is dynamic, and every situation different. True love, God-love, must be seen, observed, lived, and expressed in the behavior of a Christian.

What I do with and to and for someone is what matters most in demonstrating and describing love. If we have any questions about this type of love, we simply need to look at the life of Jesus and meditate on His words: "God so loved this world that He gave His one and only begotten Son!" This is not a sentimental love, nor an emotional or feeling type of love. It is a love that was initiated by God, demonstrated in the life of Jesus and to be seen today in and through the lives of Christians today.

This love is the foundation of all relationships: first for our relationship with God and then our relationships with others. "God-love" will keep a relationship strong and healthy and bring individuals together in a common bond. In fact, this love will unite people in spite of flaws and faults, failures and foolish deeds. As Christians, we are obligated to "demonstrate God-love."

Prayer: Father, fill our hearts with God-love, a love that has no limits, never gives up, puts others first, always demonstrates compassion, and proves our concern. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

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: 03.25.25

1 5 17 39 62 8

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 27 Mins 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.26.25

16 19 30 37 47 6

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$27,470,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 42 Mins 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.27.25

7 20 27 35 46 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 57 Mins 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.26.25

3 14 24 30 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$80,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 57 Mins 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.26.25

26 32 41 51 66 22

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 26 Mins 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.26.25

5 20 29 39 53 6

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$515,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 26 Mins 44 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

Powerful earthquake rocks Thailand and Myanmar, killing at least 2 in Bangkok high-rise collapse

By DAVID RISING and JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — A state of emergency has been declared in six regions and states in Myanmar after a 7.7 magnitude earthquake whose epicenter was near the country's second largest city.

State-run MRTV television said the military-run government's proclamation includes the capital Naypyitaw and Mandalay, after the earthquake and a strong aftershock hit midday.

Myanmar is in the midst of a civil war and many areas are not easily accessible. It was not immediately clear what relief efforts the military would be able to provide.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below.

BANGKOK (AP) — Thai emergency responders say two people have been found dead and an unknown number of others are still under the rubble of a building that collapsed after a massive earthquake hit the capital, Bangkok.

Rescue worker Songwut Wangpon told reporters another seven people had been found alive, as he spoke outside the tall pile of rubble that was once a high-rise building under construction.

The multi-story structure collapsed after the 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck midday Friday, sending the crane on top toppling to the ground and a massive plume of dust into the air.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below.

BANGKOK (AP) — A 7.7 magnitude earthquake rocked Thailand and neighboring Myanmar midday on Friday, causing the collapse of a high-rise building under construction in Bangkok and forcing hundreds of thousands to evacuate from their homes and workplaces.

The midday temblor was followed by a strong 6.4 magnitude aftershock.

Possible casualties from the building collapse near Bangkok's popular Chatuchak market are not yet known, police said, and there was no immediate information on how many workers were on the site at the time.

A dramatic video circulated on social media showed the multi-story building with a crane on top collapsing into a cloud of dust, while onlookers screamed and ran.

People in Bangkok evacuated from their buildings were cautioned to stay outside in case there were more aftershocks.

The U.S. Geological Survey and Germany's GFZ center for geosciences said the earthquake was a shallow 10 kilometers (6.2 miles), with an epicenter in Myanmar, according to preliminary reports.

"All of a sudden the whole building began to move. Immediately there was screaming and a lot of panic," said Fraser Morton, a tourist from Scotland, who was in one of Bangkok's many malls shopping for camera equipment.

"I just started walking calmly at first but then the building started really moving, yeah, a lot of screaming, a lot of panic, people running the wrong way down the escalators, lots of banging and crashing inside the mall."

Like Morton, thousands of people poured into Benjasiri Park from nearby shopping malls, high rises and apartment buildings along Bangkok's busy Sukhumvit Road.

Many were on phones trying to reach loved ones as others sought shade from the hot early afternoon sun. Others stared up fearfully at the tall buildings in the densely packed part of the city.

"I got outside and then looked up at the building and the whole building was moving, dust and debris, it was pretty intense," Morton said. "Lots of chaos."

The sound of sirens echoed throughout central Bangkok and vehicles filled the street, leaving some of the city's already congested streets gridlocked. The elevated rapid transit system and subway were shut down.

City hall declared the city a disaster area to facilitate interagency aid and emergency help.

Paul Vincent, a tourist visiting from England, was at a streetside bar when the quake struck.

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"The next thing, everybody came on the street, so there was a lot of screaming and panicking, which obviously made it a lot worse," he said.

As he came onto the street himself, he said he saw a high-rise building swaying and water was falling from a rooftop pool.

"When I saw the building, oh my God, that's when ... it hit me," he said. "There was people crying in the streets and, you know, the panic was horrendous really."

In Mandalay, Myanmar's second-largest city and close to the epicenter, the earthquake damaged part of the former royal palace and buildings, according to videos and photos released on Facebook social media.

While the area is prone to earthquakes, it is generally sparsely populated, and most houses are low-rise structures.

In the Sagaing region just southwest of Mandalay, a 90-year-old bridge collapsed, and some sections of the highway connecting Mandalay and Myanmar's largest city, Yangon, were also damaged.

Residents in Yangon rushed out of their homes when the quake struck. There were no immediate reports of injuries or deaths.

In the capital Naypyitaw, the quake damaged religious shrines, sending parts toppling to the ground, and some homes.

To the northeast, the earthquake was felt in Yunnan and Sichuan provinces in China and caused damage to houses and injuries in the city of Ruili on the border with Myanmar, according to Chinese media reports.

Videos that one outlet said it had received from a person in Ruili showed building debris littering a street and a person being wheeled in a stretcher toward an ambulance.

The shaking in Mangshi, a Chinese city about 100 kilometers (60 miles) northeast of Ruili, was so strong that people couldn't stand, one resident told The Paper, an online media outlet.

A resident of Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan, told The Paper that her ceiling lamp was swinging wildly and the shaking lasted more than 10 seconds.

In Bangkok, alarms went off in buildings as the earthquake hit around 1:30 p.m., and startled residents were evacuated down staircases of high-rise condominiums and hotels.

The greater Bangkok area is home to more than 17 million people, many of whom live in high-rise apartments.

Water from high-rise rooftop pools sloshed over the side as they shook, and debris fell from many buildings as the long-lasting earthquake rattled the city.

"I have experienced earthquakes twice before in Myanmar, but that was only one second, one big bang, but here it went on for at least, I'd say, a minute," said Zsuzsanna Vari-Kovacs, a Hungarian resident of Bangkok, who had just finished eating at a restaurant when the quake hit.

"My husband was in a high-rise, I think that's even worse."

Thailand's Department of Disaster Prevention said the quake was felt in almost all regions of the country.

Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra called an emergency meeting to assess the impact of the quake.

Trial of former President Sarkozy sheds light on France's back-channel talks with Libya's Gadhafi

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The monthslong trial of former French President Nicolas Sarkozy over the alleged illegal financing of his 2007 presidential campaign is shedding light on France's back-channel talks with the government of then-Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi.

Family members of terrorist attacks sponsored by Gadhafi's regime have told the court they suspect that Sarkozy was willing to sacrifice the memories of their loved ones in order to normalize ties with Libya almost two decades ago.

French prosecutors on Thursday requested a seven-year prison sentence for the 70-year-old former leader. Sarkozy, who was president from 2007 to 2012, has denied all wrongdoing.

The trial, which started in January, is to continue until April 8, with Sarkozy's lawyers to plead on the

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last day. The verdict is expected at a later date.

Some key moments in the trial have focused on talks between France and Libya in the 2000s, when Gadhafi was seeking to restore diplomatic ties with the West. Before that, Libya was considered a pariah state for having sponsored attacks.

French families of victims of a 1989 plane bombing told the court about their shock and sense of betrayal as the trial questioned whether promises possibly made to Gadhafi's government were part of the alleged corruption deal.

The Lockerbie and UTA flight bombings

In 1988, a bomb planted aboard a Pam Am flight exploded while the plane was over the Scottish town of Lockerbie, killing 270 people from 21 countries, including 190 Americans.

The following year, on Sept. 19, 1989, the bombing of UTA flight 772 over Niger killed 170 people, including 54 French nationals on board, after an in-flight explosion caused by a suitcase bomb.

Both French and U.S. investigations have tied both bombings to Libya, whose government had engaged in long-running hostilities with the U.S. and other Western governments.

Now, families of victims are wondering whether French government officials close to Sarkozy promised to forget about the bombings in exchange for business opportunities with the oil-rich nation and possibly, an alleged corruption deal.

"What did they do with our dead?" Nicoletta Diasio, the daughter of a man who died in the bombing, has told the court, saying she wondered if the memories of the victims "could have been used for bartering" in talks between France and Libya.

During the trial, Sarkozy has said he has "never ever betrayed" families of victims. "I have never traded their fate for any compromise, nor pact of realpolitik," he said.

Libya's push to restore ties with the West

Libya was long a pariah state for its involvement in the 1980s bombings.

In 2003, it took responsibility for both the 1988 and 1989 plane bombings and agreed to pay billions in compensation to the victims' families.

Gadhafi also announced he was dismantling his nuclear weapons program, which led to the lifting of international sanctions against the country.

Britain, France and other Western countries sought to restore a relationship with Libya for security, diplomatic and business purposes.

In 2007, Sarkozy welcomed Gadhafi to Paris with honors for a five-day official visit, allowing him to set up a bedouin tent near the Elysee presidential palace. Many French people still remember that gesture, feeling Sarkozy went too far to please a dictator.

Sarkozy said during the trial he would have preferred to "do without" Gadhafi's visit at the time but it came as a diplomatic gesture after Libya's release of Bulgarian nurses who were imprisoned and facing death sentences for a crime they said they did not commit.

Bulgarian nurses

On July 24, 2007, under an accord partially brokered by first lady Cecilia Sarkozy and EU officials, Libya released the five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor.

The medics, who had spent over eight years in prison, faced death sentence on charges they deliberately infected hundreds of children with the AIDS virus in the late 1990s — an allegation they denied.

The release of the medics removed the last major obstacle to Libya's rejoining the international community.

Sarkozy travelled to the capital, Tripoli, for talks with Gadhafi the day after the medics were returned to Bulgaria on a French presidential plane.

In court has spoken of his "pride to have saved those six persons."

"If you did not discuss with Gadhafi, you'd not get the release of the nurses," he said.

Libya's spy chief at heart of questions

Accused of masterminding the attack on UTA Flight 772, Gadhafi's brother-in-law and intelligence chief Abdullah al-Senoussi was convicted in absentia to a life sentence by a Paris court in 1999 for the attack.

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An international arrest warrant was issued for him and five other suspects.

Financial prosecutors have accused Sarkozy of having promised to lift the arrest warrant targeting al-Senoussi in exchange for alleged campaign financing.

In 2005, people close to Sarkozy, who was at the time the interior minister, including his chief of staff Claude Guéant and junior minister Brice Hortefeux, travelled to Tripoli, where they met with al-Senoussi.

Both Guéant and Hortefeux have told the court that it was a "surprise" meeting they were not aware of beforehand.

Al-Senoussi told investigative judges that millions of dollars were provided to support Sarkozy's campaign. Accused of war crimes, he is now imprisoned in Libya.

Sarkozy has strongly denied that.

Gadhafi's son accusations

Gadhafi's son, Seif al-Islam, told the French news network RFI in January that he was personally involved in giving Sarkozy 5 million dollars in cash.

Seif al-Islam sent RFI radio a two-page statement on his version of events. It was the first time he talked to the media about the case since 2011.

He said Sarkozy initially "received \$2.5 million from Libya to finance his electoral campaign" during the 2007 presidential election, in return for which Sarkozy would "conclude agreements and carry out projects in favour of Libya."

He said a second payment of \$2.5 million in cash was handed over without specifying when it was given.

According to him, Libyan authorities expected that in return, Sarkozy would end a legal case about the 1989 UTA Flight 771 attack — including removing his name from an international warrant notice.

Sarkozy strongly denied those allegations.

"You'll never find one Libyan euro, one Libyan cent in my campaign," he said at the opening of the trial in January. "There's no corruption money because there was no corruption."

Sarkozy turning his back to Gadhafi

The Libyan civil war started in February 2011, with army units and militiamen loyal to Gadhafi opposing rebels.

Sarkozy was the first Western leader to take a public stance to support the rebellion.

On Feb. 25, 2011, he said the violence by pro-Gadhafi forces was unacceptable and should not go unpunished. "Gadhafi must go," he said at the time.

On March 10 that year, France was the first country in the world to recognize the National Transitional Council as the legitimate government of Libya.

"That was the Arab Spring," Sarkozy told the court. "Gadhafi was the only dictator who had sent (military) aircrafts against his people. He had promised rivers of blood, that's his expression."

Moammar Gadhafi was killed by opposition fighters in Oct. 2011, ending his four-decade rule of the North African country.

Vance and wife to tour US military base in Greenland after diplomatic spat over uninvited visit

By PHILIP CROWTHER and KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

NUUK, Greenland (AP) — U.S. Vice President JD Vance and his wife are due to visit an American military base in Greenland on Friday in a trip that was scaled back after an uproar among Greenlanders and Danes who were irked that the original itinerary was planned without consulting them.

The couple's revised trip to the semi-autonomous Danish territory comes as relations between the U.S. and the Nordic country have soured after U.S. President Donald Trump repeatedly suggested that the United States should in some form control the mineral-rich territory of Denmark — a traditional U.S. ally and NATO member.

Friday's one-day visit to the U.S. Space Force outpost at Pituffik, on the northwest coast of Greenland, has removed the risk of potentially violating diplomatic custom by sending a delegation to another country

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without an official invitation. It will also reduce the likelihood that Vance and his wife will cross paths with residents angered by Trump's annexation announcements.

Ahead of the visit, four of the five parties elected to Greenland's parliament earlier this month agreed to form a new, broad-based coalition government, banding together in the face of Trump's designs on the territory.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said on Tuesday that the visit, which was originally set for three days, created "unacceptable pressure." On Thursday she was cited by Danish public broadcaster DR as saying: "We really want to work with the Americans on defense and security in the kingdom. But Greenland belongs to the Greenlanders."

Initially, Usha Vance had announced a solo trip to the Avannaata Qimussersu dogsled race in Sisimiut. Her husband then subsequently said he would join her on that trip, only to change that itinerary again — after protests from Greenland and Denmark — to a one-day visit of the couple to the military post only.

Nonetheless, in an interview on Wednesday, Trump repeated his desire for U.S. control of Greenland. Asked if the people there were "eager" to become U.S. citizens, Trump said he didn't know "but I think we have to do it, and we have to convince them."

Inhabitants of Greenland's capital, Nuuk — which is about 1,500 kilometers (930 miles) south of Pituffik — voiced concern about Vance's visit and the U.S. interest in their island.

Cora Høy, 22, said Vance was "welcome if he wants to see it but of course Greenland is not for sale." She added that "it's not normal around here" with all the attention Greenland is getting. "I feel now every day is about (Trump) and I just want to get away from it."

"It's all a bit crazy. Of course the population here is a bit shook up," said 30-year-old Inuk Kristensen. "My opinion is the same as everyone's: Of course you don't do things this way. You don't just come here and say that you want to buy the place."

As the nautical gateway to the Arctic and North Atlantic approaches to North America, Greenland has broader strategic value as both China and Russia seek access to its waterways and natural resources.

During his first term, Trump floated the idea of purchasing the world's largest island, even as Denmark insisted it wasn't for sale. The people of Greenland also have firmly rejected Trump's plans.

Vance has several times criticized long-standing European allies for relying on military support from the United States, openly antagonizing partners in ways that have generated concerns about the reliability of the U.S.

Opponents of Trump's plans to control Greenland announced a rally in front of the American embassy in the Danish capital for Saturday, DR reported Thursday.

Colleges rely on federal research funding. Under Trump, its future is in doubt

By SHARON LURYE and JOCELYN GECKER AP Education Writers

After decades of partnership with the U.S. government, colleges are facing new doubts about the future of their federal funding.

President Donald Trump's administration has been using the funding spigot to seek compliance with his agenda, cutting off money to schools including Columbia University and the University of Pennsylvania. All the while, universities across the country are navigating cuts to grants for research institutions.

The squeeze on higher education underscores how much American colleges depend on the federal government — a provider of grants and contracts that have amounted to close to half the total revenue of some research universities, according to an Associated Press analysis.

It adds up to a crisis for universities, and a problem for the country as a whole, say school administrators and advocates for academic freedom. America's scientific and medical research capabilities are tightly entwined with its universities as part of a compact that started after World War II to develop national expertise and knowledge.

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"It feels like any day, any university could step out of line in some way and then have all of their funding pulled," said Jonathan Friedman, managing director of free expression programs at PEN America.

Tens of billions of dollars are at stake

The AP analysis looked at federal funding for nearly 100 colleges currently under investigation for programs the administration has deemed as illegally pushing diversity, equity and inclusion, or for not doing enough to combat antisemitism. Those schools took in over \$33 billion in federal revenue in the 2022-2023 academic year. That's before taking into account federal student aid, which represents billions more in tuition and room-and-board payments.

For most of the schools, around 10% to 13% of their revenue came from federal contracts or research funding, according to the analysis. For some prestigious research universities, however, federal money represented up to half of their revenue.

The AP analyzed data from the National Center for Education Statistics and federal audit reports, with help from researchers Jason Cohn and James Carter at the Urban Institute.

Perhaps no school is more vulnerable than Johns Hopkins University, which received \$4 billion in federal funds, close to 40% of its revenue, according to the analysis. Much of that went to defense research, paying for projects like missile design, submarine technology and precision tracking systems in outer space. Billions of dollars also went to medical research for topics such as immunology and transplants, aging, neuroscience and mental health.

Johns Hopkins is facing an antisemitism investigation, which threatens its federal money, but already it has been feeling the effects of cuts to research grants from the National Institutes of Health and other federal agencies. Earlier this month, it announced 2,200 layoffs.

"We face challenging times for the patients and families that rely on us for cures and treatments, and for the researchers dedicated to the pursuit of improving the health of all Americans," the university said in a statement.

Trump extracted concessions from Columbia

Trump has singled out Columbia University, making an example of the Ivy League school by withholding \$400 million in federal money. The administration repeatedly accused Columbia of letting antisemitism go unchecked at protests against Israel that began at the New York City university last spring and quickly spread to other campuses — a characterization disputed by those involved in the demonstrations.

As a precondition for restoring that money — along with billions more in future grants — the Republican administration demanded unprecedented changes in university policy. Columbia's decision last week to bow to those demands, in part to salvage ongoing research projects at its labs and medical center, has been criticized by some faculty and free speech groups as capitulating to an intrusion on academic freedom.

At the White House on Wednesday, Trump expressed satisfaction with the pressure campaign on colleges.

"You see what we're doing with the colleges, and they're all bending and saying, 'Sir, thank you very much, we appreciate it,'" Trump said during an event for Women's History Month.

In the 2022-2023 academic year, Columbia got close to a fifth of its revenue from federal sources, around \$1.2 billion. An audit shows that much of Columbia's federal money went to research and development, including \$166 million for global AIDS programs, \$99 million to study aging, \$28 million for cancer biology and \$24 million for drug abuse and addiction research.

A new approach on enforcement of civil rights laws

Federal law allows the Education Department to terminate funding to colleges that violate civil rights laws, but only after taking certain steps. Title VI of the law says the department must first make a formal finding of noncompliance, offer a hearing, notify Congress and then wait 30 days before pulling aid.

But the Trump administration has a new strategy, moving quickly from demands to penalties with little room for negotiating, and little indication of due process, legal experts say.

At Penn, the administration suspended \$175 million in federal funding from the Defense Department and the Department of Health and Human Services over a transgender swimmer who last competed for the school in 2022. The White House said the action came out of a review of discretionary money going to universities.

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"It looks like much of the playbook is intimidation, more so than actual substantiated legal findings," said Michael Pillera, director of educational equity issues at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. "I think all of this is designed as an attempt to intimidate all universities, not just the institutions under investigation."

The cuts and the uncertainty have led some universities to accept fewer graduate students, cutting off pathways to careers. Many graduate students in science programs receive scholarships and stipends that come from federal research grants.

Purdue University senior Alyssa Johnson had been planning to pursue graduate research on amphibian diseases, and she was accepted into one of three schools she applied to. She said one of the schools appeared to have limited their acceptances to preemptively avoid funding concerns. But given her application experience, the changing landscape of research and her shifting interests, she decided to change her course of study to something she felt would help build trust between scientists and the public.

"I kind of went through a little bit of career crisis, which was definitely catalyzed by what's going on with the current administration and their attitudes toward science and science communication," Johnson said.

Suspected US strikes pummel Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Suspected U.S. airstrikes pummeled sites across Yemen controlled by the Houthi rebels early Friday, including neighborhoods in the capital, Sanaa.

The extent of the damage and possible casualties wasn't immediately clear, though the number of strikes appeared particularly intense compared to other days in the campaign that began March 15.

An Associated Press review has found the new American operation under President Donald Trump appears more extensive than those under former President Joe Biden, as the U.S. moves from solely targeting launch sites to firing at ranking personnel as well as dropping bombs in cities.

Initial reports from the Houthis described at least seven people being hurt in the attacks Friday in Sanaa, Yemen's capital that the rebels have held since 2014. Other strikes hit around the Red Sea port city of Hodeida, the rebel's stronghold of Saada and in Yemen's al-Jawf, Amran and Marib governorates.

The Houthis did not immediately acknowledge what at those sites had been targeted, other than Sanaa International Airport, which is used for both civilian and military traffic. Neighborhoods in the capital also are home to military and intelligence service sites — as well as crowded with civilians.

An Associated Press video showed one bomb dropping into Sanaa, with a huge plume of smoke rising into the night sky as many people were awake in the final days of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan.

Other areas hit included mountainous terrain north of Sanaa in Amran, where military camps and other installations are believed to be. The Houthis' al-Masirah satellite news network described communication networks going down after the attacks, which included at least 19 strikes there alone.

The U.S. military's Central Command, which now has authority from the White House to strike offensively in Yemen without pre-approval, did not immediately acknowledge conducting any strikes. The command, which under Biden offered details on individual strikes, has not provided that information in this campaign.

The new campaign of airstrikes, which the Houthis say have killed at least 57 people, started after the rebels threatened to begin targeting "Israeli" ships again over Israel blocking aid entering the Gaza Strip. The rebels in the past have had a loose definition of what constitutes an Israeli ship, meaning other vessels could be targeted as well.

The Houthis had targeted over 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two vessels and killing four sailors during their campaign targeting ships from November 2023 until January of this year. They also launched attacks targeting American warships, though none have been hit so far.

The attacks greatly raised the Houthis' profile as they faced economic problems and launched a crack-down targeting any dissent and aid workers at home amid Yemen's decadelong stalemated war that has torn apart the Arab world's poorest nation.

US defense chief says stronger deterrence needed against China in disputed sea

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Friday that the Trump administration would boost military ties with the Philippines to strengthen deterrence against “threats from the communist Chinese” and ensure freedom of navigation in the disputed South China Sea.

Hegseth spoke during a meeting with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in the Philippines, his first stop in his first trip to Asia to reaffirm Washington’s “ironclad” commitment to the region under Trump. Ahead of the visit, China called the United States a “predator” and an unreliable ally.

Trump’s “America First” foreign policy thrust has triggered concerns in Asia about the scale and depth of U.S. commitment to the region.

Hegseth’s decision to make the Philippines his first stop in Asia, followed by Japan — both U.S. treaty allies facing territorial disputes with China — was the strongest assurance yet by the U.S. under Trump to maintain a security presence in the region.

“Deterrence is necessary around the world but specifically in this region, in your country, considering the threats from the communist Chinese,” Hegseth told Marcos. “Friends need to stand shoulder to shoulder to deter conflict, to ensure that there is free navigation whether you call it the South China Sea or the West Philippine Sea.”

“Peace through strength is a very real thing,” Hegseth said. He praised the Philippines for standing “very firm” to defend its interests in the contested waters.

China claims virtually the entire South China Sea, a major security and global trade route. The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also have overlapping claims to the resource-rich and busy waters, but confrontations have spiked between Chinese and Philippine coast guard and naval forces in the last two years.

Chinese forces have used powerful water cannons and dangerous maneuvers in the high seas to block what Beijing said were encroachments by Philippine ships into China’s waters. Chinese military aircraft have also approached Philippine patrol planes at alarmingly close distance to drive them away from the Scarborough Shoal, a hotly disputed fishing atoll in the disputed waterway.

Under the previous Biden administration, the U.S. has repeatedly warned that it is obligated to help defend the Philippines if Filipino forces, ships and aircraft come under an armed attack in the Pacific, including in the South China Sea.

Hegseth echoed that pledge by expressing “the ironclad commitment” of Trump and him “to the Mutual Defense Treaty and to the partnership.”

Marcos told the U.S. defense chief that by visiting the Philippines first in Asia he “sends a very strong message of the commitment of both our countries to continue to work together to maintain the peace in the Indo-Pacific region, within the South China Sea.”

“We have always understood the principle that the greatest force for peace in this part of the world would be the United States,” Marcos said.

Ahead of Hegseth’s visit, Chinese Defense Ministry spokesperson Wu Qian said China opposes “interference from outside countries” in the South China Sea.

“U.S.-Philippines military cooperation must not harm the security interests of other countries or undermine regional peace and stability,” he said Thursday in a monthly news conference.

He added without elaborating that the United States has “an astonishing record of breaking its promises and abandoning its allies” throughout its history.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun separately warned the Philippines in a news conference on Tuesday “that nothing good could come out of opening the door to a predator. Those who willingly serve as chess pieces will be deserted in the end.”

Hegseth’s visit to the Philippines comes a month before the longtime treaty allies hold the “Balikatan,” Tagalog for shoulder to shoulder, their largest annual combat exercises that include live-fire drills. The

recent years, the exercises have been held near the South China Sea and the sea border between the Philippines and Taiwan.

The defense secretary projected composure and camaraderie, as he's receiving harsh criticism for texting attack plans to a Signal group that included top-level U.S. security officials and the editor-in-chief of The Atlantic magazine.

Clad in a sweatshirt and shorts, he joined American and Filipino forces in physical training, including push-ups, in a gym. He shook hands and posed smiling with military personnel while they flashed the thumbs-up in pictures posted by the U.S. Embassy on X.

Flagg flies in March Madness and Duke wins 100-93 over Arizona to reach the Elite Eight

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

NEWARK, N.J. (AP) — Duke stud Cooper Flagg's highlight reel included a 3-pointer from just in front of the logo at the halftime buzzer, one no-look pass for an alley-oop and another for a 3, and a huge blocked shot into a row of Arizona cheerleaders.

He needed all that to hold off an onslaught from the Wildcats and Duke's biggest nemesis, Caleb Love, for a 100-93 victory in the NCAA Tournament on Thursday night that pushed the Blue Devils a win from the Final Four.

Flagg's final line: 30 points, seven assists, six rebounds, three blocks. And his biggest college win yet.

"That's one of the best tournament performances I've ever coached or been a part of," said coach Jon Scheyer, who has seen plenty.

Love, a thorn in Duke's side for the last five years, finished with 35 points, one short of his career high, including a streak of 15 straight for his fourth-seeded Wildcats (24-13) during a ferocious second-half run that cut a 19-point deficit to five with 1:56 left.

But it's the top-seeded Blue Devils (34-3) moving on. On Saturday comes a 1-vs.-2 showdown in the East Region, when Scheyer's team faces Alabama, which set a March Madness record for 3-pointers in a 113-88 win over BYU earlier in the evening.

A win would put Duke in the Final Four for the 18th time. The last time, in 2022, Love played for North Carolina and scored 28 points to bring an end to legendary coach Mike Krzyzewski's career.

This time, the 18-year-old Flagg ended Love's stay in college, and showed why he should be the top pick in the NBA draft if he decides to leave, too.

"What I've wanted from him was not to defer," Scheyer said. "Just wanted him to fully be him. I thought he was in his element tonight. He was loose, talking, competitive, the whole thing."

Arizona chipped away at its big deficit and got within five when Carter Bryant made a 3-pointer with 1:56 left.

Flagg made three of four free throws — and Duke made 9 of 10 — to salt away the win down the stretch.

"They were a machine on offense," Arizona coach Tommy Lloyd said.

Duke shot 60% from the floor and 57.9% from 3 to close out a defense-optional night at the Prudential Center in which both winners hit triple digits.

The fourth-seeded Wildcats sagged and hung on the 6-foot-9 freshman and made him work for everything. But he was just better than everyone on the court.

There were too many highlights to count. Here were a few:

— At the end of the first half, when Duke rebounded Love's missed 3, worked the ball to Flagg and he swished his own 3, then turned around and screamed "Let's go, man!" as he ran to the locker room with a 48-42 lead.

— A spinning, no-look pass to Sion James, who made an open 3 early in the second half, as part of a run that built the lead to 19.

— Two alley-oops, one a no-look to Khaman Maluach, the other to Kon Knueppel.

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— A massive rejection of Arizona guard KJ Lewis into the phalanx of Arizona cheerleaders on a possession that could've trimmed the deficit to seven with about five minutes left.

It was a show that brought a close to Love's vibrant college career — one he wasn't willing to see end without a fight. He missed his first three shots but finished 11 for 21 and made five 3s to keep his team in it.

"He's had an amazing career and I'm so excited for his future," Lloyd said. "He was tremendous today. He's going to wake up tomorrow and he's going to smile. He has a lot to look forward to and so I'm really, really proud of him."

Love scored seven more than he did when he shut down Coach K's career.

In this one, he got the most help from Jaden Bradley, who finished with 15 points. But the Wildcats couldn't do enough to conjure a repeat of 2011, the last time these programs met in the tournament and Arizona knocked out the top-seeded Blue Devils.

Brown back for Duke

Maliq Brown returned to action for the Blue Devils after sitting out two weeks with an injured shoulder.

Sporting a sleeve on his left shoulder and upper arm, the junior came into the game with 7:51 left in the first half. He played four minutes and finished with a rebound and an assist.

Arizona gets recruiting win

Arizona did get a big win earlier Thursday, when one of the nation's top high school prospects, Koa Peat, said on "The Pat McAfee Show" that he was committing to play for the Wildcats.

Peat is expected to join another top recruit, LeBron James' son Bryce, in coach Tommy Lloyd's program next season.

Syrians left in the dark as the interim government struggles to restore electricity

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and ABDELRAHMAN SHAHEEN Associated Press

JARAMANA, Syria (AP) — Rana Al-Ahmad opens her fridge after breaking fast at sundown with her husband and four children during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

Apart from eggs, potatoes and some bread, it's empty because state electricity in Syria only comes two hours a day.

"We can't leave our food in the fridge because it will spoil," she said.

Her husband, a taxi driver in Damascus, is struggling to make ends meet, so the family can't afford to install a solar panel in their two-room apartment in Jaramana on the outskirts of the capital.

Months after a lightning insurgency ended over half a century of the Assad dynasty's rule in Syria, the Islamist interim government has been struggling to fix battered infrastructure after a 14-year conflict decimated much of the country. Severe electricity shortages continue to plague the war-torn country.

The United Nations estimates that 90% of Syrians live in poverty and the Syrian government has only been able to provide about two hours of electricity every day. Millions of Syrians, like Al-Ahmad and her family, can't afford to pay hefty fees for private generator services or install solar panels.

Syria's new authorities under interim leader Ahmad Al-Sharaa have tried to ease the country's electricity crisis, but have been unable to stop the outages with patchwork solutions.

Even with a recent gas deal with Qatar and an agreement with Kurdish-led authorities that will give them access to Syria's oil fields, the country spends most of its days with virtually no power. Reports of oil shipments coming from Russia, a key military and political ally of Assad, shows the desperation.

Pitch black

At Al-Ahmad's home, she and her husband were only able to get a small battery that could power some lights.

"The battery we have is small and its charge runs out quickly," said Al-Ahmad, 37. It's just enough that her children can huddle in the living room to finish their homework after school.

And the family is not alone. Everywhere in Syria, from Damascus to Daraa in the south, neighborhoods turn pitch black once the sun sets, lit only from street lamps, mosque minarets and car headlights.

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The downfall of Assad in December brought rare hope to Syrians. But the new interim authorities have scrambled to establish control across the country and convince Western nations to lift economic sanctions to make its economy viable again.

The United States in January eased some restrictions for six months, authorizing some energy-related transactions. But it doesn't appear to have made a significant difference on the ground just yet.

Battered and bruised fields

Washington and other Western governments face a delicate balance with Syria's new authorities, and appear to be keen on lifting restrictions only if the war-torn country's political transition is democratic and inclusive of Syrian civil society, women and non-Sunni Muslim communities.

Some minority groups have been concerned about the new authorities, especially incidents of revenge attacks targeting the Alawite community during a counter-offensive against an insurgency of Assad loyalists.

Fixing Syria's damaged power plants and oil fields takes time, so Damascus is racing to get as much fuel as it can to produce more energy.

Damascus is now looking towards the northeastern provinces, where its oil fields under Kurdish-led authorities are to boost its capacity, especially after reaching a landmark ceasefire deal with them.

Political economist Karam Shaar said 85% of the country's oil production is based in those areas, and Syria once exported crude oil in exchange for refined oil to boost local production, though the fields are battered and bruised from years of conflict.

These crucial oil fields fell into the hands of the extremist Islamic State group, which carved out a so-called caliphate across large swaths of Syria and Iraq from 2014 to 2017.

"It's during that period where much of the damage to the (oil) sector happened," said Shaar, highlighting intense airstrikes and fighting against the group by a U.S.-led international coalition.

After IS fell, the U.S.-backed Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces took control of key fields, leaving them away from the central government in Damascus. The new authorities hope to resolve this in a landmark deal with the SDF signed earlier this month.

Kamran Omar, who oversees oil production in the Rmeilan oil fields in the northeastern city of Hassakeh, says shortages in equipment and supplies and clashes that persisted with Turkey and Turkish-backed forces have slowed down production, but told the AP that some of that production will eventually go to households and factories in other parts of Syria.

The fields only produce a fraction of what they once did. The Rmeilan field sends just 15,000 of the approximately 100,000 barrels they produce to other parts of Syria to ease some of the burden on the state.

The authorities in Damascus also hope that a recent deal with Qatar that would supply them with gas through Jordan to a major plant south of the capital will be the first of more agreements.

The cornerstone of recovery

Syria's authorities have not acknowledged reports of Russia sending oil shipments to the country. Moscow once aided Assad in the conflict against armed Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham that toppled the former president, but this shows that they are willing to stock up on fuel from whoever is offering.

Interim Electricity Minister Omar Shaqrouq admitted in a news conference that bringing back electricity to Syrian homes 24 hours a day is not on the horizon.

"It will soon be four hours, but maybe some more in the coming days."

Increasing that supply will be critical for the battered country, which hopes to ease the economic woes of millions and bring about calm and stability. Shaar, who has visited and met with Syria's new authorities, says that the focus on trying to bring fuel in the absence of funding for major infrastructural overhauls is the best Damascus can do given how critical the situation is.

"Electricity is the cornerstone of economic recovery," said Shaar. "Without electricity you can't have a productive sector, (or any) meaningful industries."

Alabama makes March Madness record 25 3s and romps past BYU 113-88 to reach Elite Eight

By DAN GELSTON AP Sports Writer

NEWARK, N.J. (AP) — Alabama broke the 35-year-old March Madness record for 3-pointers with 25 and Mark Sears scored 30 of his 34 points on 3s, a relentless long-range spree that ushered the second-seeded Crimson Tide past BYU 113-88 on Thursday night in an NCAA Tournament East Region semifinal.

Alabama reached the Elite Eight in consecutive years for the first time in program history.

The Crimson Tide made 25 of 51 3-point attempts to break the record of 21 set by Loyola Marymount in a second-round game against Michigan in 1990. Sears, a first-team All-America guard, hit the record-breaking 22nd 3 late in the game to make it 97-66 and received a standing ovation from the Alabama fans when he checked out with 10 3s and more than four minutes left to play.

Sears and the Crimson Tide (28-8) showed they are no March fluke under coach Nate Oats. Riding a wave of 3s, Alabama set itself up for a date against top-seeded Duke for a shot at the Final Four.

Richie Saunders scored 25 points to lead sixth-seeded BYU (26-10), which hasn't played in a regional final since 1981.

Sears' 10 3s were one short of the record set by Loyola Marymount's Jeff Fryer in that memorable 149-115 win over Michigan. Sears was 1 of 9 from 3 in the first two NCAA Tournament games.

He missed only seven times against BYU.

"I felt like the basket was as big as an ocean," Sears said. "I lost myself in the game."

The Crimson Tide made their first Final Four appearance in school history last season, when they lost to eventual national champion UConn.

Alabama loved the 3 this season, averaging 28 attempts a game. Against BYU, Sears and the Crimson Tide feasted on the long ball.

Sears hit five in the first half, camping out behind the arc without much of a hand in his face. Sears and Chris Youngblood hit back-to-back 3s for a 38-30 lead and repeated the feat minutes later for a 44-34 advantage. BYU's Egor Demin followed with an airball and Alabama could smell crimson in the water.

Alabama attempted 15 2-pointers and made 10 of them.

"We've been working all week to prepare to get our shot right," Sears said.

Sears raised his teammates out of their seats and into a frenzy when another 3 early in the second half opened a 63-47 lead that sent the shaken Cougars into a timeout. The deep, up-tempo Crimson Tide let Sears bury 3 after 3 after 3 with the Elite Eight in sight.

Alabama's previous 3-point record was 23 against LSU in 2021. John Petty Jr., twice hit 10 3s, the latter time against Samford in 2019.

Takeaways

Alabama continued the Southeastern Conference's run in the tournament and coasted in its third straight Sweet 16 appearance. Holloway made six 3s and Youngblood had five. Collectively, Alabama shot 53% from the floor and it also made 18 of 21 free throws.

The shots — and now, free tater tots — dried up for BYU. Saunders, a descendant of the man who invented tater tots, had fueled BYU's run to the Sweet 16.

BYU was a bust trying match Alabama beyond the arc. The Cougars missed 12 of 13 3s in the first half.

"We felt like it was hard for them to sustain that," coach Kevin Young said. "You're trying everything and nothing seemed to work."

The Cougars gamely pulled within striking distance only to get socked down by, yes, another Alabama 3. Demin hit a 3 that pulled BYU within 63-55, only for Aden Holloway to connect again beyond the arc for the Tide.

"An open 3 is kind of a layup," Holloway said.

Up next

Alabama will try to reach only the second Final Four in program history.

Rain and cooler weather help South Korean fire crews battle devastating wildfires

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Rain and cooler temperatures are helping South Korean fire crews as they battle the country's worst-ever wildfires on Friday, as the governor of the hardest-hit region called for overhauling response strategies to respond to the climate crisis that he says worsened the disaster.

The wildfires, which have killed 28 people and razed vast swaths of land in the southeast in the last week, were 85% contained as of Friday morning, Korea Forest Service chief Lim Sang-seop told a televised briefing. He said authorities will launch "all-out efforts" to extinguish the remaining blazes by bringing more helicopters and fire fighters to the areas.

The raging inferno has also destroyed thousands of houses, factories, vehicles and other structures, while mountains and hills were stripped of anything but a carpet of smoldering ashes.

"Hazes have been diminished because of the rain last night, so that's favorable for securing visibility. Also temperatures are now lower than the last few days, so things are very favorable to put out the wildfires," Lim said.

Firefighters — many in their 60s, a reflection of one of the world's fastest-aging populations — navigated forests in yellow helmets and red protective suits, spraying suppressants at flames that flickered near their feet. Helicopters dropped buckets of water over hills that glowed red in the night.

Residents hunkered down in temporary shelters in places like schools and gyms, but the fire crept dangerously close to some of them too. A video shared by one evacuee shows blazes approaching a school soccer field under a sky choked with smoke.

"I just kept crying this morning," said 79-year-old Seo Jae Tak, an evacuee at a gym in Andong city, on Thursday. "When I went back yesterday, the entire mountain had turned to ashes. It's just unbelievable, I can't even put it into words. All I can do is cry."

Authorities were mobilizing about 9,000 people, 125 helicopters and hundreds of other vehicles to battle the wildfires, the government's disaster response center said.

The wildfires have burned 47,860 hectares (118,265 acres) of land, forced more than 30,000 people to flee their homes and injured 37 others since last Friday. Officials said Friday that 8,000 residents remained at temporary shelters. The fires have been driven by strong winds and dry weather.

While it's hard to link any one event to climate change, officials and experts say that it is making wildfires more likely and more severe. Scientists have already warned the warming atmosphere around the world is driving ever more extreme weather events, including wildfires, flooding, droughts, hurricanes and heat waves that are killing people and causing billions of dollars in damage every year.

"We must completely overhaul our wildfire response strategy in the face of extreme climate conditions," said Lee Cheol-woo, governor of North Gyeongsang Province, in a news conference.

Lee noted that the past week has shown how wildfires, fueled by dry and windy conditions, can quickly overwhelm the country's resources. He said he would request that the government establish better evacuation guidelines, adopt more powerful firefighting tools including aircraft equipped with water cannons, and adopt other approaches to improve firefighting efforts during nighttime hours.

"We don't have the equipment for firefighting at night," Lee said. "In the night, firefighting is done solely with manual efforts, but with the increased density of our forests compared to the past, it's difficult to manage with just that."

On Thursday, Lee Han-kyung, deputy head of the disaster response center, told a meeting that the wildfires showed "the reality of climate crisis that we have yet experienced," according to Yonhap news agency.

The people killed were mostly in their 60s or older. They include a pilot whose helicopter crashed during efforts to contain a fire Wednesday and four firefighters and other workers who died earlier after being trapped by fast-moving flames. Officials say older people found it difficult to evacuate quickly but have not provided details of the civilian dead.

In Uiseong, about 20 of the 30 structures at the Gounsa temple complex, which is said to have been

originally built in the 7th century, have burned. Among them were two state-designated “treasures”: a pavilion overlooking a stream that dates to 1668, and a Joseon dynasty structure built in 1904 to mark the longevity of a king.

Turkish student at Tufts University is latest Palestinian supporter swept up in US crackdown

By MICHAEL CASEY, JAKE OFFENHARTZ and KATHY McCORMACK Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — A Turkish student detained by federal officers as she walked along a street in a Boston suburb is the latest supporter of Palestinian causes to be swept up in the Trump administration’s crackdown on immigrants who express their political views.

Rumeysa Ozturk, 30, a doctoral student at Tufts University, was swiftly moved out of Massachusetts, another case of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement sending immigrants taken into custody to detention centers or deporting them altogether before a federal judge has a chance to weigh in and possibly halt the actions.

Ozturk, who was detained Tuesday shortly after she left her home in Somerville, had been moved to an ICE detention center in Louisiana by the time her lawyer went to court and a judge ordered her to be kept in Massachusetts, U.S. government lawyers said in a court document Thursday. They said they made her lawyers aware that she was being moved and facilitated contact with her Wednesday night.

A senior Department of Homeland Security spokesperson said federal authorities detained Ozturk after an investigation found she had “engaged in activities in support of Hamas, a foreign terrorist organization that relishes the killing of Americans.” The department did not provide evidence of that support.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the Trump administration has revoked the visas of at least 300 people, including Ozturk: “We do it every day.”

“We gave you a visa to come and study and get a degree, not to become a social activist, to tear up our university campuses,” Rubio told reporters during a stop in Guyana.

Friends say Ozturk wasn’t very involved in protests

Friends and colleagues of Ozturk said she was not closely involved in pro-Palestinian protests that broke out on campuses last spring. Her only known activism, they said, was co-authoring an op-ed in a student newspaper that called on Tufts University to engage with student demands to cut ties with Israel.

“The only thing I know of that Rumeysa organized was a Thanksgiving potluck,” said Jennifer Hoyden, a friend who studied with Ozturk at Columbia University’s Teachers College. “There’s a very important distinction between writing a letter supporting the student Senate and taking the kind of action they’re accusing her of, which I’ve seen no evidence of.”

Hamas invaded Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, in an attack that killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and during which about 250 hostages were seized. Israel’s retaliatory offensive has killed more than 50,000 people, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry, and destroyed much of the enclave.

Ozturk’s arrest appears to be part of President Donald Trump’s pledge to deport students he said engage in “pro-terrorist, anti-Semitic, anti-American activity,” a label the administration has applied broadly to those who criticize Israel and protest its military campaign in Gaza.

Earlier this month, immigration enforcement agents arrested and detained Mahmoud Khalil, a legal U.S. resident and Palestinian activist who played a prominent part in protests at Columbia last year. He is now facing possible deportation.

Dr. Rasha Alawieh, a kidney specialist from Lebanon who was due to start as an assistant professor at Brown University, was deported this month — after a federal judge ordered that she not be removed until a hearing could be held. Homeland Security officials said Alawieh was deported despite having a U.S. visa because she “openly admitted” supporting a Hezbollah leader.

A University of Alabama student was also detained this week by ICE, his lawyer confirmed. There was no indication that Alireza Doroudi, a doctoral student from Iran studying mechanical engineering who was

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detained Tuesday, was involved in any protests, said attorney David Rozas.

"With the words of his fiancé, he is a nerd. All he does is study and is literally trying to fulfill his dream, the American dream, of becoming a researcher and professor of mechanical engineering," Rozas said.

On Thursday evening, a few hundred people turned out at Somerville City Hall to rally for Ozturk's release and for the greater Palestinian cause.

Speakers railed against Israel over the war in Gaza as well as the ICE raids that protesters said have left immigrant communities terrified. They also sang songs supporting the Palestinians — sometimes accompanied by a horn section — and led the crowd in chants of "Resistance Is justified when people are occupied."

Among the speakers was Lebanese American Carina Kurban who said she was furious when she heard about the arrest of Ozturk and other scholars.

"I was born here. I'm a U.S. citizen, and I need to use that privilege that I have to speak up for those who can't because of everything that's happening with this administration," Kurban said.

"America was built on free speech, so if we don't have that, then what?" she added. "Then where do we go?"

ICE officers approached Ozturk on the street

Video obtained by The Associated Press appeared to show six people, all but one with their faces covered, taking away a shouting Ozturk's phone before she was handcuffed on Tuesday.

"We're the police," members of the group are heard saying in the video.

A bystander is heard asking, "Why are you hiding your faces?"

Ozturk, who is Muslim, was meeting friends for iftar, a meal that breaks a fast at sunset during Ramadan, according to her lawyer, Mahsa Khanbabai.

Khanbabai, who said no charges have been filed against Ozturk, filed a petition seeking her release Tuesday and then an emergency motion Wednesday.

U.S. District Judge Indira Talwani initially issued an order giving the government until Friday to answer why Ozturk was being detained. Talwani also ordered that Ozturk not be moved outside the District of Massachusetts without 48 hours advance notice.

The government said in its response Thursday that it "will set forth the timeline" of Ozturk's arrest and transfer from Massachusetts.

The facility where she's being held is one of nine in Louisiana that house immigrants waiting for legal proceedings or deportation, according to a 2024 report on ICE's website. It's situated on the outskirts of Basile, a rural town about 50 miles (80 kilometers) northwest of Lafayette.

"We are in touch with local, state, and federal elected officials and hope that Rumeysa is provided the opportunity to avail herself of her due process rights," Tufts University President Sunil Kumar said in a statement Wednesday night.

Ozturk was one of four students who wrote an op-ed in The Tufts Daily last March criticizing the university's response to student demands that Tufts "acknowledge the Palestinian genocide," disclose its investments and divest from companies with direct or indirect ties to Israel.

After the op-ed was published, Ozturk's name, photograph and work history were published on the website Canary Mission, which describes itself as documenting people who "promote hatred of the U.S.A., Israel and Jews on North American college campuses."

The Associated Press, banned from White House press pool, renews request to court for reinstatement

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A lawyer for The Associated Press asked a federal judge Thursday to reinstate the agency's access to the White House press pool and other official events, saying the Trump administration's ban is a fundamental attack on freedom of speech and should be overturned. The government insisted there was no evidence that AP had been harmed irreparably.

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"AP has now spent 44 days in the penalty box," said Charles Tobin, speaking on behalf of the news agency. After a full day's hearing, U.S. District Judge Trevor N. McFadden adjourned the case without a decision. The AP and the new administration are at odds over the White House's removal of AP reporters and photographers from the small group of journalists who follow the president in the pool and other events. Last month, AP sued White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt and two other administration officials, demanding reinstatement.

The White House retaliated against the news outlet last month for not following President Donald Trump's executive order to rename the Gulf of Mexico.

The notion of banning a news agency for what it says — and for not using the words that a government demands — is extraordinarily unusual in a country whose Constitution guarantees free speech without official interference. By punishing AP for what it publishes, the administration has raised questions about what the White House feels it could punish from news outlets whose words or images it doesn't like.

The judge questioned whether it's a court's place to order the White House which reporters it could or couldn't exclude from a presidential event. "My instinct is that this has not changed how your client is exercising its free-speech rights," McFadden told Tobin.

A lawyer for the government, Brian Hudak, said that the AP hadn't shown irreparable harm to its business. "There is no showing of exclusion," he said, adding that AP can still access events in the East Room and document who arrives at the White House and leaves it. The AP says that it has had only sporadic access to East Room events.

Hudak brought no White House officials in as witnesses on Thursday. The AP brought its chief White House photographer and reporter as witnesses to explain how their job has been affected. Tobin said that the AP has already lost a \$150,000 advertising contract by a client concerned about the ban.

Journalists talk about how the ban has affected AP

Evan Vucci, the AP photographer, testified that the agency was "basically dead in the water on major news stories." Vucci took a renowned and widely distributed photo of Trump immediately after an assassination attempt in Pennsylvania last summer; in court, Tobin held up a book published by Trump's allies that depicted the same photo on its cover.

In his testimony, Vucci said the AP relied on his eyes and expertise to often get photos from the Oval Office on the wire and to the world within a minute after taking them — while the event is still going on.

The AP's chief White House correspondent, Zeke Miller, also detailed how AP was able to get news to the world quickly while events were happening. But the ban has cut into that ability. Miller said AP wasn't able to get news out about a delay in instituting tariffs against Canada and Mexico until nearly 40 minutes after a competitor.

"We don't see the president nearly as much as we did before this ban took effect," Miller said.

Miller also said that he had noticed that the tone and tenor of questions asked of the president had softened since the AP ban, suggesting that it had a chilling effect on other journalists. But he could not offer specific examples when pressed by the judge.

In cross-examination of the two journalists, Hudak tried to establish that the ban was not as harmful as the AP was making it out to be. For example, he noted that the outlet was able, through licensing deals with other companies, to sell photos from events where it was excluded.

'Viewpoint discrimination' is at the center of the case

In last month's hearing, McFadden refused the AP's request for an injunction to stop the White House from barring reporters and photographers from events in the Oval Office and Air Force One. He urged the Trump administration to reconsider its ban before Thursday's hearing. It hasn't.

The AP has sued Trump's team for punishing a news organization for using speech that it doesn't like. The news outlet said it would still refer to the Gulf of Mexico in its style guidance to clients around the world, while also noting that Trump has ordered it renamed the Gulf of America.

"For anyone who thinks the Associated Press's lawsuit against President Trump's White House is about the name of a body of water, think bigger," Julie Pace, the AP's executive editor, wrote in an op-ed for the Wall Street Journal on Wednesday. "It's really about whether the government can control what you say."

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The White House said it has the right to decide who gets to question the president, and has taken steps to take over a duty that has been handled by journalists for decades.

The president has dismissed the AP as a group of “radical left lunatics” and said that “we’re going to keep them out until such time as they agree that it’s the Gulf of America.”

AP is still covering the president

The case is one of several aggressive moves the second Trump administration has taken against the press since his return to office, including FCC investigations against ABC, CBS and NBC News, dismantling the government-run Voice of America and threatening funding for public broadcasters PBS and NPR.

The AP has still covered the president, and has been permitted in Leavitt’s press briefings, but the ban has cost the organization time in reporting and impeded its efforts to get still images. Even if McFadden rules in favor of the news organization, it’s unclear how the White House will respond to the judge’s order.

A Trump executive order to change the name of the United States’ largest mountain back to Mount McKinley from Denali is being recognized by the AP. Trump has the authority to do so because the mountain is completely within the country he oversees, AP has said.

Writing in the Journal, Pace said the AP didn’t ask for the fight and made efforts to resolve the issue before going to court, but needed to stand on principle.

“If we don’t step up to defend Americans’ right to speak freely,” she wrote, “who will?”

Trump executive order on Smithsonian targets funding for programs with ‘improper ideology’

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Thursday revealed his intention to force changes at the Smithsonian Institution with an executive order that targets funding for programs that advance “divisive narratives” and “improper ideology,” the latest step in a broadside against culture he deems too liberal.

Trump claimed there has been a “concerted and widespread” effort over the past decade to rewrite American history by replacing “objective facts” with a “distorted narrative driven by ideology rather than truth,” adding that it casts the “founding principles” of the United States in a “negative light.”

The order he signed behind closed doors puts Vice President JD Vance, who serves on the Smithsonian Institution’s Board of Regents, in charge of overseeing efforts to “remove improper ideology” from all areas of the institution, including its museums, education and research centers, and the National Zoo.

It marks the Republican president’s latest salvo against cultural pillars of society, such as universities and art, that he considers out of step with conservative sensibilities. Trump recently had himself installed as chairman of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts with the aim of overhauling programming, including the annual Kennedy Center Honors awards show. The administration also recently forced Columbia University to make a series of policy changes by threatening the Ivy League school with the loss of several hundred million dollars in federal funding.

The executive order also hints at the return of statues and monuments of Confederate figures, many of which were taken down or replaced around the country after the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020 and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, which is detested by Trump and other conservatives.

The order also calls for improvements to Independence Hall in Philadelphia by July 4, 2026, in time for the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Trump singled out the National Museum of African American History and Culture, which opened in 2016 near the White House, the Women’s History Museum, which is in development, and the American Art Museum for criticism.

“Museums in our Nation’s capital should be places where individuals go to learn — not to be subjected to ideological indoctrination or divisive narratives that distort our shared history,” he said.

Linda St. Thomas, the Smithsonian Institution’s chief spokesperson, said in an email late Thursday, “We have no comment for now.”

Under Trump's order, Vance will also work with the White House budget office to make sure future funding for the Smithsonian Institution isn't spent on programs that "degrade shared American values, divide Americans based on race, or promote programs or ideologies inconsistent with federal law and policy." Trump also wants to ensure that the women's history museum celebrates women and not "recognize men as women in any respect."

It also requires the interior secretary to reinstate monuments, memorials, statues and similar properties that have been removed or changed since Jan. 1, 2020, to "perpetuate a false reconstruction of American history, inappropriately minimize the value of certain historical events or figures, or include any other improper partisan ideology."

The Smithsonian Institution is the world's largest museum, education and research complex. It consists of 21 museums and the National Zoo. Eleven museums are located along the National Mall in Washington.

The institution was established by Congress with money from James Smithson, a British scientist who left his estate to the United States to found "at Washington, under the name of the Smithsonian Institution, an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge."

Another federal judge blocks Trump policy banning transgender troops in the military

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

TACOMA, Wash. (AP) — A U.S. judge in Washington state has blocked enforcement of President Donald Trump's order banning transgender people from serving in the military, the second nationwide injunction against the policy in as many weeks.

The order Thursday from U.S. District Court Judge Benjamin Settle in Tacoma came in a case brought by several long-serving transgender military members who say the ban is insulting and discriminatory, and that their firing would cause lasting damage to their careers and reputations.

In his 65-page ruling, Settle — an appointee of former President George W. Bush and a former captain in the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General Corps — said the administration offered no explanation as to why transgender troops, who have been able to serve openly over the past four years with no evidence of problems, should suddenly be banned.

"The government's arguments are not persuasive, and it is not an especially close question on this record," Settle wrote. "The government's unrelenting reliance on deference to military judgment is unjustified in the absence of any evidence supporting 'the military's' new judgment reflected in the Military Ban."

U.S. District Judge Ana Reyes in Washington, D.C., similarly issued an order blocking the policy last week but then put her own ruling temporarily on hold pending the government's appeal. The U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia late Thursday told the parties that it would consider putting the ruling into effect if "any action occurs that negatively impacts" transgender service members.

In a more limited ruling on Monday, a judge in New Jersey barred the Air Force from removing two transgender men, saying they showed their separation would cause lasting damage to their careers and reputations that no monetary settlement could repair.

Trump signed an executive order Jan. 27 that claims the sexual identity of transgender service members "conflicts with a soldier's commitment to an honorable, truthful, and disciplined lifestyle, even in one's personal life" and is harmful to military readiness.

In response, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth issued a policy that presumptively disqualifies transgender people from military service.

"They can do the right number of pullups. They can do the right amount of pushups. They can shoot straight," Sasha Buchert, an attorney with the civil rights law firm Lambda Legal, said after arguments Monday in Tacoma. "Yet, they're being told they have to leave the military simply because of who they are."

Those challenging the policy and Trump's executive order in Tacoma include Gender Justice League, which counts transgender troops among its members, and several transgender members of the military. Among them is U.S. Navy Cmdr. Emily "Hawking" Shilling, a 42-year-old woman who has served for more

than 19 years, including 60 missions as a combat aviator in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In his ruling, Settle highlighted her case.

"There is no claim and no evidence that she is now, or ever was, a detriment to her unit's cohesion, or to the military's lethality or readiness, or that she is mentally or physically unable to continue her service," he wrote. "There is no claim and no evidence that Shilling herself is dishonest or selfish, or that she lacks humility or integrity. Yet absent an injunction, she will be promptly discharged solely because she is transgender."

During arguments Monday, Justice Department lawyer Jason Lynch insisted that the president was entitled to deference in military affairs and suggested the service ban was not as broad as the plaintiffs had suggested.

The judge peppered Lynch with questions, noting that the government had offered no evidence that allowing transgender troops to serve openly had caused any problems for military readiness.

Thousands of transgender people serve in the military, but they represent less than 1% of the total number of active-duty service members.

In 2016, a Defense Department policy permitted transgender people to serve openly in the military. During Trump's first term in the White House, the Republican issued a directive to ban transgender service members, with an exception for some of those who had already started transitioning under more lenient rules that were in effect during the Obama administration. The Supreme Court allowed that ban to take effect. President Joe Biden, a Democrat, scrapped it when he took office.

The rules imposed by Hegseth include no such exceptions.

Trump withdraws Rep. Elise Stefanik's nomination for UN ambassador, citing tight GOP House margin

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump announced Thursday that he was pulling Rep. Elise Stefanik's nomination to be U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, a stunning turnaround for his Cabinet pick after her confirmation had been stalled for months over concerns about Republicans' tight margins in the House.

Trump confirmed he was withdrawing the New York Republican's nomination in a Truth Social post, saying that it was "essential that we maintain EVERY Republican Seat in Congress."

"We must be unified to accomplish our Mission, and Elise Stefanik has been a vital part of our efforts from the very beginning. I have asked Elise, as one of my biggest Allies, to remain in Congress," the president said. He did not say whom he would nominate to replace her and fill his last remaining Cabinet seat.

The abrupt withdrawal reflects growing concern among House Republicans, led by Speaker Mike Johnson, that their historically slim majority could be at risk, particularly ahead of two special elections in Florida next week. The loss of a mere handful of seats could swing the House majority to Democrats and derail their efforts to enact Trump's sweeping agenda in the months ahead.

Johnson praised Stefanik, the former No. 4 House leader, as "selfless" and "patriotic" after Trump announced the move.

"It is well known Republicans have a razor-thin House majority, and Elise's agreement to withdraw her nomination will allow us to keep one of the toughest, most resolute members of our Conference in place to help drive forward President Trump's America First policies," Johnson said in a post on X. He added that he "will invite her to return to the leadership table immediately," although it's unclear what position she would take since there are no vacancies.

Stefanik said Thursday night that multiple issues factored into the decision, including the possibility that an election to replace her may be delayed; the upcoming special elections in Florida; and the threadbare GOP majority in the House.

"I have been proud to be a team player," Stefanik said on Fox News' "Hannity" of the withdrawal of her nomination. "The president knows that. And he and I have had multiple conversations today, and we are

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committed to delivering results on behalf of the American people."

Trump had tapped Stefanik to represent the U.S. at the international body shortly after winning reelection in November. She was seen as among the least controversial Cabinet picks, and her nomination advanced out of committee in late January, but House Republicans' razor-thin majority kept her ultimate confirmation in a state of purgatory for the last several months.

In recent weeks, it had seemed as if Stefanik's nomination would advance to the Senate floor, given two U.S. House special elections in Florida in districts that Trump easily won in 2024. Filling those vacant GOP seats would have allowed Stefanik to finally resign from the House and given Republicans, who currently hold 218 seats, a little more breathing room on passing legislation in a growingly divided Congress. Democrats hold 213 seats.

Both districts have long been Republican strongholds, and a win by either Democratic candidate would be a major surprise, but House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries and other Democratic leaders are looking to at least narrow the margin from November, when Trump carried both districts in the presidential election by more than 30 points.

That, coupled with Democrats' upset in a Tuesday special election for a Pennsylvania state Senate seat in Republican-leaning suburbs and farming communities, has given Republicans pause and pushed some members into full panic mode, according to one congressional aide, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal concerns.

Trump's statement Thursday also seemed to indicate an anxiety about the party's ability to hold on to Stefanik's seat if she were to take on the U.N. post, even though the sprawling district in northern New York is one of the state's most conservative and is considered to be solid Republican territory. Stefanik herself cruised to reelection last year, winning 62% of the vote over her Democratic opponent. Almost all of the counties in her district voted for Trump last year.

In a statement, Jeffries, D-N.Y., said that Trump withdrew Stefanik's nomination "because the extremists are afraid they will lose the special election to replace her."

"The Republican agenda is extremely unpopular, they are crashing the economy in real time and House Republicans are running scared," Jeffries continued. "What happened to their so-called mandate?"

Stefanik is the fourth Trump administration nominee who didn't make it through the confirmation process. Previously, former U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz withdrew from consideration for attorney general, Chad Chronister was pulled for the Drug Enforcement Administration and former Florida congressman Dr. David Weldon was yanked from contention to lead the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The former congresswoman had been in a state of limbo for months, not able to engage in her official duties as a member of the 119th Congress or to participate in the action at the U.N. The vacancy of a permanent U.S. ambassador was happening at a critical moment for the international body as the world leaders had been discussing the two major wars between Russia and Ukraine and Israel and Hamas.

In late February, the U.S. mission, under Trump, split with its European allies by refusing to blame Russia for its invasion of Ukraine in votes on three U.N. resolutions seeking an end to the three-year war. Dorothy Shea, the deputy U.S. ambassador to the U.N., has been the face of America's mission in New York during the transition.

The withdrawal of Stefanik's nomination came after she had launched a recent farewell tour of her district, meeting with supporters and thanking them for their support. On her Instagram page, Stefanik had also been conducting what appeared to be a retrospective of her time in Congress, with one post containing images from 2016 that showed her on a cable news show and posing with supporters atop a caption that began with "Congressional throwback continued."

Reflecting the abruptness of Trump's decision, Stefanik's last throwback post was made Thursday morning.

King Charles III briefly hospitalized for observation following side effects from cancer treatment

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — King Charles III was briefly hospitalized for observation on Thursday after experiencing “temporary side effects” related to a scheduled cancer treatment, Buckingham Palace said in a statement. His engagements for Thursday afternoon and Friday were canceled.

“His majesty has now returned to Clarence House and as a precautionary measure, acting on medical advice, tomorrow’s diary program will also be rescheduled,” the palace said. “His majesty would like to send his apologies to all those who may be inconvenienced or disappointed as a result.”

The king’s health has been closely watched ever since early last year when he announced that he had been diagnosed with an undisclosed form of cancer. Charles, 76, stepped away from public duties for about three months but continued fulfilling state duties, such as reviewing government papers and meeting with the prime minister.

Charles’ cancer diagnosis has heaped pressure on the British monarchy, which is still evolving after the 70-year reign of the late Queen Elizabeth II.

When he succeeded his mother in September 2022, Charles’ task was to demonstrate that the 1,000-year-old institution remains relevant in a modern nation whose citizens come from all corners of the globe. But this task takes much time and energy.

Although the duties of a constitutional monarch are largely ceremonial, the royal whirl can be exhausting. Besides the occasional procession in full royal regalia, there are meetings with political leaders, dedication ceremonies and events honoring the accomplishments of British citizens. That added up to 161 days of royal engagements during Charles’s first year on the throne.

Charles’ illness came as his daughter-in-law, Kate, the Princess of Wales, was also diagnosed with cancer. Kate, the wife of Prince William, took more than six months off before returning to public duties in late September.

Man accused of setting fire to Tesla vehicles in Las Vegas arrested, police say

By RIO YAMAT Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A man who set fire to Tesla vehicles in Las Vegas and who painted the word “resist” for authorities to find at the scene has been arrested.

Paul Hyon Kim, 36, faces charges in connection with the March 18 attack in both state and federal court in Nevada, authorities announced Thursday, a day after his arrest. Kim was being held in the custody of the federal government.

In state court, Kim is facing charges of arson, possession of an explosive device and firing a weapon into a vehicle, Clark County Sheriff Kevin McMahon said at a news conference.

Kim is also charged with federal unlawful possession of an unregistered firearm and arson, according to a criminal complaint filed Thursday.

Wearing a black T-shirt, black jeans and tennis shoes, Kim appeared briefly Thursday in U.S. District Court in Las Vegas. He told a judge that he completed 12 years of schooling. Kim is scheduled to return to federal court Friday for a detention hearing.

The federal public defender’s office in Las Vegas, which has been appointed to represent Kim, declined Thursday to comment.

Security video played at the police news conference showed the suspect, dressed all in black and covering his face, paint the word “resist” across the glass doors of a Tesla service center. McMahon said the suspect threw Molotov cocktails — crude bombs filled with gasoline or another flammable liquid — and fired several rounds from a weapon into multiple vehicles. No one was injured.

McMahon said Thursday they were “actively investigating” a motive and whether it is connected to other

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recent cases of vandalism targeting Tesla property across the country.

There has been an uptick of attacks on property with the Tesla logo across the U.S. since President Donald Trump took office and tapped Tesla CEO Elon Musk for a prominent role overseeing a new Department of Government Efficiency that has slashed government spending.

Some of the most prominent incidents have taken place in left-leaning cities in the Pacific Northwest.

An Oregon man allegedly threw several Molotov cocktails at a Tesla store in Salem, then returned another day and shot out windows. In the Portland suburb of Tigard, more than a dozen bullets were fired at a Tesla showroom, damaging vehicles and windows.

Prosecutors in Colorado have also charged a woman in connection with attacks on Tesla dealerships that authorities say also included Molotov cocktails thrown at vehicles and the words "Nazi cars" spray-painted on a building. And federal agents in South Carolina have arrested a man accused of setting fire to Tesla charging stations near Charleston.

In Las Vegas, Spencer Evans, the special agent in charge of the FBI division there, declined Thursday to comment on the similarities of the cases. But he told reporters last week that the Las Vegas case "has some of the hallmarks" of terrorism.

"Was this terrorism? Was it something else? It certainly has some of the hallmarks that we might think — the writing on the wall, potential political agenda, an act of violence," Evans said. "None of those factors are lost on us."

FAA acknowledges it must do better after deadly DC air collision

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

The head of the Federal Aviation Administration told Congress during a hearing Thursday about a mid-air collision over Washington, D.C., that killed 67 people that the agency must do more to ensure flying remains safe.

The FAA's artificial intelligence-led review aimed at identifying safety threats at other airports with similar helicopter-airplane congestion should be finished in a couple weeks, said Chris Rocheleau, the agency's acting administrator.

During the hearing, the head of the National Transportation Safety Board and members of Congress again questioned how the FAA hadn't noticed an alarming number of close calls near Ronald Reagan National Airport and addressed the problem before the January collision between an Army helicopter and a jetliner. The collision over the Potomac River was the nation's deadliest plane crash since November 2001.

"We have to do better," Rocheleau said. "We have to identify trends, we have to get smarter about how we use data, and when we put corrective actions in place, we must execute them."

How the FAA is using AI

The FAA is using AI to dig into the millions of reports it collects to assess other places with busy helicopter traffic including: Boston, New York, Baltimore-Washington, Detroit, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles and along the Gulf Coast. Rocheleau promised to take immediate action if risks are found.

Investigators have highlighted 85 close calls around Reagan airport in the three years before the crash that should have signaled a growing safety problem. Rocheleau told the aviation subcommittee of the Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation that every close call is investigated and all the data was reviewed before, but this alarming trend was missed.

NTSB Chairwoman Jennifer Homendy said there clearly was an issue with identifying trends in the data the FAA collects.

Dailey Crofton, whose brother Casey Crofton died in the collision, attended the hearing.

"I was surprised at the lapses of safety protocols that led to this crash," he said in a statement afterward.

Collision alarms keep going off

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz said he learned that the Secret Service and U.S. Navy triggered a rash of collision alarms in planes around Reagan Airport on March 1 while testing anti-drone technology that used a similar frequency to the one used by planes' warning systems. Cruz said that happened despite a warning from

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the FAA against doing it.

"This is deeply disturbing that just a month after 67 people died while on approach to DCA (Reagan Airport), that the Secret Service and Pentagon would inadvertently cause multiple flights to receive urgent cockpit alerts recommending evasive action," Cruz said.

Helicopter traffic around Reagan National has been restricted since January any time planes use the same runway the American Airlines plane that crashed was approaching when it collided with the helicopter. At the NTSB's urging, the FAA permanently banned that particular helicopter route under most circumstances. If a helicopter does use the route, planes are prohibited from taking off or landing on that runway.

The Army still wasn't broadcasting helicopter locations

The U.S. Army's head of aviation Brig. Gen. Matthew Braman acknowledged that as of Thursday morning helicopters were still flying over the nation's capital with a key system broadcasting their locations turned off during most missions because it deemed them sensitive.

Cruz called this "shocking and deeply unacceptable."

Rocheleau then said the FAA will immediately require all aircraft flying near Reagan National to broadcast their locations. The "ADS-B out data" is designed to help air traffic controllers better track an aircraft's location with position updates every second..

Before that announcement, exceptions in the airspace above Washington allowed Army and other government aircraft to fly without transmitting, or fly in a mode that allowed less information to be transmitted to avoid broadcasting potentially sensitive missions to the public.

Former Black Hawk pilot Tim Lilley, father of airliner copilot Sam Lilley, said he's disappointed that the Army has not taken simple steps to improve safety he recommended in a meeting with Braman, including turning on the locator systems, adding a fourth crew member or barring the use of older Black Hawks on routes around Washington.

"I was frustrated with the lack of accountability. The Army still doesn't want to say that they did anything wrong," said Lilley, who flew helicopter routes around the capital for four years in the 1990s as part of a 20-year Army career and now flies private jets.

Are the systems even working?

Homendy also noted that it is important to inspect the transmission equipment to make sure it actually works. The helicopter involved in this collision had not transmitted any location data for 730 days. When the NTSB checked the rest of the unit's helicopters after the crash, it found eight of them that hadn't transmitted since 2023.

Plus, Homendy said she's not sure what the Army was doing with any close call reports it received or how closely it was monitoring whether its helicopters violated altitude limits during their flights like the one that collided with the jetliner did. She said most of the safety conversations at the battalion level were focused on "OSHA slips, trips and falls."

Was classified information shared?

Senators overseeing military request probe into Signal leak

By STEPHEN GROVES, AAMER MADHANI and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The top Republican and Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee requested an investigation Thursday into how Trump national security officials used the Signal app to discuss military strikes and a federal judge said he would order the preservation of the messages, ensuring at least some scrutiny on an episode President Donald Trump has dismissed as frivolous.

Sen. Roger Wicker, the Republican chair of the committee, and Sen. Jack Reed, the top Democrat, signed onto a letter to the acting inspector general at the Department of Defense for an inquiry into the potential "use of unclassified networks to discuss sensitive and classified information, as well as the sharing of such information with those who do not have proper clearance and need to know."

The senators' assertion that classified information was potentially shared was notable, especially as Trump's Republican administration has contended there was no classified information on the Signal chain

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that had included Jeffrey Goldberg, editor-in-chief of The Atlantic magazine.

Later Thursday, U.S. District Judge James Boasberg said during a hearing for a lawsuit brought by a nonprofit watchdog, American Oversight, that he'll issue a temporary restraining order barring administration officials from destroying messages.

Across Washington, the Signal leak presented a major test early in Trump's second term on the federal government's system of checks and balances meant to protect national security. Yet even as mechanisms for oversight and investigation sputtered to life, it was a halting effort as most Republicans seemed content to allow the controversy to blow over. Meanwhile, Democrats slammed the Signal chat as a reckless violation of secrecy that could have put service members in harm's way.

"This put pilots at risk because of sloppiness and carelessness," said Sen. Mark Kelly, an Arizona Democrat and former fighter pilot.

Kelly and other Democrats have called for Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to either resign or be fired. "If this was an officer in the military — at any level — or enlisted person, they would have been fired already," Kelly said.

Asked by a reporter Wednesday about the call by Wicker, of Mississippi, and Reed, of Rhode Island, for an investigation, Trump replied, "It doesn't bother me."

Classified hearing with administration requested

Wicker, whose support was crucial to Hegseth's Senate confirmation, is one of the most ardent defense hawks in Congress and has said the committee will request a classified hearing to follow up on the inspector general's report, as well as for the administration to verify the contents of the Signal chat. The contents, which were published by The Atlantic, show that Hegseth listed weapons systems and a timeline for the attack on Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen earlier this month.

Senate Republicans have criticized the discussion on Signal but have stopped short of calling for the removal of Hegseth or anyone else involved. Sen. Mike Rounds, a Republican member of both the Senate Intelligence and Armed Services committees, said any oversight should be done "in a bipartisan way."

Still, Democrats are pressing to probe much deeper. Sen. Mark Warner, the top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, said he wants to check the phones of those involved in the Signal chat for malware as well as whether Hegseth had shared military plans on other Signal chats.

Warner said he expected support from Republicans in calling for such an investigation, but so far Warner's Republican counterpart on the intelligence committee, Sen. Tom Cotton, has given no sign he would join in those calls.

Meanwhile, the Justice Department, which has traditionally handled investigations into the mishandling of classified or sensitive information by both Republican and Democratic administrations, showed that under Trump it would likely stay on the sidelines. When asked at an unrelated news conference what the Justice Department plans to do, Attorney General Pam Bondi deflected, saying the mission was ultimately a success.

Echoing the White House, Bondi also insisted that none of the information shared on Signal was classified, even though officials have provided no evidence that that's the case. Espionage Act statutes require the safe handling of closely held national defense information even if it's not marked classified.

Bondi, who has pledged not to play politics with the department, quickly pivoted to former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and former President Joe Biden, who were investigated for allegations that they mishandled classified information but were not charged. Both Democrats were subject to extensive criminal investigations, and the FBI and the Justice Department have long track records of such inquiries.

Trump is unhappy with a lawsuit and the judge overseeing it

In civil court, the lawsuit filed by the group American Oversight against several Trump administration officials and the National Archives and Records Administration alleges they violated federal record-keeping laws.

That only further inflamed Trump's ire at the judiciary, especially when the case was randomly assigned Wednesday to Boasberg, who was already presiding over a case challenging the deportation of Venezu-

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elan migrants under wartime powers. In that case, the Trump administration just this week invoked the "state secrets" privilege to refuse to share details with the judge about the timing of deportation flights to El Salvador.

Trump early Thursday declared it "disgraceful" that Boasberg had been assigned the case in the Washington court. He added that Boasberg, who was nominated by President Barack Obama, a Democrat, is "Highly Conflicted." Trump and his allies have called for impeaching Boasberg.

In court Thursday, Boasberg limited his order to messages sent between March 11 and March 15, and a government attorney said the administration already was taking steps to collect and save the messages.

Meanwhile, the White House National Security Council has also said it would investigate the Signal chat. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters on Thursday that she had no update on the status of that investigation.

"We've been incredibly transparent about this entire situation, and we will continue to be," Leavitt said.

Leavitt is one of three Trump administration officials who face a lawsuit from The Associated Press on First and Fifth Amendment grounds. The AP says the three are punishing the news agency for editorial decisions they oppose. The White House says the AP is not following an executive order to refer to the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America.

Global automakers say Trump's tariffs will be painful for them and US consumers

By DAVID McHUGH, LORNE COOK, AAMER MADHANI and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press
FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — Whatever the U.S. gains from President Donald Trump's 25% tax on imported cars — and experts are skeptical — automakers around the world are bracing for a lot of pain.

In Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Canada and across Europe, automakers employ millions of people whose livelihoods depend on buyers in the U.S. that currently spend more than \$240 billion annually on imported cars and light trucks.

The Trump tariffs — aimed at boosting U.S. jobs and tax revenues — will also affect imported auto parts, which were valued last year at \$197 billion.

"The impact will be really huge and very disruptive," said Sigrid de Vries, director general of the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association. Vries and others critics say American car shoppers will also be worse off, as tariffs push prices higher.

Policymakers around the world said Thursday they were weighing their next moves — namely, whether to retaliate or not, and if so, how. But they also expressed hope that negotiations with Washington could avert an escalating trade war, and the economic damage and global supply chain disruptions that would come with it.

Trump said the U.S. would begin collecting tariffs on autos on April 3. The impending hit comes on top of other U.S. tariffs planned globally on steel and aluminum, and at a time when competition from China, and the transition to electric vehicles, is already pressuring automakers.

The anticipated blow knocked down the stock prices of many major automakers on Thursday, including Toyota, Mercedes-Benz, Kia and BMW.

U.S. carmakers are less exposed to possible retaliation because they export only 2% of their production to the EU. Still, shares of Ford and General Motors fell because the U.S. industry relies heavily on cross-border trade in auto parts — although Tesla is an exception and its stock price rose on Thursday.

Most foreign carmakers have plants in the U.S. — Japanese carmakers have two dozen, for example. But that would not shield them if they use imported parts, unless those parts are exempted under a free-trade agreement with Mexico and Canada.

The auto tariffs will be felt sharply in Europe, for whom the U.S. is the biggest export market for an industry that supports nearly 14 million jobs.

The EU's top trade official, Maros Sefcovic, has traveled to Washington at least twice since Trump was reelected to try to engage the administration. But Trump says the tariffs, which his administration esti-

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mates would raise \$100 billion in revenue annually, are “permanent.” The White House has claimed they will foster domestic manufacturing.

“This will continue to spur growth,” Trump told reporters Wednesday upon announcing the tariffs.

The head of the United Auto Workers, Shawn Fain, thanked the White House “for stepping up to end the free trade disaster that has devastated working class communities for decades.”

The U.S. president on Monday cited plans by South Korean automaker Hyundai to build a \$5.8 billion steel plant in Louisiana as evidence that tariffs would bring back manufacturing jobs.

Economists say the tariffs will only raise costs that will be passed on to consumers and lead to a cycle of retaliation that will reduce trade between countries.

“There’s a risk of retaliatory tariffs and then a tit-for-tat, and then we end up with significant barriers to trade and we all lose out,” said David Bailey, professor of business economics at the University of Birmingham. “That’s the fundamental problem here, essentially that governments will start to retaliate against each other.”

Trump has already placed a 20% tax on all imports from China for its role in the production of fentanyl. He similarly placed 25% tariffs on Mexico and Canada, in part to pressure them to help reduce illegal immigration to the U.S. And he has imposed 25% tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports — and said he plans tariffs on computer chips, pharmaceutical drugs, lumber and copper.

Before the new auto tariffs were announced, the EU had been planning to re-impose suspended tariffs in mid-April on a range of U.S. goods, including jeans, bourbon and motorcycles, as part of a previous dispute over trade in steel and aluminum.

“We have our plans ready,” said EU foreign affairs representative Kaja Kallas. But she said there is still uncertainty about which tariffs Trump will follow through on, and which can be resolved through negotiations.

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba on Thursday reiterated a request that his country’s automakers be exempted from Trump’s tariffs. When asked about possible responses, he said “all options” are on the table, without giving specifics.

The union that represents auto workers in Canada lashed out at Trump’s decision, and called on their prime minister, Mark Carney, to retaliate if necessary. Carney said he and Trump would be speaking in coming days.

“We have never seen an attack like this but we are ready,” said Lana Payne, the National President of Unifor. She said Carney should tell Trump that if U.S. automakers are going to sell cars and trucks in Canada they are going to have to build in Canada.

Autos are Canada’s second largest export, and on Wednesday — before Trump made his announcement — Carney unveiled a \$2 billion Canadian (\$1.4 billion) “strategic response fund” that will protect Canadian auto jobs affected by the tariffs.

For now, international auto companies are reluctant to make expensive operational changes, such as adjusting supply chains or relocating more production to the U.S., since it is still possible the tariffs will be withdrawn by Trump if they cause too much economic pain for Americans, according to analysts at the Sanford C. Bernstein research firm.

“Despite claims that the tariffs would last for Trump’s full term, we think it is unlikely that the new tariff regime will last, given the wide-spread damage they will do across industries and the inflationary impact on the US economy,” they wrote. They pointed out that the last tariff escalation between the U.S. and China impacting autos only lasted from July to December 2018, during Trump’s first term in office.

The 25% tariffs — if kept in place over the long-term — could add as much as \$12,000 per imported vehicle purchased in the U.S., Bernstein analysts estimate. Of course, carmakers will ultimately determine how much of the Trump tariffs to pass along to consumers, as opposed to taking the hit in their profit margins.

The blow will not fall evenly. The most exposed among European automakers are German and Italian carmakers. Japan and South Korea are also major exporters, while Canada and Mexico are deeply integrated into U.S. carmakers’ supply chains.

Europe's carmakers already face a shrunken domestic market and new competition from cheaper Chinese electric vehicles. Any trouble in the auto industry would weigh on Europe's economy, which did not grow at all in the last quarter of 2024.

"This would deliver a substantial blow to a sector that not only sustains millions of jobs but also contributes to a large proportion of the bloc's GDP," wrote analyst Clarissa Hahn at Oxford Economics.

Health and Human Services will lay off 10,000 workers and close agencies in a major restructuring

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a major overhaul, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will lay off 10,000 workers and shut down entire agencies, including ones that oversee billions of dollars in funds for addiction services and community health centers across the country.

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. criticized the department he oversees as an inefficient "sprawling bureaucracy" in a video announcing the restructuring Thursday. He faulted the department's 82,000 workers for a decline in Americans' health.

"I want to promise you now that we're going to do more with less," Kennedy said in the video, posted to social media.

The restructuring plan caps weeks of tumult at the nation's top health department, which has been embroiled in rumors of mass firings, the revocation of \$11 billion in public health funding for cities and counties, a tepid response to a measles outbreak, and controversial remarks about vaccines from its new leader.

Still, Kennedy said a "painful period" lies ahead for HHS, which is responsible for monitoring infectious diseases, inspecting foods and hospitals, and overseeing health insurance programs for nearly half the country.

Overall, the department will downsize to 62,000 positions, losing nearly a quarter of its staff — 10,000 jobs through layoffs and another 10,000 workers who took early retirement and voluntary separation offers encouraged by President Donald Trump's administration.

The staffing cuts were first reported by The Wall Street Journal.

Public health experts, doctors, current and former HHS workers and congressional Democrats quickly panned Kennedy's plans, warning they could have untold consequences for millions of people.

"These staff cuts endanger public health and food safety," said Brian Ronholm, director of food policy at Consumer Reports, in a statement. "They raise serious concerns that the administration's pledge to make Americans healthy again could become nothing more than an empty promise."

But Kennedy, in announcing the restructuring, blasted HHS for failing to improve Americans' lifespans and not doing enough to drive down chronic disease and cancer rates.

"All of that money," Kennedy said of the department's \$1.7 trillion yearly budget, "has failed to improve the health of Americans."

Cancer death rates have dropped 34% over the past two decades, translating to 4.5 million deaths avoided, according to the American Cancer Society. That's largely due to smoking cessation, the development of better treatments — many funded by the National Institutes of Health, including groundbreaking immunotherapy — and earlier detection.

The reorganization plan also underscores Kennedy's push to take more control of the public health agencies — the NIH, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — which have traditionally operated with a level of autonomy from the health secretary. Under the plan, external communications, procurement, information technology and human resources will be centralized under HHS.

FDA and CDC face the deepest cuts

Federal health workers — stationed across the country at agencies including at the NIH and FDA, both in Maryland — described shock, fear and anxiety rippling through their offices Thursday. Workers were not given advance notice of the cuts, several told The Associated Press, and many remained uncertain about

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whether their jobs were on the chopping block.

"It's incredibly difficult and frustrating and upsetting to not really know where we stand while we're trying to keep doing the work," said an FDA staffer who spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear of retaliation. "We're being villainized and handicapped and have this guillotine just hanging over our necks."

HHS on Thursday provided a breakdown of some of the cuts.

___ 3,500 jobs at the FDA, which inspects and sets safety standards for medications, medical devices and foods.

___ 2,400 jobs at the CDC, which monitors for infectious disease outbreaks and works with public health agencies nationwide.

___ 1,200 jobs at the NIH, the world's leading public health research arm.

___ 300 jobs at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which oversees the Affordable Care Act marketplace, Medicare and Medicaid.

HHS said it anticipates the changes will save \$1.8 billion per year but didn't give a breakdown or other details.

The cuts and consolidation go far deeper than anyone expected, an NIH employee said.

"We're all pretty devastated," said the staff member, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation. "We don't know what this means for public health."

Union leaders for CDC workers in Atlanta said they received notice from HHS on Thursday morning that reductions will focus on administrative positions including human resources, finance, procurement and information technology.

At CMS, where cuts focus on workers who troubleshoot problems that arise for Medicare beneficiaries and Affordable Care Act enrollees, the result will be the "lowest customer service standards" for thousands of cases, said Jeffrey Grant, a former deputy director at the agency who resigned last month.

Kennedy plans to shutter some agencies, even those created by Congress

Beyond losing workers, Kennedy said he will shut down entire agencies, some of which were established by Congress decades ago. Several will be folded into a new Administration for a Healthy America, he said.

Those include the Health Resources and Services Administration, which oversees and provides funding for hundreds of community health centers around the country, as well as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, which funds clinics and oversees the national 988 hotline. Both agencies pump billions of dollars into on-the-ground work in local communities.

SAMHSA was created by Congress in 1992, so closing it is illegal and raises questions about Kennedy's commitment to treating addiction and mental health, said Keith Humphreys, a Stanford University addiction researcher.

"Burying the agency in an administrative blob with no clear purpose is not the way to highlight the problem or coordinate a response," Humphreys said.

The Administration for Healthy America will focus on maternal and child health, environmental health and HIV/AIDS work, HHS said.

The Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response, created by a law signed by then-Republican President George W. Bush and responsible for maintaining the national stockpile that was quickly drained during the COVID-19 pandemic, will also be eliminated and moved into the CDC.

Republican Sen. Mike Rounds of South Dakota said the ramifications of Kennedy's plans for HHS are unclear.

"We'll just wait and see what it is, and then we'll go back and try to fix if there is something broken," Rounds said. "That's the approach we've taken so far."

But Democratic Sen. Patty Murray of Washington warned that the fallout is clear.

"It does not take a genius to understand that pushing out 20,000 workers at our preeminent health agencies won't make Americans healthier," Murray said in a statement. "It'll just mean fewer health services for our communities, more opportunities for disease to spread, and longer waits for lifesaving treatments and cures."

Alleged leader of MS-13 street gang on the East Coast is arrested in Virginia

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

MANASSAS, Va. (AP) — The alleged leader of the violent MS-13 street gang on the East Coast has been arrested in Virginia, U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi announced Thursday.

Bondi lauded the the early morning arrest of the 24-year-old man from El Salvador, who was described as one of MS-13's top three leaders in the United States, as a major victory in the Trump administration's effort to crack down on a gang known for brutal violence and extortion.

Henry Josue Villatoro Santos was taken into custody in northern Virginia on an outstanding administrative immigration warrant, according to court papers, and was charged with illegal gun possession after agents found several firearms during the search of his home. Bondi said he was living in the U.S. illegally.

There was no attorney listed for him in the court docket. Telephone numbers for relatives could not immediately be found in public records.

The administration promoted the arrest as part of its effort to fulfill campaign promises to quash illegal immigration and eliminate gangs. MS-13 gang, or Mara Salvatrucha, was one of eight Latin American criminal organizations declared foreign terrorist organizations by the Trump administration last month.

"We want to make our streets safer," Bondi told reporters. "We want to make our schools safer. We want to make your neighborhoods safer. This guy was living in a neighborhood right around you, no longer."

At the White House, press secretary Karoline Leavitt, citing the arrest, called it "a good day for our country."

In the past decade, the U.S. Justice Department has intensified its focus on MS-13, which originated as a neighborhood street gang in Los Angeles, but grew into a transnational gang based in El Salvador. It has members in Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico and thousands of members across the U.S. with numerous branches, or "cliques."

The 2016 killings of two high school girls, who were hacked and beaten to death as they walked through their neighborhood on New York's Long Island, focused national attention on the gang. Nisa Mickens, 15, and Kayla Cuevas, 16, friends and classmates at Brentwood High School, were killed with a machete and a baseball bat by a group of young men and teenage boys who had stalked them from a car. More killings followed in the coming months.

President Donald Trump has blamed the violence and gang growth on lax immigration policies. In his first term as president, Trump promised an all-out fight against MS-13, saying he would "dismantle, decimate and eradicate" the gang.

Leavitt is one of three Trump administration officials who face a lawsuit from The Associated Press on First and Fifth Amendment grounds. The AP says the three are punishing the news agency for editorial decisions they oppose. The White House says the AP is not following an executive order to refer to the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America.

Opening day is here: Juan Soto debuts, Paul Skenes vs Sandy Alcántara, and more

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Juan Soto, Blake Snell and Clay Holmes debut for new teams, Paul Skenes makes his first opening-day start at age 22 and Sandy Alcántara returns from Tommy John surgery.

A week after the defending champion Los Angeles Dodgers swept an opening two-game series over the Chicago Cubs in Tokyo, 26 other teams get underway Thursday on opening day in the U.S. and Canada.

One day later the Rays and Rockies become the final clubs to take the field, given extra time while Tampa Bay moved into the New York Yankees' Steinbrenner Field, its temporary home this season after Hurricane Milton destroyed Tropicana Field's roof.

With Oakland stripped from its name, the cityless Athletics start the first of at least three years at a

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makeshift minor league home in Sacramento when they host the Cubs on Monday. But first, the A's start at Seattle with Luis Severino on the mound after he agreed to a team-record \$67 million, three-year contract.

Across the majors, Miami's Clayton McCullough makes his major league managing debut and Cincinnati's Terry Francona and Will Venable of the Chicago White Sox start tenures with new teams.

Starting pitchers feature a Zack, Zach and Zac.

Banged up Yankees open at home after AL pennant

Action begins in the Bronx when Carlos Rodón makes his first opening day start for the defending AL champion New York Yankees, who are without three-fifths of their starting rotation following injuries to Gerrit Cole, Luis Gil and Clarke Schmidt. In addition, Giancarlo Stanton and DJ LeMahieu are hurt.

Freddy Peralta pitches for Milwaukee, which could see former closer Devin Williams for the first time since he buckled in the ninth inning of NL Wild Card Series Game 3, when he allowed a go-ahead, three-run homer to the Mets' Pete Alonso.

\$765 million reasons to pay attention

Soto signed a record \$765 million, 15-year contract to leave the Yankees and join the Mets, who totaled \$1.36 billion in payroll and luxury tax over four years under owner Steve Cohen but remain without a title since 1986.

New York is 41-22 in openers, at .651 the best winning percentage of any franchise. After losing their first eight, the Mets have won 41 of their last 55.

Holmes left the Yankees for a \$38 million, three-year deal with the Mets and will make his first start since 2018 with Pittsburgh. Framber Valdez will be on the mound for the Astros.

Raising the flag

After winning their second title in a five-year span and eighth overall, the Dodgers lift the World Series flag above Chavez Ravine before their home opener against Detroit.

Snell, a 2018 and '23 Cy Young Award winner, joined Los Angeles for a \$182 million, five-year contract that was part of a spending spree in which the Dodgers committed \$458.5 million to nine players. AL Cy Young winner Tarik Skubal starts for the Tigers, who won 15 of their final 20 games last season, then swept Houston in a Wild Card Series and lost to Cleveland in a five-game Division Series.

First of many?

Skenes, the NL Rookie of the Year, will be at 22 years, 302 days when he takes the mound at Miami, the youngest opening day starting pitcher since the Marlins' José Fernández at 21-243 in 2014.

Alcantara makes his first appearance for Miami since Sept. 3, 2023. The 2022 NL Cy Young winner had Tommy John surgery that Oct. 6. Clayton McCullough makes his debut as Marlins manager after replacing Skip Schumaker.

Sale starts opener for Braves

NL Cy Young winner Chris Sale starts his sixth opener, but first for Atlanta after three for the White Sox and two for Boston. With Yu Darvish sidelined by elbow inflammation, Michael King start for the Padres — he pitched seven scoreless innings against the Braves with 12 strikeouts in last year's Wild Card Series opener.

New faces for the Red Sox

Garrett Crochet starts for Boston at Texas following his offseason acquisition from the White Sox, who started the left-hander in the opener of what turned into a record 121-loss season last year. Alex Bregman takes over at third base after agreeing to a \$120 million, three-year contract, while Rafael Devers moves to designated hitter and 22-year-old Kristian Campbell appeared set to start at second base in his major league debut.

Nathan Eovaldi becomes the first pitcher to make consecutive opening day starts for Texas since Kevin Millwood from 2006-09.

Gallen starts for Diamondbacks against Cubs

Zac Gallen was picked over Corbin Burnes to start for Arizona against the Cubs, making his third straight opening day start. Justin Steele makes his second start of the season for Chicago after allowing five runs over four innings in the second game loss to the Dodgers last week.

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On the road, before heading to temporary home

Before starting their Sacramento tenancy on Monday against the Cubs, the vagabond Athletics open at Seattle with Severino, the third straight pitcher to make his A's debut by starting opening day after Kyle Muller and Alex Wood.

Coming off his first All-Star selection, Logan Gilbert starts his first Seattle opener. Dan Wilson begins his first full season as Mariners manager after replacing Scott Servais last August.

Blue Jays seek sixth straight opening day win

José Berríos starts his fifth opener and joins Jimmy Key, Dave Stieb and Roy Halladay as the only pitchers to start three for Toronto, who have the longest opening day winning streak in the big leagues. Outfielder Anthony Santander debuts for the Blue Jays.

Zach Eflin, acquired from the Rays last summer, will be on the mound for the Orioles and will become the fourth pitcher since 1900 to start consecutive openers against the same opponent for different teams, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. The others were Sad Sam Jones, Wes Ferrell and Madison Bumgarner.

Kikuchi becomes record third Japanese pitcher to start 2025 opener

Making his Los Angeles Angels debut, Kikuchi follows opening starts in Japan last week by the Dodgers' Yoshinobu Yamamoto and the Cubs' Shota Imanaga.

Sean Burke, a 25-year-old right-hander who made his first three big league starts last September, becomes the sixth pitcher in 70 years to start an opener with three or fewer big league starts, according to Elias, after Crochet, Tanner Scheppers, David Nied, Al Holland and Fernando Valenzuela.

Wheeler starts second straight Phillies opener

Zack Wheeler at 34 becomes the oldest Philadelphia pitcher to make consecutive opening day starts since Halladay pitched his third straight in 2012. MacKenzie Gore at 26 will be the Nationals' youngest opening day starter since Stephen Strasburg in 2014.

Ragans starts second straight opener for Royals

Cole Ragans at 27 will be the youngest Kansas City pitcher to start two openers in a row since 27-year-old Jeff Suppan pitched his third straight in 2002. In an AL Central matchup, Tanner Bibee was scratched as the starter for Cleveland due to a stomach flu and replaced by Ben Lively.

Francona back in dugout with Reds

Francona starts his 24th season as a big league manager at age 65 after taking a season off and regaining his health following 11 seasons with Cleveland. Hunter Greene starts for the Reds, who have opened exclusively with right-handers since 1999.

Shortstop Willy Adames debuts for the Giants after signing a \$182 million, seven-year contract for a team run by former star catcher Buster Posey.

López starts third straight opener for Twins

Pablo López becomes the first Minnesota pitcher to start three openers in a row since Brad Radke's seven from 1999-2005. Sonny Gray starts his fourth opener and first for St. Louis after outings for Oakland and Cincinnati. The Cardinals open their last season under president of baseball operations John Mozeliak, who has been in charge since October 2007 and will be replaced next fall by Chaim Bloom.

Eyes on batters

In the third season of restrictions on defensive shifts and larger bases, focus will be on offense.

Last year's final batting average of .2433 was higher in the post-1900 era than only .237 in 1968, .239 in 1908, .242 in 1967 and .2427 in 2022.

Robot umpires on the horizon

This could be the last opening day without robot umpires looking over the men calling balls and strikes. A spring training test of the Automated Ball-Strike System received a mostly positive initial reception and could lead to regular-season use in 2026.

Prosecutor asks for 18-month suspended sentence for Gérard Depardieu if convicted of sexual assault

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Paris' public prosecutor on Thursday requested that French actor Gérard Depardieu be found guilty and given a 18-month suspended prison sentence on the last day of a trial over accusations that he sexually assaulted two women who were working on a film with him.

The actor, 76, is accused of having groped a 54-year-old set dresser and a 34-year-old assistant during filming in 2021 of the movie "Les Volets Verts" ("The Green Shutters"). He denied the accusations.

"You're going to declare Gérard Depardieu guilty of these sexual assaults," the prosecutor told the court. He also requested a fine of 20,000 euros (\$21,580). The prosecutor denounced Depardieu's "total denial and failure to question himself." The actor showed no apparent reaction.

The maximum sentence for the charges is up to five years in prison and a fine of 75,000 euros (\$81,000) if convicted. The verdict, decided by a panel of judges, will be rendered on May 13.

Depardieu's long and storied career has turned the four-day trial into a post- #MeToo test of the willingness of France and its movie industry to confront sexual violence and hold influential men accountable.

Alleged misconduct for decades

Earlier on Thursday, the plaintiffs' lawyers called Depardieu a sexual predator and a "misogynist" in their final plea.

The set dresser's lawyer, Carine Durrieu Diebolt, said that he committed misconduct for decades towards "little people" in the cinema world.

"Maybe you think he's a great actor and you love his films," she said. "Depardieu is also a sexual predator."

His status as a world-renowned actor made him both an artistic and an economic power in the film industry, in contrast with the plaintiffs, who risked being blacklisted if they spoke up, Durrieu Diebolt said, denouncing what she called a "system of impunity."

"Depardieu, when he's touching women's bodies, he's exercising his power over them," she said.

On Tuesday, Depardieu acknowledged that he had used vulgar and sexualized language with the set dresser. He said he grabbed her hips during an argument, but denied that his behavior was sexual.

Plaintiff's lawyer describes a misogynist

The lawyer for the other plaintiff started her plea with a minutes-long list of obscene words and other vulgar expressions rarely heard in a courtroom, saying: "That's how Gerard Depardieu behaves on a film set, that the atmosphere he's imposing around him."

"No, you can't separate the man from the artist," said the lawyer, Claude Vincent. "He is Gérard Depardieu, a misogynist amid misogynists."

The plaintiff, an assistant, said that Depardieu groped her buttocks and her breasts during three separate incidents on the film set.

The Associated Press doesn't identify by name people who say they were sexually assaulted unless they consent to be named. Neither woman has done so in this case.

Vincent noted that Depardieu defended director Roman Polanski, accused in the still-unresolved Los Angeles criminal sexual assault case that prompted him to flee to Europe in 1978. Speaking Wednesday about his career and life, Depardieu mentioned Polanski as being "persecuted" for 50 years.

"Some would say I'm from the old world. Certainly," he said.

Depardieu says he's "not like that"

Three other women — a journalist, a former costume designer and a comedian — also testified Wednesday in court that they were sexually assaulted by Depardieu in 2007, 2014 and 2015. Those cases are covered by the status of limitations.

Depardieu has rejected the accusations since the beginning of the trial Monday, saying he's "not like that."

He is being tried by a panel of three judges, not a jury, which is normal for such cases. The judges don't issue their verdict right away, but generally deliberate for weeks or months.

Depardieu may have to face other legal proceedings soon.
In 2018, actor Charlotte Arnould accused him of raping her at his home. That case is still active, and in August 2024 prosecutors requested that it go to trial.

U.S. economy grew 2.4% in the 4th quarter after upgrade in final growth estimate

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. economy expanded at a healthy annual 2.4% pace the final three months of 2024, supported by a year-end surge in consumer spending, the government said Thursday in a slight upgrade of its previous estimate of fourth-quarter growth.

But it's unclear whether the United States can sustain that growth as President Donald Trump wages trade wars, purges the federal workforce and promises mass deportations of immigrants working in the country illegally.

Growth in gross domestic product — the nation's output of goods and services — decelerated from a 3.1% pace in July-September 2024, the Commerce Department said.

For all of 2024, the economy — the world's biggest — grew 2.8%, down a tick from 2.9% in 2023.

Consumer spending rose at a 4% pace, up from 3.7% in third-quarter 2023. But business investment fell, led by an 8.7% drop in investment in equipment.

A drop in business inventories shaved 0.84 percentage points off fourth-quarter GDP growth.

A category within the GDP data that measures the economy's underlying strength rose at a healthy 2.9% annual rate in the fourth quarter, slipping from the government's previous estimate of 3.2% and from 3.4% in the third quarter. This category includes consumer spending and private investment but excludes volatile items like exports, inventories and government spending.

Wednesday's report showed continued inflationary pressure at the end of 2024. The Federal Reserve's favored inflation gauge — the personal consumption expenditures, or PCE, price index — rose at an annual rate of 2.4%, up from 1.5% in the third quarter and above the Federal Reserve's 2% target. Excluding volatile food and energy prices, so-called core PC inflation registered 2.6%, compared to 2.2% in the third quarter.

Thursday's report was the government's third and final look at fourth-quarter GDP.

The outlook is cloudier. Trump's decision to slap taxes on a range of imports — including a 25% tax on foreign autos announced Wednesday — could push up inflation and disrupt investment, hurting growth.

The fourth-quarter showed the U.S. economy "before the enormous surge in policy uncertainty, particularly trade, took hold and the Trump administration imposed additional tariffs," wrote Ryan Sweet, chief U.S. economist at Oxford Economics. "The combination of policy uncertainty, tariffs, and tightening financial market conditions are weighing on growth early this year."

U.S. consumer confidence is sliding sharply over anxiety about both tariffs and inflation, and major retailers are lowering their expectations for the year, saying that customers are already pulling back on spending.

French prosecutors seek 7-year sentence for Sarkozy in Libya campaign financing trial

PARIS (AP) — French prosecutors on Thursday requested a seven-year prison sentence and a 300,000-euro (around \$325,000) fine for former President Nicolas Sarkozy, in connection with allegations that his 2007 presidential campaign was illegally financed by former Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi's government.

The National Financial Prosecutor's Office, known by its French acronym PNF, also called for a five-year ban on Sarkozy's civic, civil and family rights — a measure that would bar him from holding elected office or serving in any public judicial role.

The case, which opened in January and is expected to conclude on April 10, is considered the most

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serious of the multiple legal scandals that have clouded Sarkozy's post-presidency.

The 70-year-old Sarkozy, who led France from 2007 to 2012, faces charges of passive corruption, illegal campaign financing, concealment of embezzlement of public funds and criminal association. He has denied any wrongdoing.

The accusations trace back to 2011, when a Libyan news agency and Gadhafi himself said that the Libyan state had secretly funneled millions of euros into Sarkozy's 2007 campaign.

In 2012, the French investigative outlet Mediapart published what it said was a Libyan intelligence memo referencing a 50 million-euro funding agreement. Sarkozy denounced the document as a forgery and sued for defamation.

French magistrates later said that the memo appeared to be authentic, though no conclusive evidence of a completed transaction has been presented.

Investigators also looked into a series of trips by Sarkozy's associates to Libya between 2005 and 2007.

In 2016, Franco-Lebanese businessman Ziad Takieddine told Mediapart that he had delivered suitcases filled with cash from Tripoli to the French Interior Ministry under Sarkozy. He later retracted his statement. That reversal is now the focus of a separate investigation into possible witness tampering.

Sarkozy and his wife, Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, have both been placed under preliminary investigation in that case.

Sarkozy's former ministers Claude Guéant, Brice Hortefeux, and Éric Woerth are also on trial, along with eight other defendants. But prosecutors have made clear the central figure is the former president himself — accused of knowingly benefiting from a "corruption pact" with a foreign dictatorship while campaigning to lead the French republic.

While Sarkozy has already been convicted in two other criminal cases, the Libya affair is widely seen as the most politically explosive — and the one most likely to shape his legacy.

In December 2024, France's highest court upheld his conviction for corruption and influence peddling, sentencing him to one year of house arrest with an electronic bracelet. That case stemmed from tapped phone calls uncovered during the Libya investigation. In a separate ruling in February 2024, a Paris appeals court found him guilty of illegal campaign financing in his failed 2012 reelection bid.

Sarkozy has dismissed the Libya allegations as politically motivated and rooted in forged evidence. But if convicted, he would become the first former French president found guilty of accepting illegal foreign funds to win office.

A verdict is expected later this year.

At least 6 dead after submarine carrying tourists on a reef tour in Red Sea sinks off Egypt

By SAMY MAGDY and FATMA KHALED Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — A recreational submarine taking 45 tourists on an underwater cruise of coral reefs in the Red Sea sank off the Egyptian resort town of Hurghada on Thursday, leaving six Russians dead, the provincial governor said. The remaining tourists, more than two dozen of whom were injured, were rescued, he said.

The cause of the sinking was not immediately known. The Russian consulate said it took place about 1,000 meters (0.6 miles) offshore.

The submarine was carrying 45 tourists and five Egyptian crewmembers when it sank, Red Sea governor Maj. Gen. Amr Hanafi, said in a statement, adding that rescue teams were quickly sent.

He said all six dead were Russians, and that 29 of the 39 tourists rescued were injured and taken to hospitals. No one was still missing from the vessel, he said.

Hurghada is a major destination for divers, snorkelers and other tourists drawn by the Red Sea's extensive coral reefs.

The submarine, named "Sindbad," runs tours lasting about 40 minutes underwater, cruising at about 20-25 meters (65-80 feet) underwater with panoramic windows on the bottom to give views of the marine

life, according to the website of the company that the Russian consulate identified as running the vessel. The company did not respond to phone calls seeking comment.

Russia's Tass news agency earlier said the Russian dead included at least two children, citing the country's consul in Hurghada. The consulate had said all 45 tourists on board were Russian, but the Egyptian governor said they also included Indian, Norwegian and Swedish citizens.

Footage posted by the governor's office showed Hanafy meeting survivors at the hospital, including two Egyptian crewmembers. One Russian tourist had a small bandage on his head. A family with two young daughters smiled and told him they were OK. An Indian man asked Hanafy to see his daughter, who remains in critical condition, doctors can be heard explaining.

In November, a tourist yacht sank in the Red Sea after warnings of rough waters, Egyptian officials said. At least four people drowned, while 33 were rescued.

Tourism is an important sector of Egypt's economy but many tourist companies have stopped or limited traveling on the Red Sea due to the dangers from conflicts in the region.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are still targets of hatred 5 years after pandemic surge

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

Up until 2020, Anna Wong had gone her entire adulthood in Los Angeles without ever facing blatantly racist abuse for being Asian. After COVID-19 hit, she was accosted twice in six months.

The first time, she was browsing an aisle in Bed Bath & Beyond when a white, 30-something woman suddenly yelled: "Six feet away from me, you Chinese witch!" A shaken Wong left the store, the woman still yelling after her. The second time, Wong was walking her dog when a passenger in a car — a young Hispanic man — screamed at her "Thanks for ruining the world," followed by an ethnic slur.

"The first, second year of the pandemic, I do distinctly remember thinking ... I was very nervous to go out," said Wong, who did not report the incidents to police. "Am I going to draw attention to the fact that I'm Asian?"

It seemed unfathomable she was facing such anti-Asian vitriol nearly a century after her aunt, pioneering movie star Anna May Wong, dealt with constant racial discrimination.

It was five years ago this month that pandemic-fueled abuse of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders became so frequent — reports spiked 35% from March 2020 to the end of 2021 — that a reporting center was formed. Stop AAPI Hate legitimized fears of a concurrent pandemic of xenophobia. The group's data prompted national legislative action, including the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act, and galvanized advocacy among young people within the Asian American community.

New concerns five years on

Five years later, Stop AAPI Hate is receiving fewer incident reports yearly but they're still happening by the hundreds and are likely an undercount. Now, those still fighting anti-Asian hate are worried it will only intensify in a political climate of immigration crackdowns, English-only mandates and bans on DEI initiatives.

During President Donald Trump's first term, many partially blamed him for framing COVID-19 with racist language. Trump said his remarks were "not racist at all." Now, there is concern not just about hate but erasure of Asian American and Pacific Islander history and culture. For example, this month the Pentagon mistakenly took down web pages honoring Japanese American servicemen.

"What's the opposite of diversity? It's segregation or re-segregation," Manjusha Kulkarni, Stop AAPI Hate co-founder, said, referring to Trump's policies so far. "They want to put us — people of color, women, LG-BTQ — sort of back in our 'place,' which means not with access to jobs or housing or ability to celebrate our holidays."

The genesis of Stop AAPI

Kulkarni, executive director of the AAPI Equity Alliance, Cynthia Choi of Chinese for Affirmative Action, and San Francisco State University professor Russell Jeung came together in 2020 after a Los Angeles teen

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of Asian descent was assaulted at school. They solicited accounts of hate acts from victims, even those not legally hate crimes. They received a barrage.

"The first thing we need to know and understand is how big of a problem is this," Kulkarni said, adding that she will be eternally grateful that people responded. "That helped us to know what was going on."

Besides federal hate crimes legislation, Stop AAPI Hate's data led to the passing of three California bills. These included expanding civil rights protection in public spaces and studying hate-driven harassment on public transit. They've also attempted social media campaigns like "Spread AAPI Love," the opposite of their moniker.

Even though the pandemic has abated, their data shows racism prevails. From March 2020 to the end of 2023, Stop AAPI Hate collected over 12,000 reports though they believe it's likely an undercount. Over 700 occurred in 2023. Figures for 2024 will be released in May.

Also in 2023, an AAPI Data and Associated Press-NORC poll found a third of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders say they have experienced an act of abuse based on their race or ethnicity in the last year.

An FBI analysis from that year found out of 7,049 reported hate crime offenses motivated by race, ethnicity or ancestry, 6.6% involved anti-Asian bias. Kash Patel, the first person of color and Asian American to be agency director, talked about being subjected to racism during his confirmation hearing.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders activated

There was a groundswell of Asian American activism after 2020, according to Stop AAPI Hate. Their 2023 report found nearly 3 in 4 Asian American and Pacific Islander adults participated in activities to reduce or resist racism.

William Diep, who was 16 in 2020, was disturbed by attacks he heard about in New York City. So he started a campaign, "Virus: Racism." He virtually gathered testimonies from young people about anti-Asian encounters. The project deeply affected him.

"I learned to stick up for people," said Diep, now a senior at Columbia University.

He wonders how advocates can navigate the current political climate and if government resources such as translations or race-based census research will be eliminated.

"I'm scared that there's no one to protect Asian Americans," Diep said. "I think Asian Americans protect each other, but I question the infrastructure that exists to protect our rights and our heritage."

Stop AAPI Hate does rely on some federal funding. Ideally, neither the government nor any other outside force will be able to dictate or hamper the organization's work.

"We hope not. I mean, we're fighting as hard as we can," Kulkarni said.

Now, the coalition's focus has expanded to include educating people about issues like birthright citizenship, cultural school curriculum and immigrants' rights. Some Asian legal U.S. residents say they are being targeted for deportation.

"I hope and strongly believe that our communities are stronger, that we're more equipped to handle the challenges of today, which are even more significant than they were in 2020," Kulkarni said. "We were built for this and our values remain the same."

NATO clarifies comments that four missing US soldiers had died during training in Lithuania

By VANESSA GERA and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — NATO on Wednesday clarified comments that Secretary-General Mark Rutte made earlier in the day, when he suggested that four U.S. soldiers who went missing while training in Lithuania had died, even though the U.S. Army said their fate was not yet confirmed.

"The search is ongoing," NATO said in a statement posted on X. "We regret any confusion about remarks @SecGenNATO delivered on this today. He was referring to emerging news reports & was not confirming the fate of the missing, which is still unknown."

The U.S. Army said the Hercules armored vehicle the four U.S. soldiers were in during a training exercise had been found submerged in a body of water. It said recovery efforts were underway by U.S. Army and

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Lithuanian Armed Forces and civilian agencies.

The soldiers, all from 1st Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, were conducting tactical training when they went missing.

Asked Wednesday evening by reporters if he had been briefed about the missing soldiers, President Donald Trump said, "No, I haven't."

During a trip to Warsaw, Rutte told reporters that he had received word of the deaths of the four soldiers while he was delivering a lecture, and that his thoughts were with their families and with the United States.

"This is still early news so we do not know the details. This is really terrible news and our thoughts are with the families and loved ones," Rutte said in Warsaw.

Lithuanian public broadcaster LRT reported that the four U.S. soldiers and their vehicle were reported missing Tuesday afternoon during an exercise at the General Silvestras Žukauskas training ground in Pabradė, a town located less than 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the border with Belarus.

The Baltic countries of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are all NATO members and have often had chilly ties with Russia, a key ally of Belarus, since declaring independence from the Soviet Union in 1990.

Relations soured further over Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda has been one of the most outspoken supporters of Ukraine in its fight against Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces.

Macron says a proposed European force for Ukraine could 'respond' if attacked by Russia

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron said Wednesday that a proposed European armed force for possible deployment in Ukraine in tandem with an eventual peace deal could "respond" to a Russian attack if Moscow launched one.

Macron spoke after talks with Ukraine's president and ahead of a summit in Paris of some 30 nations on Thursday that will discuss the proposed force for Ukraine that Macron suggested could be deployed in "important towns" and elsewhere.

"If there was again a generalized aggression against Ukrainian soil, these armies would, in fact, be under attack and then it's our usual framework of engagement," Macron said. "Our soldiers, when they are engaged and deployed, are there to react and respond to the decisions of the commander in chief and, if they are in a conflict situation, to respond to it."

Macron, together with U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer, has been driving an effort to build a coalition of nations willing in one way or another to support the deployment of an armed force in Ukraine, with the aim of securing a lasting peace by dissuading Russia from attacking the country again.

Macron didn't specify what sort of response he envisaged in the eventuality of a Russian attack.

He said the proposed European forces wouldn't be stationed on the frontlines in Ukraine, "nor be engaged on the first day opposite Russian forces." They would "be forces that dissuade the Russians from attacking again. And by holding important towns, strategic bases, mark the clear support from several European governments and allies," he said.

"So we are not on the frontlines, we don't go to fight, but we are there to guarantee a lasting peace. It's a pacifist approach," he said. "The only ones who would, at that moment, trigger a conflict, a bellicose situation, would be the Russians if they decided again to launch an aggression."

Macron is expecting 31 delegations around the table Thursday morning at the presidential Elysee Palace. That's more than the French leader gathered for a first meeting in Paris in February — evidence that the coalition to help Ukraine, possibly with boots on the ground, is gathering steam, according to the presidential office.

Trump administration isn't keen

The big elephant in the room will be the country that's missing: the United States.

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has shown no public enthusiasm for the coalition's discus-

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sions about potentially sending troops into Ukraine after an eventual ceasefire to help make peace stick. Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, has dismissed the idea of a European deployment or even the need for it.

"It's a combination of a posture and a pose and a combination of also being simplistic," he said in an interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson.

That's not the view in Europe. The shared premise upon which the coalition is being built is that Russian President Vladimir Putin's actions in Ukraine — starting with the illegal seizure of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and culminating in the 2022 full-scale invasion that unleashed all-out war — shows that he cannot be trusted and that a European force could help dissuade another attack.

Ukraine's leader envisages multi-missioned force

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Macron both suggest that a foreign contingent in Ukraine could also provide military training, something allies already have been doing outside Ukraine, preparing more than 75,000 Ukrainian troops for battle against Russia's larger and expanding military and helping to make up for some of Ukraine's losses from more than three years of intense fighting.

"Primarily, any contingent consists of combat units, but they are above all intended to control the situation, monitor it, carry out joint training, and also to prevent any desire by Russia to return with renewed waves of aggression," Zelenskyy said at Wednesday's news conference with Macron.

European officials say that in any peace-deal scenario, Ukraine's first line of defense against any future Russian aggression would be Ukraine's own army. The 27-nation European Union is pressing ahead with a so-called steel "porcupine strategy" aimed at making Ukraine an even tougher nut for Russia to crack, by strengthening its armed forces and defense industry. Britain is also pledging continued military aid so Ukraine can keep fighting if peace talks fail or a ceasefire is broken.

Macron announced a new package of defense aid for Ukraine that he said was worth 2 billion euros (US\$ 2.15 billion) and will include light tanks, air defense and anti-tank missiles and other weaponry and support.

Boots on the ground

The basket of possible options that European military chiefs and planners have been looking at includes an array of scenarios they have been preparing for government leaders to consider and, ultimately, green light.

A possible option that France has been pushing would be a deployment by coalition members of a sizable force in central Ukraine, somewhere along the Dnieper River, away from frontlines, said a French official who spoke on condition of anonymity about the closed-door discussions.

The official said other possible options being examined are deploying a support force even further away from the fronts, in Ukraine's far west, or in a neighboring country.

British officials have said a force could consist of between 10,000 and 30,000 troops — which would be a considerable effort for nations that shrank their militaries after the Cold War but are now rearming.

Today in History: March 28 Three Mile Island nuclear plant accident

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, March 28, the 87th day of 2025. There are 278 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 28, 1979, America's worst commercial nuclear accident occurred with a partial meltdown inside the Unit 2 reactor at the Three Mile Island plant near Middletown, Pennsylvania.

Also on this date:

In 1898, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, ruled 6-2 that Wong, who was born in the United States to Chinese immigrants, was an American citizen. It was the first Supreme Court decision to rule on the citizenship status of a child born in the United States to noncitizen parents.

In 1935, the notorious Nazi propaganda film "Triumph des Willens" (Triumph of the Will), directed by Leni Riefenstahl, premiered in Berlin with Adolf Hitler present.

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In 1941, author Virginia Woolf, 59, drowned herself near her home in Lewes, East Sussex, England.

In 1969, the 34th president of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, died in Washington, D.C., at age 78.

In 2022, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed the Florida Parental Rights in Education Act (commonly referred to as the "Don't Say Gay" law), which includes the prohibition of classroom discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity in some grade levels in Florida schools.

In 2024, FTX cryptocurrency exchange founder Sam Bankman-Fried was sentenced to 25 years in prison after being convicted on fraud and conspiracy charges related to the collapse of the exchange.

Today's Birthdays: Author Mario Vargas Llosa is 89. Basketball Hall of Famer Rick Barry is 81. Actor Dianne Wiest is 79. Singer-actor Reba McEntire is 70. Olympic gymnastics gold medalist Bart Conner is 67. Rapper Salt (Salt-N-Pepa) is 59. Country musician Rodney Atkins is 56. Actor Vince Vaughn is 55. Sen. Ashley Moody, a Republican from Florida, is 50. Actor Julia Stiles is 44. Singer-actor Lady Gaga is 39. Stylist-TV personality Jonathan Van Ness is 38.