

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 1 of 74

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [4- Winter Storm Warning](#)
- [5- Groton City Council Agenda](#)
- [6- Updated BC Commission Agenda](#)
- [7- Weekly Vikings Roundup](#)
- [8- SD SearchLight: Governor proposes county sales tax option to reduce residential property taxes](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: Judge keeps South Dakota lawsuit against NCAA in state court](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: Legislature sustains veto of geographic signature requirement for constitutional amendment petitions](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: 17 states, including SD, want to end an abortion privacy rule. A federal judge is questioning HIPAA itself.](#)
- [14- SD SearchLight: Medicaid cuts could hurt older adults who rely on home care, nursing homes](#)
- [17- SD SearchLight: Federal judge pauses Noem's effort to strip protections for Venezuelans](#)
- [19- Weather Pages](#)
- [24- Daily Devotional](#)
- [25- Subscription Form](#)
- [26- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [27- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [28- News from the Associated Press](#)

Tuesday, April 1

Senior Menu: Hamburger gravy on rice, corn, peaches, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg Omelets

School Lunch: Hot dogs, chips.

Postponed until Thursday: NSU Indoor Track Meet, 3 p.m.

City Council meeting, 7 p.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid LWML, 1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 2

Senior Menu: Chicken cordon blue hotdish, Capri blend, vanilla pudding with oranges, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Cereal.

School Lunch: Chicken piccata, rice.

Groton Chamber meeting, City Hall, noon

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Sarah



Circle, 5 p.m.; Soup Supper, 6 p.m. (League is host); worship, 7 p.m.

Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation 3:45 p.m.; Supper, 6 p.m.; Lent Service, 7 p.m.

Thursday, April 3

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potato with gravy, carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Pancake on a stick.

School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, mashed potatoes.

State FFA Convention, SDSU

Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

Friday, April 4

Senior Menu: Lemon baked fish, parsley buttered potatoes mixed vegetables, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg bake.

School Lunch: Fish nuggets, tri taters.

State FFA Convention, SDSU

Groton Daily Independent
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Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 2 of 74

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.

Badger State Showdown

Wisconsin voters cast ballots today in a closely watched election to determine the ideological balance of the state's Supreme Court. The swing-state race has become a proxy for the national political mood, with more than \$75M in ad spending poured in—the most ever for a state-level judicial contest.

The court currently has a 4-3 left-leaning composition, with liberal Justice Ann Walsh Bradley retiring. Recent polls have Democratic candidate Susan Crawford with an eight-point lead over Republican Brad Schimel (though data has been limited). Crawford has outspent Schimel, though a number of influential figures have publicly supported the Trump-endorsed Schimel—including Elon Musk, who gave out two \$1M checks to voters during a Sunday rally.

Separately, Republicans look to defend two Florida House seats in special elections, with candidates vying to replace former Rep. Matt Gaetz (FL-1) and National Security Adviser Mike Waltz (FL-6). President Donald Trump won both districts by more than 30 points, though the contest to replace Waltz has become closer than expected.

French Embezzlement Ruling

Marine Le Pen, a leader of France's nationalist-populist National Rally party, was convicted yesterday of embezzling millions in European Union funds. A Paris court sentenced the 56-year-old to four years in prison—two years under house arrest and two years suspended—and imposed an approximately \$108K fine. She was also barred from holding public office for five years, effective immediately, likely disqualifying her from the 2027 presidential election.

The court found Le Pen and 24 other party officials misappropriated roughly \$4.8M in funds intended for EU parliamentary aides, instead diverting the money to fictitious assistants to pay party staff between 2004 and 2016, violating EU regulations. National Rally was fined more than \$2.1M for its role.

Le Pen, who was the runner-up in France's 2017 and 2022 presidential elections, plans to appeal the ruling, though a final decision before the next election is unlikely. Her political protégé, Jordan Bardella, is expected to replace Le Pen on the ballot in the 2027 election.

Alzheimer's Blood Test

Researchers have developed a blood test that diagnoses Alzheimer's disease and measures its progression with 92% accuracy. The breakthrough offers a potential tool to accurately diagnose the disease while tailoring treatments to an individual's specific disease stage.

Unlike existing blood tests that only aid in diagnosis, the new test can distinguish between early- and late-stage Alzheimer's and differentiate it from other causes of cognitive impairment. The test identifies levels of MTBR-tau243, a protein that indicates toxic tau accumulation in the brain, correlating with Alzheimer's severity. Researchers found patients with non-Alzheimer's cognitive impairment showed normal levels of the protein, while patients with mild cognitive symptoms from Alzheimer's showed elevated tau protein levels, and those in the dementia phase showed levels up to 200 times higher.

Alzheimer's affects nearly 7 million Americans. Accumulations of molecules known as amyloid beta plaques and misfolded tau proteins are believed to play a key role.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 3 of 74

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NCAA women's Final Four set as UCLA, South Carolina, Texas, and Connecticut advance from the Elite Eight; see updated bracket.

Kendrick Lamar live-action comedy film from the creators of "South Park" sets March 2026 release date. NFL adds United Arab Emirates to slate of new international markets as the league looks to play up to 10 international games in 2026.

NFL owners meeting this week to discuss potential for 18-game regular season.

Science & Technology

Amazon unveils AI agent that can take control of a web browser and perform simple tasks as well as a tool kit for developers to build personalized agents.

Engineers develop brain-computer interface that converts thoughts to speech in near real time; device may allow patients with severe paralysis to regain verbal communication.

Fecal transplants from elite athletes into mice improve insulin sensitivity and help muscles store more energy.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.6%, Dow +1.0%, Nasdaq -0.1%); Nasdaq, S&P 500 post worst quarters since 2022 as investors await new US tariffs to take effect tomorrow.

Conservative cable channel Newsmax shares surge over 700% in first trading day on NYSE.

Google DeepMind's drug discovery spin-off Isomorphic Labs raises \$600M.

Mortgage company Rocket to buy competitor Mr. Cooper Group in all-stock deal valued at \$9.4B; comes three weeks after Rocket bought Redfin.

CEO of fast-fashion brand Primark, Paul Marchant, resigns over allegations of improper behavior; Marchant had led the company since 2009.

Politics & World Affairs

Death toll from earthquake that struck Myanmar Friday surpasses 2,000, with more than 3,000 injured; at least 20 people dead in Bangkok, Thailand, which also felt the quake.

Trump administration says it is reviewing roughly \$9B in federal grants and contracts awarded to Harvard, claiming the school failed to address issues of antisemitism on campus; review comes after similar probe into Columbia.

Israeli military orders evacuation of Gaza's southern border city of Rafah as it seeks to reoccupy 25% of the enclave.

Three US Army soldiers found dead in Lithuania after their armored vehicle sank in a bog during training; search for fourth soldier continues.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 4 of 74

Winter Storm Warning

URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE
National Weather Service Aberdeen SD
325 AM CDT Tue Apr 1 2025

McPherson-Brown-Marshall-Roberts-Day-Grant-
Including the cities of Milbank, Eureka, Sisseton, Aberdeen, Britton, and Webster
325 AM CDT Tue Apr 1 2025

...WINTER STORM WARNING IN EFFECT FROM 7 AM THIS MORNING TO 7 PM CDT WEDNESDAY...

* WHAT...Heavy mixed precipitation expected. Total snow accumulations between 6 and 9 inches and ice accumulations up to one tenth of an inch. Lesser amounts of snow are expected across the southern half of Brown county, and the western half of Marshall and Day counties. Winds gusting as high as 40 mph.

* WHERE...Portions of north central and northeast South Dakota.

* WHEN...From 7 AM this morning to 7 PM CDT Wednesday.

* IMPACTS...Roads, and especially bridges and overpasses, will likely become slick and hazardous. Travel could be very difficult.

Areas of blowing snow could significantly reduce visibility. The hazardous conditions could impact the Tuesday morning and evening commutes.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

If you must travel, keep an extra flashlight, food, and water in your vehicle in case of an emergency. The latest road conditions can be obtained by calling 5 1 1.

Persons should consider delaying all travel. Motorists should use extreme caution if travel is absolutely necessary.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 5 of 74

Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

April 1, 2025 – 7:00pm
City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
3. Department Reports
4. Open Sealed Bids for 3-year Garbage Hauling Contract
5. Wastewater Funding – IMEG & NECOG
6. 2025 Spring City Wide Cleanup – April 28th to May 2nd, 2025
7. Open Sealed Bids for Exterior Painting of City Hall
8. Approval of Special Event Alcoholic Beverage License – Fireman's Fun Night on April 12, 2025
9. 2025-2026 Malt Beverage License Renewals:
MJ's Sinclair
Ken's Food Fair
Dollar General
10. Minutes
 - a. City Council Meeting from March 18, 2025
 - b. Board of Equalization Meeting from March 18, 2025
11. Bills
12. Announcement: City Offices Closed on April 18th and 21st, 2025 for Good Friday and Easter Monday
13. Reminder: Applications are Open for Summer Recreational Positions:
 - Girls' Softball Coaches (U8 & U14)
 - Day Baseball/Softball Coach
 - Swimming Pool Lifeguards
 - Baseball Groundskeepers
 - Baseball Gatekeepers
14. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
15. Hire Summer Recreational Employees
16. Adjournment

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 6 of 74

**BROWN COUNTY
BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA
REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY**

April 1, 2025, 8:45 A.M.

COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS, COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of the Agenda
3. Opportunity for Public Comment
4. Chris Hemen, Weed & Pest Supervisor
 - a. Award Chemical Bids
 - b. Approve & Authorize Chairman to sign Weed & Pest Grants:
 - i. WP-26-3 for Chemical, Seasonal Labor, Radio Ads, Booth in Brown County
 - ii. WP-C26-4 for Yellow Toadflax Biological Control
 - iii. WP-C26-5 for Yellow Toadflax Mapping & Spot Spraying Project
5. Second Reading/Possible Adoption on following Ordinances:
 - a. Ord. #290 – Rezone for Brown County Planning & Zoning
 - b. Ord. #291 – Rezone for North Western Energy
6. Gene Loeschke, Equalization Director
 - a. Annual Conference
7. Jon Lemke, Chief Deputy Sheriff & Keith Baker, Deputy Sheriff
 - a. Request for use of Opioid Funds
8. Approve & Authorize Chairman to sign Quote from Huff Construction to Revise Public Defender Office
9. Discuss Burn Ban
10. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes of March 25, 2025
 - b. Claims
 - c. HR Report
 - d. Lease Agreements
 - e. Claim Assignment
 - f. Abatement/Refund
 - g. Set Hearing Date & Authorize Publication for Liquor License Transfers
 - h. Approve Updated Mileage Reimbursement Rate
11. Other Business
12. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
13. Adjourn

Brown County Commission Meeting

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone.

<https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>

You can also dial in using your phone. United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3311](tel:+18722403311)

Access Code: 601-168-909 #

Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://meet.goto.com/install>

Public comment provides an opportunity for the public to address the county commission.

Presentations may not exceed 3 minutes.

Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes (or at the discretion of the board) - Public comment will be accepted virtually when the virtual attendance option is available.

Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at <https://www.brown.sd.us/node/454>

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 7 of 74

Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

The Minnesota Vikings underwent a significant change on the defensive side of the ball last offseason, and no move was bigger than the team letting Danielle Hunter walk in free agency. Hunter spent his first eight seasons in Minnesota, accumulating 87.5 sacks and making the Pro Bowl four times (which is especially impressive considering he only started one game in his first two seasons). Hunter, unfortunately, was more of a 4-3 defensive end, and when the Vikings switched to a 3-4 defense, they had to find players who better fit the scheme. And so, in an effort to replace Hunter, the Vikings signed two lesser-known players in free agency last year, Jonathan Greenard and Andrew Van Ginkel.

Jonathan Greenard was a third-round pick by the Houston Texans and played there for four seasons before coming to Minnesota. In his first year with the Vikings, Greenard racked up 12 sacks and made his first Pro Bowl. He was the 2024 week three defensive player of the week in the NFC and the defensive player of the month in November last year. He will be 28 when the season starts and should be a main piece of the Vikings' defense next season.

Andrew Van Ginkel was an under-the-radar acquisition last offseason when he signed with the Vikings. He was a fifth-round pick by the Miami Dolphins in 2019 and spent his first five seasons in the league there. He was coming off the best season of his career with six sacks in 2023. In 2024 with the Vikings, AVG had 11.5 sacks and made his first Pro Bowl. He was also named the Week 16 NFC Defensive Player of the Week.

Dallas Turner was a first-round pick last year, but he didn't see the field as much as most people anticipated. However, that's not his fault, since the Vikings had Greenard and AVG playing at Pro Bowl levels. Turner played in 16 games last season but didn't start any of them. However, he started seeing the field more as the season progressed, and that should carry over into 2024.

Besides Greenard, Avg, and Turner, the Vikings had Patrick Jones Jr., Gabriel Murphy, Bo Richter, and Jihad Ward get some playing time at outside linebacker last year. Patrick Jones Jr. was the most impressive of the group, and he turned a productive 2024 into a new contract with the Carolina Panthers this offseason. Gabriel Murphy and Bo Richter are still on the roster, while Jihad Ward is a free agent and waiting to sign with a new team soon.

At inside linebacker, the Vikings' 2024 starters were Blake Cashman and Ivan Pace Jr., and both will be back for the 2025 season. However, both players have injury concerns (Cashman started 14 games last season while Pace only started 10). To add some depth to the iLB position, the Vikings brought back a familiar face this offseason when they signed Eric Wilson. Also on the roster is Brian Asamoah, who will battle it out with Wilson for the primary backup this upcoming season. While Cashman and Pace are good players when they are on the field, I wouldn't be surprised to see the Vikings bring in more depth, either through free agency or the draft.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Governor proposes county sales tax option to reduce residential property taxes

Savings could be about \$900 annually on a \$325,000 home in some situations, Rhoden says

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 31, 2025 5:49 PM

PIERRE — South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden unveiled a proposal Monday that would give counties the option to implement a half-percent sales tax to fund property tax reductions for homeowners.

Rhoden said the plan could save hundreds of dollars annually for typical homeowners in some areas. Counties that opt-in to the plan would shift some of their residential property tax burden to consumers, he said, including tourists from elsewhere making purchases while they pass through.

"Realistically, it's a tax decrease for the citizens of the state," Rhoden said.

The plan would alter longstanding taxation policy that reserves sales tax revenue for the state and cities. The state imposes a 4.2% sales tax that's scheduled to increase to 4.5% in 2027, and cities may impose up to an additional 2% local rate, plus another 1% on hospitality-related items such as alcoholic beverages, restaurant meals, lodging accommodations and various types of events.

The governor said he'll send his proposal to a summer legislative committee studying property taxes, and he doesn't anticipate action on the plan until next winter's annual legislative session.

It's the second property tax relief idea Rhoden has proposed since becoming governor in January, after the departure of Kristi Noem to serve in President Donald Trump's Cabinet.

The first idea, already signed into law, is a multifaceted effort that includes a five-year, countywide 3% cap on growth in owner-occupied home assessments, plus other provisions such as an eligibility expansion for an assessment freeze program for elderly and disabled people.

As described by the governor, the new plan would allow county commissions to impose the sales tax. County citizens could refer the commission decision to local ballots, or petition the tax increase onto the ballot themselves.

Revenue from the sales tax would have to be used to offset the county's portion of property taxes on owner-occupied homes. Once that's fully achieved, any remaining revenue would have to be used to offset taxes for commercial and agricultural property. The sales tax would be limited to a five-year term,



South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden speaks to reporters during a press conference on March 31, 2025, at the state Capitol in Pierre. (Joshua Haiar/South

Dakota Searchlight)

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 9 of 74

with the possibility of renewal.

The plan would not affect school districts, which also receive property tax revenue.

The governor said that in Minnehaha and Pennington counties, the proposal would reduce annual property taxes by \$967 and \$917, respectively, on a home valued at \$325,000. Those are the two most-populated counties in the state, home to Sioux Falls and Rapid City.

Rhoden said counties that attract lots of tourists are also some of the counties most affected by property tax increases, in part due to growth from incoming residents willing to pay higher prices for the limited number of houses on the market. Thus, Rhoden said, those counties are particularly well-suited for his plan.

He said the lack of county-specific targeting was a problem with many of the property tax relief proposals that failed during the legislative session.

"They were proposing a statewide solution to a five-county problem," Rhoden said.

Asked whether the plan might place a greater burden on low-income residents who pay sales taxes but rent their homes and do not directly benefit from property tax reductions, Rhoden acknowledged the concern. But he said the ultimate decision would rest with local officials and voters.

"Every county has different circumstances," he said.

Rep. Mike Derby, R-Rapid City, who co-chairs the Legislature's main budget committee, said lawmakers are excited to see the governor put a proposal on the table.

"Around here in the Legislature, you have to start with an idea," Derby said. "And it's a lot easier to poke holes in an idea or try and fix it or make it better when you have a starting point. Governor Rhoden has done that."

The plan would result in the following estimated annual property tax savings on a \$325,000 home in cities within selected counties, according to the Governor's Office:

Minnehaha (Sioux Falls): \$967

Pennington (Rapid City): \$917

Custer (Custer): \$431

Hughes (Pierre): \$873

Lawrence (Spearfish): \$845

Lincoln (Tea): \$613

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.



South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley holds a news conference on Aug. 17, 2023, in Pierre. (Cour-

tesy of Dakota Scout)

Judge keeps South Dakota lawsuit against NCAA in state court

BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MARCH 31, 2025 4:29 PM

A South Dakota lawsuit against the NCAA will stay in state court rather than move to federal court, a judge has decided.

The NCAA is the governing body for the highest level of collegiate athletics. State Attorney General Marty Jackley and the South Dakota Board of Regents sued the NCAA last year, alleging that a proposed \$2.8 billion settlement meant to compensate college athletes would disproportionately burden smaller colleges, including schools like South Dakota State University and the University of South Dakota.

The NCAA filed a motion to move the case into federal court, saying the settlement's provisions and implications stretch

across state lines.

U.S. District Judge Karen Schreier signed an order Friday denying the NCAA's request to move the lawsuit out of state court. Jackley praised the decision in a Monday news release.

Dates for further state court proceedings in Brookings County have not been scheduled.

The proposed \$2.8 billion nationwide settlement for college athletes that motivated the lawsuit is an outgrowth of a 2021 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that the NCAA's previous practice of banning payments for student athletes violated antitrust laws. The settlement would require NCAA member schools to contribute to the settlement fund over the course of a decade.

Jackley said South Dakota wants a court order requiring an NCAA vote on how it intends to have schools pay for the settlement. That would allow South Dakota's and other states' universities to have a voice in the settlement that the NCAA has so far denied them, Jackley said.

Legislature sustains veto of geographic signature requirement for constitutional amendment petitions

BY: SETH TUPPER - MARCH 31, 2025 3:36 PM

Petitioners hoping to put state constitutional amendments on the ballot won't need signatures from each of South Dakota's legislative Senate districts.

After the governor vetoed a bill containing the requirement last week, the state Senate sustained the veto Monday at the Capitol in Pierre. The House voted earlier Monday to override the veto, but agreement from both chambers is required to overturn the governor's action.

Michael Rohl, R-Aberdeen, was among the senators who opposed the bill and supported the veto. While the bill's sponsors said it would force more inclusion of rural areas in the political process, Rohl said the bill could harm rural voters.

"It gives every district veto power," Rohl said. "That means that we, as a small community, don't have a voice unless we get Sioux Falls to agree."

The legislation, House Bill 1169, would have required constitutional amendment petitions to have signatures from registered voters in each of the 35 Senate districts spread across the state. Petitions would have needed a number of signatures from each district equal to 5% of the total votes cast for governor in that district during the last general election.

That would have been an addition to the existing requirement that petitions have a total number of signatures — from anywhere in the state — equal to at least 10% of the votes cast statewide for governor in the last general election.

House Bill 1169's main sponsor, Rep. Rebecca Reimer, R-Chamberlain, said Monday she's willing to work on the legislation's language and bring it back next year.

Reimer and other lawmakers who wanted to override the veto said voters are tired of the number of constitutional amendments showing up on their ballots, that the state constitution should be reserved for matters pertaining to the structure and powers of government and not for specific policies, and that the constitution should be harder to amend. Multiple lawmakers referenced an amendment last year, rejected by voters, that would have inserted abortion rights into the constitution.

Legislators considered numerous bills this year to restrict citizen lawmaking. Among those that passed into



State Sen. Michael Rohl, R-Aberdeen, speaks on the South Dakota Senate floor on March 3, 2025. (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

law were a bill to move the deadline for submitting petition signatures for citizen-initiated ballot measures from May to February, which will shorten the signature-gathering window by three months. Legislators also sent a measure to the 2026 ballot that will ask voters to raise the approval threshold for constitutional amendment ballot questions from a simple majority to 60%.

Monday was the last day of this year's legislative session, set aside to consider any remaining vetoes from Gov. Larry Rhoden. Earlier this month, legislators sustained Rhoden's only other veto, which would have offered additional child care tuition assistance to child care workers for their own children.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

17 states, including SD, want to end an abortion privacy rule. A federal judge is questioning HIPAA itself.

BY: KELCIE MOSELEY-MORRIS - MARCH 31, 2025 11:49 AM

The decades-old federal law protecting the privacy of individual health information is threatened by multiple lawsuits that seek to throw out a rule restricting disclosure of information in criminal investigations, including for those seeking legal abortion and other reproductive health care.

In one of the cases, the Texas federal judge who has been at the center of several anti-abortion court battles appears to question the constitutionality and legality of the health privacy act in its entirety.

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act — or HIPAA — established in 1996 to protect the privacy and security of patient health information, includes some exceptions under limited conditions, such as law enforcement investigations. But after the U.S. Supreme Court ended federal abortion rights in 2022 and more than a dozen states passed abortion bans, advocates worried that such records could be used by state officials

and law enforcement to investigate and prosecute patients seeking an abortion and those who help them.

Health officials under former President Joe Biden's administration enacted a HIPAA rule to keep health information private when the patient was in a state with legal access and the care was obtained legally. In order to release information related to this type of care, the entity subject to HIPAA rules must sign a document stating it is not released for one of the prohibited purposes.

"These cases may have been prompted by this newer rule, but they threaten more broadly the entire HIPAA system on which we all rely when accessing medical care," said Carrie Flaxman, senior legal adviser for Democracy Forward, a nonprofit legal organization.

Two lawsuits seek to rescind that most recent rule, while another brought by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton goes a step further, asking the court to remove the general rules established in 2000 about how much health information can be disclosed to law enforcement.

"The threats to the 2000 privacy rule would be a seismic shift that could erode patients' trust entirely in their providers and dissuade them from wanting to seek out health care and be transparent about their



Multiple Republican-led states have sued to rescind a federal rule keeping the records of those who sought legal reproductive care private, while a federal judge in Texas is questioning the constitutionality of the federal HIPAA law in its entirety.

(Photo by Wichayada Suwanachun/Getty Images)

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 12 of 74

symptoms,” said Ashley Emery, a senior policy analyst for the nonprofit Partnership for Women and Families. “A law enforcement officer could pressure a psychiatrist to share patient notes from therapy sessions without a subpoena, without a warrant, if the 2000 privacy rule is invalidated.”

The state of Missouri sued to rescind the Biden rule in January, and the state of Tennessee filed a similar action the same day that 14 other Republican attorneys general joined as plaintiffs: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota and West Virginia. All but three of those states either heavily restrict or outright ban abortion, and if the lawsuits are successful, records kept by doctors and pharmacists in other states could be subpoenaed.

All of the lawsuits are filed against the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which is now under Republican President Donald Trump and HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. The Trump administration has so far followed the direction of the conservative Heritage Foundation’s Project 2025, which calls for the most recent HIPAA rule to be rescinded.

Amarillo judge ordered briefing on HIPAA’s constitutionality and legality

Three cases are still in motion, including one with a physician as the plaintiff. Dr. Carmen Purl, the sole owner of Dr. Purl’s Fast Care Walk In Clinic in Dumas, Texas, sued HHS because she said the rule creates a conflict with the laws requiring her to report child abuse.

“I consider both a pregnant woman and her unborn child to be human persons, and both are entitled to medical care and deserve the protection of the law,” Purl said in court documents. “I believe ... that elective abortions harm patients’ health and public health.”

The location of Purl’s clinic puts her in the judicial district that has only one federal judge — U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, a Trump appointee. Most federal cases are assigned randomly to a group of judges in a district, but since Kacsmaryk is the only one, many advocates and attorneys have accused law firms like Alliance Defending Freedom, who is representing Purl in the case, of “judge shopping,” or finding a plaintiff in a certain area for the purpose of putting it in front of an ideologically friendly judge.

On Dec. 22, Kacsmaryk granted an injunction blocking enforcement of the rule against Purl while the case proceeds, and he is still considering whether to permanently block the law.

As part of the decision, Kacsmaryk also ordered the parties to submit briefs explaining how recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings that delegate more authority to Congress over administrative agencies “affect the constitutionality or legality of HIPAA and HHS’s authority to issue the 2024 rule.”

Kacsmaryk presided over a lawsuit in 2023 brought by a group of anti-abortion doctors seeking to revoke the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s approval of mifepristone, one of two drugs commonly used to terminate pregnancies in the first trimester and to treat miscarriages. Kacsmaryk ruled in favor of removing its approval, but the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously overruled him in 2024.

Purl added that she thinks gender-affirming care is harmful to children, never medically necessary and a matter of concern for public health, though she has never treated a child with gender dysphoria. In the process of providing routine medical care, she said she could learn that a child was being subjected to gender-affirming treatments or procedures that could constitute child abuse, and she would be obligated to report it.

Purl’s clinic has fewer than 20 employees, and she has been licensed to practice family medicine in Texas since 1986. In that time, she said she has treated many patients who have been victims of abuse and neglect, and estimates she has personally treated more than 100 pediatric patients who were victims of sexual abuse.

“I have treated hundreds of girls under the age of consent who were either pregnant or reported sexual activity. During my career, I have delivered babies from mothers as young as 12 years old,” Purl wrote.

Purl said she has responded to Child Protective Services investigations between 10 and 12 times, and she fears that providing full, unredacted patient records in response to an entity such as CPS would violate the 2024 rule and subject her and the clinic to civil and criminal penalties, which often means hefty fines.

In a response filed by HHS in December, before Trump’s second term began, the department said the

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 13 of 74

rule does nothing to prevent Purl from reporting suspected child abuse, and denied the other harms Purl said she would incur.

"Given the nature of her medical practice, Dr. Purl is highly unlikely to ever encounter a conflict between her obligations under state law and under the Rule," the department said in court documents.

AGs from ban states are testing newly enacted shield laws

The Texas case led by Paxton has been on hold since February, after the U.S. Department of Justice asked the court to delay scheduling until the new administration could determine how to proceed. U.S. District Judge James Wesley Hendrix, a Trump appointee, ordered the parties to file a status report by May 1.

Attorneys general in states with abortions bans have already attempted to prosecute providers in other states for prescribing abortion pills via telehealth and prosecute women who obtained an abortion in another state without the consent of a male partner. Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry signed an extradition warrant for a doctor in New York for prescribing and mailing abortion pills to residents of the state.

New York is one of 17 Democratic-led states that has a shield law to protect providers and patients from out-of-state legal actions for reproductive care and gender-affirming care, and the state government has so far refused to comply with Louisiana's law enforcement efforts.

The coalition of states that joined Tennessee's lawsuit claim the privacy rule harms their ability to investigate cases of waste, fraud and abuse, and "sharply limits state investigative authority."

Chad Kubis, spokesperson for Tennessee Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti, told States Newsroom via email that the office could not comment for this story because of the ongoing litigation.

"The final rule will hamper states' ability to gather information critical to policing serious misconduct like Medicaid billing fraud, child and elder abuse, and insurance-related malfeasance," the complaint says.

Attorneys at Democracy Forward have asked the courts to allow the clients they are representing to intervene as defendants in all four cases, arguing that the new administration is likely to either not defend the cases at all or defend them inadequately. They are representing the cities of Columbus, Ohio, and Madison, Wisconsin, as well as Doctors for America, an activist organization of physicians and medical students. None of the judges have ruled on their motions yet.

Partnership for Women and Families filed an amicus brief with 23 other advocacy organizations to support upholding the rule.

"We can't count on the Trump administration to defend this regulation, given its longstanding record of hostility toward reproductive health and rights," Emery said.

It's possible the new leadership at HHS will rescind the 2024 rule, Emery said, but the lawsuits alone are concerning enough because of the threat posed to privacy protections. That's part of the goal, said Emery and Flaxman — to present the threat and sow fear and intimidation in patients and providers. And the method of launching multiple lawsuits in various jurisdictions fits a pattern that has been observed in the fight for abortion rights, Emery said.

"Anti-abortion extremists' legal campaign against HIPAA's reproductive health privacy protections is designed to test out different legal venues and arguments to obtain the most favorable outcome possible," she said.

Doctor who has been investigated before says intimidation tactics have an effect

Indiana OB-GYN Dr. Caitlin Bernard knows what it's like to be the target of an investigation, and said she's still in court fighting new attempts to instill fear in doctors and patients.

Bernard was an abortion provider in Indiana before the state enacted its ban in August 2023. She reported in 2022 that she had provided a medication abortion to a 10-year-old rape victim who traveled to Indiana from Ohio when the state briefly had a ban in place. She was accused of violating patient privacy laws and investigated by Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita, and the state licensing board fined her \$3,000 and reprimanded her for the incident after Rokita asked the board to revoke her license to practice medicine. She was not found to have violated patient privacy and kept her license.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 14 of 74

"Now my case is held up as an example of what can happen to you if you speak out about abortion bans," Bernard said. "I've spoken to many physicians across the country who are intimidated by that. They say, 'Look at Dr. Bernard and what happened to her.'"

Now, Bernard is part of a lawsuit against the state to categorize terminated pregnancy records as medical records in state law that cannot be released to the public. Indiana has historically treated abortion reports as public record with certain details redacted, but Bernard said with the ban in place and so few people qualifying for its limited exceptions, that policy should change. The records include demographic information like age, ethnicity and education level, as well as information such as diagnoses and the date, location and physician who provided care.

"It also includes the county, so you could imagine in these very small counties, somebody could absolutely figure out who that person is," Bernard said.

Ashley Emery, senior policy analyst at Partnership for Women and Families, said the lawsuits take aim at a deeply needed line of defense against abortion criminalization, and said it will disproportionately affect immigrants, people of color and low-income populations. Trust is already low between marginalized people and health care providers, Emery said, and this would further erode that trust.

"These challenges to HIPAA are designed to take protections away from patients and try to allow anti-abortion politicians to have more control, and I think that power deficit is really important to note, and it should be very chilling," she said.

Kelcie Moseley-Morris is an award-winning journalist who has covered many topics across Idaho since 2011. She has a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Idaho and a master's degree in public administration from Boise State University. Moseley-Morris started her journalism career at the Moscow-Pullman Daily News, followed by the Lewiston Tribune and the Idaho Press.

Medicaid cuts could hurt older adults who rely on home care, nursing homes

Congressional Republicans' proposals to slash billions of dollars from federal Medicaid funding would shift burden to states

BY: ANNA CLAIRE VOLLERS, STATELINE - MARCH 31, 2025 8:54 AM

Dr. Fred Levin has been watching with growing alarm the national debate around federal cuts to Medicaid. He's responsible for the medical care of about 100 older adults at the Community PACE center in rural Newaygo, Michigan. For his patients, Medicaid isn't just a safety net — it's a matter of life or death.

"If left to see to their own needs, a lot of them would stay in their homes and would slowly die," he said. "They wouldn't be able to get to their doctors' appointments unless they had a family member to help. They wouldn't get social care. They wouldn't have people coming into their homes and seeing the bed bugs or the lice in their hair. They wouldn't get their medications."

The care at Community PACE is paid for by Medicaid, the state-federal health insurance program for people with low incomes or certain disabilities, and Medicare, the federal insurance program for people 65 and older. The center is a one-stop shop that provides medical and social services to older adults during the day, allowing them to continue living safely in their homes.

If Congress cuts funding to Medicaid, Levin expects his center would probably close. Unlike traditional nursing home care, which state Medicaid programs are required by federal law to cover, the services at PACE centers like his are an optional benefit that 33 states have opted to cover.

Around the nation, doctors, lawmakers, advocates and patients are watching anxiously as Republicans in Congress consider proposals to slash billions of dollars from federal Medicaid funding as they look to offset trillions in proposed tax cuts. The specific nature of the funding cuts are still being hammered out. But any reductions to federal Medicaid spending would shift those costs to states.

The additional financial burden could blow billion-dollar holes in state budgets, forcing state lawmakers

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 15 of 74

to slash health benefits or restrict who's eligible for them. Nearly a fifth of Americans rely on Medicaid, and the percentage is even higher in some states.

"There are a lot of people who don't pay attention to this because they think it doesn't affect them personally," Levin said. "But 1 in 4 people in Michigan are on Medicaid. It's very likely you have friends or family on Medicaid."

Nearly all Americans over age 65 are covered by Medicare, which Republicans have pledged not to touch. Medicare doesn't cover most nursing home or other long-term care, however. Neither does most private insurance.

But Medicaid does.

"If you have an older adult in your life who has been in a nursing home or received help at home with cooking, bathing, dressing, chances are Medicaid was involved," said Natalie Kean, director of federal health advocacy for Justice in Aging, an advocacy group focused on addressing poverty among older people.

"Many of us have a connection to the program or will one day," she said.



Older adults participate in Fort Worth falls prevention awareness day of action on Sept. 26, 2024, in Fort Worth, Texas. (Photo by Rick Kern/Getty Images for National Council on Aging)

A divided front

Conservatives have long argued for reducing the reach of Medicaid. They say the program is too expensive and that its expansion under the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, diverts too much money toward able-bodied adults and away from the more vulnerable populations it was originally intended to help.

But policy experts say that reducing coverage for some Medicaid recipients, such as the working adults who got coverage under expansion programs, will have ripple effects on vulnerable groups such as children and older adults.

Republicans aren't united in a desire to see massive cuts.

Last month, Nevada Gov. Joe Lombardo, a Republican governor in a purple state, publicly called on Congress not to slash Medicaid funding.

Earlier this week, Washington Republican state Rep. Michelle Caldier wrote a letter to Trump asking him to reconsider cuts to Medicaid and expressing her concern about the large number of military retirees and senior citizens in her district.

Caldier, a dentist who has worked with nursing home patients, told Stateline she believes the most likely cuts would be a reduction in the amount the federal government matches state spending for working adults who are covered under Medicaid expansion. That, she said, would have little impact on older adults.

"The only caveat is that I am very worried that the leadership in our state does not have a good relationship with our president," Caldier said. Democrats control the offices of governor and both legislative chambers in Washington state. Caldier worries that if Washington lawmakers defy the president over issues such as gender-affirming care for transgender youth, the feds could retaliate by slashing their Medicaid payments to the state.

"If we got into a political match with the president, we would lose, no matter how you slice or dice it," she said.

In Idaho, Republican state lawmakers shot down a bill that likely would have repealed Medicaid expansion, before passing one that will introduce sweeping policy changes in an effort to control costs.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 16 of 74

Even in Congress, some Republicans are balking, publicly defending Medicaid and warning about the consequences of deep cuts. Some who have high percentages of Medicaid recipients in their districts have urged party leaders not to cut funding for the program and have vowed to vote against any budget plan that does so.

Medicaid covers 72 million Americans. A majority of American adults, including two-thirds of Republicans, say they want Congress to either maintain current Medicaid spending or increase it, according to a February 2025 poll from KFF, a health policy research group.

President Donald Trump has said in recent months that he won't touch Medicaid. But last month, U.S. House Republicans pushed through a budget plan, now under consideration in the Senate, that calls for about \$880 billion in cuts to Medicaid over the next decade to help counterbalance the Trump administration's desired \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts.

Facing cuts that large, states would have to figure out which benefits to chop in order to keep their budgets balanced, which is a constitutional requirement in most states.

Older adults and people with disabilities already account for more than half of states' Medicaid spending, on average. In some states, including Alabama, Florida, Kansas, Mississippi and North Dakota, those groups account for two-thirds of state Medicaid spending.

Idaho state Sen. Melissa Wintrow, a Democrat on the state Senate Health & Welfare committee, said her biggest concern is Congress reducing the federal match rate. This is the amount of money the federal government chips in to help states pay for Medicaid. How much a state receives mainly depends on how wealthy its residents are. Richer states such as California and Connecticut get less help, while poorer states get more.

In Idaho, on the poorer end of the spectrum, the feds pay about 67% of traditional Medicaid costs and 90% of Medicaid expansion costs.

"It is all a domino effect," Wintrow said. The federal government covers about \$3 billion of Idaho's \$4.2 billion Medicaid budget. "If the feds start chopping that off, it's going to impact everything."

Cutting care at home

All state Medicaid programs have opted to cover at least some home-based and community care, such as home health aides who assist people with bathing, toileting and other daily living activities, transportation and adult day care.

Kean and other experts worry that because federal law doesn't require state Medicaid programs to cover home-based care, state lawmakers might sharply reduce spending on those services — or even eliminate coverage.

"When states have budget shortfalls, they start to tighten eligibility for the home-based programs," said Kean. "We're certain those would be the first to go if federal funding is cut for Medicaid."

Paying for home-based services out of pocket would exhaust the median Medicare recipient's savings in less than two years, according to KFF.

The median cost of a year of a full-time aide to help is about \$62,400, far above the median income for Americans over 65, which is about \$36,000. The median life savings for Medicare beneficiaries was \$103,800 in 2023.

Home-based services are a popular benefit for state Medicaid programs, because most enrollees prefer to remain in their homes. And despite the expense, home care can be more cost effective than nursing homes — about \$38,000 vs. nearly \$54,000 per year in 2021, according to a KFF analysis.

Cutting Medicaid also could make it harder to recruit and keep a workforce of nursing home and home health employees.

Over the past two years, most states — even those led by Republicans — increased their Medicaid payment rates for those services, in an effort to combat the nationwide shortage of long-term care workers.

But federal funding cuts could jeopardize what states are able to pay those workers.

"There's already a direct-care workforce crisis," Kean said. "Even if eligibility isn't directly cut or programs

aren't cut, there wouldn't be enough workers to provide that care. At home and in nursing facilities, the quality of care will go down."

In rural Michigan, Levin said the PACE center where he works employs about 100 people. Its closure would impact not only those workers, but also would mean his patients would be left to find transportation and other health services on their own, even if those services are still covered by Medicaid.

"Without access in rural areas, how are these individuals going to get to the bigger cities where they can get to their health care? It's going to overwhelm other parts of the health care system," Levin said.

"Everybody's going to be responsible for taking care of the people who don't have health insurance, in some indirect way or another. It's going to affect us all."

Stateline reporter Anna Claire Vollers can be reached at avollers@stateline.org.

Anna Claire Vollers covers health care for Stateline. She is based in Huntsville, Alabama.

Federal judge pauses Noem's effort to strip protections for Venezuelans

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - MARCH 31, 2025 8:56 PM

WASHINGTON — A federal judge in California on Monday blocked the U.S. Department of Homeland Security from terminating the temporary protected status of more than 350,000 Venezuelans next week.

The group was set to lose deportation protections by April 7 after DHS Security Kristi Noem, in her first week in office, vacated an extension of protections put in place by the Biden administration.

The order does not apply to a separate group of 250,000 Venezuelans who are set to lose their status in September.

U.S. District Judge Edward Chen of the Northern District of California said the groups that brought the suit against the Trump administration are likely to succeed in their claims. He noted that Noem's decision to vacate the temporary protected

status for Venezuelans was not only arbitrary and capricious, but would harm the TPS holders, cost the U.S. billions in economic loss and harm public health and safety in U.S. communities.

DHS did not immediately respond to States Newsroom's request for comment.



U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem delivers remarks to staff at DHS headquarters in Washington on Jan. 28, 2025. (Photo by Manuel Balce Ceneta-Pool/Getty Images)

Program for immigrants in danger

TPS allows nationals from countries deemed too dangerous to return to remain in the U.S. Those with the status have deportation protections and are allowed to work and live in the U.S. for 18 months, unless extended by the DHS secretary.

Under Biden administration orders, protections were extended until October 2026 for two groups of Venezuelans, one initially assigned temporary protected status in 2021 and another in 2023.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 18 of 74

Chen's order applies only to the group who first gained status in 2023. The 2021 group is also challenging the Trump administration's revocation of their status, but that group's status is in place until September.

Chen noted that the Trump administration "failed to identify any real countervailing harm in continuing TPS for Venezuelan beneficiaries."

Chen was appointed by President Barack Obama in 2011.

Gang activity cited

The groups who brought the suit against Noem represent TPS holders from Venezuela.

The groups argued that Noem's decisions to vacate the 2023 protections and end TPS for Venezuelans were arbitrary and capricious.

They also argued that the Trump administration violated the Constitution's equal protection clause, arguing that the decisions to vacate the extension and terminate protections "were motivated, at least in part, by intentional discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or national origin."

Noem cited gang activity as her reason for not extending TPS for the 2023 group of Venezuelans.

The Trump administration has invoked the Alien Enemies Act to quickly deport any Venezuelan national 14 years or older who is suspected of having ties to the Tren de Aragua gang. A federal judge has placed a temporary restraining order on use of the wartime law.

'Classic example of racism'

In his order, Chen said that while attorneys on behalf of the Trump administration argued that there is the threat of the Tren de Aragua gang, "it has made no showing that any Venezuelans TPS holders are members of the gang or otherwise have ties to the gang."

Chen also rejected the Trump administration's argument that Noem had the legal authority to vacate the extension of protections.

"The unprecedented action of vacating existing TPS (a step never taken by any previous administration in the 35 years of the TPS program), initiated just three days after Secretary Noem took office, reverses actions taken by the Biden administration to extend temporary protection of Venezuelan nationals that have been in place since 2021," he wrote.

In granting the nationwide pause, Chen noted the groups had a strong claim under the equal protection clause because Noem has "made sweeping negative generalizations about Venezuelan TPS beneficiaries."

"This is evident not only in what she said, but also in the fact that she decided to take en masse actions against all Venezuelan TPS beneficiaries, who number in the hundreds of thousands," he said. "Acting on the basis of a negative group stereotype and generalizing such stereotype to the entire group is the classic example of racism."

This is not the first time the Trump administration has tried to end TPS designation for certain nationals. During Trump's first term, DHS tried to end TPS for Haiti, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Sudan, but the courts blocked those attempts in 2018.

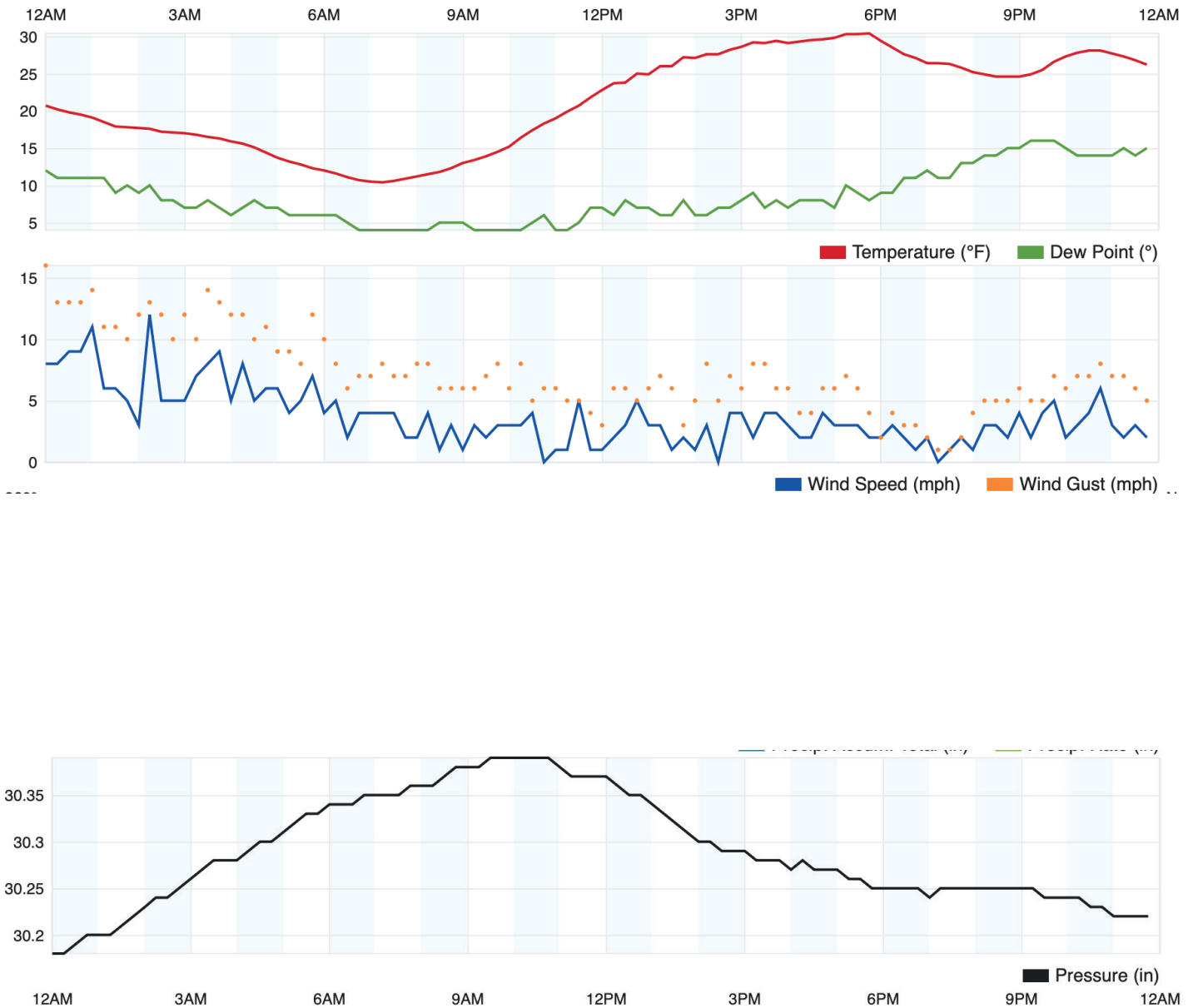
Noem has also moved to end TPS for nationals from Haiti. There are also legal challenges to that decision.

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

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 19 of 74






Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 20 of 74

Winter Storm Warning

Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
High: 38 °F	Low: 28 °F	High: 35 °F	Low: 24 °F	High: 39 °F
Rain/Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow	Rain/Snow and Breezy	Rain/Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow	Slight Chance Snow	Partly Sunny



Winter Weather Headlines

April 1, 2025
4:58 AM

Winter Headlines are in effect from 7 AM Today through 7 PM Wednesday

Key Messages

- Rain, freezing rain and/or snow all possible today through Wednesday
- 6+ inches of snow likely across the **Leola Hills & Sisseton Hills**
- high levels of uncertainty in regards to precipitation type & snowfall totals remain
 - Related to timing/changes in precip types and temperatures close to freezing

NEW

Important Updates

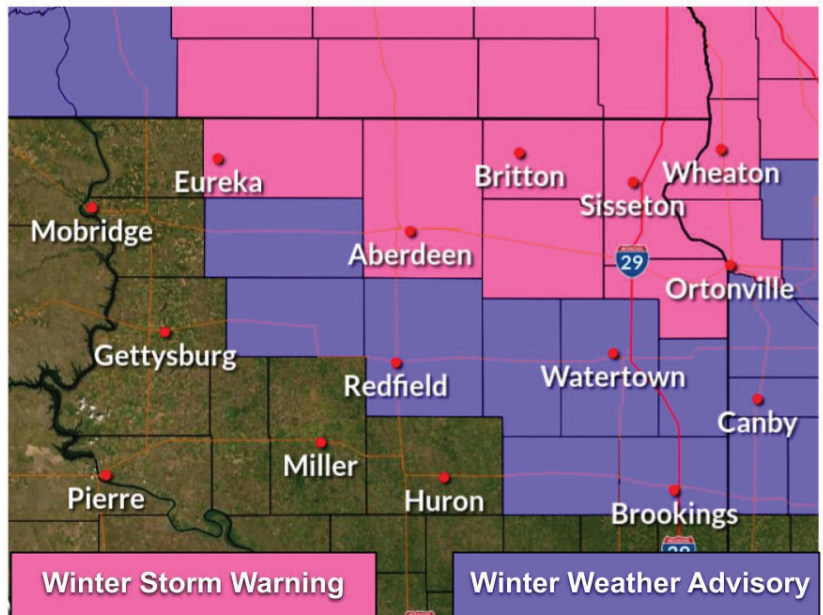
- Winter Storm Watch upgraded to a Winter Storm Warning. Winter Weather Advisory remains in effect

Next Scheduled Briefing

- Tuesday Afternoon



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



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A very complex spring storm system will move into the region today through Wednesday night and bring a mix of precipitation types to the region, not to mention strong winds.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 21 of 74

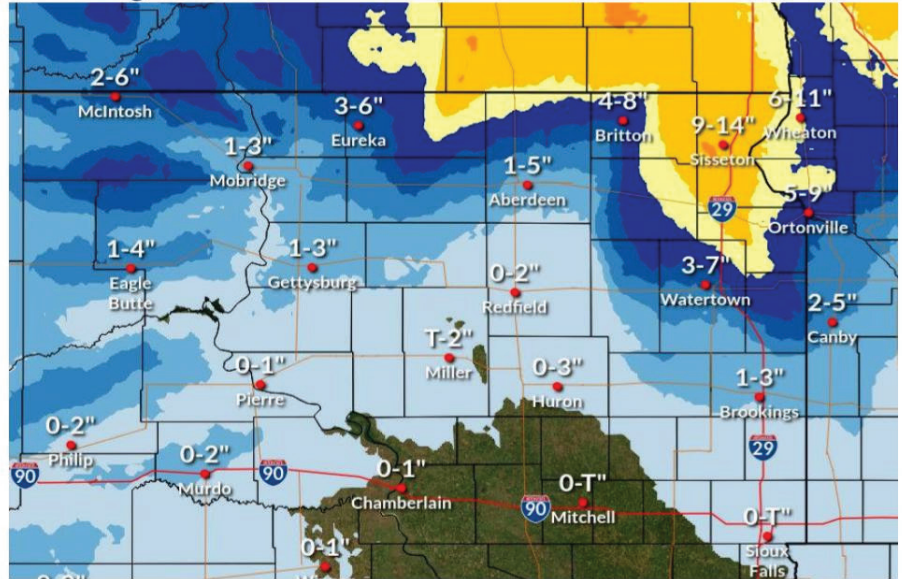


What's Responsible For The Uncertainty?

April 1, 2025
5:04 AM

And Why Are The Ranges So High?

- Interplay of Warm & Cold Air Impacting Precip Type
 - Warm air from southeast results in changes in precip types
 - Cold air persists on the periphery of system meaning less transition



Any minor shift in location, change in timing, even minor differences in temps from one location to another will play a major part in the transition between precipitation types and accumulation potential

1. First Wave - rain/snow tracks northeast this morning
2. Transition - rain/snow line maintains position across northern SD/west central MN this afternoon and tonight
3. Second Wave - additional moisture, colder temps, more snowfall late tonight into Wednesday

We continue to see some very high ranges in snowfall for this storm system as there are many factors and moving pieces that will dictate the eventual outcomes. It should also be noted that while these are total ranges, there may be a period during the day today in which some of the morning snowfall melts, or we get rain, before changing back over to snowfall late tonight into Wednesday.



Type and Chance of Precipitation

April 1, 2025
5:10 AM

	Precipitation Starts				Precip Transitions				Heaviest Snowfall			
	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am
Aberdeen	100%	85%	90%	65%	85%	85%	70%	25%				
Britton	90%	90%	95%	70%	90%	90%	70%	30%				
Chamberlain	50%	60%	45%	45%	60%	60%	35%	5%				
Clark	100%	85%	85%	65%	90%	90%	65%	25%				
Eagle Butte	50%	75%	75%	65%	75%	75%	50%	15%				
Eureka	95%	75%	90%	70%	90%	90%	70%	30%				
Gettysburg	90%	75%	75%	65%	85%	85%	65%	20%				
McIntosh	70%	75%	85%	70%	80%	80%	50%	20%				
Millbank	95%	95%	95%	70%	90%	90%	70%	15%				
Miller	90%	75%	75%	65%	85%	85%	55%	15%				
Mobridge	85%	75%	80%	65%	85%	85%	60%	20%				
Murdo	30%	70%	70%	55%	70%	70%	45%	10%				
Pierre	35%	75%	70%	60%	75%	75%	45%	15%				
Redfield	100%	80%	85%	65%	85%	85%	65%	20%				
Sisseton	95%	90%	95%	70%	90%	90%	70%	30%				
Watertown	95%	85%	90%	60%	85%	85%	65%	15%				
Webster	95%	90%	95%	65%	90%	90%	70%	30%				
Wheaton	90%	90%	95%	75%	90%	90%	70%	25%				

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

Once snow tapers off...
Check SD511 for road conditions before heading out

Hopefully this will give you a good idea of what types of precipitation to expect during certain periods with this storm system. Though again, there are a lot of moving parts and a small change in one could have a significant impact on the types of precipitation and accumulations.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 22 of 74

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 44 °F at 5:38 PM

Low Temp: 23 °F at 7:31 AM

Wind: 17 mph at 6:58 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 52 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 80 in 1928

Record Low: 0 in 1899

Average High: 51

Average Low: 26

Average Precip in April.: 0.04

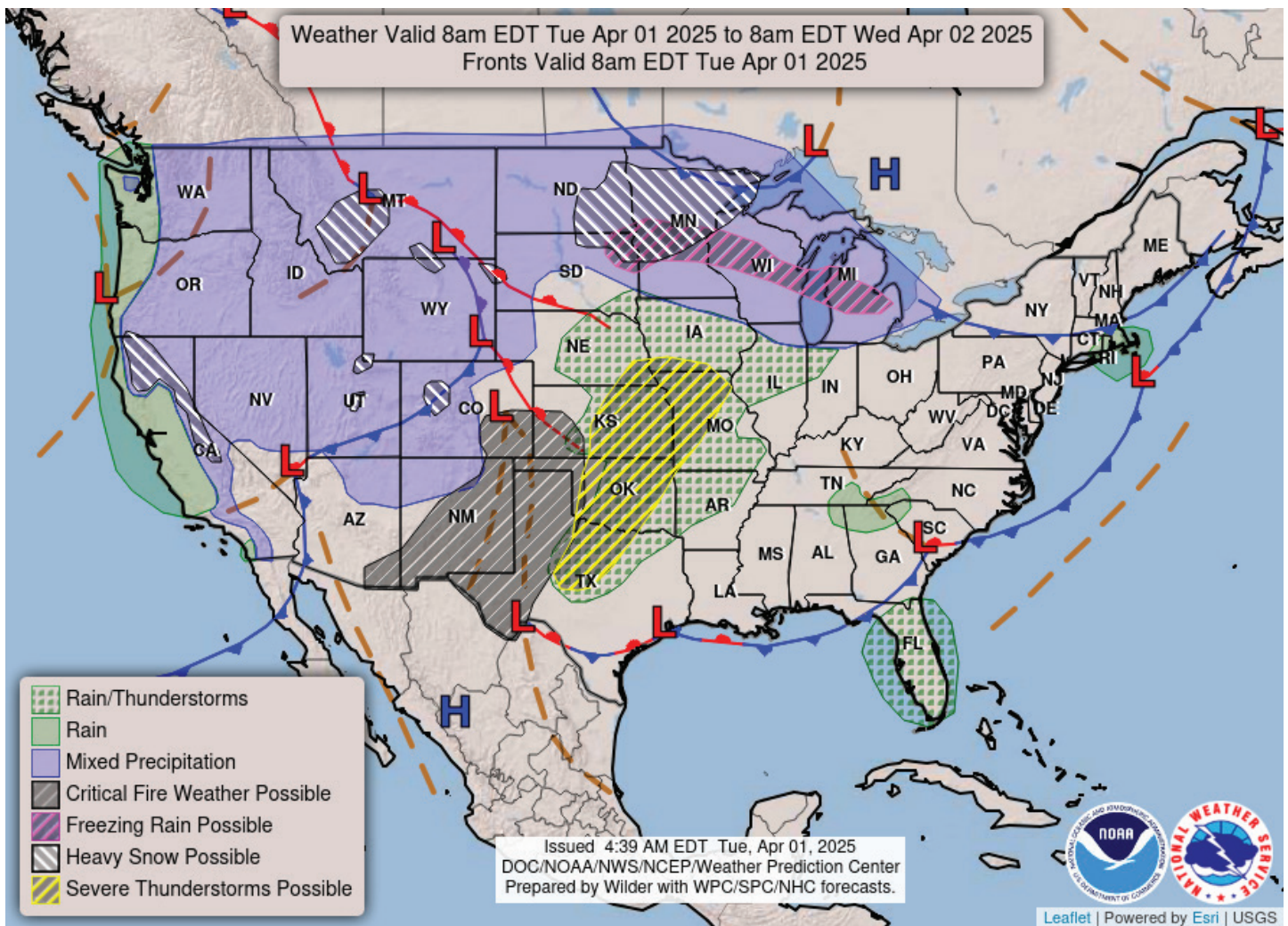
Precip to date in April.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 2.10

Precip Year to Date: 0.63

Sunset Tonight: 8:02:13 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:08:05 am



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 23 of 74

Today in Weather History

April 1st, 1960: Heavy snow of 4 to 10 inches fell in the eastern half of South Dakota. Some highways were closed mainly due to the difficulty plowing the heavy, wet snow. The snowfall in the Aberdeen area, which received 7.5 inches, set the record for April 1st and caused short-term power and phone failures. Snow with a high water content aggravated floods that were currently in progress on the James, Vermillion, and Big Sioux Rivers.

April 1-13th, 2011: Snowmelt flooding in March continued across much of central and northeast South Dakota as the rest of the snowpack melted into early April. Many roads, along with many acres of crop and pastureland, remained flooded. Roads, culverts, and bridges were damaged across the region. Several roads were washed out, and many were closed. Many homes were threatened, and some were surrounded by water. Rising lake levels in northeast South Dakota also threatened and flooded many homes. Many people had to use four-wheelers to get to their homes. The total damage estimates, including March, were from 4.5 to 5 million dollars for the area. The flooding diminished across much of the region into May.

The snowmelt flooding damaged many roads and highways throughout Hamlin County, including U.S. Highway 81. Many roads were closed throughout the county. In the late evening of April 13th on U.S. Highway 81, a car with four people inside went through a flooded area at a high rate of speed and ended up in the flooded ditch. They all got out with no injuries. The snowmelt runoff caused Lake Kampeska to rise to nearly 44 inches overfull. The lake flooded several roads and also threatened many homes. Sandbagging was done to hold off the rising lake. Waves and ice chunks eventually caused some damage to homes. Also, many boat lifts were damaged. Mud Creek near Rauville also went slightly above the flood stage of 9 feet to 9.64 feet for a couple of days in early April.

1912 - A tornado with incredible velocity ripped into downtown Houston, TX, breaking the water table and giving the city its first natural waterspout. (The Weather Channel)

1923 - Residents in the eastern U.S. awoke on "April Fool's Day" to bitterly cold temperatures. The mercury plunged to -34 degrees at Bergland MI and to 16 degrees in Georgia. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Forty-five cities across the southeastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. Lows of 37 degrees at Apalachicola FL, 34 degrees at Jacksonville FL, 30 degrees at Macon GA, and 22 degrees at Knoxville TN, were records for April. (The National Weather Summary)

1987 - A tornado touched down briefly during a snow squall on the south shore of White Fish Bay (six miles northwest of Bay Mills WI). A mobile home was unroofed and insulation was sucked from its walls. (The Weather Channel)

1988 - A powerful spring storm produced 34 inches of snow at Rye CO, 22 inches at Timpas OK, 19 inches at Sharon Springs KS, and up to 35 inches in New Mexico. Severe thunderstorms associated with the same storm spawned a tornado which caused 2.5 million dollars damage at East Mountain TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Up to six inches of snow blanketed the Adirondacks of eastern New York State and the Saint Lawrence Valley of Vermont. Up to a foot of snow blanketed the Colorado Rockies. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in Texas, from southern Arkansas and northern Louisiana to southern Georgia, and from northern South Carolina to the Upper Ohio Valley during the day and evening. Thunderstorms spawned a tornado at Evergreen AL, and there were more than eighty reports of large hail and damaging winds. Thunderstorms produced baseball size hail north of Bastrop LA, and produced damaging winds which injured one person west of Meridian MS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 24 of 74



HUMILITY MATTERS

It was his first day as a general. For years his one goal was to pin a star on his shoulder. Sitting behind his desk for the first time, with his personal flag behind him, he felt as though he had finally “arrived.” He was anxious to impress his staff with his accomplishment.

There was a knock on his door, and he shouted, “Enter.” He reached for his phone, and wanting to impress the men who were quietly walking into his office, said, “Thank you, Mr. President, for calling. It was good to speak with you. Yes, sir. Goodbye.” He then hung up the phone.

Turning to the men before him, he asked, “And now, men, what can I do for you?”

“Yes, sir, thank you, sir. I’m your aide, and these men have come to connect your phone.”

There is nothing wrong with wanting to succeed. But there is something wrong with wanting to succeed for selfish, self-seeking, self-centered reasons. Pride brings with it the idea that we deserve whatever we can get. It creates a greedy appetite within us and leads us to believe that we should have whatever we can get or should have whatever we want in life. It makes us want far more than we need and leaves us unsatisfied with what we have. Sometimes God has to humiliate us to teach us humility. “Pride comes before a fall!”

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to trust You for our needs, to be satisfied with what we have, and to be thankful for Your love. May we be covered with humility and grace. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” James 4:6

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

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 25 of 74

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Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 26 of 74



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.28.25

2 9 31 60 63 23

MegaPlier: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$29,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 39 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.31.25

11 24 33 38 47 1

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$28,410,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 54 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.31.25

8 31 39 40 42 4

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 9 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.29.25

3 15 20 26 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$84,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 9 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.31.25

2 44 52 65 66 12

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 38 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.31.25

12 41 44 52 64 25

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$30,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 38 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 27 of 74

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

Chinese military launches large-scale drills around Taiwan

By HUIZHONG WU and JOHNSON LAI Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — The Chinese military announced large-scale drills in the waters and airspace around Taiwan on Tuesday that include an aircraft carrier battle group, as it again warned the self-ruled island democracy against seeking formal independence.

The joint exercises involve navy, air ground and rocket forces and are meant to be a “severe warning and forceful containment against Taiwan independence,” according to Shi Yi, a spokesperson for the People’s Liberation Army’s Eastern Theater Command. No operational name for the drills was announced or previous notice given.

China considers Taiwan a part of its territory, to be brought under its control by force if necessary, while most Taiwanese favor their de-facto independence and democratic status. Any conflict could bring in the U.S., which maintains a series of alliances in the region and is legally bound to treat threats to Taiwan as a matter of “grave concern.”

Taiwan’s Presidential Office said in a message on the social platform X that “China’s blatant military provocations not only threaten peace in the #Taiwan Strait but also undermine security in the entire region, as evidenced by drills near Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Korea, the Philippines & the SCS. We strongly condemn China’s escalatory behavior.”

The SCS refers to the South China Sea, the strategic waterway that China claims almost in its entirety. China’s navy also recently held drills near Australia and New Zealand for which it gave no warning, forcing the last-minute rerouting of commercial flights.

Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defence said it had tracked 19 Chinese navy vessels in the waters surrounding the island in a 24-hour period from 6 a.m. Monday until 6 a.m. Tuesday.

It added that it had been tracking the movement of the Shandong aircraft carrier since Saturday and that its carrier group had entered into Taiwan’s air defense identification zone, a self-defined area tracked by the military. China regularly dispatches military assets into the zone, which China does not recognize, but Taiwanese officials have recently warned that China could launch a sneak attack under the guise of military exercises.

“I want to say these actions amply reflect (China’s) destruction of regional peace and stability,” said Taiwan’s Defense Minister Wellington Koo.

Taiwan has set up a central response group to monitor the latest exercises, Koo said.

On the streets of Taipei, people said the atmosphere was tense but they were more concerned about the economy and developments surrounding the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump.

“The Chinese Communists spend so much time and effort on these things but most people don’t pay much attention,” said Lin Hui-tsung, a noodle seller in the city’s Tiananmu district.

China’s Coast Guard also announced it was conducting a “law enforcement patrol” on Tuesday around Taiwan, its spokesperson Zhu Anqin said.

The drills come just two weeks after a large-scale exercise in mid-March, when Beijing sent a large number of drones and ships toward the island.

China’s Taiwan Affairs Office said the exercises were directed at Lai Ching-te, Taiwan’s strongly pro-independence president.

“Lai Ching-te stubbornly insists on a ‘Taiwan independence’ stance, brazenly labeling the mainland as a ‘foreign hostile force,’ and has put forward a so-called “17-point strategy ... stirring up anti-China sentiments,” said China’s Taiwan Affairs Office in a statement on Tuesday. “We will not tolerate or condone this in any way and must resolutely counter and severely punish these actions.”

In mid-March, Taiwan’s Lai put forward a 17-point strategy aimed at shoring up Taiwan’s national security. The points include allowing espionage cases to be tried by military courts and making immigration rules

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 29 of 74

stricter for Chinese citizens applying for permanent residency.

Lai's words and actions appear to have especially angered Chinese leader Xi Jinping, whose previous attempts at intimidation have had little effect on the Taiwanese public. Those have often been timed in response to expressions of Taiwanese independence, including a visit by then U.S. House leader Nancy Pelosi.

China's PLA also released a series of videos to publicize their military exercise, including one in which they depict Lai as a green parasite "poisoning" the island by hatching smaller parasites. The video shows Lai's head on the body of a bulbous green worm, with a pair of chopsticks picking him up and roasting him over a flame set over Taiwan.

Beijing sends warplanes and navy vessels toward the island on a daily basis, seeking to wear down Taiwanese defenses and morale, although the vast majority of the island's 23 million people reject its claim of sovereignty over Taiwan. In recent years, it has stepped up the scope and scale of these exercises, from sending small numbers of individual fighters and surveillance planes to sending groups of planes, drones and ships.

"The PLA organized naval and air forces to practice subjects such as sea and land strikes, focusing on testing the troops' ability to carry out precision strikes on some key targets of the Taiwan authorities from multiple directions," said Zhang Chi, a professor at China's National Defense University in an interview with Chinese state television.

Taiwan and China split amid civil war 76 years ago, but tensions have risen since 2016, when China cut off almost all contacts with Taipei.

A woman is rescued from rubble in Myanmar but hope is fading for more quake survivors

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Rescue workers saved a 63-year-old woman from the rubble of a building in Myanmar's capital on Tuesday, but hope was fading of finding many more survivors of the violent earthquake that killed at least 2,000, compounding a humanitarian crisis caused by a bloody civil war.

The fire department in Naypyitaw said the woman was successfully pulled from the rubble early Tuesday, 91 hours after being buried when the building collapsed in the 7.7 magnitude earthquake that occurred at midday Friday. Experts say the likelihood of finding survivors drops dramatically after 72 hours.

The earthquake's epicenter was near the country's second-largest city Mandalay, and so far the military-run government has reported 2,065 people killed, more than 3,900 injured and 270 missing.

Those figures are widely expected to rise, but the earthquake hit a wide swath of the country, leaving many areas without power, telephone or cell connections and damaging roads and bridges, leaving the full extent of the devastation hard to assess.

Most of the reports so far have come from Mandalay and Naypyitaw.

Myanmar's Fire Services Department said 403 people have been rescued in Mandalay and 259 bodies have been found so far. In one incident alone, 50 Buddhist monks who were taking a religious exam in a monastery were killed when the building collapsed and 150 more are thought to be buried in the rubble.

The World Health Organization said more than 10,000 buildings overall are known to have collapsed or been severely damaged in central and northwest Myanmar.

The earthquake also rocked neighboring Thailand, causing a high-rise building under construction to collapse and burying many workers.

Two bodies were pulled from the rubble on Monday but dozens were still missing. Overall, there were 20 people killed and 34 injured in Bangkok, primarily at the construction site.

In Myanmar, search and rescue efforts across the affected area paused briefly at midday on Tuesday as people stood for a minute in silent tribute to the dead.

Foreign aid workers have been arriving slowly to help in the rescue efforts, but progress was still slow with a lack of heavy machinery in many places.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 30 of 74

In one site in Naypyitaw on Tuesday, workers formed a human chain, passing chunks of brick and concrete out hand-by-hand from the ruins of a collapsed building.

The Myanmar military government's official Global New Light of Myanmar reported Tuesday that a team of Chinese rescuers saved four people the day before from the ruins of the Sky Villa, a large apartment complex that collapsed during the quake. They included a 5-year-old and a pregnant woman who had been trapped for more than 60 hours.

The same publication also reported two teenagers were able to crawl out of the rubble of the same building to where rescue crews were working, using their cell phone flashlights to help guide them. The rescue workers were then able to use details from what they told them to locate their grandmother and sibling.

International rescue teams from several countries are on the scene, including from Russia, China, India, the United Arab Emirates and several Southeast Asian countries. The U.S. Embassy said an American team had been sent but had not yet arrived.

Meantime, multiple countries have pledged millions in aid to assist Myanmar and humanitarian aid organizations with the monumental task ahead.

Even before the earthquake, more than 3 million people had been displaced from their homes by Myanmar's brutal civil war, and nearly 20 million were in need, according to the United Nations.

Many were already lacking in basic medical care and standard vaccinations, and the destruction of water and sanitation infrastructure by the earthquake raises the risk of disease outbreaks, warned the U.N.'s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

"The displacement of thousands into overcrowded shelters, coupled with the destruction of water and sanitation infrastructure, has significantly heightened the risk of communicable disease outbreaks," OCHA said in its latest report.

"Vulnerability to respiratory infections, skin diseases, vector-borne illnesses such as dengue fever, and vaccine-preventable diseases like measles is escalating," it added.

Shelter is also a major problem, especially with the monsoon season looming.

Since the earthquake, many people have been sleeping outside, either because homes were destroyed or out of fear of aftershocks.

Myanmar's military seized power in 2021 from the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, sparking what has turned into significant armed resistance and a brutal civil war.

Government forces have lost control of much of Myanmar, and many places were dangerous or impossible for aid groups to reach even before the quake.

Military attacks and those from some anti-military groups have not stopped in the aftermath of the earthquake, though the shadow opposition National Unity Government has called a unilateral ceasefire for its forces.

The NUG, established by elected lawmakers who were ousted in 2021, called for the international community to ensure humanitarian aid is delivered directly to the earthquake victims, urging "vigilance against any attempts by the military junta to divert or obstruct humanitarian assistance."

"We are in a race against time to save lives," the NUG said in a statement.

"Any obstruction to these efforts will have devastating consequences, not only due to the impact of the earthquake but also because of the junta's continued brutality, which actively hinders the delivery of life-saving assistance."

South Korea's Constitutional Court will rule Friday on Yoon's impeachment

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's Constitutional Court will rule Friday on whether to formally dismiss or reinstate impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol — a decision that either way will likely deepen domestic divisions.

The court has been deliberating on Yoon's political fate after the conservative leader was impeached in

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 31 of 74

December by the National Assembly, which is controlled by the liberal opposition, over his brief imposition of martial law that triggered a massive political crisis.

Millions of people have rallied around the country to support or denounce Yoon. Police said they'll mobilize all available personnel to preserve order and respond to possible acts of vandalism, arson and assault before and after the court's ruling.

The Constitutional Court said in a brief statement Tuesday that it would issue its ruling at 11 a.m. Friday and allow TV stations to broadcast it live.

Removing Yoon from office requires support from at least six of the court's eight justices. If the court rules against Yoon, South Korea must hold an election within two months for a new president. If the court overturns his impeachment, Yoon would immediately return to his presidential duties.

Jo Seung-lae, a spokesperson for the main liberal opposition Democratic Party which led Yoon's impeachment, called for the court to "demonstrate its firm resolve" to uphold the constitutional order by dismissing Yoon. Kwon Youngse, leader of Yoon's People Power Party, urged the court's justices to "consider the national interest" and produce a decision that is "strictly neutral and fair."

Many observers earlier predicted the court's verdict would come in mid-March based on the timing of its rulings in past presidential impeachments. The court hasn't explained why it takes longer time for Yoon's case, sparking rampant speculation on his political fate.

At the heart of the matter is Yoon's deployment of hundreds of troops and police officers to the National Assembly after imposing martial law on Dec. 3. Yoon has insisted that he aimed to maintain order, but some military and military officials testified Yoon ordered them to drag out lawmakers to frustrate a floor vote on his decree and detain his political opponents.

Yoon argues that he didn't intend to maintain martial law for long, and he only wanted to highlight what he called the "wickedness" of the Democratic Party, which obstructed his agenda, impeached senior officials and slashed his budget bill. During his martial law announcement, he called the assembly "a den of criminals" and "anti-state forces."

By law, a president has the right to declare martial law in wartime or other emergency situations, but the Democratic Party and its supporters say South Korea wasn't in such a situation.

The impeachment motion accused Yoon of suppressing National Assembly activities, attempting to detain politicians and others and undermining peace in violation of the constitution and other laws. Yoon has said he had no intention of disrupting National Assembly operations and detaining anyone.

Martial law lasted only six hours because lawmakers managed to enter the assembly building and voted to strike down his decree unanimously. No violence erupted, but live TV footage showing armed soldiers arriving at the assembly invoked painful memories of past military-backed dictatorships in South Korea. It was the first time for South Korea to be placed under martial law since 1980.

Earlier public surveys showed a majority of South Koreans supported Yoon's impeachment. But after his impeachment, pro-Yoon rallies have grown sharply, with many conservatives fed up with what they call the Democratic Party's excessive offensive on the already embattled Yoon administration.

In addition to the Constitutional Court's ruling on his impeachment, Yoon was arrested and indicted in January on criminal rebellion charges. Yoon was released from prison March 8, after a Seoul district court cancelled his arrest and allowed him to stand his criminal trial without being detained.

Ten senior military and police officials have also been arrested and indicted over their roles in the martial law enactment.

A 17-year-old from the West Bank becomes the first Palestinian teenager to die in an Israeli prison

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — A 17-year-old from the West Bank who was held in an Israeli prison for six months without being charged died after collapsing in unclear circumstances, becoming the first Palestinian teen to die in Israeli detention, officials said.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 32 of 74

Walid Ahmad was a healthy high schooler before his arrest in September for allegedly throwing stones at soldiers, his family said. Rights groups have documented widespread abuse in Israeli detention facilities holding thousands of Palestinians who were rounded up after Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack ignited the war in the Gaza Strip.

Prison authorities deny any systematic abuse and say they investigate accusations of wrongdoing by prison staff. But the Israeli ministry overseeing prisons acknowledges conditions inside detention facilities have been reduced to the minimum level allowed under Israeli law.

Israel's prison service did not respond to questions about the cause of death. It said only that a 17-year-old from the West Bank had died in Megiddo Prison, a facility that has previously been accused of abusing Palestinian inmates, "with his medical condition being kept confidential." It said it investigates all deaths in detention.

Khalid Ahmad, Walid's father, said his son was a lively teen who enjoyed playing soccer before he was taken from his home in the occupied West Bank during a pre-dawn arrest raid.

Six months later, after several brief court appearances during which no trial date was set, Walid collapsed on March 23 in a prison yard and struck his head, dying soon after, Palestinians officials said, citing eyewitness accounts from other prisoners.

The family believes Walid contracted amoebic dysentery from the poor conditions in the prison, an infection that causes diarrhea, vomiting and dizziness — and can be fatal if left untreated.

Walid is the 63rd Palestinian prisoner from the West Bank or Gaza to die in Israeli custody since the start of the war, according to the Western-backed Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the West Bank. Palestinian prisoner rights groups say that is about one-fifth of the roughly 300 Palestinians who have died in Israeli custody since the 1967 Mideast war, when Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem. The Palestinians want all three territories for their future state.

The Palestinian Authority says Israel is holding the bodies of 72 Palestinian prisoners who died in Israeli jails, including 61 who died since the beginning of the war.

Conditions in Israeli prisons have worsened since the start of the war, former detainees told The Associated Press. They described beatings, severe overcrowding, insufficient medical care, scabies outbreaks and poor sanitary conditions.

Israel's National Security Ministry, which oversees the prison service and is run by ultranationalist Cabinet Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, has boasted of reducing the conditions of Palestinian detainees "to the minimum required by law." It says the policy is aimed at deterring attacks.

'Don't worry about me'

Israel has rounded up thousands of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, saying it suspects them of militancy. Many have been held for months without charge or trial in what is known as administrative detention, which Israel justifies as a necessary security measure. Others are arrested on suspicion of aggression toward soldiers but have their trials continuously delayed, as the military and Israel's security services gather evidence.

Walid sat through at least four court appearances over videoconference, his father said, but each time the judge delayed, eventually setting an April 21 trial date. Each session was about three minutes, Walid's father said.

In a February session, four months after Walid was detained, his father noticed that his son appeared to be in poor health.

"His body was weakened due to malnutrition in the prisons in general," the elder Ahmad said. He said Walid told him he had gotten scabies — a contagious skin rash caused by mites that causes intense itching— but had been cured.

"Don't worry about me," his father remembers him saying.

Khalid Ahmad later visited his son's friend, a former soccer teammate who had been held with Walid in the same prison. The friend told him Walid had lost weight but that he was OK.

Four days later, the family heard that a 17-year-old had died in the prison. An hour and half later, they

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 33 of 74

got the news that it was Walid.

"We felt the same way as all the parents of the prisoners and all the families and mothers of the prisoners," said Khalid Ahmad. "We can only say 'Indeed, we belong to Allah, and indeed to him we shall return.'"

Cause of death is unknown

Walid's lawyer, Firas al-Jabrini, said Israeli authorities denied his requests to visit his client in prison. But he says three prisoners held alongside Walid told him that he was suffering from dysentery, saying it was widespread among young Palestinians held at the facility.

They said Walid suffered from severe diarrhea, vomiting, headaches and dizziness, the lawyer said. He said they suspected the disease was spreading because of dirty water, as well as cheese and yogurt that prison guards brought in the morning and that sat out all day while detainees were fasting for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Megiddo, in northern Israel, "is the harshest prison for minors," al-Jabrini said. He said he was told that rooms designed for six prisoners often held 16, with some sleeping on the floor. Many complained of scabies and eczema.

Thaer Shriteh, spokesperson for the Palestinian Authority's detainee commission, said Walid collapsed and hit his head on a metal rod, losing consciousness. "The prison administration did not respond to the prisoners' requests for urgent care to save his life," he said, citing witnesses who spoke to the commission.

The lawyer and the Palestinian official both said an autopsy is needed to determine the cause of death. Israel has agreed to perform one but a date has not been set.

"The danger in this matter is that the Israeli occupation authorities have not yet taken any action to stop this (disease) and have not provided any treatment in general to save the prisoners in Megiddo prison," Shriteh said.

Earthquake compounds Myanmar's humanitarian crisis as the death toll passes 2,000

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — The death toll in last week's massive earthquake in Myanmar has passed 2,000, state media said Monday, as accounts of some people's last moments emerged: Two hundred Buddhist monks crushed by a collapsing monastery. Fifty children killed when a preschool classroom crumbled. Seven hundred Muslims struck while praying at mosques for Ramadan.

The quake could exacerbate hunger and disease outbreaks in a country that was already one of the world's most challenging places for humanitarian organizations to operate because of civil war, aid groups and the United Nations warned.

The 7.7 magnitude quake hit Friday, with the epicenter near Myanmar's second-largest city of Mandalay. It damaged the city's airport, buckled roads and collapsed hundreds of buildings along a wide swath down the country's center.

Relief efforts are further hampered by power outages, fuel shortages and spotty communications. A lack of heavy machinery has slowed search-and-rescue operations, forcing many to search for survivors by hand in daily temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit).

Rescue workers at Mandalay's collapsed U Hla Thein monastery said they were still searching for about 150 of the dead monks.

Some 700 Muslim worshipers attending Friday prayers were killed when mosques collapsed, said Tun Kyi, a member of the steering committee of the Spring Revolution Myanmar Muslim Network. He said some 60 mosques were damaged or destroyed. Videos posted on The Irrawaddy online news site showed several mosques toppling.

It was not clear whether those numbers were already included in the official toll.

Myanmar state MRTV reported that the leader of the military government, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, told Pakistan's prime minister during a call that 2,065 people were killed, with more than 3,900 injured and about 270 missing.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 34 of 74

Relief agencies expect those numbers to rise sharply, since access is slow to remote areas where communications are down.

The United Nations' Myanmar country team called for unimpeded access for aid teams.

"Even before this earthquake, nearly 20 million people in Myanmar were in need of humanitarian assistance," said Marcoluigi Corsi, the U.N. resident and humanitarian coordinator.

Devastation's full extent is not clear

"We're really not clear on the scale of the destruction at this stage," Lauren Ellery, deputy director of programs in Myanmar for the International Rescue Committee, told The Associated Press. "They were talking about a town near Mandalay where 80% of the buildings were reportedly collapsed, but it wasn't in the news because telecommunications have been slow."

Groups the IRC works with have reported that some places are cut off by landslides, she said.

The World Health Organization said it has reports of three hospitals destroyed and 22 partially damaged in the region.

"There is an urgent need for trauma and surgical care, blood transfusion supplies, anesthetics, essential medicines and mental health support," it said.

More than 10,000 buildings are collapsed or severely damaged in central and northwest Myanmar, the U.N. humanitarian agency said. One preschool classroom building collapsed in Mandalay district, killing 50 children and two teachers, it said.

An artificial intelligence analysis of satellite images of Mandalay by Microsoft's AI for Good Lab showed 515 buildings with 80% to 100% damage and another 1,524 with 20% to 80% damage. It was not clear what percentage of the city's buildings that represented.

Civil war had displaced millions

Rescue efforts are also complicated by the civil war. In 2021, the military seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, sparking what has turned into significant armed resistance.

While one group has declared a partial unilateral ceasefire, the government and other armed groups have not stopped fighting.

Government forces have lost control of much of Myanmar, and many places were dangerous or impossible for aid groups to reach even before the quake. More than 3 million people have been displaced by the fighting, according to the U.N.

Ellery with the International Rescue Committee noted that the area worst hit by the earthquake was seriously damaged by flooding last year, and many displaced people sought refuge there.

Since the earthquake, many people have been sleeping outside, either because homes were destroyed or out of fear of aftershocks.

Monsoon rains start in May and finding people shelter will be a major challenge, she said.

Myanmar's neighbors and allies send aid

International rescue teams from several countries are on the scene, including from Russia, China, India and several Southeast Asian countries.

On Monday, an Indian team jackhammered through slabs of fallen concrete at one site in Mandalay. They could be seen bringing out one body.

The European Union, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and others have announced millions of dollars in aid.

Despite massive cuts and firings at the U.S. Agency for International Development — the body charged with delivering humanitarian assistance overseas — the U.S. Embassy said a team of experts was on its way to Myanmar. The embassy said it would provide up to \$2 million through local organizations.

Looking for survivors in Bangkok

A small number of U.S. military personnel were sent to assist in Bangkok, where the earthquake killed at least 18 people, many at a construction site where a partially built high-rise collapsed. Another 33 have been reported injured and 78 missing, primarily at the construction site near the popular Chatuchak market.

On Monday, heavy equipment was temporarily shut down at the site and authorities urged onlookers to

be silent as they used machines to try and detect signs of life.

Bangkok Governor Chadchart Sittipunt told reporters that signs had been detected Sunday night, though experts could not determine whether it had been machine error.

Watching the crews at work, Naruemon Thonglek said she had "made some peace" with the fact that her partner and five friends there were unlikely to be found alive.

"A part of me still hope they will survive," she said.

'I bought their dream': How a US company's huge land deal in Senegal went bust

By JACK THOMPSON Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Rusting pipes in a barren field and unpaid workers are what remain after a U.S. company promised to turn a huge piece of land in Senegal — about twice the size of Paris — into an agricultural project and create thousands of jobs.

In interviews with company officials and residents, The Associated Press explored one of the growing number of foreign investment projects targeting Africa, home to about 60% of the world's remaining uncultivated arable land. Many, like this one, fail, often far from public notice.

Internal company documents seen by the AP show how the Senegalese-government-endorsed plans for exporting animal feed to wealthy Gulf nations fell apart.

At first glance, the landscape of stark acacia trees on the edge of the Sahara Desert doesn't hold much agricultural promise. But in an age of climate change, foreign investors are looking at this and other African landscapes.

The continent has seen a third of the world's large-scale land acquisitions between 2000 and 2020, mostly for agriculture, according to researchers from the International Institute of Social Studies in the Netherlands.

But 23% of those deals have failed after sometimes ambitious plans to feed the world.

In 2021, the Senegalese village of Niéti Yone welcomed investors Frank Timis and Gora Seck from a U.S.-registered company, African Agriculture. Over cups of sweet green tea, the visitors promised to employ hundreds of locals and, one day, thousands.

Timis, originally from Romania, was the majority stakeholder. His companies have mined for gold, minerals and fossil fuels across West Africa.

Seck, a Senegalese mining investor, chaired an Italian company whose biofuel plans for the land parcel had failed. It sold the 50-year lease for 20,000 hectares to Timis for \$7.9 million. Seck came on as president of African Agriculture's Senegalese subsidiary and holds 4.8% of its shares.

Now the company wanted the community's approval.

The land was next to Senegal's largest freshwater lake, for which the company obtained water rights. African Agriculture planned to grow alfalfa and export it to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Both traditionally buy alfalfa from the U.S., but land in alfalfa production there has dropped by 38% in the last 20 years, largely due to drought caused by climate change, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The proposal divided the community of subsistence farmers. Herders that raised livestock on the land for generations opposed it. Others, like Doudou Ndiaye Mboup, thought it could help ease Senegal's unemployment crisis.

"I bought their dream. I saw thousands of young Africans with jobs and prosperity," said Mboup, who was later employed as an electrician and now leads a union of employees.

Despite the formation of an opposition group called the Ndial Collective, African Agriculture moved ahead, hiring about 70 of the community's 10,000 residents.

After planting a 300-hectare pilot plot of alfalfa, the company announced in November 2022 it would go public to raise funds.

African Agriculture valued the company at \$450 million. The Oakland Institute, an environmental think tank in the U.S., questioned that amount and called the deal bad for food security as well as greenhouse

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 36 of 74

gas emissions.

The company went public in December 2023, with shares trading at \$8 on the NASDAQ exchange. It raised \$22.6 million during the offering but had to pay \$19 million to the listed but inactive company it had merged with.

That payment signaled trouble to investors. It showed that the other company, 0X Capital Venture Acquisition Corp. II, didn't want to hold its 98% of stock. And it highlighted the way African Agriculture had used the merger to bypass the vetting process needed for listing.

One year later, shares in African Agriculture were worth almost nothing.

Now, security guards patrol the land's barbed-wire perimeter, blocking herders and farmers from using it. The company has been delisted.

Mboup said he and others haven't been paid for six months. The workers took the company to employment court in Senegal to claim about \$180,000 in unpaid wages. In February, they burned tires outside the company's office. Mboup later said an agreement was reached for back wages to be paid in June.

"I took out loans to build a house and now I can't pay it back," said Mboup, who had been making \$200 a month, just above average for Senegal. "I've sold my motorbike and sheep to feed my children and send them to school, but many are not so lucky."

Timis didn't respond to questions. Seck told the AP he was no longer affiliated with African Agriculture. Current CEO Mike Rhodes said he had been advised to not comment.

Herders and farmers are furious and have urged Senegal's government to let them use the land. But that rarely happens. In a study of 63 such foreign deals, the International Institute of Social Studies found only 11% of land was returned to the community. In most cases, the land is offered to other investors.

"We want to work with the government to rectify this situation. If not, we will fight," warned Bayal Sow, the area's deputy mayor.

The Senegalese minister of agriculture, food sovereignty and herding, Mabouba Diagne, did not respond to questions. The African Agriculture deal occurred under the previous administration.

The failed project has undermined community trust, said herder Adama Sow, 74: "Before we lived in peace, but now there's conflict for those of us who supported them."

Meanwhile, African Agriculture's former CEO has moved on to a bigger land deal elsewhere on the continent — with experts raising questions again.

In August, South African Alan Kessler announced his new company, African Food Security, partnering with a Cameroonian, Baba Danpullo. It has announced a project roughly 30 times the size of the Senegal one, with 635,000 hectares in Congo and Cameroon.

The new company seeks \$875 million in investment. The company's investor prospectus, obtained by the AP, says it planned to register in Abu Dhabi.

In an interview with the AP in January, Kessler blamed the failure of the Senegal project on the way African Agriculture's public offering was structured. He said there were no plans for a public offering this time.

He claimed his new company's project would double corn production in these countries, and described African Food Security as the "most incredibly important development company on the planet." He said they have started to grow corn on 200 hectares in Cameroon.

Experts who looked over the prospectus raised concerns about its claims, including an unusually high projection for corn yields. Kessler rejected those concerns.

"When he was CEO of African Agriculture, Kessler also made lofty claims about food production, job creation, exports and investment returns that did not pan out," said Renée Vellvé, co-founder of GRAIN, a Spain-based nonprofit for land rights.

Hype without proof was a key strategy for African Agriculture, said its former chief operating officer, Javier Orellana, who said he is owed 165,000 euros in unpaid salary after leaving the company in 2023.

He told the AP he had been suspicious of the company's \$450 million valuation.

"I know the agriculture industry well and (\$450 million) didn't add up," Orellana said, adding he stayed on because the company gave him what he called a very attractive offer.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 37 of 74

In the end, a share in African Agriculture is now worth less than a penny.
"We are looking forward to going back to Senegal," Kessler said. "We were appreciated there. We've been welcomed back there."

Bitcoin investor buys an entire SpaceX flight for the ultimate polar adventure

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A bitcoin investor who bought a SpaceX flight for himself and three polar explorers blasted off Monday night on the first rocket ride to carry people over the North and South poles.

Chun Wang, a Chinese-born entrepreneur, hurtled into orbit from NASA's Kennedy Space Center. SpaceX's Falcon rocket steered southward over the Atlantic, putting the space tourists on a path never flown before in 64 years of human spaceflight.

Wang won't say how much he paid Elon Musk's SpaceX for the 3 ½-day ultimate polar adventure.

The first leg of their flight — from Florida to the South Pole — took barely a half-hour. From the targeted altitude of some 270 miles (440 kilometers), their fully automated capsule will circle the globe in roughly 1 ½ hours including 46 minutes to fly from pole to pole.

"Enjoy the views of the poles. Send us some pictures," SpaceX Launch Control radioed once the capsule reached orbit.

Wang has already visited the polar regions in person and wants to view them from space. The trip is also about "pushing boundaries, sharing knowledge," he said ahead of the flight.

Now a citizen of Malta, he took along three guests: Norwegian filmmaker Jannicke Mikkelsen, German robotics researcher Rabea Rogge and Australian polar guide Eric Philips.

Mikkelsen, the first Norwegian bound for space, has flown over the poles before, but at a much lower altitude. She was part of the 2019 record-breaking mission that circumnavigated the world via the poles in a Gulfstream jet to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin's moon landing.

The crew plans two dozen experiments — including taking the first human X-rays in space — and brought along more cameras than usual to document their journey called Fram2 after the Norwegian polar research ship from more than a century ago.

Until now, no space traveler had ventured beyond 65 degrees north and south latitude, just shy of the Arctic and Antarctic circles. The first woman in space, the Soviet Union's Valentina Tereshkova, set that mark in 1963. Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space, and other pioneering cosmonauts came almost as close, as did NASA shuttle astronauts in 1990.

A polar orbit is ideal for climate and Earth-mapping satellites as well as spy satellites. That's because a spacecraft can observe the entire world each day, circling Earth from pole to pole as it rotates below.

Geir Klover, director of the Fram Museum in Oslo, Norway, where the original polar ship is on display, hopes the trip will draw more attention to climate change and the melting polar caps. He lent the crew a tiny piece of the ship's wooden deck that bears the signature of Oscar Wisting, who with Roald Amundsen in the early 1900s became the first to reach both poles.

Wang pitched the idea of a polar flight to SpaceX in 2023, two years after U.S. tech entrepreneur Jared Isaacman made the first of two chartered flights with Musk's company. Isaacman is now in the running for NASA's top job.

SpaceX's Kiko Dontchev said late last week that the company is continually refining its training so "normal people" without traditional aerospace backgrounds can "hop in a capsule ... and be calm about it."

Wang and his crew view the polar flight like camping in the wild and embrace the challenge.

"Spaceflight is becoming increasingly routine and, honestly, I'm happy to see that," Wang said via X last week.

Wang said he's been counting up his flights since his first one in 2002, flying on planes, helicopters and hot air balloons in his quest to visit every country. So far, he's visited more than half. He arranged it so that liftoff would mark his 1,000th flight.

Israel strikes building in southern Beirut, killing at least 3 people

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The Israeli military struck a building in Beirut's southern suburbs early Tuesday, killing at least three people, in an attack it said it targeted a member of the Hezbollah militant group.

The airstrike came without warning days after Israel launched an attack on the Lebanese capital, Beirut, on Friday for the first time since a ceasefire ended fighting between Israeli forces and the Hezbollah militant group in November. The Israeli military had warned residents in the crowded suburbs before the attack after two projectiles were launched from southern Lebanon, which Hezbollah denied firing.

At least seven other people were wounded in the airstrike, according to the Lebanese Health Ministry.

The Israeli military said in a statement the latest strike targeted a Hezbollah member who had been helping the Palestinian Hamas group in the Gaza Strip in attacks against Israel. It said the airstrike was "under the direction of the Shin Bet," Israel's domestic intelligence agency.

Hezbollah did not comment on the strike. There was no immediate word on casualties.

Photos and videos widely shared on local and social media showed the top three floors of an apartment building damaged following the strike. Piles of debris covered cars below the building.

Jets were heard in parts of the Lebanese capital before the strike near the Hay Madi neighborhood. During Israel's last war with Hezbollah, Israeli drones and jets regularly pounded the southern suburbs, where Hezbollah has wide influence and support. Israel sees the area as a militant stronghold and accuses the group of storing weapons there.

"We were at home. It was Eid al-Fitr," said Hussein Nour El-Din, a resident in the neighborhood, referring to the Islamic holiday that marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan. "We didn't know where it happened, but once the smoke cleared we saw it was the building facing us."

The leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah group, Sheikh Naim Kassem, warned Saturday that if Israel's attacks on Lebanon continued and if Lebanon's government does not act to stop them, the group would eventually resort to other alternatives.

Under the U.S.-brokered ceasefire that ended the 14-month Israel-Hezbollah war, Israeli forces were supposed to withdraw from all Lebanese territory by late January, while Hezbollah had to end its armed presence south of the Litani River along the border with Israel.

Israel has launched daily strikes in southern and eastern Lebanon since the U.S.-brokered ceasefire went into effect, saying it targets Hezbollah officials and infrastructure. The Lebanese military has gradually deployed in the country's southern region, and Beirut has urged the international community to pressure Israel to stop attacks and withdraw its forces still present on five hilltops in Lebanese territory.

Madison Booker helps Texas reach its first women's Final Four since 2003 with 58-47 win over TCU

By ALANIS THAMES AP Sports Writer

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Rori Harmon put her hands on her knees and bowed her head as the clock wound down. The Texas senior guard doesn't like crying, but she gave herself a moment to reflect on the past 10 months.

This time last year, Harmon was sidelined by a knee injury. She could only watch as the Longhorns were eliminated in the Elite Eight of the women's NCAA Tournament.

It came full circle Monday night. Madison Booker scored 18 points, Harmon added 13 and No. 1 seed Texas used its stifling defense to reach the Final Four for the first time since 2003, beating well-traveled point guard Hailey Van Lith and second-seeded TCU 58-47.

"Just to see us get to the Final Four after recovering and coming back from my ACL injury in 10 months," Harmon said, "I thought it was an amazing thing, and I was just really proud of myself in that moment."

The Longhorns (35-3) will face defending champion South Carolina on Friday night in Tampa, Florida, for

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 39 of 74

a spot in the national title game.

Texas won a regional final for the first time in four tries under coach Vic Schaefer, who previously made two Final Four trips with Mississippi State. The Longhorns' 35 wins are one more than its only national title-winning squad had in 1986 under Jody Conradt, who was in the stands Monday night and led Texas to its three previous Final Fours.

Van Lith scored 17 points for TCU (34-4) in her collegiate finale, but Texas neutralized the Horned Frogs' star center, Sedona Prince, who had four points and nine rebounds before fouling out with 6:32 left.

Harmon guarded Van Lith most of the night.

"That to me is vintage Rori," Schaefer said. "She embraces the defensive challenge. She loves it. She eats it for breakfast."

TCU had never made it past the second round of March Madness, but Van Lith helped the Horned Frogs make program history while taking her third school to the Elite Eight.

Booker, Texas' offensive dynamo, scored 14 points in the second half. Harmon had 11 in the first half.

Nothing came easy for the Horned Frogs' high-scoring trio of Van Lith, Prince and Madison Conner. Van Lith shot 3 of 15 from the field but made 10 of 11 free throws. The 6-foot-7 Prince attempted only four shots, and Conner scored nine points.

Prince, whose career started with Texas in 2018, said the Longhorns' post players did a good job scouting her. But she also felt that Texas was in her head. She never played for the Longhorns, leaving the program for Oregon in 2019 after breaking her leg playing for USA Basketball.

"I thought that we had to win to prove it to them that they couldn't beat me," Prince said. "But being part of this program, being here and succeeding ... it doesn't matter."

The Longhorns forced 21 turnovers and had nine steals and six blocks, but they didn't pull away until center Kyla Oldacre intercepted Van Lith's pass and went coast-to-coast early in the fourth quarter.

The 6-foot-6 Oldacre was fouled by Prince and made the free throw, energizing the Longhorns and the announced crowd of 12,175 that made the trip to Alabama. The three-point play put Texas ahead by double digits for the first time.

After falling behind by 14, TCU pulled within six with 2:42 remaining on four straight points from forward Deasia Merrill. Consecutive jumpers from Booker and Harmon put the Longhorns back up by 10, and the Horned Frogs never got any closer.

Harmon had two steals in the first seven minutes as the Longhorns held the Horned Frogs to just nine points in the opening quarter. The Longhorns went up by nine before TCU closed the second quarter on a 7-0 run that made it 23-21 at the half.

Oldacre scored nine points, all in the second half, to help Texas outscore TCU 35-26 after the break.

This was the 57th meeting of the former Big 12 foes and first in the NCAA Tournament. Texas moved to the Southeastern Conference this season, went 15-1 against the SEC in the regular season, captured the regular-season title and had the SEC player of the year in Booker.

Sticking to the formula

The Longhorns stuck with what's worked for them all season. They don't attempt many 3-pointers, and they wear teams out with the frontcourt rotation of Oldacre and 6-4 Taylor Jones.

Jones had seven points and six rebounds for Texas, which outscored TCU 24-8 in the paint.

Top seed dominance

Texas' win put three No. 1 seeds in the Final Four, along with South Carolina and top overall seed UCLA. The Gamecocks edged second-seeded Duke on Sunday to move two wins away from repeating as champs. The Bruins dispatched Flaujae Johnson and No. 3 seed LSU behind 17 points from standout center Lauren Betts.

The top seeds will be joined by Paige Bueckers and No. 2 seed UConn, who beat No. 1 seed Southern California in Monday night's other semifinal.

Trump's nominee to be the next Joint Chiefs chairman will face senators' questions

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's pick to be the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Dan "Razin" Caine, will face questions from senators during his confirmation hearing Tuesday about his qualifications to become the top U.S. military officer.

Caine is a decorated F-16 combat pilot who served in leadership positions in multiple special operations commands and in some of the Pentagon's most classified programs. He does not, however, meet the prerequisites for Joint Chiefs chairman, although they can be waived by the president.

Caine was nominated by Trump in February, one day after the president fired the former chairman, Gen. CQ Brown Jr., in a purge of general officers whom he and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth viewed as endorsing diversity, equity and inclusion in the ranks.

Caine met Trump when the president visited troops in Iraq in 2018 during his first term. Trump has told political supporters the encounter left an impression on him — and that Caine put on a red "Make America Great Again" hat at the time, something Caine's inner circle has said is not true.

Caine has been described by former military colleagues as a deeply serious career officer who has spent the past few weeks meeting with both Democratic and Republican lawmakers, said a former U.S. official who has helped Caine prepare for the confirmation process and spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide details on Caine's nomination. Hegseth notably refused to meet with many Democrats when he was going through the confirmation process.

Because he retired in December, Caine would need to be sworn back into active duty. That would take place after he is confirmed, and then he would be promoted to four-star general, the official said.

Caine's nomination following the ouster of Brown is likely to raise questions from some Democrats on the Senate Armed Services Committee about whether he will remain independent of Trump.

During Trump's first term, his relationship with then-Chairman Gen. Mark Milley soured as Milley pushed back and took steps to try to prevent what he saw as an attempt to politicize the office, such as by reminding military service members they take an oath to the Constitution, not to a president.

The relationship soured to the extent that within hours of Trump being sworn in office in January, Milley's portrait as chairman of the Joint Chiefs was removed from the Pentagon. Trump and Hegseth have subsequently stripped Milley of his security clearance and security detail.

Caine does not meet prerequisites laid out in a 1986 law, such as being a combatant commander or service chief. The law, however, allows presidents to waive those requirements to fill the position with someone they are most comfortable with.

While Caine would be the military's top uniformed officer, his chief duty would be serving as the president's top military adviser.

But Caine has spent time inside the Pentagon, leading its Special Access Programs Central Office, which oversees what classified information on weapons programs is shared with foreign governments.

He also served as the commander of the joint special operations task force in Iraq in 2008 and as the assistant commanding general of joint special operations command at Fort Bragg. From 2018 to 2019, he was the deputy commanding general of the special operations joint task force for Operation Inherent Resolve, countering the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria.

He also was associate director for military affairs at the CIA from 2021 until he retired in December.

Caine transferred into the National Guard in 2009 and began working in the private sector, including as an adviser at an investment firm run by the brother of Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law.

He has more than 2,800 flying hours in the F-16 and has earned the Distinguished Flying Cross and Bronze Star Medal with bronze oak leaf cluster, among other awards.

A Senate vote to reverse Trump's tariffs on Canada is testing Republican support

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With President Donald Trump's so-called "Liberation Day" of tariff implementation fast approaching, Senate Democrats are putting Republican support for some of those plans to the test by forcing a vote to nullify the emergency declaration that underpins the tariffs on Canada.

Republicans have watched with some unease as the president's attempts to remake global trade have sent the stock market downward, but they have so far stood by Trump's on-again-off-again threats to levy taxes on imported goods.

Even as the resolution from Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia offered them a potential off-ramp to the tariffs levied on Canadian imports, Republican leaders were trying to keep senators in line by focusing on fentanyl that comes into the U.S. over its northern border. It was yet another example of how Trump is not only reorienting global economics, but upending his party's longtime support for ideas like free trade.

"I really relish giving my Republican colleagues the chance to not just say they're concerned, but actually take an action to stop these tariffs," Kaine told The Associated Press in an interview last week.

Kaine's resolution would end the emergency declaration that Trump signed in February to implement tariffs on Canada as punishment for not doing enough to halt the flow of illegal drugs into the U.S. If the Senate passes the resolution, it would still need to be taken up by the Republican-controlled House.

A small fraction of the fentanyl that comes into the U.S. enters from Canada. Customs and Border Protection seized 43 pounds of fentanyl at the northern border during the 2024 fiscal year, and since January, authorities have seized less than 1.5 pounds, according to federal data. Meanwhile, at the southern border, authorities seized over 21,000 pounds last year.

Kaine warned that tariffs on Canadian goods would ripple through the economy, making it more expensive to build homes and military ships.

"We're going to pay more for our food products. We're going to pay more for building supplies," he said. "So people are already complaining about grocery prices and housing costing too much. So you raise the cost of building supplies and products. It's a big deal."

Still, Trump has claimed that the amount of fentanyl coming from Canada is "massive" and pledged to follow through by executing tariffs Wednesday.

"There will never have been a transformation of a Country like the transformation that is happening, for all to see, in the United States of America," the president said on social media Monday.

Republican leaders in the Senate have signaled they aren't exactly fans of tariffs, but argued that Trump is using them as a negotiating tool.

"I am supportive of using tariffs in a way to accomplish a specific objective, in this case ending drug traffic," Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., told reporters last month. He said this week that his "advice remains the same."

While Trump's close allies in the Senate were standing steadfastly by the idea of remaking the U.S. economy through tariffs, others have begun openly voicing their dissatisfaction with trade wars that could disrupt industries and raise prices on autos, groceries, housing and other goods.

"I'm keeping a close eye on all these tariffs because oftentimes the first folks that are hurt in a trade war are your farmers and ranchers," said Sen. Steve Daines, a Montana Republican.

Sen. John Kennedy, a Louisiana Republican, said he would prefer to see the U.S. and its trading partners move to remove all tariffs on each other, but he conceded that Trump's tariff threats had injected uncertainty into global markets.

"We're in uncharted waters," Kennedy told reporters. "Nobody knows what the impact of these tariffs is going to be."

On the heels of a dry winter, firefighters around the US brace for wildfire risks

By TY ONEIL and SUSAN MONTROYA BRYAN Associated Press
PRESCOTT, Ariz. (AP) — From the southwestern U.S. to Minnesota, Iowa and even parts of New Jersey, it seemed that winter never materialized.

Many communities marked their driest winters on record, snowpack was nearly nonexistent in some spots, and vegetation remains tinder dry -- all ingredients for elevated wildfire risks.

More than 1,000 firefighters and fire managers recently participated in an annual wildfire academy in Arizona, where training covered everything from air operations to cutting back brush with chain saws and building fire lines. Academy officials say there's consensus that crews will be busy as forecasts call for more warm and dry weather, particularly for the Southwest.

The lack of moisture and warm temperatures can combine to increase the rate of spread and intensity of fire, said Roy Hall, the prescribed fire officer for the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management. He says it's been dry in his state for months.

"We would be remiss to not acknowledge that changes how we might see fire behavior come out of the blocks at the beginning and through fire season," he said.

How dry has it been?

Experts with NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information reported in early March that total winter precipitation in the U.S. was just shy of 6 inches (15.24 centimeters) — or nearly an inch (2.54 centimeters) below average. The period of December through the end of February — what forecasters consider the meteorological winter — ranked the third driest on record.

Flagstaff, nestled in the mountains south of the Grand Canyon, has long been on the list of quick escapes for desert dwellers looking to build snowmen or go sledding. The northern Arizona city finished the winter period with a 50-inch (1.27 meter) snowfall deficit. A major storm hit the area in mid-March, forcing the closure of Interstate 40 and stranding motorists for hours. It wasn't enough to erase the shortfall.

In New Mexico, there were at least 17 sites that marked either their driest winters on record or tied previous records. Albuquerque set a new low by logging just 0.12 inches (0.30 centimeters) of precipitation over a three-month period.

"The tap just turned off and the drought conditions have been proceeding," Andrew Mangham, a senior hydrologist with the National Weather Service in Albuquerque, said during a recent call with state and federal drought experts.

What does that mean for wildfire conditions?

Arizona, New Mexico and parts the Midwest already have had their share this spring of red flag warnings — when low humidity couples with windy, warm weather to heighten wildfire risks. Those threats materialized in mid-March in Oklahoma, where fires destroyed hundreds of homes. Crews in New Jersey and the Carolinas also battled flames amid dry conditions.

In the West, land managers and firefighting forces are concerned that without adequate snowpack in many mountain ranges, there's less moisture to keep fires from ballooning into fast-moving conflagrations.

April 1 typically marks the peak of the snowpack, but forecasters say many areas already are melting out. Strong spring winds that deposit dust onto the snowpack help to speed up the process.

Even southern Alaska is experiencing a snow drought at lower elevations, according to the National Integrated Drought Information System. The Anchorage airport recorded its driest February on record, while large areas in southwest Alaska and low elevations in the south-central part were nearly snow-free as of March 1.

Recent storms brought some moisture to California, pushing snowpack levels there to just shy of average. But most of the southern region is dealing with moderate to extreme drought.

A new wildfire outlook will be released Tuesday. While California isn't among those areas facing significant potential for wildfires at the moment, deadly fires in January torched more urban area than any other fire in that state since at least the mid-1980s.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 43 of 74

How are communities dealing with the threat?

Seeing flames race through Los Angeles earlier this year prompted municipal leaders throughout the West to host community meetings to raise awareness, including in New Mexico's San Juan County.

The Four Corners region — where Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Utah meet — is among those on the radar for high fire potential given the unfavorable conditions. Firefighters in San Juan County responded to 25 bushfires in the first 27 days of March and two more were reported on Friday, said county spokesperson Devin Neeley.

In Arizona, the Phoenix Fire Department have warned the mayor and city councilors about increasing risks. They have a plan for surging department resources to help contain fires before they escalate, particularly in areas where urban development intersects with wildland environments.

In neighboring Scottsdale, Mayor Lisa Borowsky recently floated the idea of creating a volunteer brigade to bolster wildfire prevention, pointing to invasive species and overgrown vegetation within the McDowell Sonoran Preserve that could pose risks. A fire department crew has been clearing and trimming brush along roadways.

Christopher Reed, a fire prevention captain with the Arizona forestry department, said some people think of wildfire as a "macro problem" that involves vast landscapes beyond their suburban borders. He said people should prepare on a micro level, ensuring their own homes are defensible before it's too late.

"We always say Day 1 of firefighting is now," Reed said.

Israeli military orders the evacuation of Gaza's southern city of Rafah

By WAFAA SHURAF and FATMA KHALED Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel's military on Monday issued sweeping evacuation orders covering Rafah and nearby areas, indicating it could soon launch another major ground operation in the Gaza Strip's southernmost city.

Israel ended its ceasefire with the Hamas militant group and renewed its air and ground war earlier this month. At the beginning of March it cut off all supplies of food, fuel, medicine and humanitarian aid to the territory's roughly 2 million Palestinians to pressure Hamas to accept proposed changes to the truce agreement.

Israel's military ordered Palestinians to head to Muwasi, a sprawl of squalid tent camps along the coast. The orders came during Eid al-Fitr, a normally festive Muslim holiday marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan.

Last May, Israel launched a major operation in Rafah, on the border with Egypt, leaving large parts in ruins. The military seized a strategic corridor along the border as well as the Rafah crossing with Egypt, Gaza's only gateway to the outside world that was not controlled by Israel.

Israel was supposed to withdraw from the corridor under the ceasefire it signed with Hamas in January under U.S. pressure, but it later refused to do it, citing the need to prevent weapons smuggling.

On Monday, people fled with their belongings loaded onto donkeys and stacked on car roofs. Families traveled by foot carrying luggage as children held the adults' hands.

"We are dying. There is no food, no drink, no electricity, no medicine," said Hanadi Dahoud, who was displaced from the southern city of Khan Younis. "We want to live. We just want to live. We are tired."

The United Nations said the continuous forced movement of people was causing panic and uncertainty.

"People are treated like pinballs with constant military orders playing with their fate and lives," said Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees.

Medics killed by Israeli fire are buried

Dozens gathered at a funeral for some of the 15 emergency responders killed by Israeli fire during a ground operation in Rafah last week. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies called it the deadliest attack on its medics in several years.

Raed al-Nems, a spokesperson for the Palestinian Red Crescent, said the paramedics were "killed in cold

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 44 of 74

blood” despite wearing uniforms and operating in clearly labeled ambulances. At funeral prayers, their shrouds were draped with Red Crescent banners.

Israel’s military has said its forces opened fire on several vehicles that raised suspicions by advancing without headlights or emergency signals. The military said a Hamas operative and eight other militants were among those killed.

The United Nations humanitarian office said the dead included eight Red Crescent workers, six members of Gaza’s Civil Defense, which operates under the Hamas-run government, and a U.N. worker.

Rescuers were only allowed to access the area nearly a week later to recover the bodies. Footage of Sunday’s recovery operation released by the U.N. showed Civil Defense workers digging into a mound of sand and pulling out a body wearing the same orange vest as theirs.

Netanyahu vows to implement Trump’s Gaza plan

Israel has vowed to intensify its military operations until Hamas releases the remaining 59 hostages it holds — 24 of them believed to be alive. Israel has also demanded that Hamas disarm and leave the territory, conditions that were not included in the ceasefire agreement and which Hamas has rejected.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday that Israel would take charge of security in Gaza after the war and implement U.S. President Donald Trump’s proposal to resettle Gaza’s population in other countries, describing it as “voluntary emigration.”

That plan has been universally rejected by Palestinians, who view it as forcible expulsion from their homeland. Human rights experts say it would likely violate international law.

Hamas has insisted on implementing the signed agreement, which called for the remainder of the hostages to be released in exchange for a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli pullout. Negotiations over those parts of the agreement were supposed to begin in February but only preliminary talks have been held.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, rampaging through army bases and farming communities and killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians. The militants took another 251 people hostage, most of whom have been released in ceasefires or other deals.

Israel’s retaliatory offensive has killed more than 50,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry, which does not say how many were civilians or combatants. At its height, the war had displaced some 90% of Gaza’s population, with many fleeing multiple times.

Large areas of Gaza have been destroyed, and it’s unclear how or when anything will be rebuilt.

French far-right leader Marine Le Pen barred from seeking office for 5 years, a political earthquake

By SYLVIE CORBET, JOHN LEICESTER and SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — A French court on Monday convicted Marine Le Pen of embezzlement and barred her from seeking public office for five years — a hammer blow to the far-right leader’s presidential hopes and an earthquake for French politics.

Le Pen denounced the verdict in an interview with French TV channel TF1 as a “political” move aimed at preventing her from running in the 2027 presidential election and said that millions of French people “are outraged.”

She described the ruling as a violation of the rule of law, said she would appeal and asked that the court proceedings take place before the 2027 campaign. She would remain ineligible to be a candidate until the appeal is decided.

Le Pen also was given four years’ imprisonment, with two to be served under house arrest and two suspended - which would not apply pending appeal.

Major political implications

The court ruling was a political as well as a judicial temblor for France, hobbling one of the leading contenders to succeed President Emmanuel Macron at the end of his second and final term. So broad were the political implications that even some of Le Pen’s opponents said the Paris court had gone too far.

But it’s too early to say how the case will affect voters. The potential elimination of Le Pen could fire up

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 45 of 74

diehard supporters, just as U.S. President's Donald Trump's legal problems motivated some of his. But it could also leave her on the sidelines, deflating what had been her upward trajectory.

Le Pen said the court should not have made her ineligible to run for office until all her chances at appeal had been exhausted, and that by doing so it was clear the court was aiming "specifically to prevent" her from being elected president.

"If that's not a political decision, I don't know what is," Le Pen said in the TF1 interview.

She said the ruling marked a "fateful day for our democracy" but vowed to keep pursuing what she called the now "admittedly narrow" path to the presidency.

"There are millions of French people who believe in me, millions of French people who trust me," she added: "For 30 years I've been fighting for you, and for 30 years I've been fighting against injustice, so I'm going to continue fighting."

Le Pen left the court before the sentencing

Le Pen herself was not around to hear the chief judge pronounce the sentence that threw her career into a tailspin. By then, the 56-year-old politician had already strode out of the courtroom.

Her supporters quickly expressed their disapproval of the verdict. Jordan Bardella, her 29-year-old protégé who could replace her on the ballot in 2027 if she cannot run, said on X that Le Pen was "being unjustly condemned" and that French democracy was "being executed."

Hungary's populist prime minister, Viktor Orbán, quickly took to social media to express his support, posting "Je suis Marine!" — I am Marine — on X.

Among political opponents of Le Pen who expressed unease was conservative lawmaker Laurent Wauquiez, who said the verdict put "a very heavy weight on our democracy."

'A political death' scenario

The sentence could prevent Le Pen from making what would have been her fourth run for the presidency in 2027, a scenario she has previously described as a "political death." The party's most recognized figurehead and a formidable campaigner, Le Pen was runner-up to Macron in the 2017 and 2022 presidential elections, and her party's electoral support has grown in recent years.

Only an appellate ruling that overturns the ban on public office could restore her hopes of running. But with the election just two years away, time is running out. There's no guarantee that an appeals court would rule more favorably, and appeals in France can take several years to conclude.

The verdict was a resounding defeat for Le Pen's National Rally party, formerly the National Front.

She and 24 other party officials were accused of having used money intended for European Union parliamentary aides to instead pay staff who worked for the party between 2004 and 2016, violating the 27-nation bloc's regulations.

A "system" to siphon off EU money

The judge handed down guilty verdicts to eight other current or former members of her party who, like Le Pen, previously served as European Parliament lawmakers. Also convicted were 12 people who served as parliamentary aides and three others. Only one defendant was acquitted. All had denied wrongdoing during the nine-week trial that took place in late 2024.

The chief judge said Le Pen had been at the heart of "a system" that her party used to siphon off EU parliament funds, though she said they didn't enrich themselves personally. The ruling described the embezzlement as "a democratic bypass" that deceived the parliament and voters.

From the front row of the court, Le Pen showed no immediate reaction when the judge first declared her guilty. But she grew more agitated as the verdict was delivered in greater detail. She shook her head in disagreement as the judge said Le Pen's party illegally used European funds for its own benefit.

"Incredible," she whispered at one point. She then left without warning, picking up her bag and striding out, her heels clicking on the hardwood floor. The abrupt departure left many in the courtroom in disbelief as they turned their heads toward the door.

The electoral ineligibility takes effect immediately, but the house arrest is suspended while she appeals.

Le Pen also serves as a lawmaker in France's National Assembly, a role not affected by the ineligibility ruling that she can keep for now.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 46 of 74

But if Macron dissolves parliament again, as he did last year, and calls early legislative elections, she would be barred from running.

NASA's newly returned astronauts say they would fly on Boeing's Starliner capsule again

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA's celebrity astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams said Monday that they hold themselves partly responsible for what went wrong on their space sprint-turned-marathon and would fly on Boeing's Starliner again.

SpaceX recently ferried the duo home after more than nine months at the International Space Station, filling in for Boeing that returned to Earth without them last year.

In their first news conference since coming home, the pair said they were taken aback by all the interest and insisted they were only doing their job and putting the mission ahead of themselves and even their families.

Wilmore didn't shy from accepting some of the blame for Boeing's bungled test flight.

"I'll start and point the finger and I'll blame me. I could have asked some questions and the answers to those questions could have turned the tide," he told reporters. "All the way up and down the chain. We all are responsible. We all own this."

Both astronauts said they would strap into Starliner again. "Because we're going to rectify all the issues that we encountered. We're going to fix them. We're going to make it work," Wilmore said, adding he'd go back up "in a heartbeat."

Williams noted that Starliner has "a lot of capability" and she wants to see it succeed. "We're all in," she said.

The two will meet with Boeing leadership on Wednesday to provide a rundown on the flight and its problems.

"It's not for pointing fingers," Wilmore said. "It's just to make the path clearer going forward."

The longtime astronauts and retired Navy captains ended up spending 286 days in space — 278 days more than planned when they blasted off on Boeing's first astronaut flight on June 5. The test pilots had to intervene in order for the Starliner capsule to reach the space station, as thrusters failed and helium leaked.

Their space station stay kept getting extended as engineers debated how to proceed. NASA finally judged Starliner too dangerous to bring Wilmore and Williams back and transferred them to SpaceX. But the launch of their replacements got stalled, stretching their mission beyond nine months.

President Donald Trump urged SpaceX's Elon Musk to hurry things up, adding politics to the stuck astronauts' ordeal. The dragged-out drama finally ended two weeks ago with a flawless splashdown by SpaceX off the Florida Panhandle.

"It's great being back home after being up there," Williams told The Associated Press in an interview. She waited until she was steadier on her feet before reuniting with her two Labrador retrievers the day after splashdown. "Pure joy."

Wilmore already has a to-do list. His wife wants to replace all the shrubs in their yard before summer. "So I've got to get my body ready to dig holes," he told the AP.

NASA said engineers still do not understand why Starliner's thrusters malfunctioned; more tests are planned through the summer. If engineers can figure out the thruster and leak issues, "Starliner is ready to go," Wilmore said.

The space agency may require another test flight — with cargo — before allowing astronauts to climb aboard. That redo could come by year's end.

Despite Starliner's rocky road, NASA officials said they stand behind the decision made years ago to have two competing U.S. companies providing taxi service to and from the space station. But time is running out: The space station is set to be abandoned in five years and replaced in orbit by privately operated labs.

A court is allowing the release of most records in the Gene Hackman death investigation

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — A court on Monday cleared the way for the release of investigative records from the deaths of Gene Hackman and his wife, Betsy Arakawa, as long as depictions of the deceased couple are blocked from view.

The ruling from a New Mexico judge allows the possible release of redacted police body camera video and other investigative materials, including images of the couple's dead dog. All photos, video and documents from the investigation had been restricted from release by an earlier, temporary court order.

"There shall be no depiction of either body in any video production" or photographic image of the bodies, Santa Fe-based Judge Matthew Wilson said in response to questions from attorneys on his ruling.

A representative for the Hackman family estate had urged a New Mexico judge to keep the records sealed to protect the family's constitutional right to privacy.

The partially mummified remains of Hackman and Arakawa were found in their Santa Fe home on Feb. 26, when maintenance and security workers showed up at the home and alerted police.

Authorities have said Hackman, 95, died of heart disease with complications from Alzheimer's disease about a week after his wife died of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome, which is a rare, rodent-borne disease. Hackman may have been unaware Arakawa, 65, was dead.

One of the couple's three dogs, a kelpie mix named Zinna, also was found dead in a crate in a bathroom closet near Arakawa, while two other dogs were found alive. A state veterinary lab tied the dog's death to dehydration and starvation.

Authorities unraveled the mysterious circumstances of the couple's deaths and described their conclusions at a March 7 news conference without releasing most related written and photographic records.

New Mexico's open records law blocks public access to sensitive images, including depictions of dead bodies. Experts also say some medical information is not considered public record under the state Inspection of Public Records Act.

In seeking to block the release of records, estate representative Julia Peters had emphasized the possibly shocking nature of photographs and video in the investigation and potential for their dissemination by media. The Hackman family estate also sought to block the eventual release of autopsy reports by the Office of the Medical Investigator and death investigation reports by the Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office.

An attorney for the estate, Kurt Sommer, argued during Monday's hearing that the couple took great pains to stay out of the public light during their lifetimes and that the right to control the use of their names and likenesses should extend to their estate in death.

The bulk of death investigations by law enforcement and autopsy reports by medical investigators are typically considered public records under state law in the spirit of ensuring government transparency and accountability.

The Associated Press, CBS News and CBS Studios intervened in the matter. Gregory P. Williams, an attorney for the news outlets, told the judge that they had previously said in court filings that they would not disseminate images of the couple's bodies and would blur images to obscure them from other records.

"There is certainly a public interest in knowing how their deaths were investigated and knowing how that was handled," Williams said.

Susan Madore, a publicist who had worked with the Hackmans for years, testified that the couple relished living in Santa Fe because it afforded them anonymity. Hackman retired in the early 2000s.

Arakawa had no children, while Hackman is survived by three children from a previous marriage.

At Monday's hearing, an attorney for Hackman's son and daughters highlighted the possible traumatic effects of releasing conversations about the deaths within police body camera videos.

Scot Sauder, an attorney for the state medical investigator, told the judge that autopsy reports for Hack-

man and his wife do not yet exist and won't include past health care information once completed. It can take months for autopsy reports to be completed.

Privacy likely also will play a role as the couple's estate is settled. According to probate court documents, Hackman signed an updated will in 2005 leaving his estate to his wife while the will she signed that year directed her estate to him. With both dying, management of the estate is in Peters' hands.

Without trust documents being made public, it's unclear who the beneficiaries are and how the assets will be divided.

Nonprofit groups and Democrats sue Trump administration over election executive order

By ALI SWENSON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President Donald Trump's executive order seeking to overhaul the nation's elections faced its first legal challenges Monday as the Democratic National Committee and a pair of nonprofits filed two separate lawsuits calling it unconstitutional.

The Campaign Legal Center and the State Democracy Defenders Fund brought the first lawsuit Monday afternoon. The DNC, the Democratic Governors Association, and Senate and House Democratic leaders followed soon after with a complaint of their own.

Both lawsuits filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia ask the court to block Trump's order and declare it illegal.

"The president's executive order is an unlawful action that threatens to uproot our tried-and-tested election systems and silence potentially millions of Americans," said Danielle Lang, senior director of voting rights at the D.C.-based Campaign Legal Center. "It is simply not within the president's authority to set election rules by executive decree, especially when they would restrict access to voting in this way."

The White House didn't respond to a request for comment.

The legal challenges had been expected after election lawyers warned some of Trump's demands in the order, including a proof-of-citizenship requirement for voter registration and new ballot deadline rules, may violate the U.S. Constitution.

The order also asserts power that legal experts say the president doesn't have over an independent agency. That agency, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, sets voluntary voting system guidelines and maintains the federal voter registration form.

The suits come as Congress is considering codifying a proof-of-citizenship requirement for voter registration into law, and as Trump has promised more actions related to elections in the coming weeks.

Both the legal challenges draw attention to the Constitution's "Elections Clause," which says states — not the president — get to decide the "times, places and manner" of how elections are run. That section of the Constitution also gives Congress the power to "make or alter" election regulations, at least for federal office, but it doesn't mention any presidential authority over election administration.

"The Constitution is clear: States set their own rules of the road when it comes to elections, and only Congress has the power to override these laws with respect to federal elections," said Lang, calling the executive order an "unconstitutional executive overreach."

The lawsuits also argue the president's order could disenfranchise voters. The nonprofits' lawsuit names three voter advocacy organizations as plaintiffs that they allege are harmed by Trump's executive order: the League of United Latin American Citizens, the Secure Families Initiative and the Arizona Students' Association.

The DNC's lawsuit highlights the role of the government's controversial cost-cutting arm, the Department of Government Efficiency.

It alleges the order's data-sharing requirements, including instructing DOGE to cross-reference federal data with state voter lists, violate Democrats' privacy rights and increase the risk that they will be harassed "based on false suspicions that they are not qualified to vote."

"This executive order is an unconstitutional power grab from Donald Trump that attacks vote by mail,

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 49 of 74

gives DOGE sensitive personal information and makes it harder for states to run their own free and fair elections,” reads a statement from the plaintiffs.

Trump, one of the top spreaders of election falsehoods, has argued this executive order will secure the vote against illegal voting by noncitizens. Multiple studies and investigations in individual states have shown that noncitizens casting ballots in federal elections, already a felony, is exceedingly rare.

Monday’s lawsuits against Trump’s elections order could be followed by more challenges. Other voting rights advocates, including the American Civil Liberties Union, have said they’re considering legal action. Several Democratic state attorneys general have said they are looking closely at the order and suspect it is illegal.

Meanwhile, Trump’s order has received praise from the top election officials in some Republican states who say it could inhibit instances of voter fraud and give them access to federal data to better maintain their voter rolls.

If courts determine the order can stand, the changes Trump wants are likely to cause some headaches for both election administrators and voters. State election officials, who already have lost some federal cybersecurity assistance, would have to spend time and money to comply with the order, including potentially buying new voting systems and educating voters of the rules.

The proof-of-citizenship requirement also could cause confusion or voter disenfranchisement because millions of eligible voting-age Americans do not have the proper documents readily available. In Kansas, which had a proof-of-citizenship requirement for three years before it was overturned, the state’s own expert estimated that almost all the roughly 30,000 people who were prevented from registering to vote during the time it was in effect were U.S. citizens who had been eligible.

Monday’s lawsuits are the latest of numerous efforts to fight the flurry of executive actions Trump has taken during the first months of his second term. Federal judges have partially or fully blocked many of them, including efforts to restrict birthright citizenship, ban transgender people from military service and curb diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives among federal contractors and grant recipients.

Israeli troops killed 15 Palestinian medics and buried them in a mass grave, UN says

By WAFAA SHURAF, LEE KEATH and FATMA KHALED Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Palestinians held funerals Monday for 15 medics and emergency responders killed by Israeli troops in southern Gaza, after their bodies and mangled ambulances were found buried in an impromptu mass grave, apparently plowed over by Israeli military bulldozers.

The Palestinian Red Crescent says the slain workers and their vehicles were clearly marked as medical and humanitarian personnel and accused Israeli troops of killing them “in cold blood.” The Israeli military says its troops opened fire on vehicles that approached them “suspiciously” without identification.

The dead included eight Red Crescent workers, six members of Gaza’s Civil Defense emergency unit and a staffer from UNRWA, the U.N.’s agency for Palestinians. The International Red Cross/Red Crescent said it was the deadliest attack on its personnel in eight years.

Since the war in Gaza began 18 months ago, Israel has killed more than 100 Civil Defense workers and more than 1,000 health workers, according to the U.N.

Here is what we know about what happened.

Missing for days

The emergency teams had been missing since March 23, when they went at around noon to retrieve casualties after Israeli forces launched an offensive into the Tel al-Sultan district of the southern city of Rafah.

The military had called for an evacuation of the area earlier that day, saying Hamas militants were operating there. Alerts by the Civil Defense at the time said displaced Palestinians sheltering in the area had been hit and a team that went to rescue them was “surrounded by Israeli troops.”

“The available information indicates that the first team was killed by Israeli forces on 23 March,” the U.N.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 50 of 74

said in a statement Sunday night.

Further emergency teams that went to rescue the first team were "struck one after another over several hours," it said. All the teams went out during daylight hours, according to the Civil Defense.

The Israeli military said Sunday that on March 23, troops opened fire on vehicles that were "advancing suspiciously" toward them without emergency signals.

It said "an initial assessment" determined that the troops killed a Hamas operative named Mohammed Amin Shobaki and eight other militants. Israel has struck ambulances and other emergency vehicles in the past, accusing Hamas militants of using them for transportation.

However, none of the dead staffers from the Red Crescent and Civil Defense had that name, and no other bodies were reported found at the site, raising questions over the military's suggestion that alleged militants were among the rescue workers.

The military did not immediately respond to requests for the names of the other alleged militants killed or for comment on how the emergency workers came to be buried.

The United Nations on Monday demanded "justice and answers" for the Israeli killings of emergency responders.

U.N. humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher made the demands saying: "They were killed by Israeli forces while trying to save lives."

After a ceasefire that lasted roughly two months, Israel relaunched its military campaign in Gaza on March 18. Since then, bombardment and new ground assaults that have killed more than 1,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. The ministry's count does not distinguish between militants and civilians, but it says over half those killed are women and children.

Aid workers say ambulance teams and humanitarian staff have come under fire in the renewed assault. A worker with the charity World Central Kitchen was killed Friday by an Israeli strike that hit next to a kitchen distributing free meals. A March 19 Israeli tank strike on a U.N. compound killed a staffer, the U.N. said, though Israel denies being behind the blast.

Mass grave

For days, Israeli forces would not allow access to the site where the emergency teams disappeared, the U.N. said.

On Wednesday, a U.N. convoy tried to reach the site but encountered Israeli troops opening fire on people.

The convoy saw a woman who had been shot lying in the road. The dashboard video shows staff talking about retrieving the woman. Then two people are seen walking across the road. Gunfire rings out and they flee. One stumbles, apparently wounded, before he is shot and falls onto his face to the ground. The U.N. said the team retrieved the body of the woman and left.

On Sunday, the U.N. said teams were able to reach the site after the Israeli military informed it where it had buried the bodies, in a barren area on the edges of Tel al-Sultan. Footage released by the U.N shows workers from PRCS and Civil Defense, wearing masks and bright orange vests, digging through hills of dirt that appeared to have been piled up by Israeli bulldozers.

The footage shows them digging out multiple bodies wearing orange emergency vests. Some of the bodies are found piled on top of each other. At one point, they pull out a body in a Civil Defense vest out of the dirt, and it is revealed to be a torso with no legs. Several ambulances and a U.N. vehicle, all heavily damaged or torn apart, are also buried in the dirt.

"Their bodies were gathered and buried in this mass grave," said Jonathan Whittall, with the U.N. humanitarian office OCHA, speaking at the site in the video. "We're digging them out in their uniforms, with their gloves on. They were here to save lives."

"It's absolute horror what has happened here," he said.

Funerals

A giant crowd gathered on Monday outside the morgue of Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis as the bodies of the eight slain PRCS workers were brought out for funerals. Their bodies were laid out on stretchers wrapped in white cloth with the Red Crescent logo on it and their photos, as family and others held funeral prayers over them. Funerals for the seven others followed.

"They were killed in cold blood by the Israeli occupation, despite the clear nature of their humanitarian mission," Raed al-Nimis, the Red Crescent spokesperson in Gaza, told the AP.

Israeli troops have killed at least 30 Red Crescent medics over the course of the war. Among them were two killed in February 2024 when they tried to rescue Hind Rajab, a 5-year-old girl who was killed along with six other relatives when they were trapped in their car under Israeli fire in northern Gaza.

From Geneva, the head of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Jagan Chapagain, said the staffer killed last week "wore emblems that should have protected them; their ambulances were clearly marked."

"All humanitarians must be protected," he said.

Trump task force to review Harvard's funding after Columbia bows to federal demands

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Harvard University has become the latest target in the Trump administration's approach to fight campus antisemitism, with the announcement of a new "comprehensive review" that could jeopardize billions of dollars for the Ivy League college.

A federal antisemitism task force is reviewing more than \$255 million in contracts between Harvard and the federal government to make sure the school is following civil rights laws, the administration announced Monday. The government also will examine \$8.7 billion in grant commitments to Harvard and its affiliates.

The same task force cut \$400 million from Columbia University and threatened to slash billions more if it refused a list of demands from President Donald Trump's administration. Columbia agreed to many of the changes this month, drawing praise from some Jewish groups and condemnation from free speech groups, who see it as a stunning intrusion by the federal government.

Dozens of other universities have been put on notice by the Trump administration that they could face similar treatment over allegations of antisemitism. The federal government is a major provider of revenue for American universities through grants for scientific research.

Education Secretary Linda McMahon said Harvard symbolizes the American Dream, but has jeopardized its reputation by "promoting divisive ideologies over free inquiry" and failing to protect students from antisemitism.

"Harvard can right these wrongs and restore itself to a campus dedicated to academic excellence and truth-seeking, where all students feel safe on its campus," McMahon said in a statement.

Harvard President Alan Garber acknowledged that antisemitism exists even on his campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but he said Harvard has done much to fight it.

"For the past fifteen months, we have devoted considerable effort to addressing antisemitism," Garber said in a statement. "We have strengthened our rules and our approach to disciplining those who violate them."

Harvard will ensure the government has a full account of the university's work, Garber said. If federal funding is pulled, he added, it will "halt life-saving research and imperil important scientific research and innovation."

The elite university is among more than 100 colleges and school systems facing investigations for antisemitism or Islamophobia following Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack against Israel. The Trump administration has promised tougher action than its predecessor, naming antisemitism as the top priority for civil rights investigations.

Monday's announcement didn't say whether the government had made any specific demands of Harvard. The Education Department, the Health and Human Services Department and the U.S. General Services Administration are leading the review of its contracts and grants.

Those agencies will determine whether orders to halt work should be issued for certain contracts between Harvard and the federal government, the government said. The task force is also ordering Harvard to submit a list of all contracts with the federal government, both directly with the school or through any

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 52 of 74

of its affiliates.

"The Task Force will continue its efforts to root out anti-Semitism and to refocus our institutions of higher learning on the core values that undergird a liberal education," said Sean Keveney, acting general counsel for Health and Human Services. "We are pleased that Harvard is willing to engage with us on these goals."

Some of the nation's most prestigious colleges have faced extraordinary scrutiny from Republicans in Congress following a wave of pro-Palestinian protests that started at Columbia and spread across the country last year. Presidents of several Ivy League schools were called before Congress over allegations that they allowed antisemitism to fester.

The hearings on Capitol Hill contributed to the resignation of presidents at Harvard, Columbia and Penn. The interim president who took over at Columbia, Katrina Armstrong, resigned last week after the school agreed to the government's demands.

Trump and other officials have accused the protesters of being "pro-Hamas." Student activists say they oppose Israel's military activity in Gaza.

Instead of going through a lengthy process that allows the Education Department to cut funding from schools that violate civil rights laws, the Trump administration has found quick leverage by pulling contracts and grants. The tactic is being challenged in a federal lawsuit brought by the American Association of University Professors and the American Federation of Teachers.

Judge pauses Trump administration plans to end temporary legal protections for Venezuelans

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A federal judge on Monday paused plans by the Trump administration to end temporary legal protections for hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans, a week before they were scheduled to expire.

The order by U.S. District Judge Edward Chen in San Francisco is a relief for 350,000 Venezuelans whose Temporary Protected Status was set to expire April 7 after Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem reversed protections granted by the Biden administration.

Chen said in his ruling that the action by Noem "threatens to: inflict irreparable harm on hundreds of thousands of persons whose lives, families, and livelihoods will be severely disrupted, cost the United States billions in economic activity, and injure public health and safety in communities throughout the United States."

He said the government had failed to identify any "real countervailing harm in continuing TPS for Venezuelan beneficiaries" and said plaintiffs will likely succeed in showing that Noem's actions "are unauthorized by law, arbitrary and capricious, and motivated by unconstitutional animus."

Chen, who was appointed to the bench by President Barack Obama, a Democrat, said his order in the lawsuit brought by the National TPS Alliance applies nationally. Noem had also announced the end of TPS for an estimated 250,000 additional Venezuelans in September.

The judge gave the government one week to file notice of an appeal and the plaintiffs one week to file to pause for 500,000 Haitians whose TPS protections are set to expire in August. Alejandro Mayorkas, the previous secretary, had extended protections for all three cohorts into 2026.

"Today is a good day for the migrant community in this country," said Pablo Alvarado, co-executive director of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network.

He said that people fleeing war-torn El Salvador who initially benefited from the TPS program fought to maintain protections that came to include countries such as Ukraine, Sudan and Syria — and the broader community must continue fighting.

"It takes so much courage to come forward and say, 'Here I am, and I'm going to fight for this,'" Alvarado said. "We're not going to throw anyone under the bus. We're going to fight for everyone because everyone is deserving."

The Department of Homeland Security did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 53 of 74

Congress created TPS, as the law is known, in 1990 to prevent deportations to countries suffering from natural disasters or civil strife, giving people authorization to live and work in the U.S. in increments of up to 18 months if the Homeland Security secretary deems conditions in their home countries are unsafe for return.

The reversals are a major about-face from immigration policies under former President Joe Biden, a Democrat, and come as Republican President Donald Trump and his top aides have ratcheted up attacks on judges who rule against them, with immigration being at the forefront of many disagreements.

At a hearing last Monday, lawyers for TPS holders said that Noem has no authority to cancel the protections and that her actions were motivated in part by racism. They asked the judge to pause Noem's orders, citing the irreparable harm to TPS holders struggling with fear of deportation and potential separation from family members.

Government lawyers for Noem said that Congress gave the secretary clear and broad authority to make determinations related to the TPS program and that the decisions were not subject to judicial review. Plaintiffs have no right to thwart the secretary's orders from being carried out, they said.

But Chen found the government's arguments unpersuasive and said that numerous derogatory and false comments by Noem — and by Trump — against Venezuelans as criminals show that racial animus was a motivator in ending protections.

"Acting on the basis of a negative group stereotype and generalizing such stereotype to the entire group is the classic example of racism," he wrote.

Biden sharply expanded use of TPS and other temporary forms of protection in a strategy to create and expand legal pathways to live in the United States while suspending asylum for those who enter illegally.

Trump has questioned the impartiality of a federal judge who blocked his plans to deport Venezuelan immigrants to El Salvador, levelling his criticism only hours before his administration asked an appeals court to lift the judge's order.

The administration has also said it was revoking temporary protections for more than 530,000 Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans who have come to the U.S. since October 2022 through another legal avenue called humanitarian parole, which Biden used more than any other president. Their two-year work permits will expire April 24.

Trump has dubbed April 2 'Liberation Day' for his tariffs. Here's what to expect

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — As the trade wars launched by U.S. President Donald Trump continue to escalate, all eyes are on Wednesday.

Trump has repeatedly called April 2 "Liberation Day," with promises to roll out a set of tariffs, or taxes on imports from other countries, that he says will free the U.S. from a reliance on foreign goods. To do this, Trump has said he'll impose "reciprocal" tariffs to match the duties that other countries charge on U.S. products.

But a lot remains unknown about how these levies will actually be implemented. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Monday that Trump would unveil his plans to place reciprocal tariffs on nearly all American trading partners on Wednesday, but maintained that the details are up to the president to announce.

Since taking office just months ago, Trump has proven to be aggressive with tariff threats, all while creating a sense of whiplash through on-again, off-again trade actions. And it's possible that we'll see more delays or confusion this week.

Trump has argued that tariffs protect U.S. industries from unfair foreign competition, raise money for the federal government and provide leverage to demand concessions from other countries. But economists stress that broad tariffs at the rates suggested by Trump could backfire.

Tariffs typically trickle down to the consumer through higher prices — and businesses worldwide also have

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 54 of 74

a lot to lose if their costs rise and their sales fall. Import taxes already in effect, coupled with uncertainty around future trade actions and possible retaliations, have already roiled financial markets and lowered consumer confidence while enveloping many with questions that could delay hiring and investment.

Here's what you need to know.

What will happen on April 2?

Details around Trump's plans remain uncertain. Reciprocal tariffs could take the form of product-by-product duties, for example, or broader "averages" imposed across all goods from each country — or perhaps something else entirely. The rates could reflect what other countries charge as well as their value added taxes and subsidies to domestic companies.

White House trade adviser Peter Navarro told "Fox News Sunday" that the tariffs could raise \$600 billion annually, which would imply an average rate of 20%.

Trump has talked about taxing the European Union, South Korea, Brazil and India, among other countries, through these levies. On Monday, Leavitt said Trump had been presented with several proposals by his advisers. She added that the president would make a final decision, but right now was not contemplating any country-wide exemptions from the tariffs.

Previously-delayed import taxes could take effect very soon. Trump's month-long delay for many goods from Canada and Mexico, for example, is set to elapse in early April. Earlier this month, Trump wrote on his social media platform Truth Social that the extension granted for Mexican imports covered by the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement runs through April 2. But further confirmation around a specific date has not been issued since.

Which of Trump's tariffs are about to start?

Trump has said he will place a 25% tariff on all imports from any country that buys oil or gas from Venezuela, which includes the U.S. itself, starting Wednesday — in addition to imposing new tariffs on the South American country.

His 25% tariffs on auto imports will start being collected Thursday, with taxes on fully-imported cars kicking off at midnight. The tariffs are set to expand to applicable auto parts in the following weeks, through May 3.

The White House says it expects to raise \$100 billion in revenue annually from these new duties, but economists stress this trade action will upend the auto industry's global supply chain and lead to higher prices for consumers.

Which tariffs have already gone into effect?

Trump imposed a 10% tariff on all Chinese imports beginning Feb. 4, a levy he later doubled to 20% from March 4 onward. And China has hit back with retaliatory tariffs covering a range of U.S. goods, including a 15% tariff on coal and liquefied natural gas products and 10% tariff on crude oil from the U.S. that took effect Feb 10. China also imposed tariffs of up to 15% on key U.S. farm exports starting March 10.

Trump's expanded steel and aluminum tariffs went into effect earlier this month, too. Both metals are now taxed at 25% across the board — with Trump's order to remove steel exemptions and raise aluminum's levy from his previously-imposed 2018 import taxes taking effect March 12.

Canada and Mexico, America's two largest trading partners, have also faced steep tariffs. Earlier this month, Trump implemented a partial, month-long delay of his 25% tariffs on both countries — delaying taxes for auto-related imports as well as goods that comply with the 2020 US-Mexico-Canada Agreement until early April.

But other imports are still levied, as well as a lower 10% duty on potash and Canadian energy products. In response to these tariffs, as well as the new steel and aluminum import taxes, Canada has rolled out a series of counter measures amounting to billions of dollars on U.S. goods. Mexico, meanwhile, has yet to formally impose new levies — signaling it may still hope to de-escalate the trade war, although the country previously promised retaliation to Trump's actions.

Can we expect additional tariffs down the road?

Even more tariffs from Trump are likely, with the president also threatening import taxes on products

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 55 of 74

like copper, lumber, pharmaceutical drugs and computer chips.

And many countries have promised retaliatory measures — if not already imposed them, like Canada. Trump has said he won't negotiate with other countries on Wednesday's tariffs until after they're imposed, though he has said his 25% taxes on auto imports would be permanent.

In response to Trump's steel and aluminum tariffs, the European Union announced measures on U.S. goods worth some 26 billion euros (\$28 billion) — to target steel and aluminum products, but also American beef, poultry, bourbon, motorcycles, peanut butter and jeans. The 27-member bloc had intended to roll out this retaliatory trade action in two phases, on Tuesday and April 13, but later said it will delay it until mid-April, without giving a specific date.

We'll potentially see more retaliatory announcements this week, particularly if Trump confirms more details of sweeping reciprocal tariffs on Wednesday.

Wall Street swings again as the approach of Trump's 'Liberation Day' wallops stock markets worldwide

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — President Donald Trump's fast-approaching "Liberation Day" sent stock markets swinging sharply worldwide on Monday.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 rose 0.6% in another roller-coaster day, after being down as much as 1.7% during the morning. The reversal helped the index shave its loss for the first three months of the year to 4.6%, making it the worst quarter in two-and-a-half years.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average also swerved higher after erasing an initial loss, and it climbed 417 points, or 1%. Slides for Tesla, Nvidia and other influential Big Tech stocks, though, sent the Nasdaq composite down 0.1%.

Such neck-twisting turns have become routine for the U.S. stock market recently because of uncertainty about what Trump will do with tariffs — and by how much they will worsen inflation and grind down growth for economies. Wall Street's swings followed a sell-off that spanned the world earlier Monday as worries built about the effects of the tariffs that Trump says will bring manufacturing jobs back to the United States.

In Japan, the Nikkei 225 index dropped 4%. South Korea's Kospi sank 3%, and France's CAC 40 fell 1.6%. Instead of stocks, prices strengthened for things considered safer bets when the economy is looking shaky. Gold rose again to briefly crest \$3,160 per ounce.

Prices for Treasury bonds also climbed, which in turn sent their yields down. The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.21% from 4.27% late Friday and from roughly 4.80% in January.

On Wednesday, the United States is set to begin what Trump calls "reciprocal" tariffs, which will be tailored to match what he sees is the burden each country places on his, including things like value-added taxes. Much is still unknown, including exactly what the U.S. government will do on "Liberation Day."

At Goldman Sachs, economists expect Trump to announce an average 15% reciprocal tariff. They also raised their forecast for inflation and lowered it for U.S. economic growth for the end of the year.

They now see a 35% chance of recession in the next year, up from an earlier forecast of 20%, "reflecting our lower growth forecast, falling confidence, and statements from White House officials indicating willingness to tolerate economic pain," according to Goldman Sachs economist David Mericle.

If the April 2 tariffs end up being less onerous than investors fear — maybe Trump includes no additional tariff increases on China, for example — stocks could rally. But if they end up being a worst-case scenario, which gets businesses so fearful that they start cutting their workforces, stocks could sink much further.

Of course, there's also the chance that April 2 does little to clear the uncertainty. It could end up being a "stepping stone for further negotiations" instead of a "clearing event" for the market, according to Michael Wilson and other strategists at Morgan Stanley.

"This means policy uncertainty and growth risks are likely to persist — it's a question of to what degree," Wilson wrote in a report.

One worry is that even if Trump's tariffs end up being less harsh than feared, all the uncertainty created

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 56 of 74

by them alone could cause U.S. households and businesses to freeze their spending, which would hurt an economy that had been running at a solid pace to close last year.

Either way, some familiar names were among Wall Street's hardest hit on Monday.

Tesla fell 1.7% to bring its loss for the year so far to 35.8%. It's been one of the year's worst performers in the S&P 500 in large part because of fears that the electric-vehicle maker's brand has become too intertwined with its CEO, Elon Musk.

Musk has been leading U.S. government efforts to cut spending, making him a target of growing political anger, and protests have swarmed Tesla showrooms as a result.

Other Big Tech stocks also struggled. They've been at the sell-off's center in large part because of criticism that their stock prices had become too expensive. Critics pointed to how their prices rose faster than their already quick-growing profits in recent years.

Nvidia, which has ridden the frenzy around artificial-intelligence technology to become one of Wall Street's most influential stocks, fell 1.2% to bring its loss for the year so far to 19.3%.

On the winning side of Wall Street was Mr. Cooper, which jumped 14.5% after the home loan servicer said it's being bought by mortgage company Rocket in an all-stock deal valued at \$9.4 billion. The deal comes just weeks after Rocket acquired real estate listing company Redfin, and Rocket's stock fell 7.4%.

Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway rose 1.2% and was one of the strongest forces lifting the S&P 500. The parent of GEICO and other companies said earlier this year it's sitting on \$334.2 billion in unused cash. Such a large amount could indicate Buffett, who's famous for buying when prices are low, may see little worth purchasing in a stock market that critics had called too expensive.

Newsmax surged 735% in a dizzying first day of trading for the stock of the news company. Its price was so volatile that trading of its stock was briefly halted a dozen times through the day.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 30.91 points to 5,611.85. The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 417.86 to 42,001.76, and the Nasdaq composite fell 23.70 to 17,299.29.

A stroke survivor speaks again with the help of an experimental brain-computer implant

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Scientists have developed a device that can translate thoughts about speech into spoken words in real time.

Although it's still experimental, they hope the brain-computer interface could someday help give voice to those unable to speak.

A new study described testing the device on a 47-year-old woman with quadriplegia who couldn't speak for 18 years after a stroke. Doctors implanted it in her brain during surgery as part of a clinical trial.

It "converts her intent to speak into fluent sentences," said Gopala Anumanchipalli, a co-author of the study published Monday in the journal *Nature Neuroscience*.

Other brain-computer interfaces, or BCIs, for speech typically have a slight delay between thoughts of sentences and computerized verbalization. Such delays can disrupt the natural flow of conversation, potentially leading to miscommunication and frustration, researchers said.

This is "a pretty big advance in our field," said Jonathan Brumberg of the Speech and Applied Neuroscience Lab at the University of Kansas, who was not part of the study.

A team in California recorded the woman's brain activity using electrodes while she spoke sentences silently in her brain. The scientists used a synthesizer they built using her voice before her injury to create a speech sound that she would have spoken. They trained an AI model that translates neural activity into units of sound.

It works similarly to existing systems used to transcribe meetings or phone calls in real time, said Anumanchipalli, of the University of California, Berkeley.

The implant itself sits on the speech center of the brain so that it's listening in, and those signals are translated to pieces of speech that make up sentences. It's a "streaming approach," Anumanchipalli said,

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 57 of 74

with each 80-millisecond chunk of speech – about half a syllable – sent into a recorder.

"It's not waiting for a sentence to finish," Anumanchipalli said. "It's processing it on the fly."

Decoding speech that quickly has the potential to keep up with the fast pace of natural speech, said Brumberg. The use of voice samples, he added, "would be a significant advance in the naturalness of speech."

Though the work was partially funded by the National Institutes of Health, Anumanchipalli said it wasn't affected by recent NIH research cuts. More research is needed before the technology is ready for wide use, but with "sustained investments," it could be available to patients within a decade, he said.

Marine Le Pen brought the far right to France's front door

By THOMAS ADAMSON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — For years, Marine Le Pen stood at the gates of power — poised, relentless and rising. She stripped the French far right of its old symbols, sanded down its roughest edges and built in its place a sleek, disciplined machine with the single goal of winning the country's presidency.

In 2022, she came closer than anyone thought possible, winning more than 40% of the vote in the runoff against Emmanuel Macron. The Élysée Palace seemed within reach.

Now her political future may lay in ruins. On Monday, a French court convicted Le Pen of embezzling European Union funds and barred her from holding office for five years. The sentence may have done more than just potentially remove her from the next presidential race. It may have ended the most sustained far-right bid for power in Western Europe since World War II — surpassed only, in outcome, by Italy's prime minister, Giorgia Meloni.

But the political earthquake Le Pen set in motion will rumble for years to come.

A family inheritance — reforged

Le Pen was born in 1968 into a family already on the fringes of French politics. In 1972, her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, founded the National Front party rooted in racism, antisemitism and a yearning for France's lost empire.

She was just 8 years old when a bomb destroyed the family's apartment in Paris in what was widely seen as an assassination attempt on her father. No one was seriously hurt, but the blast marked her for life. She has said it gave her a lasting sense that her family was hated, and that they would never be treated like other people.

As a young woman, she studied law, became a defense attorney and learned how to argue her way through hostile rooms. In politics, she didn't wait her turn. In 2011, she wrested control of the party from her father. In 2015, she expelled him after one of his Holocaust-denying tirades.

She renamed the party the National Rally. She replaced leather-jacketed radicals with tailored blazers and talking points. She talked less about race, more about the French way of life. She warned of "civilizational threats," called for bans on headscarves and promised to put French families first.

Her tone changed. Her message didn't.

In one of her sharpest political maneuvers, she sought out a group long despised by her father: the LGBTQ community. Le Pen filled her inner circle with openly gay aides, skipped public protests against same-sex marriage and framed herself as a protector of sexual minorities against "Islamist danger."

Critics called it "pinkwashing" — a cosmetic tolerance masking deeper hostility. But it worked. A surprising number of gay voters, especially younger ones, started backing her. Many saw strength, clarity and the promise of order in a world spinning too fast.

From the fringe to the front line

She ran for president three times: 2012, 2017 and 2022. Each time, she climbed higher. In her final campaign, she was confident, calm and media savvy. She leaned into her role as a single mother, posed with her cats and repeated her calls for "national priority." She no longer shocked. She convinced.

Behind her stood a constellation of far-right leaders cheering her on: Hungary's Viktor Orbán, Italy's Matteo Salvini, the Netherlands' Geert Wilders. They saw in her not only an ally, but a leader. Her mix of cultural nationalism, social media fluency and calculated restraint became a blueprint.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 58 of 74

"Marine Le Pen posts pictures of her cat, talks about being a mother. But when it comes to policy, there's no softening," said Pierre Lefevre, a Paris-based consultant. "It makes extreme positions seem more palatable, even to people who might otherwise be put off."

When she lost in 2022, she didn't vanish. She regrouped, stayed present in parliament and prepared for 2027. Polls had her leading. Macron cannot run again.

Then came Monday's verdict.

The fall

The court found that Le Pen had siphoned millions of euros in public funds while serving in the European Parliament, paying party staff with money intended for EU assistants. Prosecutors described it as deliberate and organized. The court agreed.

She was sentenced to two years of house arrest, fined €100,000 (\$108,200) and banned from holding public office for five years. She said she would appeal. The house arrest sentence will be suspended during the appeal, but the ban on holding office takes effect immediately.

Her allies erupted in outrage. Orbán declared, "Je suis Marine" — I am Marine. Salvini called the ruling "a declaration of war by Brussels." In Paris, her supporters called it political persecution. Her opponents fist-pumped in the streets.

A changed political landscape

Even in disgrace, Le Pen remains one of the most consequential political figures of her time. She took a name that once evoked hatred and transformed it into a serious vehicle for national leadership. She made the far right electable. She blurred the line between fringe and power.

Her party, the National Rally, became the largest last year in France's lower house of parliament. Her handpicked successor, 29-year-old Jordan Bardella, now leads it. He is polished and popular, but he lacks broad political experience and name recognition.

Whether Le Pen returns after her ban, fades into silence or reinvents herself again, her mark is permanent. She forced mainstream rivals to adapt to her language. She turned fear into votes and redefined what was politically possible in a republic once seen as immune to extremism.

She never became president, but she changed the race and the rules.

Trump's promised 'Liberation Day' of tariffs is coming. Here's what it could mean for you

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump says Wednesday will be "Liberation Day" — a moment when he plans to roll out a set of tariffs that he promises will free the United States from foreign goods.

The details of Trump's next round of import taxes are still sketchy. Most economic analyses say average U.S. families would have to absorb the cost of his tariffs in the form of higher prices and lower incomes. But an undeterred Trump is inviting CEOs to the White House to say they are investing hundreds of billions of dollars in new projects to avoid the import taxes.

It is also possible that the tariffs are short-lived if Trump feels he can cut a deal after imposing them.

"I'm certainly open to it, if we can do something," Trump told reporters. "We'll get something for it."

At stake are family budgets, America's prominence as the world's leading financial power and the structure of the global economy.

Here's what you should know about the impending trade penalties:

What exactly does Trump plan to do?

He wants to announce import taxes, including "reciprocal" tariffs that would match the rates charged by other countries and account for other subsidies. Trump has talked about taxing the European Union, South Korea, Brazil and India, among other countries.

As he announced 25% auto tariffs last week, he alleged that America has been ripped off because it imports more goods than it exports.

"This is the beginning of Liberation Day in America," Trump said. "We're going to charge countries for

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 59 of 74

doing business in our country and taking our jobs, taking our wealth, taking a lot of things that they've been taking over the years. They've taken so much out of our country, friend and foe. And, frankly, friend has been oftentimes much worse than foe."

In an interview Saturday with NBC News, Trump said it did not bother him if tariffs caused vehicle prices to rise because autos with more U.S. content could possibly be more competitively priced.

"I hope they raise their prices, because if they do, people are gonna buy American-made cars," Trump said. "I couldn't care less because if the prices on foreign cars go up, they're going to buy American cars."

Trump has also suggested that he will be flexible with his tariffs, saying he will treat other nations better than they treated the United States. But he still has plenty of other taxes coming on imports.

The Republican president plans to tax imported pharmaceutical drugs, copper and lumber. He has put forth a 25% tariff on any country that imports oil from Venezuela, even though the United States also does so. Imports from China are being charged an additional 20% tax because of its role in fentanyl production. Trump has imposed separate tariffs on goods from Canada and Mexico for the stated reason of stopping drug smuggling and illegal immigration. Trump also expanded his 2018 steel and aluminum tariffs to 25% on all imports.

Some aides suggest the tariffs are tools for negotiation on trade and border security; others say the revenues will help reduce the federal budget deficit. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick says they will force other nations to show Trump "respect."

What could tariffs do to the US economy?

Nothing good, according to most economists. They say the tariffs would get passed along to consumers in the form of higher prices for autos, groceries, housing and other goods. Corporate profits could be lower and growth more sluggish. Trump maintains that more companies would open factories to avoid the taxes, though that process could take three years or more.

Economist Art Laffer estimates the tariffs on autos, if fully implemented, could increase per vehicle costs by \$4,711, though he said he views Trump as a smart and savvy negotiator. The investment bank Goldman Sachs estimates the economy will grow this quarter at an annual rate of just 0.6%, down from a rate of 2.4% at the end of last year.

Mayor Andrew Ginther of Columbus, Ohio, said on Friday that tariffs could increase the median cost of a home by \$21,000, making affordability more of an obstacle because building materials would cost more.

White House trade adviser Peter Navarro told "Fox News Sunday" that the auto tariffs would raise \$100 billion annually and the other tariffs would bring in about \$600 billion per year, or about \$6 trillion over 10 years. As a share of the economy, that would be the largest tax increase since World War II, according to Jessica Riedl, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, a conservative think tank.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has suggested that tariffs would be a one-time price adjustment, rather than the start of an inflationary spiral. But Bessent's conclusion rests on tariffs being brief or contained, rather than leading other countries to retaliate with their own tariffs or seeping into other sectors of the economy.

"There is a chance tariffs on goods begin to filter through to the pricing of services," said Samuel Rines, a strategist at WisdomTree. "Auto parts get more expensive, then auto repair gets more expensive, then auto insurance feels the pressure. While goods are the focus, tariffs could have a longer-term effect on inflation."

How are other nations thinking about the new tariffs?

Most foreign leaders see the tariffs as destructive for the global economy, even if they are prepared to impose their own countermeasures.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said Trump's tariff threats had ended the partnership between his country and the United States, even as the president on Friday talked about his phone call with Carney in relatively positive terms. Canada already has announced retaliatory tariffs.

French President Emmanuel Macron said the tariffs were "not coherent" and would mean "breaking value chains, creating inflation in the short term and destroying jobs. It's not good for the American economy,

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 60 of 74

nor for the European, Canadian or Mexican economies." Yet Macron said his nation would defend itself with the goal of dismantling the tariffs.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has avoided the tit-for-tat responses on tariffs, but she sees it as critical to defend jobs in her country.

The Chinese government said Trump's tariffs would harm the global trading system and would not fix the economic challenges identified by Trump.

"There are no winners in trade wars or tariff wars, and no country's development and prosperity are achieved through imposing tariffs," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said.

How did Trump land on it being called 'Liberation Day'?

Based off Trump's public statements, April 2 is at least the third "liberation day" that he has identified.

At a rally last year in Nevada, he said the day of the presidential election, Nov. 5, would be "Liberation Day in America." He later gave his inauguration the same label, declaring in his address: "For American citizens, Jan. 20, 2025, is Liberation Day."

His repeated designation of the term is a sign of just how much importance Trump places on tariffs, an obsession of his since the 1980s. Dozens of other countries recognize their own form of liberation days to recognize events such as overcoming Nazi Germany or the end of a previous political regime deemed oppressive.

Trump sees his tariffs as providing national redemption, but the slumping consumer confidence and stock market indicate that much of the public believes the U.S. economy will pay the price for his ambitions.

"I don't see anything positive about Liberation Day," said Phillip Braun, a finance professor at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management. "It's going to hurt the U.S. economy. Other countries are going to retaliate."

A Kremlin official says Russia sees efforts to end Ukraine war as a drawn-out process

By The Associated Press undefined

Russia views efforts to end its three-year war with Ukraine as "a drawn-out process," a Kremlin spokesman said Monday, after U.S. President Donald Trump expressed frustration with the two countries' leaders as he tries to bring about a truce.

"We are working to implement some ideas in connection with the Ukrainian settlement. This work is ongoing," Dmitry Peskov said in a conference call with reporters.

"There is nothing concrete yet that we could and should announce. This is a drawn-out process because of the difficulty of its substance," the Kremlin spokesman said when asked about Trump's anger at Russian President Vladimir Putin's comments dismissing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's legitimacy to negotiate a deal.

Russia has effectively rejected a U.S. proposal for a full and immediate 30-day halt in the fighting. The feasibility of a partial ceasefire on the Black Sea, used by both countries to transport shipments of grain and other cargo, was cast into doubt after Kremlin negotiators imposed far-reaching conditions.

Trump promised during last year's U.S. election campaign that he would bring Europe's biggest conflict since World War II to a swift conclusion.

Peskov didn't directly address Trump's criticism of Putin on Sunday, when he said he was "angry, pissed off" that Putin had questioned Zelenskyy's credibility as leader.

But the spokesman said that Putin "remains absolutely open to contacts" with the U.S. president and was ready to speak to him.

Both countries are preparing for a spring-summer campaign on the battlefield, analysts and Ukrainian and Western officials say.

Putin on Monday ordered a regular bi-annual call-up intended to draft 160,000 conscripts for an one-year tour of compulsory military service. Russian authorities say that the troops deployed to Ukraine only

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 61 of 74

include volunteers who signed contracts with the military and conscripts aren't sent to the frontline. Some draftees, however, fought and were taken prisoners when the Ukrainian military launched an incursion into Russia's Kursk region in August.

Zelenskyy said late Sunday that there has been no reduction in Russia's attacks as it drives on with its invasion of Ukraine that began in February 2022.

"The geography and brutality of Russian strikes, not just occasionally, but literally every day and night, show that Putin couldn't care less about diplomacy," Zelenskyy said in his daily address.

"And almost every day, in response to this proposal, there are Russian drones, bombs, artillery shelling, and ballistic strikes," he said.

He urged further international pressure on Moscow to compel Russia to negotiate, including new sanctions.

The European Union's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas picked up on that theme at a meeting of some of the bloc's top diplomats in Madrid on Monday.

"Russia is playing games and not really wanting peace," Kallas told reporters ahead of the meeting, which was due to discuss the war. "So our question is, how can we put more pressure on Russia."

Trump said he would consider imposing further sanctions on Russia, which already faces steep financial penalties, and using tariffs to undermine its oil exports.

Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, came under another Russian drone attack overnight, injuring three people, the Ukrainian Interior Ministry said Monday.

Russia also fired two ballistic missiles and 131 Shahed and decoy drones, the Ukrainian air force said.

Meanwhile, Russia's Defense Ministry said air defenses shot down 66 Ukrainian drones early Monday over three Russian regions.

"The continuing attacks by the Ukrainian armed forces on Russia's energy facilities show the complete lack of respect for any obligations related to the settlement of the conflict in Ukraine by the Kyiv regime," the ministry said in a statement.

Supreme Court seems likely to side with Catholic Charities in religious-rights case

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court appeared Monday to be leaning toward a Catholic charitable organization pushing back against the state of Wisconsin in the latest religious rights case to come before the court.

In a case that could have wide-ranging effects, the justices suggested the Catholic Charities Bureau should not have to pay unemployment taxes because the work of the social services agency is motivated by religious beliefs, and the state exempts religious groups from the tax.

"Isn't it a fundamental principle of our First Amendment that the state shouldn't be picking and choosing between religions?" Justice Neil Gorsuch said.

The dispute is one of three cases involving religion under consideration this term by the justices who have issued a string of decisions siding with churches and religious plaintiffs. The others involve religious objections to books read in public schools and public funding for religious schools.

The charities don't qualify for the tax exemption because the day-to-day services it provides don't involve religious teachings, Colin Roth, an attorney for Wisconsin, argued. Catholic Charities has paid the tax for over 50 years, and if the court finds it can claim the exemption that could open the door to big employers like religiously-affiliated hospitals pulling out of the state unemployment system as well, he said.

While Roth faced a grilling from both liberal and conservative justices, some like Amy Coney Barrett also raised questions about how far such exemptions would go. "One of the problems here is figuring out what the line is," she said.

The Trump administration weighed in to support the charity, urging the court to toss out a Wisconsin Supreme Court ruling siding with the state. The state high court misinterpreted a federal law when it found that both the motivations and the work itself has to be religious for organizations to avoid paying

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 62 of 74

the tax, Deputy Solicitor General Curtis Gannon said.

"I do think that the Wisconsin Supreme Court deserves to know that it was incorrect," he said.

The arguments coincidentally come the day before a closely watched Wisconsin Supreme Court election that's drawn the involvement of billionaire Trump adviser Elon Musk.

Catholic Charities argues the state supreme court decision violates religious freedoms protected by the First Amendment by making determinations about what work qualifies as religious.

Liberal Justice Elena Kagan was among those questioning Wisconsin's contention that one way organizations can get the exemption is by actively proselytizing. Some faiths, she pointed out, purposely avoid attempting to convert people. "I thought it was pretty fundamental that we don't treat some religions better than other religions," she said.

Wisconsin exempts church-controlled organizations from unemployment tax if they are operated primarily for religious purposes. The Catholic Charities Bureau, though, has paid the tax since 1972. Much of the groups' funding is from public money, and neither employees or people receiving services have to subscribe to any faith, according to court papers from the state.

If the Supreme Court sides with the charity, employees would be covered by the faith's unemployment system, an option it argues is better than the state's system. The state says the costs are about the same, but the state offers more due process for employees who feel claims were wrongly denied.

A decision is expected by late June.

Democratic base's anger puts some party leaders on shaky ground

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — The Democratic base is angry.

Not just at President Donald Trump, Elon Musk and the "Make America Great Again" movement. Rank-and-file Democrats are mad at their own leaders and increasingly agitating to replace them.

Democrats in Arizona and Georgia pushed out their party chairs. And Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York postponed a book tour in the face of protests amid calls from progressives that he face a primary challenge.

The losing party after a presidential election often spends time in the wilderness, but the visceral anger among Democrats toward their party leaders is reaching a level reminiscent of the tea party movement that swept out Republican incumbents 15 years ago.

"They should absolutely be worried about holding onto power, because there's a real energy right now against them," Paco Fabián, deputy director of Our Revolution, a grassroots group allied with independent Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, said of Democratic incumbents. "And as soon as somebody figures out how to harness it, they're going to be in deep trouble."

A deeper hole than previous losses

Elections on Tuesday could give national Democrats a boost. In Wisconsin, the officially nonpartisan race for a state Supreme Court seat has become a test of Musk's influence as his political organization boosts conservative Brad Schimel and progressives back liberal Susan Crawford, who has made anti-Musk messaging a centerpiece of her campaign. And two U.S. House special elections in Florida feature Democrats who are outraising their Republican counterparts in sharply pro-Trump districts.

But the current depth of frustration among Democrats is clear and shows no signs of going away.

According to a February Quinnipiac poll, about half disapprove of how Democrats in Congress are handling their job, compared with about 4 in 10 who approve. That's a stark contrast from the beginning of Joe Biden's presidency in 2021, when more than 8 in 10 Democrats approved of how their party was doing its job in Congress, and the start of Trump's first term in 2017, when about 6 in 10 Democrats approved. In 2017, as they do now, Democrats lacked control of either congressional chamber.

A February CNN/SSRS poll found about three-quarters of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents thought Democrats in Congress weren't doing enough to oppose Trump.

Facing a coordinated and long-planned Republican effort to remake government and fire tens of thou-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 63 of 74

sands of federal workers, Democrats have struggled with a unified response.

Frustration on the left with elected Democrats began early, when some Democratic senators backed Trump Cabinet nominees and supported legislation targeting illegal immigration. It escalated following Trump's joint address to Congress, when Democratic lawmakers protested by wearing coordinated clothes and holding up signs expressing their discontent. A handful of Democrats then voted with Republicans to censure U.S. Rep. Al Green, D-Texas, who interrupted Trump's speech to Congress and was escorted out of the chamber.

Schumer faced the most serious backlash after he refused to block a Republican-led government spending bill and shut down the government. Schumer said blocking the bill would have backfired and played into Trump's hands, but many on the left saw it as capitulation.

"I want the opposition to be a lot more animated," said Stefan Therrien, a 22-year-old engineering student in Tempe, Arizona, who called Democratic leaders in Congress "very passive" in a misguided effort to appeal to centrists. "Democrats should attack harder."

Ken Human, a retired attorney who went to a town hall organized by Democrats in Lexington, Kentucky, said: "You have to stand up to bullies because otherwise they'll walk all over you."

Anger from a party's base is not unusual after a party loses the presidency.

Establishment Republicans faced fierce backlash after Democrat Barack Obama was elected president in 2008, which fueled the rise of the tea party movement that overthrew some of the party's most powerful incumbents and brought in a new cadre of lawmakers laser-focused on obstructing Obama's agenda.

Democrats, likewise, were dejected after Republican President George W. Bush was reelected in 2004, but his popularity soon tanked and Democrats could foresee the massive wins they would notch in the 2006 midterms, said Robert Shapiro, a Columbia University professor focused on American politics.

Ronald Reagan's victory in 1980 was a bigger shock to Democrats because it brought with it a period of Republican ascendance. The GOP won a Senate majority for the first time in nearly 30 years, though Democrats retained control of the House.

"The setback was significant and startling, but not as much as what's happened today, where you have Trump winning the election at the same time the Republicans have control of both houses of Congress," Shapiro said.

Grassroots Democrats were incensed by Trump's first victory — with some talk then of primary challengers to leaders — but they mostly channeled their anger toward the president and the GOP, planning marches and organizing community groups to prepare for the midterms.

Those midterms led to at least one primary upset with future implications: New York Rep. Joe Crowley, the No. 4 House Democrat, fell to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, then a virtual unknown.

Angry town halls and new challengers

Thousands have packed rallies to hear Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez, outsiders who rose to prominence for their sharp criticism of the Democratic establishment.

Democrats are getting an earful from constituents at some of the town halls, including events they're organizing in GOP-controlled districts to draw attention to Republicans avoiding unscripted interactions with voters.

In Arizona, which went for Biden in 2020 before flipping to Trump last year, furious party leaders ousted their chair, Yolanda Bejarano. The result was a shock; Bejarano had support from every prominent Democrat in the state and was widely expected to get a second term.

U.S. Rep. Nikema Williams, the chair of the Georgia Democratic Party, met a similar fate after Trump flipped Georgia in 2024. Williams resigned as party chair on Monday, days after the Democratic state committee approved a rules change making its chairmanship a full-time role, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported. The rule made it untenable for Williams to continue as chair through the end of her term in 2027 while keeping her congressional seat.

Kat Abughazaleh, a 26-year-old liberal journalist with a big social media following, decided to run for Congress, saying most Democrats "work from an outdated playbook" in an announcement video that's fiercely critical of party leaders.

"They aren't meeting the moment, and their constituents are absolutely livid," Abughazaleh said in an interview. She said Rep. Jan Schakowsky, the 80-year-old Democrat who has represented a suburban Chicago district since 1999, has an "admirable" progressive record, but "something needs to change culturally ... about how we do politics and how we campaign."

"I'm done sitting around waiting for someone else to maybe do it," Abughazaleh said.

Musk-funded political group spends big and goes door to door in the Wisconsin Supreme Court race

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) — Elon Musk and his political operatives have tried to shape the closely watched Wisconsin Supreme Court race in ways that are not immediately obvious but could be critical to Tuesday's outcome.

Musk's America PAC has sent paid canvassers across Wisconsin since early February, before conservative Brad Schimel advanced in a nonpartisan primary to face liberal Susan Crawford for an open seat on the state's highest court, where liberal justices hold a 4-3 majority and retirement this year of a liberal justice puts majority control of the court in play.

Over the eight weeks since, canvassers are expected to have reached hundreds of thousands of potential Schimel voters, based on the more than \$4.3 million alone that spending records a week before the election showed America PAC had poured into this labor-intensive aspect of the campaign.

"As I travel around the state, I've been hearing from quite a few folks who say they've got America PAC knocks at their doors," said Brian Schimming, the state Republican chairman. "And it's not just in the big areas."

Though the group has been aggressive in GOP-heavy Waukesha County in suburban Milwaukee, Schimming and others report hearing that America PAC canvassers have appeared in Racine County, a blue-collar area south of Milwaukee and areas such as Sauk County northwest of Madison.

"They have been on this more than anybody," Schimming said.

Musk played up the stakes at an America PAC event Sunday night in Green Bay, saying Schimel was in danger of losing and calling for a movement to "dagnet the state."

"Everybody's going to mobilize everywhere like crazy for the next 48 hours," he said. "And I think this will be important for the future of civilization. It's that significant. You don't hear me saying that very often. It's a big deal."

He encouraged attendees to sign up at America PAC's website to be a "block captain," for which they could earn \$20 for knocking on doors in their neighborhoods and uploading a photo as proof.

"It's ... thumbs up and hold a picture of Judge Schimel. And that's it, and you get \$20," he said.

Though America PAC declined to discuss details of its work, the group's commitment confirms Musk's uniquely powerful role in Republican politics as someone working closely with President Donald Trump and willing to spend tens of millions of dollars to boost Trump and his allies.

During the 2024 presidential election, Musk, the world's richest person, committed more than \$200 million to America PAC's work on Trump's behalf in the seven most competitive states, including Wisconsin, where Trump won by fewer than 30,000 votes, less than a percentage point.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court comes as the court is expected to rule on abortion rights, congressional redistricting, union power and voting rules that could affect the 2026 midterms and the 2028 presidential election. Musk and America PAC are trying to elevate Schimel, who has attached himself publicly to Trump and Musk.

America PAC representatives were working the crowd Friday at a Schimel rally in Beaver Dam, northeast of Madison. They were seeking petition signatures to oppose "activist judges." The political action committee promised \$100 for each Wisconsin voter who signed the petition and another \$100 for each signer they referred.

Musk has become a Democratic target and the center of the party's messaging against Schimel. Craw-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 65 of 74

ford, who is backed by liberal billionaires including George Soros and Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, referred to her opponent in their debate as "Elon Schimel."

Many standing nearby waved signs in protest to Musk.

"Musk Hates Judges Who Do Their Job!," said one man's cardboard sign, held over his head. The man next to him held one that simply said, "NO DOGE," referring to the Department of Government Efficiency, Trump's government cost-cutting effort, which Musk directs.

Musk drew widespread attention with the Sunday rally in Green Bay and his \$1 million giveaways to people who sign the petition decrying judicial activism. Groups linked to Musk have spent more than \$17 million to support Schimel in what's become the most expensive judicial race in American history.

A significant portion of that money is going into the tedious but critical work of voter turnout.

As of one week before the election, America PAC had spent \$4.3 million on canvassing alone, according to figures compiled by the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that advocates for transparency in campaign spending.

Americans for Prosperity, a group founded by anti-tax billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch, is also canvassing in the supreme court race and also was active in Wisconsin during the 2024 campaign. But the group also was a distant second in the Supreme Court race, having spent only about a sixth of America PAC — \$712,000 — on canvassing, according to the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign.

While the millions America PAC has spent on canvassing are far beyond what other groups have committed, America PAC also had spent as of last week at least another \$4 million on mail, printing, online advertising, phone-banking, text messaging and other organizing costs, also far ahead of other groups.

The group was canvassing this month in Sauk County, where the presidential candidate who took the state has won in five straight elections.

Trump last year won Sauk — split between Democratic-leaning areas closer to Madison and a more conservative rural northwest — by 626 votes after Democrat Joe Biden won the county by 615 votes in 2020.

America PAC canvassers were in Sauk County knocking on doors last fall, trying to reach voters who had voted Republican in the past but had not been reliably active.

"America PAC is in our neck of the woods," said Jerry Helmer, the county's Republican chairman. "They were up knocking on doors in the Wisconsin Dells this month. America PAC has been doing a really good job in our area. They are just killing it in Sauk County."

Trump is stronger on immigration and weaker on trade, an AP-NORC poll finds

By AMELIA THOMSON-DEVEAUX and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Immigration remains a strength for President Donald Trump, but his handling of tariffs is getting more negative feedback, according to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

About half of U.S. adults approve of Trump's approach to immigration, the survey shows, but only about 4 in 10 have a positive view of the way he's handling the economy and trade negotiations.

The poll indicates that many Americans are still on board with Trump's efforts to ramp up deportations and restrict immigration. But it also suggests that the Republican president's threats to impose tariffs — which have been accompanied by tumbling consumer confidence and wild stock market swings — might be erasing his advantage on another issue that he made central to his winning 2024 campaign.

The economy was a drag on then-President Joe Biden, who saw the share of Americans who approved of his handling of the economy fall to a low of roughly 3 in 10 in 2023. Trump drew considerable strength in November from voters who prioritized the economy, but just before he took office in January, an AP-NORC poll found that few Americans had high confidence that he'd make progress on lowering prices in his first year.

Views of Trump's job performance overall are more negative than positive, the survey found. About 4 in 10 U.S. adults approve of the way Trump is handling his job as president, and more than half disapprove.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 66 of 74

Negative opinions are also stronger than positive opinions — about 4 in 10 U.S. adults strongly disapprove of Trump's job performance, while about 2 in 10 strongly approve.

Trump's job approval is highest on immigration

More U.S. adults say they approve of Trump's handling of immigration than his approach to the presidency as a whole.

That trend even extends to Democrats. Relatively few, about 2 in 10, say they're on board with how Trump is approaching immigration, but that's higher than the roughly 1 in 10 who approve of his handling of the economy and his job as a whole.

The durability of Trump's appeal on immigration underscores that many U.S. adults support his tough approach, which he has prioritized in the first few months of his second term.

In the past few weeks, Trump's administration has been locked in a court struggle over the deportation of Venezuelan immigrants to El Salvador under an 18th century wartime law, made moves to deport foreign students who took part in pro-Palestinian demonstrations at colleges, and attempted to suspend the nation's refugee admissions system.

Voters who said immigration was their most important issue last November overwhelmingly favored more restrictive policies, according to AP VoteCast, a sweeping survey of more than 120,000 voters. The issue was also a higher priority for Americans heading into 2025 than it had been the previous year.

Signs of potential weakness on trade and the economy

There are warning signs for Trump in the poll, too, particularly in Americans' assessment of his work on tariffs and the economy.

Trade negotiations with other countries is the issue on which he's rated especially negatively, with about 6 in 10 U.S. adults saying they disapprove of his job performance. It's a relative low point, even among Republicans. About 7 in 10 Republicans approve of Trump's handling of trade — still relatively high, but lower than the roughly 9 in 10 who approve of his approach on immigration.

Trump's approach on other issues — including managing the federal government, his handling of foreign conflicts, Social Security and the economy — roughly track with his overall job approval.

But even though the economy doesn't stand out quite as starkly as trade negotiations, Trump's relatively low rating on that issue could be a problem for him going forward.

During his first term, the economy was an issue on which Americans frequently gave Trump good marks. In October 2020, just before he lost reelection, an AP-NORC poll found that about half of U.S. adults approved of Trump's handling of the economy, putting the rating far above his performance on race relations and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prices and economic growth were also a major motivator for the voters who sent Trump back to the White House for a second term. Trump won overwhelmingly among voters who said the economy was the most important issue facing the country, AP VoteCast found, and he was also the choice of most voters who said that inflation was the most important issue for their vote.

Now, Trump's stewardship of the economy is being put to the test again — and the AP-NORC poll isn't the only sign that his threats of tariffs are making everyday Americans nervous. Consumer confidence has been falling over the past few months. Trump has argued that tariffs would bring more jobs in the auto industry to the U.S. and narrow the budget deficit, but prices on imported cars could also rise steeply if some of the costs of the taxes are passed along to consumers.

Paris Hilton's nonprofit gives \$25,000 grants to women-owned small businesses hit by the Eaton Fire

By GABRIELA AOUN ANGUEIRA Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — There are brief moments when Annisa Faquir forgets that the Little Red Hen Coffee Shop, the Altadena diner her grandmother founded a half century ago, burned down in the Eaton Fire.

"You think, 'I can go grab something — oh wait, it's in ashes,'" said Faquir, who has worked at the shop since her mother, Barbara Shay, took over the family business seven years ago.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 67 of 74

The women want to rebuild the diner loved by neighbors for its shrimp and grits, catfish, and Shay's secret house coffee blend. They knew they'd need help, but were surprised when Paris Hilton called to offer it to them.

The Little Red Hen Coffee Shop is one of 50 women-owned businesses impacted by the Eaton Fire receiving a recovery grant of up to \$25,000 from Hilton's nonprofit 11:11 Media Impact and GoFundMe.org.

"These women are the backbone of their communities," the reality TV star said in a statement. "Through this powerful partnership, we're not just helping them rebuild — we're investing in their futures, their families, and their neighborhoods."

Faquir said the significant grant and the ease of the process was helpful, especially compared to tougher questioning for smaller grants from other donors who asked "for an arm and a leg." "They saw us," she said. "They heard our story."

More than 1,800 businesses were located in the Eaton and Palisades fire zones, according to Los Angeles County's Economic Development Corporation. They employed 9,600 workers and generated \$1.4 billion in annual sales. The county estimates subsequent losses in economic output, income reductions, and tax revenue will be in the billions.

"Making sure they stay afloat now is supercritical so that we can even talk to them about longterm recovery," Kelly LoBianco, director of L.A. County's Department of Economic Opportunity, said of those businesses.

Businesses generally struggle to reopen after catastrophes. In 2023, three-quarters of small businesses were underinsured, according to the insurer Hiscox, and less than half had property insurance.

In the L.A. fires, many business owners also lost their homes. Some are still repaying loans from the COVID-19 pandemic. The county is distributing about \$20 million in emergency grants, but LoBianco said much more will be needed.

After applications flooded in for its own program, 11:11 Media Impact and GoFundMe.org expanded it from 11 to 50 grants. The recipients include childcare centers, bakeries, bookshops, dance studios, and salons.

"Seeing the overwhelming response from women entrepreneurs in need of support showed us how important and urgent the need is to help this community rebuild," said Hilton.

The money will boost entrepreneurs who worried the Eaton Fire had destroyed their futures, said Lizzy Okoro Davidson, director of the Pasadena Women's Business Center, which is partnering on the grant program. The money can help pay back-rent after long closures, secure new spaces, and replace equipment. "In some cases the \$25,000 will be the bridge to get them to 100% of what they need," said Okoro Davidson.

Renata Ortega, owner of Orla Floral Studio, used to run her floral design company out of a converted garage next to the home she shared with her husband and three dogs in the Altadena foothills.

Since the Eaton fire destroyed their property, Ortega has been working from a shared workshop in downtown LA lent to her by a fellow floral designer. It was a kindness Ortega deeply appreciates, but she knows she'll eventually need her own space.

"I really didn't know if we were going to make it or how long we were going to make it, having to start from scratch, so this grant is really giving me hope right now at a time of uncertainty," she said.

Ortega will use the money for a deposit and rent on a studio while she and her husband rebuild their property. She also needs to replace all the vases, shelving, and tools she lost.

"I can continue a business that was once just a dream for me," said Ortega, adding that she will be forever grateful to Hilton. "Now we're going to make it."

The Pasadena Women's Business Center will also receive \$25,000 to provide no-cost advising to local business owners. Okoro Davidson said entrepreneurs will need lots of encouragement to keep going.

"We're really at the beginning of the beginning of the rebuild process," she said, adding that "reimagining" businesses will come next. Companies that never even had websites might now sell their products online, she said, or restaurants could convert to food trucks while they — and their customers — rebuild.

The grants came largely from GoFundMe.org's Wildfire Relief Fund, which has raised \$7.7 million from 43,000 donors so far. Hilton, whose Malibu home burned in the Palisades Fire, donated \$150,000 to the

Wildfire Relief Fund.

Her nonprofit, which normally focuses on protecting children and amplifying female voices, raised \$1.2 million in the first week after the fires.

Faquir said she and her mom will put the money toward building the restaurant, replacing equipment, and finally buying the land their diner has stood on for the last 53 years. "It's our family legacy," said Faquir. "We have to uphold what her mom started."

UAE court sentences 3 people to death in killing of Israeli-Moldovan rabbi Zvi Kogan

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A court in the United Arab Emirates has sentenced three people to death for the killing of Israeli-Moldovan Zvi Kogan, state media reported Monday.

The state-run WAM news agency announced the verdicts of the three after a trial in Abu Dhabi Federal Court of Appeals' State Security Chamber. It said a fourth person who aided the killing received a life sentence.

It did not identify those charged. However, three Uzbek nationals had been arrested in Turkey and brought back to the UAE over the killing in November.

"The defendants had tracked and murdered the victim," the WAM report said. "The evidence presented by the State Security Prosecution to the court included the defendants' detailed confessions to the crimes of murder and kidnapping, along with forensic reports, post-mortem examination findings, details of the instruments used in the crime and witness testimonies."

Authorities in the UAE have not offered a motive for the killing, nor any details about how Kogan was kidnapped and slain. However, it came amid the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip, which has inflamed anger across the wider Muslim world.

Diplomatic ties between Israel and the UAE have remained intact, though strained, by the war as Israel maintains a consulate in Dubai and an embassy in Abu Dhabi.

While not directly blaming Iran, Israeli officials including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and others have referred to an "axis of evil" being responsible for Kogan's killing — a phrase Israel in the past has used to refer to Iran and its allies.

Iran's Embassy in Abu Dhabi has denied Tehran was involved in the rabbi's slaying and the UAE itself has not made the allegation. However, Western officials believe Iran runs intelligence operations in the UAE and keeps tabs on the hundreds of thousands of Iranians living across the country.

Iranian intelligence services also have carried out past kidnappings in the UAE. Iran also has used criminal gangs in the past to target dissidents and its enemies.

Kogan, 28, an ultra-Orthodox rabbi, ran a kosher grocery store in the futuristic city of Dubai, where Israelis have flocked for commerce and tourism since the two countries forged diplomatic ties in the 2020 Abraham Accords. The UAE has a burgeoning Jewish community, with synagogues and businesses catering to kosher diners.

Kogan was an emissary of the Chabad Lubavitch movement, a prominent and highly observant branch of ultra-Orthodox Judaism based in Brooklyn's Crown Heights neighborhood in New York City. He was buried in Israel.

The UAE is an autocratic federation of seven sheikhdoms on the Arabian Peninsula and is also home to Abu Dhabi. Capital cases are rare in the country of 9 million people, but executions typically come swiftly after defendants have their appeals exhausted. Typically, the UAE uses firing squads to execute the condemned.

Tigers, swimming pools, a nightclub:

The gang drawing Trump's ire started in a Venezuelan prison

By REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

TOCORON, Venezuela (AP) — Tocarón once had it all. A nightclub, swimming pools, tigers, a lavish suite and plenty of food.

This was not a Las Vegas-style resort, but it felt like it for some of the thousands who until recently lived in luxury in this sprawling prison in northern Venezuela.

Here, between parties, concerts and weeks-long visits from wives and children, was the birthplace of the Tren de Aragua, a dangerous gang that has gained global notoriety after U.S. President Donald Trump put it at the center of his anti-immigrant narrative.

Kidnappings, extortion and other crimes were planned, ordered or committed from this prison long before Trump's rhetoric.

The tiny, impoverished town where the Aragua Penitentiary Center is used to bustle with residents selling food, renting phone chargers and storing bags for prison visitors.

Now, the prison is back under government control, and streets in the town, also called Tocarón, are mostly deserted. The community has a few convenience stores, evangelical and Catholic churches, and an informal liquor store. A few people sit around, drinking beer and playing board games, or gather for a youth baseball game.

Residents still hesitate to speak about the notorious gang that used to control their lives. Some who dare speak lower their voices or look around for anyone listening as they narrate encounters with the gang.

"This, here, Tocarón, was all highly controlled," Miguel Ponce said pointing to the prison behind him and the town around it. "I couldn't have talked to you a while back. We weren't allowed to move around."

Even now, he said, perhaps he was talking too much.

The beginnings of Tren de Aragua

Tren de Aragua, meaning Train of Aragua, came together in Venezuela just as the South American country came apart.

In 2013, a crisis was taking hold in the country, as corruption, mismanagement and a drop in crude prices wrecked the oil-dependent economy. Hunger became widespread, grocery store shelves emptied, inflation soared, jobs disappeared and millions fell into poverty.

Around the same time, a notorious criminal, Héctor Guerrero, returned to Tocarón to serve time for the murder of a police officer and other convictions.

The prison, like others across Venezuela, was badly run, and serious allegations of torture and government corruption abounded. The criminal, nicknamed "Niño Guerrero," and a few other inmates saw a profitable opportunity, expanding what had been a budding gang.

"Once these prisoners realized they had more weapons and more power than the military force guarding them, they assumed control and administration," Ronna Rísquez, author of a book on the Tren de Aragua, said.

Guerrero and others established an organization within the prison that controlled the inmates through force and extortion. Guards looked the other way or colluded with gang members.

The gang's largest source of revenue was the weekly fee it charged inmates, which Rísquez said added up to \$3.5 million a year. Other funds came from crimes committed inside or outside prison.

Over time, Rísquez said, that turned Tocarón into the gang's recruitment center and "a kind of city" tailored to the group's needs, with amenities like a zoo, baseball field, casino and restaurants.

Inmates who followed the gang's rules, paid their weekly fees and had extra money could order a meal from a tin-roof steakhouse or other food-court vendors. Their wives could visit them for weeks at a time. Their children could run around a colorful playground. Those who could not pay fees or crossed the gang suffered. Some even died.

Guerrero had his own lavish suite inside the prison. But the most famous feature at "Casa Grande," the name the gang gave the prison, was Club Tokyo, where inmates and some members of the public partied

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 70 of 74

to live music and shows of scantily clad dancers.

Prison walls do not contain the gang

Over a decade, Tren de Aragua's activities extended well beyond Tocarón. By 2023, the gang had about 4,000 members across the country, operating in 11 of the 23 states, according to the independent organization, Venezuelan Observatory of Violence.

The gang extorted businesses, charging owners regular fees, and trafficked drugs. It also carried out kidnappings as some of its members serving time in Tocarón were allowed to leave the prison for several hours a day.

Venezuela's severe food shortages in the second half of last decade added to the gang's control. Often, prisoners' wives would travel to Tocarón from faraway states to do their shopping, said a convenience store manager in Maracay, the state's capital. The manager, who asked not to be named out of fear of retaliation, explained that food was available inside the prison when it could not be found anywhere else.

Much of the coffee, flour, rice and other products sold inside Tocarón came from highway piracy. Thieves scouted a crucial interstate, stopped trucks and took their loot to the prison. That prompted Venezuelans to avoid being outdoors or driving after sundown.

Some gang victims left Venezuela, joining the exodus of more than 7.7 million people who migrated in search of better living conditions. Among them was retiree Manuel Marquez' son.

"He had a convenience store... and they wanted to charge him a 'vaccine,'" Marquez, 71, said using the colloquial term in Spanish for a protection fee that criminals charge businesses. "They came in, tied him up, and took everything. Anyone who refuses (to pay), let's just say it, is looted. That's how things work here, it's unfortunate."

Marquez's son relocated to Ecuador after the gang emptied his convenience store in Maracay.

The Tren de Aragua also spread terror with phone calls and WhatsApp messages meant to extort hundreds or thousands of dollars from average Venezuelans.

"The first time, thank God, my daughter-in-law was home, and she told me to hang up, but it was hard and I was trembling," said Maracay dentist Esperanza de Andrade, who received three calls. "They told me my name, my children's names, where they went to school, and that, of course, alarmed me greatly. They directly threatened my life and the lives of my children."

De Andrade said the last call happened around Sept. 20, 2023, when 11,000 soldiers stormed the prison to regain control.

The gang hits other countries

After they lost the prison, some members of the gang scattered, and Guerrero got away.

Members of the military used heavy equipment to destroy some of the amenities the gang had built. But the massive operation in Tocarón came too late to prevent the gang from crossing Venezuela's borders.

Peru, Colombia, Ecuador and Chile — all with large populations of Venezuelan migrants — have accused the group of being behind violent crimes.

The gang's initial work abroad focused on exploiting Venezuelan migrants through loan sharking, human trafficking and the smuggling of contraband goods to and from Venezuela. But as migrants settled in their host countries, Tren de Aragua members joined or clashed with local criminal organizations engaged in drug trafficking, extortion of local businesses and murders for hire.

The gang became known in Colombia in 2022 after authorities found at least 19 bodies in the capital, some dismembered, and linked Guerrero associates to the killings. And in Chile last year, authorities blamed the gang for the killing of a Venezuelan officer who had fled there after taking part in a failed plot to overthrow Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Earlier this month, the U.S. government announced it will extradite three Tren de Aragua members to Chile for their involvement in the case.

As the gang loses influence at home, it becomes a talking point in the U.S.

The Tren de Aragua has been on the radar of U.S. authorities for years. The administration of former U.S. President Joe Biden sanctioned the gang in July 2024, and offered \$12 million in rewards for the arrest of three of its leaders, including Guerrero.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 71 of 74

But it wasn't until Trump campaigned for a second White House term that the Tren de Aragua became widely known in the U.S., as he and his allies turned the gang into the face of the alleged threat posed by immigrants living in the country illegally.

Trump has taken the extraordinary steps to designate the group a "foreign terrorist organization," and earlier this month, an invading force, by invoking an 18th-century wartime law that allows the U.S. to deport noncitizens without any legal recourse, including rights to appear before an immigration or federal court judge.

Under those decisions, the Trump administration has sent Venezuelan immigrants to the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and a maximum-security prison in El Salvador. It has alleged that the transferred individuals were Tren de Aragua members, though it has not provided any evidence to back up that claim.

The parents of some of those immigrants categorically rejected the gang-affiliation allegation and said their children do not have criminal records in the U.S. or Venezuela.

A September 2024 slide presentation from the Texas Department of Public Safety showed Tren de Aragua activity in six states and claimed members had identifiable tattoos, including "stars on shoulder to indicate rank" and "trains and dice."

Some recently deported Venezuelans have said U.S. authorities wrongly judged their tattoos to accuse them of gang activity. Rísquez did not doubt that members of the gang are currently in the U.S., but she said tattoos, which are commonly used by Central American gangs, are not required for those affiliated with the Tren de Aragua.

"The problem is which Tren de Aragua members are in the U.S., where they are, how many there are," Rísquez said. "That is not clear, and with all the latest events, this is becoming less and less clear."

Scientists shielding farming from climate change need more public funding. But they're getting less

By MELINA WALLING Associated Press

Erin McGuire spent years cultivating fruits and vegetables like onions, peppers and tomatoes as a scientist and later director of a lab at the University of California-Davis. She collaborated with hundreds of people to breed drought-resistant varieties, develop new ways to cool fresh produce and find ways to make more money for small farmers at home and overseas.

Then the funding stopped. Her lab, and by extension many of its overseas partners, were backed financially by the United States Agency for International Development, which Trump's administration has been dismantling for the past several weeks. Just before it was time to collect data that had been two years in the making, her team received a stop work order. She had to lay off her whole team. Soon she was laid off, too.

"It's really just been devastating," she said. "I don't know how you come back from this."

The U.S. needs more publicly funded research and development on agriculture to offset the effects of climate change, according to a paper out in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences this month. But instead the U.S. has been investing less. United States Department of Agriculture data shows that as of 2019, the U.S. spent about a third less on agricultural research than its peak in 2002, a difference of about \$2 billion. The recent pauses and freezes to funding for research on climate change and international development are only adding to the drop. It's a serious issue for farmers who depend on new innovations to keep their businesses afloat, the next generation of scientists and eventually for consumers who buy food.

If scientists have reliable backing, they can keep improving crop varieties to better withstand perilous weather conditions like droughts or floods, find new uses for existing crop species, figure out how to protect workers, develop new technology to aid in planting and harvesting or create more effective ways of fighting pests. They can also investigate agriculture's potential role in fighting climate change.

"This is terrible news for the U.S. agricultural sector," said Cornell associate professor Ariel Ortiz-Bobea, the lead author of the paper.

Trump administration hastens funding cuts

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 72 of 74

As the Trump administration pauses and shutter research programs funded by the Environmental Protection Agency, USDA and other agencies, Ortiz-Bobea and other experts have seen field trials stopped, postdoctoral positions eliminated and a looming gap forming between the reality of climate change and the tools farmers have to deal with it.

The EPA declined to comment, and the USDA and USAID did not respond to Associated Press queries.

Ortiz-Bobea and his team quantified overall U.S. agricultural productivity, estimated how much it would be slowed by climate change in coming years and calculated how much money would need to be invested in research and development to counteract that slowdown.

Think of it like riding a bike into a headwind, Ortiz-Bobea said. To maintain the same speed, you have to pedal harder; in this case, R&D can be that extra push.

Some countries are heading that direction. China spends almost twice as much as the U.S. on agricultural research, and has increased its research investments by five times since 2000, wrote Omanjana Goswami, a scientist with the Food and Environment team at the Union of Concerned Scientists, in an email.

Spending cutbacks have also shuttered agricultural research across almost all of the Feed the Future Innovation Labs, of which McGuire's was one. Those 17 labs across 13 universities focused on food security, technical agriculture research, policy and various aspects of climate change. The stop-work orders at those labs not only disappointed researchers, but made useless much of their work.

"There are many, many millions of dollars of expenditure that will generate nothing now because the work couldn't be finished," said David Tschirley, a professor who had been directing another one of those programs, the Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy Research, Capacity and Influence at Michigan State University, since 2019.

Finding new funding for agricultural research

Some researchers hope that other sources of funding can fill the gaps: "That's where private sector could really step up," said Swati Hegde, a scientist in the Food, Land, and Water Program at the World Resources Institute.

From an agricultural point of view, climate change is "really scary," with larger and larger regions exposed to temperatures above healthy growing conditions for many crops, said Bill Anderson, CEO of Bayer, a multinational biotechnology and pharmaceutical company that invested nearly \$3 billion in agricultural research and development last year. But private companies have their own constraints on R&D investment, and he said Bayer can't invest as much as it would like in that area.

"I don't think that private industry can replicate" how federal funding typically supports early stage, speculative science, he said, "because the economics don't really work." He added that industry tends to be better suited to back ideas that have already been validated.

Goswami, of the Union of Concerned Scientists, also expressed concerns that private research funding isn't as trackable and transparent as public funding. And others said even sizeable investments from companies don't give anywhere near enough money to match government funding.

Researchers, farmers and consumers feel the fallout

The full impact may not be apparent for many years, and the damage won't easily be repaired. Experts think it will be a blow in other countries where climate change is already decimating yields, driving hunger and conflict.

"I really worry that if we don't really look at the global food situation, we will have a disaster," said David Zilberman, a professor at UC Berkeley who won a Wolf Prize in 2019 for his work on agriculture.

But even domestically, experts say one thing is almost certain: this will mean even higher prices at the grocery store now and in the future.

"More people on the Earth, you need more productivity to prevent food prices going crazy," said Tom Hertel, a professor of agricultural economics at Purdue University. Even if nothing changes right away, he thinks "10 years from now, 20 years from now, our yield growth will surely be stunted" by cuts to research on agricultural productivity.

Many scientists said the wound isn't just professional but personal.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 73 of 74

"People are very demoralized," especially younger researchers who don't have tenure and want to work on international food research, said Zilberman.

Now those dreams are on hold for many. In carefully tended research plots, weeds begin to grow.

Mortgage company Rocket buying Mr. Cooper in all-stock deal valued at \$9.4 billion

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writer

The mortgage company Rocket is buying competitor Mr. Cooper in an all-stock deal valued at \$9.4 billion, just weeks after acquiring real estate listing company Redfin.

Rocket Cos. said Monday that bringing Mr. Cooper Group Inc. into the fold will create a business representing one in every six mortgages in the United States and give it almost 7 million additional clients. The deal will boost loan volumes, the company said, while lowering client acquisition costs.

"By combining Mr. Cooper and Rocket, we will form the strongest mortgage company in the industry, offering an end-to-end homeownership experience backed by leading technology and grounded in customer care," Mr. Cooper Chairman and CEO Jay Bray, who will become president and CEO of Rocket Mortgage, said in a statement.

The U.S. housing market has been slumping for years with homebuyers, and sellers, buffeted by soaring mortgages rates and sky high prices that have put homes out of reach for many Americans.

Companies like Rocket, which is on an acquisition streak, are attempting to create more of a one-stop shopping experience for frazzled would-be homebuyers.

Bray will report to Rocket Cos. CEO Varun Krishna.

Mr. Cooper shareholders will receive a fixed exchange ratio of 11 Rocket shares for each share of Mr. Cooper common stock. Mr. Cooper is based in Coppell, Texas.

Rocket shareholders will own approximately 75% of the combined company, while Mr. Cooper stockholders will own about 25%. The combined company's board will have 11 members, with nine being from Rocket and two from Mr. Cooper.

Earlier this month Rocket, based in Detroit, announced that it was buying Redfin in an all-stock deal worth \$1.75 billion.

Redfin, which was founded in 2004, has more than 1 million for sale and rental listings on its online platform.

The National Association of Realtors announced this month that existing home sales rose 4.2% in February from January to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.26 million units. That was in part thanks to easing mortgage rates and more properties on the market encouraging home shoppers.

The U.S. housing sales began to slump in 2022, when mortgage rates began to climb from pandemic-era lows. Sales of previously occupied U.S. homes fell last year to their lowest level in nearly 30 years.

Today in History: April 1

US forces invade Okinawa during World War II

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, April 1, the 91st day of 2025. There are 274 days left in the year. This is April Fool's Day.

Today in history:

On April 1, 1945, American forces launched the amphibious invasion of Okinawa during World War II. (U.S. forces succeeded in capturing the Japanese island on June 22 after a battle in which more than 240,000 died, including as many as 150,000 Okinawan civilians.)

Also on this date:

In 1924, Adolf Hitler was sentenced to five years in prison for his role in the Beer Hall Putsch in Munich. (Hitler would serve just nine months of the sentence, during which time he completed the first volume of "Mein Kampf.")

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 280 ~ 74 of 74

In 1946, a magnitude 8.6 earthquake centered near Alaska's Aleutian Islands triggered a tsunami that pounded the Hawaiian Islands with waves up to 55 feet (17 meters) tall, killing 159.

In 1970, President Richard M. Nixon signed a measure banning cigarette advertising on radio and television beginning in January 1971.

In 1976, Apple Computer was founded by Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak and Ronald Wayne.

In 1984, singer Marvin Gaye was shot and killed by his father after Gaye intervened in an argument between his parents at their home.

In 2001, the Netherlands became the first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage.

In 2003, American troops raided a hospital in Nasiriyah (nah-sih-REE'-uh), Iraq, and rescued Army Pfc. Jessica Lynch, who had been held prisoner since her unit was ambushed on March 23.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Ali MacGraw is 86. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito is 75. Actor Annette O'Toole is 73. Filmmaker Barry Sonnenfeld is 72. Singer Susan Boyle is 64. Hockey Hall of Famer Scott Stevens is 61. Rapper-actor Method Man is 54. Political commentator Rachel Maddow is 52. Actor David Oyelowo is 49. Comedian-actor Taran Killam is 43. Actor Asa Butterfield is 28.