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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

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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

**No matter what
is going on in your
life, Don't Quit. No
matter what obstacles
you face or the
heartache you feel,
Don't Quit. Someone
is praying for you
and you will
make it through
this. God is
on your side.
Amen**



Saturday, April 5

State FFA Convention, SDSU

Dueling Duo at Groton Legion, 6 p.m.

State DI in Pierre at Middle School

Sunday, April 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

POPS Concert, 2 p.m. and 5 p.m.

Pancake Sunday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Groton Community Center

Baseball at Redfield, Varsity at 2 p.m., JV at 4 p.m.

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1440

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

Stocks Drop

Stocks dropped significantly today, with major players reacting to the aftereffects of President Donald Trump's broad reciprocal tariffs. The market movement is in response to one of the president's key promises made during the campaign—to tackle what has been perceived as unfair trade practices, potentially nudging manufacturers to return to the US.

Major stock indexes dropped during regular trading (S&P 500 -4.8%, Dow -4.0, Nasdaq -6.0%), largely on fears of higher costs for importing goods. Administration officials have argued the temporary economic pain will be offset by manufacturers choosing to relocate—or at least relocate supply chains—to the US.

As of this writing, a number of major companies with manufacturing supply chains in the hardest-hit countries saw their shares slide. Some of the biggest drops include Nike (-14%), Apple (-9%), and Deckers Outdoor (-14%).

Trump has remained open to using the trade taxes as negotiating levers.

Springsteen's Lost Albums

Bruce Springsteen announced yesterday the upcoming release of "Tracks II: The Lost Albums," a box set featuring seven previously unreleased albums, including 83 songs—74 of them never heard before. Spanning recordings from 1983 to 2018, the collection includes material that was fully recorded but ultimately shelved. The album, a follow-up to his 1998 "Tracks" box set, is set for release June 27.

Springsteen, often called "The Boss," is known for his gritty voice, anthemic rock, and themes of working-class life. He rose to fame with the 1975 breakthrough album "Born to Run" and has since released 21 studio albums, including "Born in the USA," which produced seven top 10 US singles—among them its often-misinterpreted title track.

The 75-year-old has sold more than 140 million records worldwide and performed thousands of live shows, including marathon concerts lasting up to four hours. He has won 20 Grammy Awards, an Academy Award, and a Tony Award, and was inducted into both the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1999.

TikTok Deadline Looms

Social video app TikTok faces a deadline to sell its US business by tomorrow or face a ban in the country. Last-minute bids were reported this week from Amazon, mobile tech company AppLovin, and AI search engine Perplexity. Several investors also reportedly offered bids, including major investors Marc Andreessen and Oracle's Larry Ellison. YouTuber MrBeast is also reportedly in the mix.

US lawmakers passed a law last April—upheld by the Supreme Court in January—forcing TikTok to divest from its US business or be barred from US app stores over national security concerns. TikTok shut down the app Jan. 18—a day before the ban was set to take effect—but it was restored after President-elect Donald Trump signaled he would delay enforcement. In a day-one executive order, Trump gave TikTok 75 days to reach a deal, a move legal analysts questioned.

Trump has said he would extend the delay if a sale isn't reached. It is unclear if TikTok is willing to sell at this stage.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Women's Final Four tips off tonight with South Carolina taking on Texas (7 pm ET, ESPN) and UCLA taking on Connecticut (9 pm ET, ESPN).

Men's Final Four is set for tomorrow with Florida vs. Auburn (6 pm ET, CBS) and Duke vs. Houston (9 pm ET, CBS).

London's Tate Modern museum receives largest donation since 1969 as a Miami-based philanthropist gifted the museum a collection of works, including a six-meter-wide Joan Mitchell painting.

The US tapped to host 2031 FIFA Women's World Cup and the UK to host 2035 Cup as both countries were the lone bidders to host the world soccer tournament.

Science & Technology

ChatGPT users have generated more than 700 million images in roughly 10 days since OpenAI launched the image generation feature; company previously had to throttle access due to overuse.

Scientists develop test to identify HIV in minutes, at quicker speeds and lower costs than existing technology; device builds on coronavirus and water pollution sensors.

Scientists discover female hormones can stimulate natural opiates; findings may lead to new pain treatment therapies.

Business & Markets

Stellantis pauses production for two weeks at assembly plants in Mexico, Canada as it assesses President Donald Trump's new 25% tariffs on auto imports.

Number of announced layoffs in the US jumps 205% in March to third-highest ever recorded (behind April and May 2020), following federal government's reduction-in-force effort, per report.

Hershey strikes \$750M deal to buy healthier snacks maker LesserEvil; comes after a string of similar deals from Hershey as the chocolate company seeks to expand into salty snacks.

Politics & World Affairs

President Donald Trump reportedly fires group of national security officials deemed insufficiently loyal. Pentagon watchdog to review Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's use of Signal app to convey US plans against Houthi rebels.

Senate confirms Mehmet Oz to lead Medicare and Medicaid agencies.

New York City Mayor Eric Adams to run for reelection as an independent.

At least seven dead in Tennessee, Indiana, and Missouri after severe thunderstorms swept across the Midwest to the mid-South, leaving nearly 250,000 people without power.

Hungary to withdraw from the International Criminal Court; comes hours after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who faces an international arrest warrant, lands in the country.

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Pauli, Tietz, Traphagen are winners at NSU Indoor Track Meet



In the 1600m run Jayden Schwan is in a close second with Jace Johnson and Kason Oswald in 5th & 7th place. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)

The Groton Area Track team placed first in four events at the Northern State University indoor track meet held Thursday. Blake Pauli won the 800m run, McKenna Tietz won the 55m hurdles and Taryn Traphagen won the 400m dash.

Those taking second were Jayden Schwan in the 1600m run, MaKenna Krause in 55m dash, Laila Roberts in the 200m dash, Faith Traphagen in the 800m run and Emerlee Jones in the high jump.

Boy's Results

55 Meter Dash: 8. Lincoln Krause, 7.05.

55 Meter Dash Varsity - Prelims: 7. Lincoln Krause, 7.09; 15. Brevin Fliehs, 7.17; 19. Ryder Schelle, 7.25.

200 Meters: 11. Lincoln Krause, 25.70; 27. Brevin

Fliehs, 26.72; 36. Ryder Schelle, 27.09.

400 Meters: 9. Tristin McGannon, 1:01.30.

800 Meters: 1. Blake Pauli, 2:07.90; 3. Jayden Schwan, 2:10.52; 5. Jace Johnson, 2:18.81.

1600 Meters: 2. Jayden Schwan, 5:04.74; 6. Jace Johnson, 5:35.37; 13. Kason Oswald, 6:32.95

55m Hurdles - 39": 4. Tristin McGannon, 10.24

Shot Put - 12lb: 17. Karter Moody, 36' 3"

High Jump: 15. Kason Oswald, 5' 1"

Long Jump: 10. Ethan Kroll, 18' 0.25"; 25. Tristin McGannon, 16' 3"; 31. TC Schuster, 14' 4.5"

Triple Jump: 18. Tristin McGannon, 31' 10"

Girl's Results

55 Meter Dash: 2. MaKenna Krause, 7.82; 3. McKenna Tietz, 7.93; 5. Laila Roberts, 7.94.

55 Meter Dash Varsity - Prelims: 2. MaKenna Krause, 7.78; 3. McKenna Tietz, 7.83; 4. Laila Roberts, 7.85; 32. Elizabeth Fliehs, 8.79

200 Meters: 2. Laila Roberts, 28.27; 3. MaKenna Krause, 28.76; 4. McKenna Tietz, 28.81; 6. Taryn Traphagen, 28.99; 41. Elizabeth Fliehs, 32.39.

400 Meters: 1. Taryn Traphagen, 1:04.81.

800 Meters: 2. Faith Traphagen, 2:34.70.

1600 Meters: 4. Faith Traphagen, 6:07.57.

55m Hurdles - 33": 1. McKenna Tietz, 9.80; 4. Talli Wright, 10.91; 5. Ella Kettner, 10.98; 6. Teagan Hanten, 11.16

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55m Hurdles - 33" Varsity - Prelims:

1. McKenna Tietz, 9.80; 3. Ella Kettner, 10.96; 5. Talli Wright, 11.11; 6. Teagan Hanten, 11.20; 10. Emerlee Jones, 11.50.

Shot Put - 4kg:

3. Emma Kutter, 32' 2"; 11. Avery Crank, 26' 0.75"; 13. Libby Cole, 25' 6.75"; 15. Audrey Davis, 24' 9"; 3. Kyleigh Kroll, 21' 10.25"; 27. Aimee Heilman, 20' 7.25"; 29. Addison Hoffman, 16' 1".

High Jump: 2. Emerlee Jones, 4' 7.75"

Long Jump: 6. MaKenna Krause, 14' 5"; 12. Teagan Hanten, 13' 3.25"; 18. Addison Hoffman, 11' 6.75"; 19. Rylie Rose, 10' 8".

Triple Jump: 4. Emerlee Jones, 27' 2"; 5. Teagan Hanten, 26' 8.25"



In the 55m High Hurdles finals McKenna Tietz leads over the first hurdle and went on to win the event. Teagan Hanten is on her right with Ella Kettner and Talli Wright to her left. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



Kason Oswald in the high jump clears the bar at 4' 1\" (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



**SOUTH DAKOTA
NEWS WATCH**

Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

Reversal of US energy agenda sparks friction between states

BY STU WHITNEY

South Dakota News Watch

Changes to climate policy under President Donald Trump's administration have sharpened Upper Midwest debates about the reliability of renewable energy and the separation of state and federal interests.

One point of agreement is that winning the White House means controlling the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a federal regulatory body that maintains and enforces environmental laws.

Lee Zeldin, Trump's pick to run the EPA, has announced plans to dramatically reduce staff and reverse policies from the Joe Biden administration involving the oversight of coal-fired power plants, oil and gas development and water quality standards.

The deregulation is of keen interest to energy officials in Republican-led South Dakota

and heavily Democratic Minnesota, where differences in climate policy have sparked border clashes over how pushing clean energy to reduce carbon emissions impacts the electrical grid.

The Minnesota Legislature passed a law in 2023 requiring all electric utilities in the state to produce only carbon-free energy by 2040 using sources like solar, wind, hydroelectric and nuclear power.

That law was an offshoot of Biden administration EPA rules requiring coal plants operating beyond 2039 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 90% by 2032, which critics saw as shutting down the industry.

Zeldin's agency has rolled back those rules, inspired by Trump's March 17 declaration on social media that he is "authorizing my Administration to immediately begin producing Energy with BEAUTIFUL, CLEAN COAL."

Chris Nelson, a Republican member of the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission, said reversing coal plant regulations is good news for South Dakota and other states focused on the sustainability of the electricity grid and avoiding blackouts.

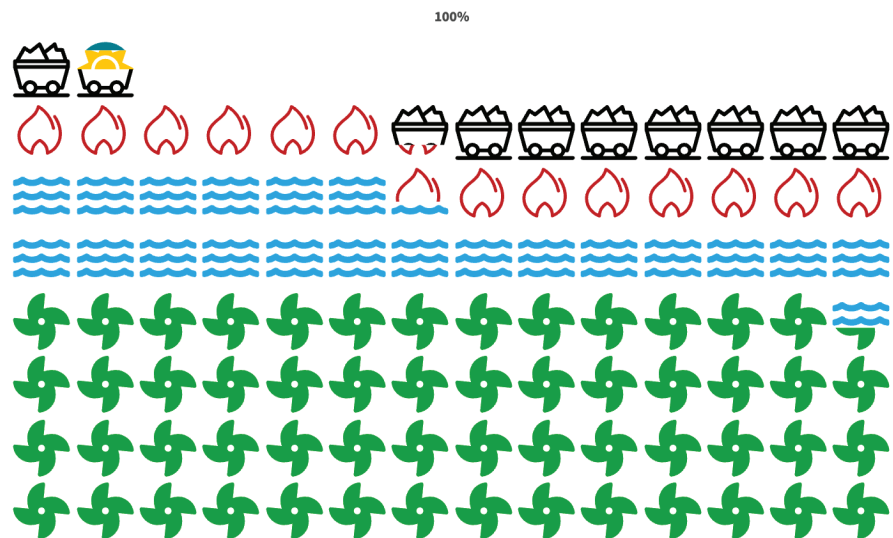
"The math didn't add up with those greenhouse gas limitation rules," Nelson told News Watch. "They simply could not replace all of those plants quickly enough (with other energy sources) to maintain reli-

Electricity generated in SD in 2023

Data visualized by percentage



☙ = 1%
☙ Wind ☙ Hydropower ☙ Natural gas ☙ Coal
☙ Solar ☙ Other



Source: South Dakota PUC • Other includes biomass (0.1%) and petroleum (0.1%)
Graphic: Michael Klinski / SD News Watch

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ability of the grid. So the Trump administration rolling back those particularly damaging rules was very helpful."

Xcel Energy to retire coal plants by 2030

Not everyone shares that opinion.

The EPA's actions face court challenges as clean-energy groups navigate federal and state environmental laws in a changing legal landscape.

The U.S. Supreme Court last year struck down the landmark 1984 Chevron "deference" doctrine, which required courts to defer to reasonable agency interpretations of ambiguous statutes.

Those interpretations are now up to the courts to decide. Democratic-leaning states are forging ahead with climate-based policies regardless of EPA rollbacks, using utility regulation as a tool to keep energy companies in line.

Minneapolis-based Xcel Energy, whose 3.7 million electrical customers include about 100,000 South Dakotans, is sticking with a plan to retire its coal-fired power plants by 2030 as part of an integrated resource plan approved by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission in February in accordance with state law.

The plan includes replacing coal with "wind, solar and storage solutions" while also building a new natural gas plant in 2028 as a way to address capacity needs.

Natural gas, which replaced coal as the nation's largest energy source in 2016, emits about half as much carbon dioxide as coal, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

SD 9th in energy consumption per capita

The Xcel announcement came despite criticism from the South Dakota PUC, which questioned the company's ability to pivot from fossil fuels at that pace without compromising reliability and affordability for customers.

South Dakota ranks ninth among U.S. states in energy consumption per capita, with 34% of households using electricity to heat their homes during frequently harsh winters. Nearly half (48%) use natural gas, with propane at 14%.

The PUC's concerns were laid out in a 2024 letter to Xcel signed by Republican commissioners Nelson, Gary Hanson and Kristie Fiegen.

"Evidence is mounting that the premature closures ... will elevate the risk of electricity outages particularly in tight load hours, including hours of extreme cold and extreme heat, as well as those hours when wind generation is low," the letter stated. "These events are likely to pose a threat to life and property."

South Dakota is part of the Southwest Power Pool, a nonprofit organization that manages electric transmission for parts of 14 states, and also the 15-state Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO). That dual membership helps ensure energy distribution whether a customer uses Xcel, MidAmerican Energy, Black Hills Energy, NorthWestern Energy, Otter Tail or another utility company.

Cooperation among these and other regional transmission organizations was critical during a major winter



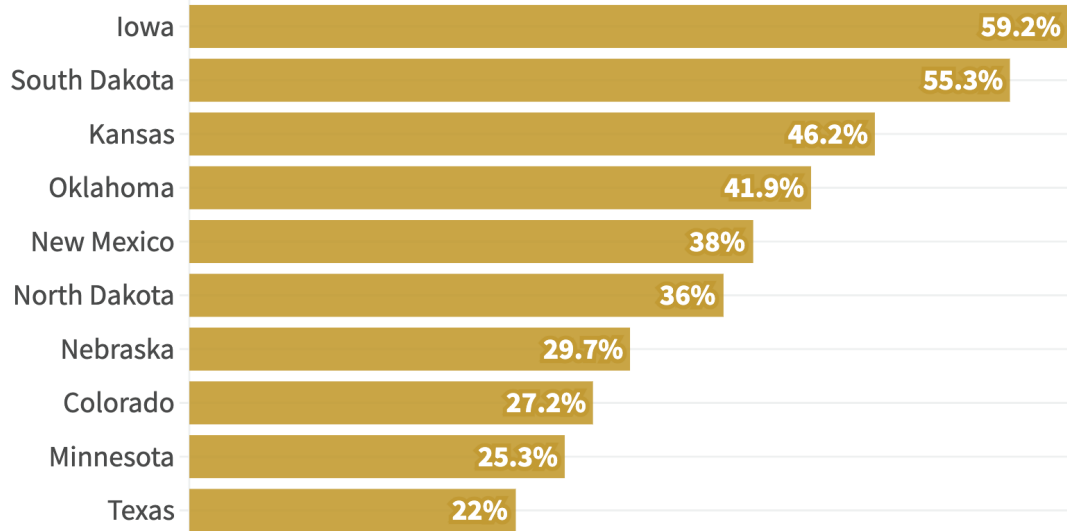
Chris Nelson talks to supporters at the Hilton Garden Inn in Sioux Falls, S.D., after being re-elected to the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission on Nov. 8, 2022. Nelson first entered the office in 2011. (Photo: Argus Leader)

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Share of wind electricity generation in the U.S.

Wind generation in the United States stood at roughly 10 percent in 2023



Source Statista.com • Graphic: Michael Klinski / South Dakota News Watch

storm in January 2024, which brought brutally cold air and blizzard conditions to much of the Midwest.

"During that storm we got 7,000 megawatts of electricity from the East to help us keep the lights on," Fiegen told News Watch in 2024.

'We're the tail trying the wag the dog'

Xcel's decision to close coal plants despite South Dakota PUC warnings shows the challenge of trying to influence policy involving companies under the sway of different state laws and con-

sumer interests.

"One of the difficulties we have is that South Dakota represents 5% to 6% of Xcel's entire system," said Nelson. "We are literally the tail trying to wag the dog on some of these decisions."

Some utility companies are advocating a more measured pace on clean energy. Minnesota's PUC clashed with Otter Tail Power over its decision to amend its long-range plan to push back closures of coal plants – including Big Stone near Milbank, in northeast South Dakota – until at least 2040.

The Minnesota PUC approved Otter Tail's resource plan last summer after concessions that included the company no longer using its North Dakota-based Coyote Station plant for Minnesota customers beyond 2031.

Otter Tail's most recent modeling projects a retirement date of 2046 for South Dakota-based Big Stone, which started operation in 1975 and burns coal from Wyoming's Powder River Basin.

The plant received a \$384 million air quality control system upgrade in 2015 following complaints from environmental groups that its lack of pollution controls violated the Clean Air Act.

"We don't have any concerns about the Big Stone plant," said Nelson. "They put pollution control equipment in that plant with the anticipation that they would be able to run it for a whole lot of years yet, and that is certainly our anticipation."

Will wind energy policy hurt South Dakota?

Despite leaning on fossil fuels to keep the lights on in extreme conditions, South Dakota has harnessed the state's wind power as an alternative energy source.

In 2023, South Dakota's wind energy production accounted for more than half (55%) of the state's in-state net power generation, a larger share than in all other states except Iowa, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

The state's other primary power sources include hydroelectric (21%), natural gas (14%) and coal (9%). Solar was less than 1% of the power generated (0.3%).

Increased wind energy production nationally runs counter to the direction of the EPA and Trump, who has criticized the efficiency of turbines and told supporters that "we're not going to do the wind thing" at

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a rally shortly after taking office.

So far, the administration's actions are aimed at offshore wind development, which rely on access to federal waters. It's not clear how the EPA's actions will impact South Dakota's 24 active wind farms, which provide tax revenue and job creation for local communities.

In fiscal year 2022, 21 school districts received a total of \$4.5 million in tax revenue from wind farms in South Dakota, led by Deubrook (\$662,527), Deuel (\$591,319), Waverly (\$467,034) and Highmore-Harold (\$421,590).

"The actions that we've seen the administration take thus far as it relates to wind have been exclusively related to offshore wind projects," said Nelson. "We've not seen any indication that there's going to be any activity for turbines that might be located in South Dakota."

One uncertainty is whether the Department of Energy's recent cost-cutting efforts and cancellation of clean energy grants could impact federal tax credits and other incentives meant to spur installation of renewable energy projects such as wind farms.

"At this point, I think that's probably an unanswerable question," Nelson said.

'It's going to make life more difficult'

Another reversal in federal climate policy involves the extent to which the government regulates lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands under the Clean Water Act, signed into law in 1972.

The Trump administration, emboldened by a friendly 2023 Supreme Court ruling, is working under the philosophy that federal regulations have protected too many wetlands and improperly limited private property rights.

With South Dakota's traditionally lax approach to state regulations, the lack of federal oversight has some environmental groups concerned that water quality in the Big Sioux River, for example, could go from bad to worse.

Testing has shown high levels of E. coli bacteria in the tributary that weaves through eastern South Dakota, mostly from upstream agricultural operations, livestock manure and stormwater runoff. The Big Sioux's watershed encompasses about 7,280 square miles in South Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa.

Also heavily scrutinized is Sioux Falls-based Smithfield Foods, a pork processing plant that ranked seventh nationally among non-poultry animal slaughtering facilities in 2022 for the amount of nitrate compounds released into the Big Sioux.

Smithfield went operational with a new \$45 million wastewater treatment facility in May 2023, reducing the amount of nitrate released. But that action was attributed partly to pressure from federal regulators.

"If there's an environmental pollutant that isn't managed by the feds, South Dakota could set its own standard, but that's highly unlikely," said Jay Gilbertson, manager for the East Dakota Water Development District, which promotes conservation and proper management of water resources.

"Basically, we do what we have to do in South Dakota from a regulatory standpoint. So if the people who decide what we have to do are saying we should do less, it's going to make life more difficult."

Some of the strategy to reduce pollutants involves incentives, such as payments to landowners to build buffer strips along the river. But those programs could be in jeopardy if federal grants and staffing are reduced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other agencies, putting more responsibility on private organizations to urge protections.

States such as neighboring Minnesota are taking notice, mindful of the axiom that pollution knows no borders.

"We're at the mercy of the political will of neighbors to stop burning coal or emitting other harmful pollutants that travel into our state," Leigh Currie of the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy told Minnesota Public Radio. "We might not have, going forward, the help from the federal government that we've had in the past."

The Associated Press contributed to this story, which was produced by South Dakota News Watch, an independent, nonprofit organization. Read more stories and donate at sdnewswatch.org and sign up for an email every few days to get stories as soon as they're published. Contact Stu Whitney at stu.whitney@sdnewswatch.org.

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PUC advises to Call Before You Dig

The South Dakota Public Utilities Commission recognizes April as National Safe Digging Month and encourages South Dakotans to call 811 before any excavation or other digging project. Doing so safeguards underground utilities, preserves vital services and protects against harm that may result from hitting buried facilities.

"It is appropriate that April has traditionally been designated as Safe Digging Month," commented PUC Chairman Gary Hanson. "South Dakotans are ready to head outdoors to tackle yard projects, get started on planting or break ground on new construction. Calling 811 must be a regular step for each of those plans," Hanson said.

Calling 811 before a digging or excavation project initiates a process that alerts owners of underground utilities in the area to mark the location of their facilities. The digger is responsible for avoiding those marked areas. Failing to call 811 or digging an area that has been marked can lead to all types of trouble including service disruptions, fines, significant repair costs, injury or even death.

"Telecommunications, natural gas, cable, water and sewer lines are all examples of buried utility infrastructure," PUC Vice Chairman Chris Nelson noted. "Anyone engaging in a digging activity should call 811 prior to the project, regardless of the depth of the excavation or the digger's familiarity with the property."

The call to 811 is free and easy. Homeowners and excavators can also use an online portal to request an underground utility locate by visiting sdonecall.com.

"Whether you are a homeowner digging on your own property or a contractor excavating on someone else's property, calling 811 before turning that first shovel is a must. It is actually the law," emphasized Commissioner Kristie Fiegen. State statute specifies the South Dakota One Call Center must be notified at least 48 hours before digging begins.



Grad cards done in Groton

Thanks Rebecca for having your grad cards done at the Groton Independent! In an hour you left with your cards! We appreciate your business! All less than \$40 for her order.

Text/Paul at 605-397-7460 to set up a time for your grad cards

UJS Warns Public About Jury Duty Scam in Central South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D.— The South Dakota Unified Judicial System (UJS) is warning the public about a jury duty scam targeting people in central South Dakota.

UJS has been informed that the Stanley County Sheriff's Office received more than 30 reports today regarding suspicious phone calls. The callers falsely claim that the recipient missed federal jury duty and that a \$2,000 warrant has been issued for their arrest. The scammers are instructing individuals to visit a local convenience store and send money using Bitcoin. One person reported losing \$4,000.

The scam calls are originating from a variety of phone numbers, with the perpetrators leaving callback numbers and falsely claiming to be the Stanley County Sheriff or Deputy Sheriff. In at least one instance, a scam email was reported that included the official Stanley County Sheriff's Office logo in an attempt to appear legitimate.

If someone receives such a suspicious call or email, they should not provide any personal information or payment and should hang up. South Dakota courts do not call prospective jurors and ask for money or personal identifying information over the telephone.

Here are some tips to avoid becoming the victim of this type of scam:

- Always be suspicious of unsolicited phone calls.
- Never give money or personal information to someone with whom you don't have ties and did not initiate contact.
- Trust your instincts. If an unknown caller pressures you or says things that don't sound right, hang up.
- If concerns remain about the caller's claims, verify the information with the appropriate law enforcement agency or court officials.

Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #20 Results

Team Standings: Chipmunks 17, Cheetahs 15, Coyotes 14, Shihtzus 12, Jackelopes 10, Foxes 4

Men's High Games: Dion Bahr 202 & 197, Tony Waage 201, Doug Jorgensen 194

Women's High Games: Vicki Walter 182, Hayley Johnson 160, Michelle Johnson 158

Men's High Series: Dion Bahr 563, Doug Jorgensen 524, Brad Waage 194

Women's High Series: Vicki Walter 490, Hayley Johnson 446, Michelle Johnson 445

Rounds Introduces Legislation to Prevent Rural Hospital Closures **Legislation would codify a USDA pilot program that provides technical assistance to hospitals**

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) and Peter Welch (D-Vt.) today introduced legislation to help rural hospitals that are at risk of being closed. The Rural Hospital Technical Assistance Program Act would codify an existing pilot program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that provides technical assistance to rural hospitals to prevent closures, improve their financial and operational performance and strengthen essential healthcare services in rural communities.

"Rural hospitals are a lifeline for the communities they serve, and far too many are struggling to keep their doors open," said Rounds. "Providing technical assistance to rural hospitals at risk for closure gives providers and administrators a fresh set of eyes on their operations and allows for new ideas to help stabilize their operations. The Rural Hospital Technical Assistance Program Act would codify this pilot program and help rural hospitals continue to provide the critical care that South Dakotans need."

"The health and wellbeing of Vermont's rural hospitals impact the health and wellbeing of every Vermonter—but our rural hospitals need help to keep their doors open for our patients," said Welch. "I'm proud to partner with Senator Rounds on this bipartisan bill, which will strengthen hospitals across the United States and help rural hospitals improve their care and services."

Through an agreement with USDA, the National Rural Health Association provides several types of technical assistance to include expert guidance on optimizing billing processes, addressing reimbursement delays, improving collections and maximizing available reimbursement opportunities. Any rural hospital is eligible under this program, with preference given to hospitals in persistent poverty communities of less than 20,000. Participating hospitals are provided with a contractor specializing in rural health care delivery, who then reports back on goals and next steps to get the hospitals to financial and operational stability.

To date, 17 hospitals have participated in the pilot version of the program, including four in South Dakota: Bennett County Hospital in Martin, Freeman Regional Health Services in Freeman, Landmann-Jungman Memorial Hospital in Scotland and Pioneer Memorial Hospital in Viborg. The program has been highly effective in assisting rural hospitals.

"The South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations would like to thank Senator Rounds for introducing this important legislation to support South Dakota's rural hospitals," said Tim Rave, President and CEO of the South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations. "In a state where our population density is 12 people per square mile and 57% of our residents live in a rural area, it is critical to ensure access to quality health care for our rural and medically underserved communities. The Rural Hospital TA Program Act will help our hospitals identify needs, access resources and strengthen their operations to maintain essential health care services."

"As a rural CEO, I am incredibly pleased with the process and action plan developed to help ensure our continued viability," said Melissa Gale, CEO of Landmann-Jungman Memorial Hospital Avera. "It was uniquely tailored to our facility, addressing the specific concerns raised during the site visit. The recommendations are both practical and achievable for our small, rural community in Scotland. This approach truly reflects a deep understanding of our needs and challenges."

"The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) applauds Senator Rounds for his introduction of the Rural Health Care Facility Technical Assistance Program Act to expand and codify the existing USDA pilot program," said Alan Morgan, CEO of the National Rural Health Association. "This legislation will help prevent hospital closures, improve financial and operations performance for facilities, and strengthen essential healthcare services in rural communities. NRHA looks forward to working with Congress to keep hospital doors open and continue providing care for the 60 million residents living in rural America."



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'Don't do that': Attorney general says guilty verdict in state theft trial sends a message

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - APRIL 3, 2025 6:04 PM



From left, South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation agent Trevor Swanson, prosecutor Nolan Welker, Attorney General Marty Jackley and Division of Criminal Investigation agent Matt Glenn hold a press conference following the end of a three-day trial on April 4, 2025, in Pierre. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

PIERRE — South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley said Thursday that a woman's conviction for stealing \$1.8 million from the state should send a message.

"Don't do that," Jackley said during a press conference after the announcement of the verdict.

At the end of a three-day trial and an hour of deliberation, a Hughes County jury found 68-year-old Lonna Carroll guilty on two felony counts of grand theft. She'll be sentenced later.

Jackley said he also hopes the case sends a message to potential whistleblowers.

"That they can come forth to us, that we will take action on it, and we

will do everything that we can to protect those employees that are doing the right thing," he said.

Carroll's conviction is the highest-profile outcome in a recent wave of white-collar prosecutions in South Dakota state government, which have also spurred reforms and increased scrutiny on departmental financial controls.

During the trial, Jackley's prosecution team laid out a paper trail illustrating Carroll's scheme, played her recorded confession, and showed a document she signed saying she committed the crimes.

Carroll formerly worked as an administrative assistant for Child Protection Services in the Department of Social Services. Her crimes were discovered by a department employee after Carroll had retired and moved to Algona, Iowa.

Carroll was found guilty of submitting fraudulent financial requests on behalf of children no longer in the

state's care, depositing the funds into accounts opened under their names, and withdrawing the money in cash for herself. Prosecutors said she did that 215 times between 2010 and 2023, stealing a total of \$1,777,665.73.

She faces up to 25 years in prison and a \$50,000 fine for one count of aggravated grand theft, and 15 years in prison and a \$30,000 fine for the other count.

Defense makes its case

Carroll's defense attorney, Timothy Whalen, argued the state bore responsibility due to lax oversight. He also contended that the statute of limitations should have prevented the prosecution.

Whalen had Logan Aukes, who manages Williams & Company CPAs in Sioux Falls, testify as an expert auditor. He said the compartmentalized nature of responsibilities within the state department created an environment where employees could look around and say, "I'm not really being looked at in anything I do."

Prior testimony explained that Child Protection Services has three tiers of approval for payment requests, and Carroll was authorized for all three levels.

Whalen said that because "my client was authorized," the charges don't fit the behavior.

Jackley called that absurd. He said there is no question the department left the door open for Carroll. But he said that leaving a door unlocked does not give someone the right to go through it.

Afterward, when asked why the case went to trial, Whalen said Carroll exercised her constitutional right after plea discussions failed to result in a resolution.

Asked whether an agreement was ever close, Whalen responded that there were plea offers back and forth, "for pleading to one count, two counts, different recommendations of sentence."

"My client made the decision," Whalen said.

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 public university tuition will rise after three-year freeze

'Conservative' increase due to inflation and budget restraints, officials say

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - APRIL 3, 2025 2:45 PM

South Dakota public university tuition will increase after remaining flat for the last three years.

The Board of Regents, which oversees the university system, approved a system-wide average 2.9% undergraduate tuition increase during its Thursday meeting at Northern State University in Aberdeen. Tuition will rise by roughly that amount at five of the state's universities, while South Dakota Mines in Rapid City will increase its tuition by 4.5% "to align the institution" with peer universities, the Regents said in a news release, and to help support the university's "special focus" on engineering, science and technology.

The board also approved a \$1 per credit hour increase in the mandatory general activity fee, which supports student activities and campus amenities, along with increases to housing and meal plan rates and other specialized or campus-specific fee increases.

The total annual undergraduate cost for South Dakota students will increase by \$520.15 next year to an average of \$18,939.92, according to the board.

Inflation and legislative decisions in a tight budget year contributed to the increase, and tough budget years will continue, said Board of Regents Executive Director Nathan Lukkes.

"We certainly don't want to get into a place where we're going too cheap, if you will," Lukkes said, "and start to sacrifice quality for our students."

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The South Dakota Board of Regents meets on the South Dakota State University campus on Dec. 14, 2023. (Makenzie

Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

'Conservative' increase helps cover 'minimum' cost increases

Competition with regional institutions largely drove tuition freezes approved by the Regents and funded by the Legislature in the last three years. South Dakota had the lowest tuition and fees for an undergraduate resident and non-resident degree compared to surrounding states in the last two school years.

Regents last approved a tuition increase of 1.1% in fiscal year 2021.

While the Legislature provided funding for tuition freezes prior to this year, that funding did not support a fee freeze, which the system chose to do anyway. The Legislature's annual mandated increases in employee salaries did not come with

extra funding either, said Heather Forney, vice president of finance and administration for the system. Universities absorbed the costs.

"In an era where our neighboring states are increasing tuition by double digits, we've really held the line," Forney said.

The increases will help address "astronomical" inflation and insurance costs universities ate during the tuition freeze era, Forney added. For example, some building insurance costs rose 450% in the last five years.

The system couldn't avoid increasing fees and tuition forever, said board member Pam Roberts. She called the proposal a "conservative" increase.

Board President Tim Rave agreed.

"I think the 2.9% really reflects, maybe in some aspects, the minimum," Rave said. "It's really not covering all the costs that the universities are exposed to."

Softened legislative cuts remain an 'ongoing concern'

The Legislature's recent \$2 million cut to the regental budget will lead to "tough financial decisions" for universities, according to a South Dakota Board of Regents press release Thursday.

"After many years of strong legislative support, these reductions may threaten key programs, support services, and physical infrastructure," the release said, "potentially impacting the state's long-term workforce development and economic growth."

Lawmakers also upheld a price increase for South Dakota high school students taking dual-credit college classes, but defeated a proposed funding reduction for the state's medical residency program. Legislators used one-time funding to avoid a proposed \$9.1 million building maintenance and repair cut. That will "kick the can down the road," Lukkes told board members.

"That certainly remains an ongoing concern," Lukkes said, "in terms of how we make sure that we have access to the resources necessary to maintain our facilities and provide a top quality experience to our students without simply passing the cost along to students."

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

Economists blast calculations for 'bombshell' Trump tariffs as faulty while stocks plunge

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - APRIL 3, 2025 6:27 PM

WASHINGTON — Markets and business owners in the United States and around the world reeled Thursday following President Donald Trump's announcement of sweeping and steep tariffs that are not "reciprocal" but rather punish many countries that U.S. importers heavily rely on, experts say.

U.S. stocks plummeted to their lowest levels since June 2020, financial media reported at the closing bell Thursday. Business groups issued criticisms, experts predicted increases in household spending and even a conservative Republican senator pushed legislation that would increase congressional power over tariffs.

Trump unveiled the tariffs Wednesday during a White House Rose Garden event billed as "Liberation Day," where he told the crowd that trading partners and allies have "torn apart our once beautiful American dream."

His answer: Signing a "historic executive order instituting reciprocal tariffs on countries throughout the world. Reciprocal. That means they do it to us, and we do it to them. Very simple."

But economists say the new U.S. tariffs Trump revealed Wednesday — illustrated on a large display table — do not match one-for-one other countries' levies, as Trump said during his remarks.

Trump held in his hands a chart that claimed to show a list of other countries' taxes on American imports. But it was wrong.

The problem with the chart

Vietnam does not charge a 90% tariff on American imports, as the chart said. Rather its rate for imported U.S. goods was on average 9.4% in 2023, according to the World Trade Organization.

"The actual calculation (circulated by the White House) doesn't factor in other countries' tariffs," said Brad Setser, senior fellow on global trade at the Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank focused on international affairs.

In other words, Setser told States Newsroom Thursday, "It's a tariff on big bilateral trade deficits."



New Nissan cars are driven onto a rail car to be transported from an automobile processing terminal located at the Port of Los Angeles on April 3, 2025 in Wilmington, California. The Japanese automotive maker is being impacted by President Trump's new 25 percent imported automobile tariffs. (Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images)

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And so, what does that mean? And why did the president's chart say that the U.S. would now be charging a 46% tax on every imported good from Vietnam?

Vietnam is a small country, but a competitive exporter, particularly in broadcasting equipment, microchips and computers. And the U.S. is a big customer.

In 2023, the U.S. imported \$118 billion in goods from Vietnam, while Vietnam imported about \$9.6 billion in U.S. products that year, according to the Observatory of Economic Complexity, a trade data project with roots at MIT.

The White House claimed on the chart that Vietnam applies a 90% tariff on the U.S. — when actually that percentage is roughly the dollar amount of the U.S. trade deficit divided by the dollar amount of how much the U.S. imports from the country. So, \$120B – \$10B = \$110B, then divide that by \$120B, and you get roughly 91%.

Trump said he would be “kind” and give trading partners “discounted” tariff rates by about half, and that's how Vietnam landed at a 46% tax on its imports into the U.S.

“So Vietnam got hit with a huge tariff. It is literally that simple,” Setser said.

Economists and journalists almost immediately took to social media to question the glaring inaccuracy.

‘Bombshell’ tariffs

The new rates are a “bombshell” on U.S. allies and trading partners, said Jack Zhang, a professor of political science who runs the Trade War Lab at the University of Kansas.

Vietnam tried to head off Trump's announcement in March by cutting levies on U.S. imports and signing “big purchase agreements,” Zhang said, but it didn't work.

Historically countries have negotiated tariffs product by product in “laborious” talks, Zhang said.

“You know, ‘You reduce tariffs on your stuff, I will reduce tariffs on maybe some other stuff.’ And it nets out to be fair. This sort of lazy, back-of-the-envelope kind of calculation based on the trade deficit, it makes it really hard to negotiate in those terms,” he said.

Products from the European Union will now be taxed at 20%, Japan's new rate is 24%, and South Korea's 25% — all significant U.S. allies and trading partners. The EU has already threatened to retaliate if the U.S. does not come to the negotiating table.

Countries carrying a trade surplus with the U.S. — meaning they import more American goods than they sell back to the U.S. — did not escape the policy, as Trump imposed a universal 10% tariff on every nation.

The United Kingdom, which runs a trade surplus with the U.S. and in 2023 charged an average of 3.8% on imported American products, will now see a 10% tax on its items headed to U.S. buyers. Australia, whose Prime Minister Anthony Albanese called the tariffs “totally unwarranted,” faces the same situation.

Trump's informational table falsely stated that the U.K., Australia and a host of other countries — including the Heard and McDonald Islands, inhabited by penguins and seals — have been charging a 10% tax on American goods.

‘Damage to their own people’

Trump did not include Canada and Mexico in his announcement Wednesday.

But those countries are already subject to up to 25% taxes on steel, aluminum and other imports that the administration enacted in March, after declaring emergencies over illicit fentanyl and immigrants crossing the northern and southern borders.

Additionally Trump's 25% foreign car tax launched Thursday. The neighboring countries factor big into the automobile supply chain.

“Given the prospective damage to their own people, the American administration should eventually change course, but I don't want to give false hope. The president believes that what he is doing is best for the American economy,” Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said Thursday in remarks that streamed on C-SPAN. Carney said he and Trump have agreed to economic and security negotiations next month.

The proposed tariffs will amount to an average \$2,100 tax increase per American household, according

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to an analysis released Thursday by the center-right Tax Foundation, which advocates for lower taxes. The average levy on all imports will reach 18.8%, compared to 2.5% in 2024, according to the foundation's modeling.

Numerous trade and advocacy groups spoke out against the tariffs.

The National Association of Manufacturers urged the Trump administration to "minimize tariff costs for manufacturers that are investing and expanding in the U.S."

The center-right Taxpayers Protection Alliance issued a scathing statement Thursday. "American consumers and taxpayers should be appalled by this executive overreach," said its president David Williams.

States Newsroom spoke to small business owners from around the country who expressed fear about the cost of day-to-day supplies. One Arizona coffee shop owner told the news outlet that he purchased a year's supply of disposable coffee cups from China last year in anticipation of Trump igniting a trade war.

Trump announced a 34% tax on Chinese imports Wednesday, and some experts say that will stack on top of the existing 20% tariffs Trump imposed during his first administration that were kept in place by former President Joe Biden.

Senators want more control over tariffs

A bipartisan pair of senators introduced on Thursday what they've titled the "American Trade Review Act of 2025," aiming to claw back congressional power over the president's near unilateral decision-making on U.S. tariffs.

"Inflation and high costs are a threat to the stability and prosperity of American businesses of all sizes, to our farmers and to our consumers," Democratic Sen. Maria Cantwell of Washington state said on the Senate floor. She and Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa are co-sponsoring the legislation.

"We live now in an interconnected world, a global economy, and advances in technology and transportation have brought that world closer and closer together. We have a global economy," Cantwell continued.

States Newsroom sent a list of questions to the White House regarding their informational table of tariffs presented Wednesday and an opportunity to respond to criticism.

In a statement, White House spokesperson Kush Desai said, "Trillions in historic investment commitments from industry leaders ranging from Apple to Hyundai to TSMC are indicative of how this administration is working with the private sector while implementing President Trump's pro-growth, pro-worker America First agenda of tariffs, deregulation, tax cuts, and the unleashing of American energy.

"These America First economic policies delivered historic job, wage, and investment growth in his first term, and everyone from Main Street to Wall Street is again going to thrive as President Trump secures our nation's economic future," the statement continued.

TSMC, a Taiwanese mega semiconductor producer, received \$6.6 billion in direct funding from the U.S., plus \$5 billion in cheap loans, under Biden's administration after he signed the CHIPS and Science Act, according to an analysis by the Council on Foreign Relations. The country announced an additional \$100 billion investment in early March.

Trump announced a 32% tariff on the island nation.

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

U.S. Senate confirms Dr. Oz to lead Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

South Dakota's Thune and Rounds each vote yes

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - APRIL 3, 2025 4:53 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate on Thursday confirmed former television personality and onetime Pennsylvania political candidate Mehmet Oz as director of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

The 53-45 party-line vote places Oz at the helm of the federal agency responsible for administering health care programs relied on by 1 in 4 Americans, including children, seniors and lower-income people.

His confirmation comes as Republicans in Congress look to Medicaid, a state-federal partnership that covers medical expenses for some low-income and older Americans, as a source for hundreds of billions in spending cuts to help pay for extending the 2017 GOP tax law.

Oz testified during his confirmation hearing in mid-March that there are several "painful truths" confronting federal programs within CMS.

"Health care expenditures are growing 2 to 3% faster than our economy; not sustainable. The Medicare trust fund will be insolvent within a decade, that's the 2.9% taken out of your paycheck," Oz said. "Medicaid is the number one expense item in most states, consuming 30% of those state budgets, and that's crowding out essential services like schools and public safety that many of you spent your careers trying to develop. Our health care cost per person in this country is twice that of other developed nations."

Oz said that chronic disease, which he argued is "linked to poor lifestyle choices," drives much of the federal spending on health care. He singled out obesity as a central issue.

Oz testified he intended to "empower beneficiaries with better tools and more transparency," "incentivize health care providers to optimize care with real-time information" in part by using artificial intelligence to "liberate doctors and nurses from paperwork," and modernize efforts that track waste, fraud and abuse.

'Ludicrous wellness grifting'

Finance Committee ranking member Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said during the hearing that Oz's comments during a failed Senate campaign about privatizing Medicare were unacceptable.

Wyden also criticized Oz for promoting products on this daytime television show that had no scientific research supporting their claims of improving people's health or preventing disease.

"Dr. Oz has used his program to promote some of the most ludicrous wellness grifting that I've heard about to date," Wyden said.



Dr. Mehmet Oz speaks during a confirmation hearing with the Senate Finance Committee in the Dirksen Senate Office Building on March 14, 2025, in Washington, D.C. Oz has been confirmed as President Donald Trump's nominee to be administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. (Photo by Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images)

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Idaho Republican Sen. Mike Crapo, chairman of the committee, said during a floor speech Thursday that Oz was well qualified to run CMS.

"At his hearing, Dr. Oz spoke strongly about his desire to modernize the CMS and encourage a healthy lifestyle for all Americans," Crapo said. "His vision for treating the underlying causes of chronic disease and equipping providers with innovative technologies to serve patients will also be a much-needed sea change at CMS."

CMS scope

The agency manages several federal health programs, including Medicare, Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program and the health insurance marketplaces established by the Affordable Care Act.

The agency spent more than \$1.5 trillion during the last full fiscal year, about 22% of all federal spending.

The more than 6,000 people who work at CMS as well as contractors "process over one billion Medicare claims annually, monitor quality of care, provide the states with matching funds for Medicaid benefits, and develop policies and procedures designed to give the best possible service to beneficiaries," according to the latest financial report.

CMS is one of many agencies housed in the Department of Health and Human Services that is subject to restructuring plans from Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Oz background

Oz received his undergraduate degree from Harvard University before earning a joint M.D. and MBA from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and Wharton Business School.

He starred in the daytime show "Dr. Oz," which ran from 2009 until 2022.

He won the Republican primary in the 2022 Pennsylvania U.S. Senate race but was defeated during the general election by Democratic Sen. John Fetterman.

When President Donald Trump announced in November he intended to nominate Oz to lead CMS, he wrote that Oz would "cut waste and fraud within our Country's most expensive Government Agency, which is a third of our Nation's Healthcare spend, and a quarter of our entire National Budget."

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

States ordered by U.S. Education Department to certify school DEI ban or lose funds

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - APRIL 3, 2025 12:12 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Education demanded in a letter to state education leaders on Thursday that they certify all K-12 schools in their states are complying with an earlier Dear Colleague letter banning diversity, equity and inclusion practices if they want to keep receiving federal financial assistance.

The department's sweeping order gives K-12 state education agencies 10 days to collect the certifications of compliance from local school governing bodies, and then sign them and return them to the federal department.

The new demand stems from a February letter threatening to rescind federal funds for schools that use DEI, or race-conscious practices, in admissions, programming, training, hiring, scholarships and other aspects of student life.

Craig Trainor, the department's acting assistant secretary for civil rights, said "federal financial assistance is a privilege, not a right," in a statement Thursday.

"When state education commissioners accept federal funds, they agree to abide by federal anti-

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discrimination requirements,” Trainor said. He added that “unfortunately, we have seen too many schools flout or outright violate these obligations, including by using (diversity, equity and inclusion) programs to discriminate against one group of Americans to favor another based on identity characteristics in clear violation of Title VI.”

He did not cite examples in the statement.

Trainor said the department “is taking an important step toward ensuring that states understand — and comply with — their existing obligations under civil rights laws and *Students v. Harvard*.”

In the February letter, Trainor offered a wide-ranging interpretation of a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 2023 involving Harvard University and the University of North Carolina. The nation’s highest court struck down the use of affirmative action in college admissions.

Trainor wrote that though the ruling “addressed admissions decisions, the Supreme Court’s holding applies more broadly.”

The four-page letter raised a slew of questions for schools — from pre-K through college — over what exactly falls within the requirements.

The department later released a Frequently Asked Questions document on the letter in an attempt to provide more guidance.

In the document, the department noted that it’s prohibited from “exercising control over the content of school curricula” and “nothing in Title VI, its implementing regulations, or the Dear Colleague Letter requires or authorizes a school to restrict any rights otherwise protected by the First Amendment.”

The agency also clarified that “programs focused on interests in particular cultures, heritages, and areas of the world” are allowed as long as “they are open to all students regardless of race.”



The Lyndon Baines Johnson Department of Education Building in Washington, D.C., pictured on Nov. 25, 2024. (Photo by Shauneen Miranda/States Newsroom)

Teachers unions react

Meanwhile, legal challenges are already underway against the Dear Colleague letter, including one spearheaded by the American Federation of Teachers and another from the National Education Association.

“In the middle of a school year, the president is trying to bully the very same school districts that he

insisted, just a few weeks ago, should be in charge of education,” Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said in a Thursday statement.

Weingarten added that “this is a power grab and a money grab — and it’s also blatantly unlawful.”

“We know the administration wants to divert federal education funds into block grants, vouchers or tax cuts, but it’s simply not legal; only Congress can do that. Further, federal statute explicitly prohibits any president from telling schools and colleges what to teach, and funds cannot be withheld on the basis of Title VI Civil Rights Act claims without due process,” she said.

In a Thursday statement, Becky Pringle, president of the National Education Association, said “educators and parents know that teaching should be guided by what is best for students, not by threat of illegal restrictions and punishment.”

“That is why we sued the Trump administration — and we stand by our lawsuit,” she said.

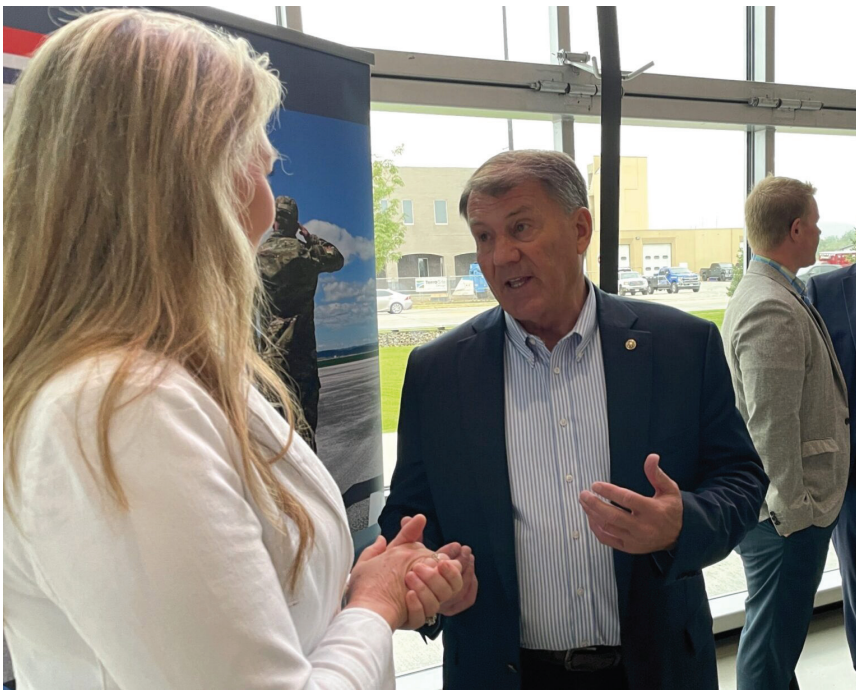
“This latest action by the Trump administration to shut down free speech and coerce educators to abandon inclusive practices at school remains illegal and unconstitutional as we pointed out in our legal filing,” she added.

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

South Dakota officials want to save AM radios in vehicles

Rounds, Johnson, Jackley support legislation pending in Senate

BY: TODD EPP, NORTHERN PLAINS NEWS LLC - APRIL 3, 2025 10:33 AM



U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds, R-South Dakota, visits with an attendee after an announcement of federal housing funds for the Black Hills on Aug. 12, 2024, at the David Lust Accelerator Building in Rapid City. (Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)

U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds, R-South Dakota, has joined a bipartisan effort to ensure AM radio remains available in all new vehicles, citing the medium’s importance for rural communities and emergency communications.

Rounds is among 60 senators now co-sponsoring the AM Radio for Every Vehicle Act, which would require automakers to maintain AM radio capability in new vehicles at no additional cost to consumers.

Rounds said he grew up listening to KCCR on 1240 and KGFX on 1060 while delivering newspapers in Pierre.

“Free AM broadcast radio has been an important resource for decades,” Rounds said in a 2023 news release when he initially co-sponsored the legislation. “Whether someone is in their car or tractor, AM radio is a valuable tool to share local news and emergency information.”

The bill, initially introduced by Sens. Ed Markey, D-Mass., and Ted Cruz, R-Texas, has now reached a critical threshold with 60 co-sponsors — enough to overcome a potential filibuster in the Senate, accord-

ing to a statement from Markey’s office. The legislation was reintroduced in January as the AM Radio for Every Vehicle Act of 2025.

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"AM radio is a lifeline for people across the country for news, sports, and especially emergency information," Markey said in a recent press release.

Johnson, Jackley among supporters

South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley has been a vocal supporter of the legislation. In October 2024, he joined 11 other attorneys general in urging Congress to pass the bill.

"AM Radio is important in rural states like South Dakota where people can turn to for severe weather updates and emergency information along with local news and sports," Jackley said in an Oct. 4, 2024, news release.

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, was among over 100 lawmakers who signed a letter to automakers in May 2023 expressing concerns about removing AM radio receivers in vehicles. The letter highlighted the need for rural Americans to access AM radio, given limited internet and cell phone connectivity.

The legislation would direct the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to require all new vehicles manufactured or imported for sale in the United States to include AM broadcast radio receivers at no additional cost.

It would provide small vehicle manufacturers at least four years after the Department of Transportation issues the rule to comply. The measure would also require automakers to inform consumers, during the period before the rule takes effect, that their vehicles do not maintain access to broadcast AM radio.

U.S. Sen. John Thune, R-South Dakota, is not among the legislation's co-sponsors. The bill has passed the Commerce Committee and awaits action by the Senate.

Some automakers removing AM radio from new vehicles

Major automakers have already begun removing AM radio, particularly from electric models. BMW, Mazda, Volvo, Volkswagen, Tesla and Ford are among the manufacturers that have either eliminated or announced plans to phase out AM radio from their newer vehicles, according to a March 2023 statement from Markey's office.

Manufacturers typically cite electromagnetic interference as the primary reason. "Electric motors can interfere with AM radio signals, causing undesirable static noise during broadcasts," The Hill reported last year.

In a joint letter to Congress, the Zero Emission Transportation Association, Consumer Technology Association, Alliance for Automotive Innovation, and TechNet argued that "requiring manufacturers to use a particular technology will slow innovation and reduce consumer preference."

John Bozzella, president and CEO of the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, and other industry leaders warned in their letter that "to accommodate analog AM radio, certain carmakers may need to scrap advanced safety features."

Albert Gore, executive director of ZETA, said in a statement to Reuters, "Requiring the installation of analog AM radios in automobiles is an unnecessary action that would impact EV range, efficiency, and affordability at a critical moment of accelerating adoption. Mandating AM radio would do little to expand drivers' ability to receive emergency alerts."

The Consumer Technology Association compared the mandate to requiring outdated technology.

"Mandating AM radio would be like mandating CD or cassette players in new vehicles," the group said in a statement to The Washington Post. "This outdated and counterproductive measure will stifle innovation and impose unnecessary costs on automakers, ultimately increasing prices for consumers."

Broadcasters, FCC commissioner, FEMA support AM radio in cars

Curtis LeGeyt, National Association of Broadcasters president and CEO, issued a statement praising the Senate Commerce Committee's endorsement of the bill: "In just one week since its introduction, this legislation has already gained nearly half of the Senate as co-sponsors and cleared a key committee, demonstrating the broad recognition of AM radio's vital role in keeping Americans informed and safe."

Nathan Simington, a commissioner with the Federal Communications Commission, also weighed in on the agency's website.

"The Commission should not be shy about asking auto manufacturers to serve the public interest by continuing to serve AM radio listeners," he wrote.

The National Association of Farm Broadcasting's board of directors issued a warning in a public statement. "Failure to approve this critical AM Radio for Every Vehicle Act will allow automakers to eliminate access to critical information to the people we serve," the statement said. "Rural and urban residents should not be forced to subscribe to an unreliable data stream for urgent information."

Manny Centeno, program manager for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Integrated Public Alert & Warning System, has emphasized that AM radio is the backbone of the nation's public warning system. Nearly 80 AM radio stations nationwide are Primary Entry Points for emergency alerts distributed by FEMA and the National Weather Service, covering approximately 90% of the U.S. population.

Todd Epp is a mostly retired journalist and lawyer from Harrisburg, South Dakota. He is the publisher and editor of Northern Plains News LLC, an independent news organization. He has worked in both commercial and public broadcasting in South Dakota and Kansas.

U.S. Senate confirms election denier, Trump defense lawyer for Justice Department

South Dakota's Thune and Rounds each vote yes

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - APRIL 3, 2025 6:47 PM

WASHINGTON — The Senate cleared two more of President Donald Trump's Department of Justice nominees Thursday, installing another attorney who defended Trump last year and a new lead on civil rights who has drawn intense criticism from advocacy groups.

The Senate confirmed California lawyer Harmeet Dhillon in a 52-45 vote to the role of assistant attorney general, heading up the agency's Civil Rights Division, one of the largest at Justice. Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski was the only Republican to oppose the nomination.

Dhillon, a Trump legal adviser and the managing partner at Dhillon Law Group in San Francisco, specializes in commercial litigation, employment law, First Amendment rights and election law matters, according to the biography on her firm's website.

Dhillon is also the CEO and founder of the Center for American Liberty, which states its mission as "defending the civil liberties of Americans left behind by civil rights legacy organizations."

Dhillon previously sat on the ACLU Northern California board and defended members of the Sikh com-



Harmeet Dhillon, confirmed on April 3, 2025, as President Donald Trump's nominee for assistant attorney general for civil rights, prepares for her confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee in the Dirksen Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill on Feb. 26, 2025, in Washington, D.C.

(Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

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munity, to which her family belongs, from attacks after 9/11, according to reporting from San Francisco-based KQED-FM.

But Dhillon also has a trail of controversies, including repeatedly denying the 2020 presidential election results and fueling conspiracies following the 2022 attack on Paul Pelosi, husband of then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat.

Civil rights advocates also point to her recent legal work challenging voting and transgender rights.

"She's not out there to protect the rights of all of us, and that's what her record has demonstrated," Lena Zwarensteyn, of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, told States Newsroom Thursday.

In an eight-page letter to senators, led by the Leadership Conference and signed by dozens of advocacy groups, the coalition wrote Dhillon has "relentlessly tried to limit access to the ballot box" and "denied, diminished and tried to erase" the existence of transgender youth.

States Newsroom reached out to the White House for comment.

Former Missouri AG elevated

The Senate also confirmed in a party-line vote, 52-45, Dean Sauer, former Missouri solicitor general and Trump's defense lawyer, to lead government litigation.

After representing Trump's presidential immunity argument before the U.S. Supreme Court last year, Sauer will now argue before the high bench on the DOJ's behalf.

Sauer made headlines in January 2024 when he suggested to a three-judge panel for the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals that a president might be shielded by presidential immunity for ordering SEAL Team Six to assassinate a rival.

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

Judge to temporarily block Trump administration from yanking \$11B in health funds from states

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - APRIL 3, 2025 6:35 PM

A federal judge in Rhode Island will grant a request from Democratic state officials to temporarily prevent President Donald Trump's administration from cutting state health grants, the judge said at a Thursday afternoon hearing.

U.S. District Court Judge Mary McElroy said the 24 Democratic attorneys general and governors were likely to prevail on the merits of their case seeking to restore funding that the Trump administration's Department of Health and Human Services abruptly rescinded late last month.

"I'm going to grant the temporary restraining order. The balance of the equities are to maintaining the funding as it is," McElroy said after brief arguments from attorneys representing a consortium of state governments and HHS. "The harm to the plaintiff states and the plaintiff agencies if we cease that ... is clearly irreparable."

HHS, under Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., revoked \$11 billion in grant funding to states beginning on March 24, the states wrote in a Tuesday filing requesting the court block the move.

McElroy indicated at least part of her decision was based on the broadness of the Trump administration's argument.

The administration was hampered from fighting the case after receiving the states' motion for a temporary restraining order and "4,000 pages of exhibits" mere days ago, Leslie Kane, who represented HHS, said.

"Given the time limitation ... it really significantly limits any substantive argument I can make at this time," Kane said. She still offered a general objection to the "extraordinary emergency relief" she said the states were seeking.

But McElroy, whom Trump appointed during his first presidency, ruled that the "voluminous" record

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Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. departs after testifying in a confirmation hearing before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions at the Dirksen Senate Office Building on Jan. 30, 2025, in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images)

provided by the states weighed in favor of granting the order.

"Given that the government really hasn't had time to make any kind of objection except a broad objection, I don't see how I can deny the temporary restraining order on the record that's before the court, which, again: quite voluminous," McElroy said.

States scrambling

The rescissions of grant funding in late March from COVID-19-era laws surprised state health departments and led to rapid layoffs and pauses in contract work while states scrambled to understand what other cuts they would need to make.

Sarah Rice, an assistant attorney general in Rhode Island who argued for the Democratic states, listed several effects already or soon to be felt by the states.

In Minnesota, 170 employees had already been laid off, with hundreds more at risk of job loss. Rhode Island employees with extensive training on vaccine storage might be laid off. Subcontractors in Wisconsin were told to pause their work, and Washington state may be unable to move substance abuse and mental health patients from a "high-acuity" treatment setting to community treatment, Rice said.

"These are just exemplars from the very many declarations that the state employees put together," she said.

States had no advance warning their funding would be pulled, and were especially shocked by the reversal of funding because HHS had told them how to continue to use COVID-19 funding, Rice said.

"This was quite a surprising turn because HHS had prior issued guidance that instructed the states how to modify these programs to comply with the appropriations statutes after the public health emergency related to COVID-19 had ended," Rice said.

The department had even granted states extensions for various grants as late as June 2027, Rice added.

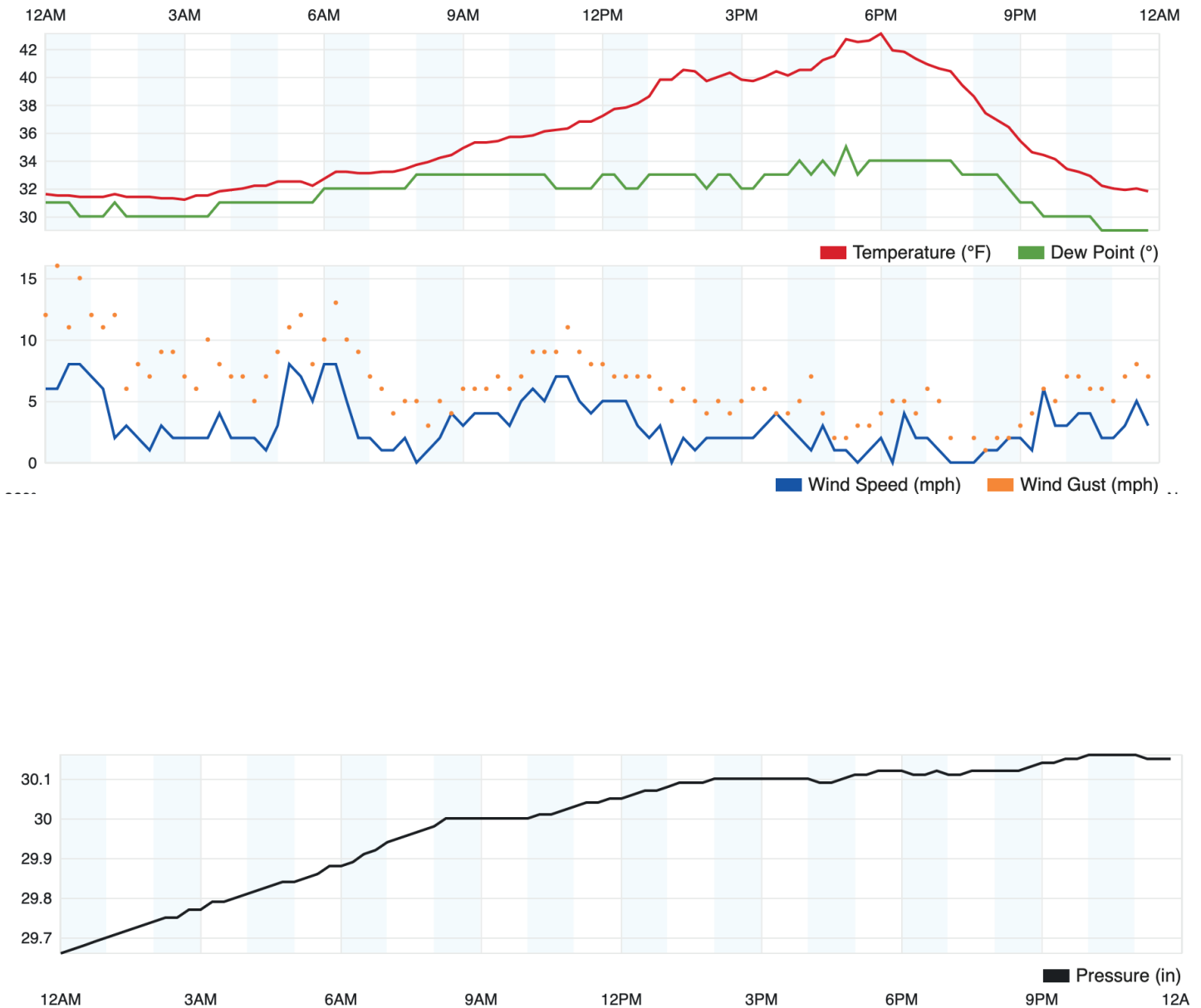
The attorneys general of Colorado, Rhode Island, California, Minnesota, Washington, Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon and Wisconsin and Govs. Andy Beshear of Kentucky and Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania brought the case.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 37 °F

Wintry Mix

Tonight



Low: 15 °F

Slight Chance
Snow then
Mostly Clear

Saturday



High: 42 °F

Sunny

Saturday Night



Low: 21 °F

Mostly Clear

Sunday



High: 51 °F

Mostly Sunny



Mix of Rain & Snow...

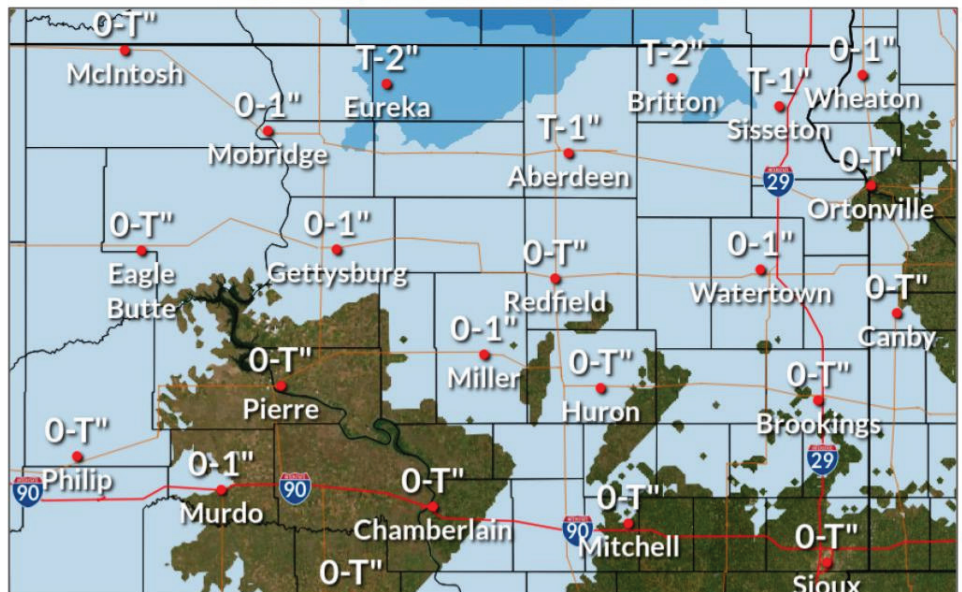
April 4, 2025

3:26 AM

As System Moves From West To East Today

Most Likely Snowfall Range 6am - 10pm

- Rain & Snow is already falling west-river & will continue to march east through the day.
- Accumulations will tend to be light, with melting of snow during the day.
- Total moisture from less than 1/10th to about 1/3rd of an inch.
- Moisture departs eastern SD & western MN late this afternoon/evening.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A weak system will bring rain and snow to the Dakotas and Minnesota today, with some light accumulations, primarily on grassy surfaces. Winds are expected to increase out of the north between 25 to 35mph across central South Dakota with lighter winds across the east.

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April 4, 2025
3:56 AM



Seasonally Cool Through The Weekend

Friday



PM Winds
(25-35 mph
Central SD)

Highs: 38-42°

Saturday



Highs: 38-52°
Lows: 14-20°

Sunday



Highs: 45-60°
Lows: 20-27°

Monday



Highs: 35-48°
Lows: 17-24°

Warmer Range - Central SD / Cooler Range - Northeast SD & Western MN

The next few days will see up and down temperatures, on average a little cooler than normal. Otherwise, after today expect mainly dry conditions with light winds

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 44 °F at 5:49 PM

Low Temp: 31 °F at 2:38 AM

Wind: 16 mph at 12:09 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 01 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1921

Record Low: -6 in 2018

Average High: 52

Average Low: 27

Average Precip in April.: 0.17

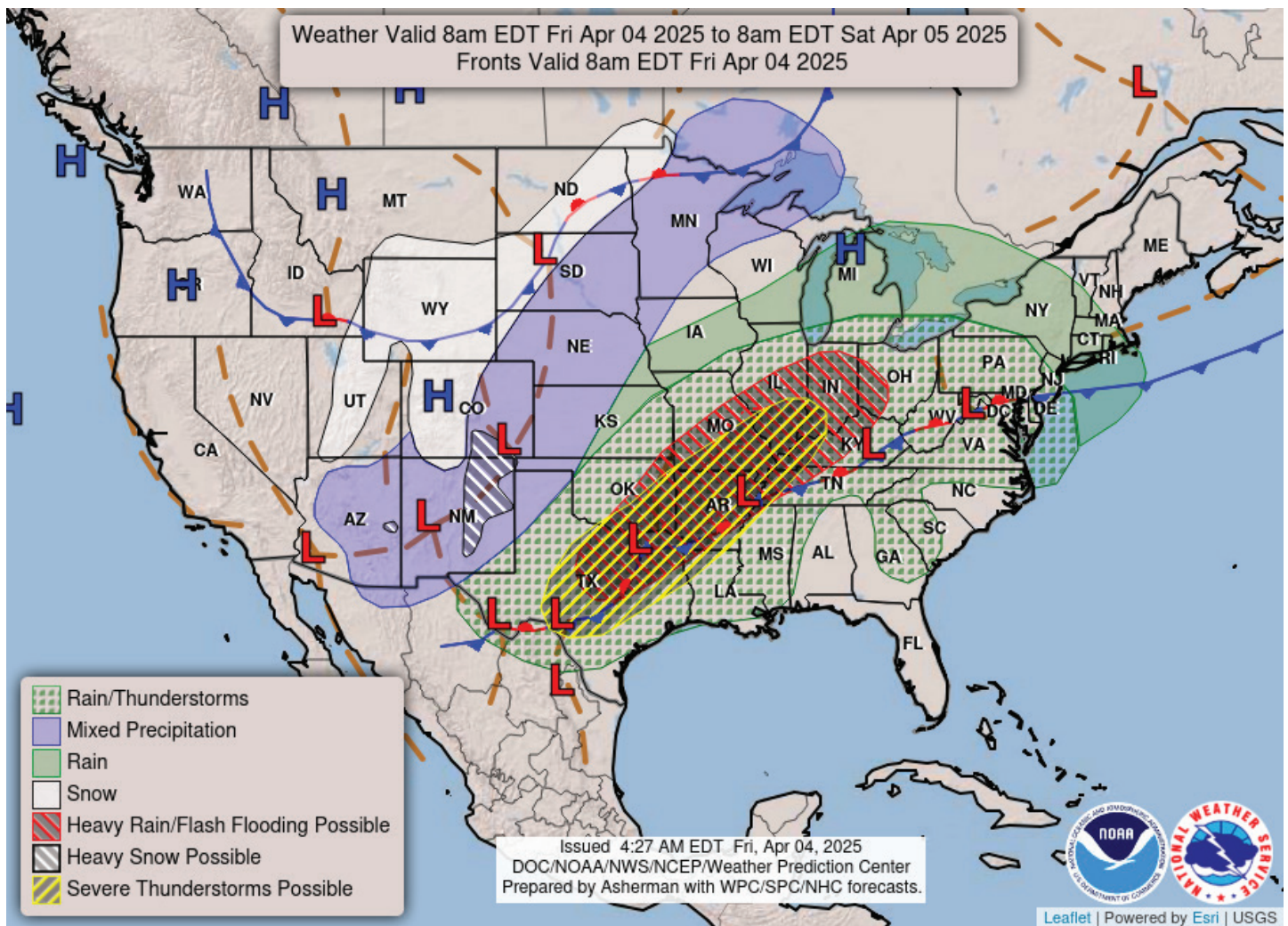
Precip to date in April.: 0.94

Average Precip to date: 2.23

Precip Year to Date: 1.57

Sunset Tonight: 8:06:06 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:02:29 am



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Today in Weather History

April 4th, 1961: High 40-60mph winds and 80-90mph gusts affected Central and Western South Dakota. The most extensive property damage occurred in the Pierre area. A new motel's roof was blown off, and one wall was damaged. One trailer home was blown over, numerous windows and large signboards were destroyed, and roofs sustained damage in Pierre.

1804 - A large tornado crossed six Georgia counties killing at least eleven persons near Augusta. (David Ludlum)

1933 - Pigeon River Bridge, MN, reported 28 inches of snow, which established the state 24 hour snowfall record. (4th-5th) (The Weather Channel)

1973 - Sandia Crest, NM, reported a snow depth of 95 inches, a record for the state of New Mexico. (The Weather Channel)

1983 - Colorado was in the midst of a three day winter storm. Buckhorn Mountain, located west of Fort Collins, received 64 inches of snow. (Storm Data)

1987 - Rains of five to eight inches drenched eastern New York State, and ten persons were killed in a bridge collapse over Schoharie Creek. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Sunny and warm weather prevailed across the nation. Fort Smith AR reported a record high of 90 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Lower Mississippi Valley to the Southern Appalachians. The thunderstorms spawned seventeen tornadoes, including one which caused two million dollars damage at Baldwin AL. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 90 mph at Bremen GA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A deep low pressure system in northern New York State brought heavy snow to parts of western and central New York during the day. The snowfall total of 5.8 inches at Buffalo was a record for the date, and 9.5 inches was reported at Rochester. Snowfall totals ranged up to 11 inches at Warsaw. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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WHY THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON?

Wisdom was a very important matter to those living during the time of Solomon. The Bible gives special recognition to the wise men of Israel's neighbor, especially those in Egypt, as well as Babylon and Phoenicia, Arabia, and Edom. The Old Testament also refers to Gentile "sages" with a certain degree of respect – but does not mention the Gentile priests and prophets.

It's important for us to remember that there were many in that period of history who were very intelligent even though they did not speak as one having a "special revelation" from God. Individuals throughout the ages, even today can think, speak and write wisely within many different fields of knowledge, and yet not speak on behalf of God. It is this simple, significant fact that makes The Proverbs of Solomon different. Solomon spoke on behalf of God, the truth of God, to guide the people of God into "paths of righteousness for His sake." Then, as now, following the teachings and instructions of Solomon, God's children have God's "filter" to see God's world through God's eyes.

We often talk about "hindsight" and "foresight," but God's Word gives us insight into the way we are to live. We may have wisdom from other sources, but the wisdom that comes from God enables us to live victoriously and successfully, and let the world see and understand the value of submitting to His teachings. We are, of all people, most blest to have His wisdom!

One more fact: We, as the children of God, also have access to the power of God, to live lives that are pleasing to God, through the strength and power of God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may we know, understand, accept and live in the light of Your wisdom every day! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel. Proverbs 1:1

We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.01.25

11 12 21 29 49 3

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$43,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 28 Mins 3 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.02.25

12 28 39 41 44 1

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$28,720,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 43 Mins 3 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.03.25

2 5 11 14 28 18

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 58 Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.02.25

2 10 20 25 26

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$90,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 58 Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.02.25

7 18 23 31 44 24

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 27 Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.02.25

5 17 41 64 69 1

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$47,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 27 Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

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

News from the **AP** Associated Press

What you do before and during a tornado could mean the difference between life and death

By JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — With new innovations and technology, scientists have learned from major tornado outbreaks over the years how to improve safety guidance. During tornado season, forecasters try to get the word out about staying safe during a storm — but also planning for it ahead of time.

Tornado seasons typically begin at different times in different parts of the United States.

In what has historically been known as Tornado Alley — a designation that typically includes Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas — the peak of tornado season is May into early June. But the season starts earlier in what's often called Dixie Alley, made up of southern states such as Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia.

The idea of a tornado alley can be misleading, since tornadoes have been reported in all 50 states. About 1,200 tornadoes strike the U.S. every year, and each year violent twisters happen outside these traditional "alleys" of tornado outbreaks, according to the National Severe Storms Laboratory. Recent twisters have even struck in places unaccustomed to them, such as one near Los Angeles in 2023 that tore apart rooftops and injured one person.

When a tornado takes aim at your house, and the sirens are sounding, the dogs are barking and the children are screaming, there are some last-minute precautions that could save the lives of you and your loved ones.

Experts also recommend a few simple steps to prepare well before the twister is on your doorstep. Here's a look at some tornado safety tips:

How do I get emergency updates?

Weather radios, specialized receivers that get alerts and can sound an alarm in an emergency, are something that every home and business should have, said Rick Smith, the warning coordination meteorologist at the National Weather Service's forecast office in Norman, Oklahoma.

"It does feel like old-school technology, but they are lifesaving devices," Smith said.

Radios can be particularly valuable in the South, where many tornadoes strike at night when people are sleeping. "This can wake you up in the middle of the night with the alarm," Smith said.

The National Weather Service encourages people to have multiple ways of being warned, which can include weather radios, a cellphone app or other method in case power is lost. Redundancy is key, Smith said.

Where should I take shelter?

The ideal places to take shelter are enclosed, underground shelters and basements, or a safe room above ground that's designed to withstand tornadic winds.

But many people don't have that option — in Oklahoma, for example, the clay soil makes building basements expensive, so lots of homes don't have them.

If you have to be above ground in a tornado, "your goal is to put as many walls and barriers between you and the outside as you possibly can," Smith said.

Smith recommends using mattresses, couch cushions or other sturdy items to protect yourself from deadly flying or falling debris. Bicycle or sports helmets can provide crucial head protection. It's important that they are stored in a convenient place so they can be retrieved quickly, when you have only minutes or seconds before the storm strikes.

A car seat can help protect a small child, Smith says, and can be brought inside ahead of time.

How can I keep my home safe?

Recent research has shown that closing your home's garage door and all interior doors could ease the high winds inside somewhat by compartmentalizing them, according to Smith. Doing so is recommended during thunderstorms and tornadoes by the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety.

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That's the opposite of a commonly held misconception: "There's still a chunk of people out there who think you're supposed to open the doors and windows to equalize the pressure," Smith said.

It's also important to prepare for the tornado's aftermath, when you might emerge from a home or shelter to find downed trees and power lines and shredded buildings. Dress for disaster, such as wearing long pants and sturdy shoes, to make it easier to safely navigate treacherous terrain.

An emergency kit of essentials like drinking water and nonperishable food items is also a good idea.

With the threat of strong tornadoes in the forecast this week for Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky and other states, forecasters are urging people to have emergency supplies, know where their safe places are and have a family communication plan.

What should I do if I'm driving?

Don't look to Hollywood for sound tornado safety practices. The recent Hollywood film "Twisters" shows the characters sprinting toward a highway underpass as a tornado approaches.

If you are in a car or truck, "you really don't have a lot of good options at that point," Smith said. "Try not to get caught in that situation."

The best thing to do is get off the road and try to find a building. If there's nowhere to go, there are no guaranteed safe options.

When it comes to ditches, overpasses or staying inside a car, "people have survived doing all of those, people have died doing all of those," Smith said. "I've seen cars rolled up into unrecognizable balls of metal."

Britain and France accuse Russia's Putin of delaying Ukraine ceasefire efforts

By LORNE COOK and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Britain and France on Friday accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of dragging his feet in ceasefire talks aimed at halting his country's invasion of Ukraine and demanded a swift response from Moscow after weeks of U.S. efforts to secure a truce.

Russia has effectively rejected a U.S. proposal for a full and immediate 30-day halt in the fighting. A Kremlin official said Monday that Moscow views efforts to end its more than three-year war with Ukraine as "a drawn-out process."

"Our judgment is that Putin continues to obfuscate, continues to drag his feet," British Foreign Secretary David Lammy told reporters at NATO headquarters, standing alongside his French counterpart Jean-Noel Barrot in a symbolic show of unity.

A Kremlin envoy who visited Washington this week for talks with Trump administration officials said Friday that further meetings will be needed to resolve outstanding issues.

Kirill Dmitriev told Russian reporters that "the dialogue will take some time, but it's proceeding positively and constructively."

He criticized what he called a "well-coordinated media campaign and attempts by various politicians to spoil Russia-U.S. relations, distort what Russia says, and cast Russia and its leaders in a negative way."

Dmitriev, the head of Russia's sovereign wealth fund, was sanctioned by the Biden administration after the invasion of Ukraine, and the U.S. had to temporarily lift the restrictions to allow him to travel to Washington this week.

Meanwhile, the war of attrition continued to claim civilian lives. A Russian Shahed drone struck a residential area of Kharkiv late Thursday, killing five people and injuring 32, according to Mayor Ihor Terekhov. Kharkiv is Ukraine's second-largest city.

Civilian areas in three other Ukrainian regions were also hit, officials said. The Ukrainian air force said Russia fired 78 strike and decoy drones overnight.

Russia's Defense Ministry said air defenses destroyed 107 Ukrainian drones.

Russian forces are preparing to launch a fresh military offensive in the coming weeks to maximize pressure on Ukraine and strengthen the Kremlin's negotiating position in the ceasefire talks, according to Ukrainian government and Western military analysts.

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Russia is preparing a major, multi-pronged ground offensive along the 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line as muddy fields dry out and allow tanks, armored vehicles and other heavy equipment to roll into key positions across the countryside.

Britain and France are helping to lead a multinational effort known as the "coalition of the willing" to set up a force that might police any future peace agreement in Ukraine. A senior Ukrainian official said earlier this week that between 10 and 12 countries have said they are ready to join the coalition.

Lammy said that while Putin should be accepting a ceasefire, "he continues to bombard Ukraine. It's civilian population. It's energy supplies. We see you, Vladimir Putin. We know what you are doing."

Barrot said that Ukraine had accepted ceasefire terms three weeks ago, and that Russia now "owes an answer to the United States." U.S. President Donald Trump has expressed frustration with Putin and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy after he promised last year to bring the war to a swift conclusion.

"Russia has been flip-flopping, continuing its strikes on energy infrastructure, continuing its war crimes," Barrot said. "It has to be 'yes.' It has to be 'no.' It has to be a quick answer."

He said that Russia shows no intention of halting its military campaign, noting that Putin on Monday ordered a call-up intended to draft 160,000 conscripts for a one-year tour of compulsory military service.

The two foreign ministers pledged to continue helping to build up Ukraine's armed forces – the country's best security guarantee since the U.S. took any prospect of NATO membership off the table.

Coalition army chiefs were due to meet in Kyiv on Friday. Defense ministers from the group will meet at NATO headquarters next Thursday.

The Latest: Trump's tariffs slam world markets in the biggest blow since the pandemic hit in 2020

By The Associated Press undefined

Asian shares slid further Friday after U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs sent shudders through financial markets at a level of shock unseen since the COVID-19 pummeled world markets in 2020.

Trump announced a minimum tariff of 10% on global imports, with the tax rate running much higher on products from certain countries like China and those from the European Union. Smaller, poorer countries in Asia were slapped with tariffs as high as 49%.

Everything from crude oil to Big Tech stocks to the value of the U.S. dollar against other currencies has fallen. Even gold, a traditional safe haven that recently hit record highs, pulled lower after Trump announced his "Liberation Day" set of tariffs, which economists say carries the risk of a potentially toxic mix of weakening economic growth and higher inflation.

Markets in Shanghai, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Indonesia were closed for holidays, limiting the scope of Friday's sell-off.

Here's the latest:

China car association says prices will go up

The China Association of Automobile Manufacturers called on the U.S. to "correct its wrong actions." It said the tariffs "will further raise car prices, and impose additional burdens on consumers in various countries including Americans and have a negative impact on global economic recovery."

China is one of the major exporters of car parts, many used in car repairs. For example, about 6 in every 10 auto replacement parts used in U.S. auto shop repairs are imported from Mexico, Canada and China. The new taxes are also estimated to make cars imported into the U.S. thousands of dollars more expensive.

Asian shares slide further, US dollar takes a hit

Asian shares slid further Friday after U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs even as markets in Shanghai, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Indonesia were closed for holidays, limiting the scope of Friday's sell-off.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 lost 4.3% to 33,263.58, while South Korea's Kospi sank 1.8% to 2,441.86. The two U.S. allies said they were focused on negotiating lower tariffs with Trump's administration. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 dropped 2.2% to 7,684.30.

In other trading early Friday, the U.S. dollar fell to 145.39 Japanese yen from 146.06. The yen is often

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used as a refuge in uncertain times, while Trump's policies are meant in part to weaken the dollar to make goods made in the U.S. more price competitive overseas. The euro gained to \$1.1095 from \$1.1055.

Chinese industry groups say new tariffs destroyed normal order of trade with US

Chinese industry groups on Friday sharply criticized the U.S. tariffs as well as the closing of the de minimis loophole which had allowed low value goods to be imported tax-free.

"America's action crudely destroyed the normal order of trade between the U.S. and China, severely impacted cooperation between global industries, and greatly harmed the rights of consumers, including American citizens," said a statement from the China Light Industry Association, which represents the interests of light manufacturing businesses.

The tax exemption, which applies to packages valued at \$800 or less, has helped China-founded e-commerce companies like Shein and Temu to thrive while cutting into the U.S. retail market.

"We call on the international community to jointly resist this trade bullying, and firmly safeguard an equal and mutually beneficial international trade system."

The China National Textile and Apparel Council chimed in as well, with a statement Friday saying they "supported the Chinese government's forceful measures" as the U.S. has "Damaged the resilience of the global textile industry's supply chain."

Vietnam says tariffs fail to reflect the spirit of the comprehensive strategic partnership

Vietnam said it regretted the U.S. decision to impose reciprocal tariff of 46% on its exports to America,

"We believe that the decision is not in line with the reality of mutually beneficial economic and trade cooperation between the two countries," Pham Thu Hang, the spokesperson for Vietnam's foreign ministry said Friday in a statement reported by state media.

She said Vietnam had actively engaged with the U.S. to address concerns, promote ties on trade and work towards fair, mutually beneficial trade. She added that it failed to reflect the spirit of the comprehensive strategic partnership that the two countries had signed in 2023.

Former President Joe Biden visited Hanoi when the southeast Asian nation elevated the U.S. to its highest diplomatic status, comprehensive strategic partner. At the time, Biden stressed this showed how far the relationship has evolved from what he described as the "bitter past" of the Vietnam War.

"If enforced, would negatively impact bilateral economic and trade relations as well as the interests of businesses and people in both countries," said Hang.

The tariffs imposed on Vietnam are among the highest of any country, more than competitors like Thailand and Malaysia. Analysts say that the tariffs will harm Vietnamese export sectors like electronics, textiles, footwear and seafood.

Vietnam will continue discussions with the U.S. to "find practical solutions" for developing sustainable bilateral economic relations that ensure the interest of businesses and people in both countries.

Deputy Prime Minister and former finance minister Ho Duc Phoc is scheduled to visit the U.S. and Cuba from April 6 to 14 to discuss and negotiate on trade matters.

Vietnamese exports to the U.S. in 2024 totally nearly \$120 billion, making up nearly a third of the country's total export turnover.

Taiwan's president will support impacted industries, says tariffs 'unreasonable'

Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te said he will offer the "greatest support" to industries impacted by the new tariffs. Lai acknowledged that Taiwan had a trade surplus with the U.S., but that much of it came from Taiwanese industries trying to fulfill the U.S. demand for Taiwan's information technology products.

"We feel that this is unreasonable and are also worried about the subsequent impact these measures may have on the global economy," Lai said in a statement on his Facebook page Thursday night.

Lai said he instructed Premier Cho Jung-tai to work closely with industries that are impacted and to communicate with the public about their plans to stabilize the economy.

Yoon Suk Yeol removed as South Korea's president over short-lived martial law

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

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's Constitutional Court unanimously removed Yoon Suk Yeol from office Friday, ending his tumultuous presidency and setting up a new election, four months after he threw the nation into turmoil with an ill-fated declaration of martial law.

The verdict capped a dramatic fall for Yoon, a former star prosecutor who became president in 2022, just a year after he entered politics.

In a nationally televised hearing, the court's acting chief Moon Hyung-bae said the eight-member bench found Yoon's actions were unconstitutional and had a grave impact.

"By declaring martial law in breach of the constitution and other laws, the defendant brought back the history of abusing state emergency decrees, shocked the people and caused confusion in the society, economy, politics, diplomacy and all other areas," Moon said.

"Given the negative impact on constitutional order caused by the defendant's violation of laws and its ripple effects are grave, we find that the benefits of upholding the constitution by dismissing the defendant far outweigh the national losses from the dismissal of the president," the justice concluded.

Protesters erupt in jubilation and sorrow

Anti-Yoon protesters near the court erupted into tears and danced when the verdict was announced in the late morning. Two women wept as they hugged and an old man near them leapt to his feet and screamed with joy. The crowd later marched through Seoul streets.

Outside Yoon's official residence, many supporters cried, screamed and yelled at journalists when they saw the news of the verdict on a giant TV screen. But they quickly cooled down after their organizer pleaded for calm.

"We will absolutely not be shaken!" a protest leader shouted on stage. "Anyone who accepts this ruling and prepares for an early presidential election is our enemy."

No major violence has been reported by late afternoon.

"Political risks related to domestic polarization and policy instability remain," Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, said. "But the Constitutional Court's unanimous ruling has removed a major source of uncertainty. Korean government institutions have withstood a volatile mix of legislative obstruction and executive overreach that posed the greatest challenge to democracy in a generation."

Korea faces an election with deep divisions

An election will be held within two months for a new president. But a festering divide over Yoon's impeachment could complicate South Korea's efforts to deal with crucial issues like President Donald Trump's tariffs and other "America First" policies, observers say.

Yoon said in a statement issued via his defense team that he deeply regrets failing to live up to the public's expectations, but stopped short of explicitly accepting the verdict. There have been fears he would incite efforts to resist his removal, as he earlier vowed to fight to the end.

He added that he will pray for the country and its people. "It has been the greatest honor of my life to serve our nation," Yoon said.

Yoon's ruling People Power Party said it would accept the decision, but one of Yoon's lawyers, Yoon Kap-keun, called the ruling "completely incomprehensible" and a "pure political decision."

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, the country's acting leader, vowed to maintain public safety and order and ensure a smooth transition to the next administration.

Surveys show Lee Jae-myung, leader of the main liberal opposition Democratic Party, is the early favorite to win the upcoming presidential by-election, though he faces several trials for corruption and other charges.

"It will be an uphill battle for the conservative party to win a snap presidential election," said Duyeon Kim, a senior analyst at the Center for a New American Security in Washington. "If Lee wins, South Korea's foreign policy will likely look very different from what the U.S. and like-minded countries have enjoyed during Yoon's presidency because of the demands of the progressive base."

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Lee welcomed the ruling and credited the South Korean people for "protecting our democratic republic." Crisis started with a night of chaos four months ago

Martial law lasted only six hours, but left behind a political crisis, rattling financial markets and unsettling the country's diplomatic partners.

After announcing martial law late at night on Dec. 3, Yoon, a conservative, sent hundreds of soldiers to the liberal opposition-controlled National Assembly, election offices and other sites. Special operations soldiers smashed windows at the assembly and scuffled with protesters, evoking traumatic memories of the country's past military rules among many South Koreans.

Enough lawmakers, including some from the ruling party, managed to enter the assembly to vote down Yoon's decree unanimously.

Some senior military and police officers sent to the assembly testified Yoon ordered them to drag out lawmakers to block the vote on his decree or to detain his political rivals. Yoon says the troops were deployed to the assembly simply to maintain order.

Yoon was impeached by the National Assembly on Dec. 14. The assembly accused him of violating the constitution and other laws by suppressing assembly activities, attempting to detain politicians, and undermining peace across the country.

In his final testimony at the Constitutional Court hearing, Yoon said his decree was a desperate attempt to draw public support of his fight against the "wickedness" of the Democratic Party, which had obstructed his agenda, impeached top officials and slashed the government's budget bill. He earlier called the National Assembly "a den of criminals" and "anti-state forces."

The Constitutional Court ruled Yoon infringed upon the assembly's right to demand martial law be lifted, the freedom of political party activities and the neutrality of the military. It also said Yoon's political impasse with the opposition wasn't the type of emergency situation that required martial law and that Yoon's decree lacked required legal procedures such as deliberation by a formal Cabinet meeting.

Yoon still faces criminal charges

Yoon has been indicted on charges of rebellion in connection with his decree, a charge that carries the death penalty or a life sentence if convicted. He became the first South Korean president to be arrested or indicted while in office.

Yoon was released from jail in March after a Seoul district court cancelled his arrest. That allows him to stand trial without detention.

His removal from office also costs Yoon the presidential immunity that protected him from most criminal prosecutions. This means he could face other criminal charges, such as abuse of power, in connection with his martial law decree, some observers say.

A week after catastrophic earthquake, focus turns to a growing humanitarian crisis in Myanmar

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Search teams pulled more bodies from the ruins of buildings on Friday, a week after a massive earthquake rocked Myanmar killing more than 3,100 people, as the focus turns toward the urgent humanitarian needs in a country that was already devastated by civil war.

United Nations humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher, who is also the emergency relief coordinator, was to arrive Friday in an effort to spur action following the quake. Ahead of his visit, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed to the international community to immediately step up funding for quake victims "to match the scale of this crisis," and he urged unimpeded access to reach those in need.

"The earthquake has supercharged the suffering with the monsoon season just around the corner," he said Thursday.

Myanmar authorities said Thursday that 3,145 people had been killed, with another 4,589 people injured and 221 missing, and did not immediately update the figures on Friday.

Britain, which had already given \$13 million to purchase emergency items like food, water and shelter,

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pledged an additional \$6.5 million in funds to match an appeal from Myanmar's Disasters Emergency Committee, according to the U.K. Embassy in Yangon.

Many international search and rescue teams were also on the scene, and eight medical crews from China, Thailand, Japan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Philippines, Indonesia and Russia were operating in Naypyitaw, according to Myanmar's military-run government. Another five teams from India, Russia, Laos and Nepal and Singapore were helping in the Mandalay region, while teams from Russia, Malaysia and the ASEAN bloc of nations were assisting in the Sagaing region.

The Trump administration has pledged \$2 million in emergency aid and sent a three-person team to assess how best to respond given drastic cuts to U.S. foreign assistance.

On Friday, five bodies were recovered from the rubble in the capital Naypyitaw and the second-largest city of Mandalay, near the epicenter of the 7.7 magnitude earthquake March 28, authorities said. The last reported rescue came Wednesday, some 125 hours after the quake struck, when a man was saved from the wreckage of a hotel in Mandalay.

The quake also shook neighboring Thailand, bringing down a high-rise under construction in Bangkok, where recovery work continued Friday. Overall, 22 people have been found dead and 35 injured in Bangkok, primarily from the construction site.

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

The quake worsened an already dire humanitarian crisis, with more than 3 million people displaced from their homes and nearly 20 million in need even before it hit, according to the United Nations.

As concerns grew that ongoing fighting could hamper humanitarian aid efforts, the military declared a temporary ceasefire Wednesday, through April 22. The announcement followed unilateral temporary ceasefires announced by armed resistance groups opposed to military rule.

On Thursday, however, there were renewed airstrikes in Kayah state, also known as Karenni, in eastern Myanmar, according to witnesses.

The military has said that it would still take "necessary" measures against resistance groups, if they use the ceasefire to regroup, train or launch attacks, and the groups have said they reserved the right to defend themselves.

Trump fires NSC officials a day after far-right activist raises concerns to him about staff loyalty

By MATTHEW LEE, AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Thursday that he's fired "some" White House National Security Council officials, a move that comes a day after far-right activist Laura Loomer raised concerns directly to him about staff loyalty.

Trump downplayed Loomer's influence on the firings. But Loomer during her Oval Office conversation with Trump urged the president to purge staffers she deemed insufficiently loyal to his "Make America Great Again" agenda, according to several people familiar with the matter. They all spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive personnel manner.

"Always we're letting go of people," Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One as he made his way to Miami on Thursday afternoon. "People that we don't like or people that we don't think can do the job or people that may have loyalties to somebody else."

Loomer appeared to take credit for the firings in a post late Thursday on X, writing, "You know how you know the NSC officials I reported to President Trump are disloyal people who have played a role in sabotaging Donald Trump?" She then noted that "the fired officials" were being defended by Trump critics on CNN and MSNBC.

The firings by Trump of NSC staff come at a tumultuous moment for Trump and his national security team. His national security adviser Mike Waltz, continues to fight back calls for his ouster after using the publicly available encrypted Signal app to discuss planning for the sensitive March 15 military operation

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targeting Houthi militants in Yemen.

Trump has said he stands by Waltz, who traveled to Florida with the president on Thursday for a dinner event ahead of the LIV Golf tournament in Miami.

Meanwhile, The Pentagon's acting inspector general announced Thursday that he would review Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's use of Signal to convey plans on the Houthi operations. The review will also look at other defense officials' use of the publicly available encrypted app.

Trump grew frustrated when asked about the review.

"You're bringing that up again," Trump scoffed at a reporter. "Don't bring that up again. Your editor's probably—that's such a wasted story."

Vice President JD Vance, chief of staff Susie Wiles, Waltz and Sergio Gor, director of the Presidential Personnel Office, also took part in the meeting with Loomer, the people said.

The Presidential Personnel Office has fired at least three senior NSC officials and multiple lower-ranking aides since Wednesday's meeting with Loomer, according to the people familiar with the situation.

The NSC officials fired include Brian Walsh, a director for intelligence; Thomas Boodry, a senior director for legislative affairs; and David Feith, a senior director for technology and national security, according to two people familiar with the matter.

"Laura Loomer is a very good patriot. She is a very strong person," said Trump, who described his talks with the far-right activist as "constructive."

Trump acknowledged that Loomer "recommended certain people for jobs."

"Sometimes I listen to those recommendations like I do with everybody," Trump said. "I listen to everybody than I make a decision."

Loomer, who has promoted 9/11 conspiracy theories, was a frequent presence on the campaign trail during Trump's 2024 successful White House run. More recently, she's been speaking out on social media about members of Trump's national security team that she insists can't be trusted.

"It was an honor to meet with President Trump and present him with my research findings," Loomer said in a Thursday posting on X. "I will continue working hard to support his agenda, and I will continue reiterating the importance of, and the necessity of STRONG VETTING, for the sake of protecting the President of the United States of America, and our national security."

Trump has a long history of elevating and associating with people who trade in falsehoods and conspiracy theories, and he regularly amplifies posts on his social media site shared by those like Loomer, who promotes QAnon, an apocalyptic and convoluted conspiracy theory centered on the belief that Trump is fighting the "deep state."

Trump's national security team has been through a difficult stretch as officials struggle to answer questions about why they were using the Signal app to discuss planning for an operation targeting Houthi militants instead of using far more secure communication means.

The use of Signal for operation planning came to light because a journalist, The Atlantic magazine's Jeffrey Goldberg, was mistakenly added to the chain and revealed that Trump's team used it to discuss precise timing of the operation, aircraft used to carry out the strikes and more.

Waltz has taken responsibility for building the text chain but has said he does not know how Goldberg ended up being included.

The Pentagon's acting inspector general announced Thursday that he would review Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's use of Signal to convey plans on the Houthi operations. The review will also look at other defense officials' use of the publicly available encrypted app.

Loomer, in the leadup to Wednesday's meeting with Trump, had complained to sympathetic administration officials that she had been excluded from the NSC vetting process as Waltz built his staff, according to one person familiar with the matter. She believes Waltz was too reliant in the process on "neocons"—shorthand for the more hawkish neoconservatives within the Republican Party—as well as what she perceived as "not-MAGA-enough" types, the person said.

Sen. Mike Rounds, a Republican who sits on Senate committees overseeing the military and national intelligence, said it "raises eyebrows" when "there is a firing of people on the National Security Council or

their staff, particularly people that we have respect for, who were part of the Intel community to begin with here in the Senate.”

Waltz, in the first days of Trump’s return to Washington, sent about 160 nonpolitical detailees assigned to the NSC back to their home agencies to ensure those at the White House were committed to implementing Trump’s America First agenda.

The move sidelined nonpolitical experts on topics that range from counterterrorism to global climate policy at a time when the United States is dealing with a disparate set of complicated foreign policy matters, including conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East.

Last week, Adam Schleifer, an assistant U.S. attorney in Los Angeles, was fired without explanation in a terse email from the White House personnel office shortly after Loomer posted about him on social media, according to a person familiar with the matter.

A church in England opens its doors to pro wrestling in a bid to attract converts

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

SHIPLEY, England (AP) — Sitting around a wrestling ring, churchgoers roared as local hero Billy O’Keeffe body-slammed a fighter named Disciple. Beneath stained-glass windows, they whooped and cheered as burly, tattooed wrestlers tumbled into the aisle during a six-man tag-team battle.

This is Wrestling Church, which brings blood, sweat and tears — mostly sweat — to St. Peter’s Anglican church in the northern England town of Shipley. It’s the creation of Gareth Thompson, a charismatic 37-year-old who says he was saved by pro wrestling and Jesus — and wants others to have the same experience.

Thompson says the outsized characters and scripted morality battles of pro wrestling fit naturally with a Christian message.

“Boil it down to the basics, it’s good versus evil,” he said. “When I became Christian, I started seeing the wrestling world through a Christian lens. I started seeing David and Goliath. I started seeing Cain and Abel. I started seeing Esau having his heritage stolen from him. And I’m like, ‘We could tell these stories.’”

A match made in heaven

Church attendance in the U.K. has been declining for decades, and the 2021 census found that less than half of people in England and Wales now consider themselves Christian. Those who say they have no religion rose from 25% to 37% in a decade.

That has led churches to get creative in order to survive.

“You’ve got to take a few risks,” said the Rev. Natasha Thomas, the priest in charge at St. Peter’s. She acknowledged that she “wasn’t entirely sure what it was I was letting myself in for” when she agreed to host wrestling events.

“It’s not church as you would know it. It’s certainly not for everyone,” she said. “But it’s bringing in a different group of people, a different community, than we would normally get.”

At a recent Wrestling Church evening, almost 200 people — older couples, teenagers, pierced and tattooed wrestling fans, parents with excited young children — packed into chairs around a ring erected under the vaulted ceiling of the century-old church.

After a short homily and prayer from Thomas, it was time for two hours of smackdowns, body slams and flying headbutts. The atmosphere grew cheerfully raucous, as fans waved giant foam fingers and hollered “knock him out!” at participants.

Some longtime churchgoers have welcomed the infusion of energy.

“I think it’s absolutely wonderful,” said Chris Moss, who married her husband Mike in St. Peter’s almost 50 years ago.

“You can look at some of the wrestlers and think” — she scrunched her face in distaste. But talking to them made her realize “you shouldn’t judge a book by its cover.”

Wrestling was a lifeline

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Thompson, whose wrestling moniker is Gareth Angel, both wrestles and presides over the organized mayhem. He's a mix of preacher and ringmaster, wearing a T-shirt that says "Pray, eat, wrestle, repeat."

He's loved wrestling since it provided solace and release during a troubled upbringing that saw him survive childhood sexual abuse and a period of homelessness as a teenager.

"I could watch Shawn Michaels and the Rock and Stone Cold (Steve Austin) and I could be like, I want to be like them," he said. "So it's always been an escape for me, and a release and a way to get away from stuff. But then God has obviously turned that around now and it's become this passion."

He found Christianity in 2011, ran his first Wrestling Church event in a former nightclub-turned-church in 2022, and moved to St. Peter's last year.

As well as the monthly Saturday night shows, his charity Kingdom Wrestling runs training sessions for adults and children in a back room of the church, along with women's self-defense classes, a men's mental health group and coaching for children who have been expelled from school.

For many in the close-knit community of U.K. wrestlers and fans, religion is a new ingredient, but not an unwelcome one.

"I'm mainly here for the wrestling," said 33-year-old Liam Ledger, who wrestles as Flamin' Daemon Crowe. Sitting in a pungent changing room as wrestlers discussed fight plans, donned knee pads and laced up their many-holed boots, he said it's a bit "surreal" when baptisms are held between bouts.

"It works both ways," he said. "There's people that come here that are big on religion, and they're here for all of that sort of stuff. And then they go, 'Oh, actually this wrestling is sort of fun.'"

Kiara, Kingdom Wrestling's reigning women's champion, said the organization has helped her bring her Catholic faith into her wrestling life.

"It's thanks to Kingdom Wrestling that I've had the confidence to pray in the locker room now before matches," said Kiara, 26, known outside the ring as Stephanie Sid. "I invite my opponent to pray with me, pray that we have a safe match, pray that there's no injuries and pray that we entertain everybody here."

Going for growth

Only a handful of people have gone from watching the wrestling to attending Sunday-morning services at St. Peter's, but Wrestling Church baptized 30 people in its first year. Thompson, whose brand of born-again Christianity is more muscular than many traditional Anglicans', plans to expand to other British cities. One day, he says, he may start his own church.

There has long been overlap between Christianity and wrestling in the U.S., where figures like Thompson's hero Shawn Michaels proudly proclaim their faith. But Britain is a less religious place, and Shipley, a former mill town 175 miles (280 kilometers) north of London, is a long way from the Bible Belt.

Thompson, though, is unfazed by doubters.

"People say, 'Oh, wrestling and Christianity, they're two fake things in a fake world of their own existence,'" he said. "If you don't believe in it, of course you will think that of it. But my own personal experience of my Christian faith is that it is alive and living, and it is true. The wrestling world, if you really believe in it, you believe that it's true and you can suspend your disbelief."

"You suspend it because you want to get lost in it. You want to believe in it. You want to hope for it."

South and Midwest face potentially catastrophic rains and floods while reeling from tornadoes

By ADRIAN SAINZ, GEORGE WALKER IV and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

LAKE CITY, Ark. (AP) — Parts of the Midwest and South faced the possibility of torrential rains and life-threatening flash floods Friday, while many communities were still reeling from tornadoes that destroyed whole neighborhoods and killed at least seven people.

Forecasters warned of catastrophic weather on the way, with round after round of heavy rains expected in the central U.S. through Saturday. Satellite imagery showed thunderstorms lined up like freight trains to take the same tracks over communities in Arkansas, Tennessee and Kentucky, according to the national Weather Prediction Center in Maryland.

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The bull's-eye centered on a swath along the Mississippi River and included the more than 1.3 million people around Memphis, Tennessee.

More than 90 million people were at risk of severe weather from Texas to Minnesota to Maine, according to the Oklahoma-based Storm Prediction Center.

Those killed in the initial wave of storms that spawned powerful tornadoes on Wednesday and early Thursday were in Tennessee, Missouri and Indiana. They included a Tennessee man and his teen daughter whose home was destroyed, and a man whose pickup struck down power lines in Indiana. In Missouri, Garry Moore, who was chief of the Whitewater Fire Protection District, died while likely trying to help a stranded motorist, according to Highway Patrol spokesperson Sgt. Clark Parrott.

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee said entire neighborhoods in the hard-hit town of Selmer were "completely wiped out" and said it was too early to know whether there were more deaths as searches continued. He warned people across the state to stay vigilant with more severe weather predicted.

"Don't let your guard down," he said during a Thursday evening news conference. "Don't stop watching the weather. Don't stop preparing yourself. Have a plan."

With flattened homes behind him, Dakota Woods described seeing the twister come through Selmer.

"I was walking down the street," Woods said Thursday. "Next thing you know, I look up, the sky is getting black and blacker, and it's lighting up green lights, and it's making a formation of a twister or tornado."

Flash flood threat looms over many states

By late Thursday, extremely heavy rain was falling in parts of southeastern Missouri and western Kentucky and causing "very dangerous/life threatening flash flooding" in some spots, according to the National Weather Service.

Heavy rains were expected to continue there and in other parts of the region in the coming days and could produce dangerous flash floods capable of sweeping away cars. The potent storm system will bring "significant, life-threatening flash flooding" each day, the National Weather Service said.

Water rescue teams and sandbagging operations were being staged across the region, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency was ready to distribute food, water, cots and generators.

Water rescues were already underway in flooded parts of Nashville, Tennessee, where the rain could persist for days after an unnerving period of tornado warnings that drained the batteries of some city sirens, the fire department said.

Western Kentucky prepared for record rain and flooding in places that normally do not get inundated, Gov. Andy Beshear said. At least 25 state highways were swamped, mostly in the west, according to a statement from his office Thursday.

Flash flooding is particularly worrisome in rural areas of the state where water can quickly rush off the mountains into the hollows. Less than four years ago, dozens died in flooding across eastern Kentucky.

Extreme flooding across the corridor that includes Louisville, Kentucky, and Memphis, which have major cargo hubs, could also lead to shipping and supply chain delays, said Jonathan Porter, chief meteorologist at AccuWeather.

Forecasters attributed the violent weather to warm temperatures, an unstable atmosphere, strong wind shear and abundant moisture streaming from the Gulf.

Tornadoes leave path of damage, and more could be coming

Under darkened skies Thursday morning, the remains of a used car dealership in Selmer stood roofless and gutted, with debris scattered across the car lot and wrapped around mangled trees. Some homes were ripped to their foundations in the Tennessee town, where three tornadoes were suspected of touching down.

The Tennessee Highway Patrol released video of lightning illuminating the sky as first responders scoured the ruins of a home, looking for anyone trapped.

In neighboring Arkansas, a tornado near Blytheville lofted debris at least 25,000 feet (7.6 kilometers) high, according to weather service meteorologist Chelly Amin. The state's emergency management office reported damage in 22 counties from tornadoes, wind, hail and flash flooding.

The home where Danny Qualls spent his childhood but no longer lives was flattened by a tornado in northeast Arkansas.

"My husband has been extremely tearful and emotional, but he also knows that we have to do the work," Rhonda Qualls said. "He was in shock last night, cried himself to sleep."

Workers on bulldozers cleared rubble along the highway that crosses through Lake City, where a tornado with winds of 150 mph (241 kph) sheared roofs off homes, collapsed brick walls and tossed cars into trees.

Mississippi's governor said at least 60 homes were damaged. And in far western Kentucky, four people were injured while taking shelter in a vehicle under a church carport, according to the emergency management office in Ballard County.

Sri Lanka's target to be free of land mines by 2028 is under threat as US reviews aid

By ERANGA JAYAWARDENA and KRISHAN FRANCIS Associated Press

MANKULAM, Sri Lanka (AP) — Thavarathnam Pushparani fought on the front lines for the now-defeated Tamil Tiger rebels against the Sri Lankan forces in its decadeslong separatist war and later took to clearing the land mines on the same battle lines.

But the Trump administration's suspension of aid threatens Sri Lanka's demining operations, pushing the livelihoods of thousands like Pushparani into uncertainty.

What is more uncertain for Sri Lanka now is its obligation to rid the island nation of mines by 2028 under the Ottawa Treaty, which it ratified in 2017.

Pushparani has experienced the civil war in its full fury. In her family, her husband, father and two brothers died fighting for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, as the rebel group was formally known. Two other siblings are missing.

She was born in eastern Sri Lanka and while still in school, her family had to move to the northern parts of the nation after a countrywide ethnic pogrom against minority Tamils by majority Sinhala mobs in 1983.

The incident stirred up emotions among many Tamil youth who joined militant organizations to fight for an independent state for the Tamils. Pushparani too joined the Tamil Tigers while still a teenager in school.

"Because the whole of my family was with the organization they arranged my marriage. My eldest daughter was born in 1990 and the younger one was born in 1992. My husband died in battle in 1996 and my children were raised in the "Sencholai" home, run by the organization," said Pushparani.

She was reunited with her children when the fighting ended in 2009 and started working with demining groups for a living.

Funds pending review

Demining operations in Sri Lanka started in 2002 during a ceasefire period and the U.S. has been the major donor among 11 countries supporting the effort, contributing about 34% of the \$250 million grants received for the projects so far.

The U.S. contribution was 45% of the grants received last year, according to M.M Nayeemudeen, director of the state-run National Mine Action Center.

Thanks to the international generosity, the demining operations continue to date despite being interrupted for a few years because of the break down of the ceasefire. They have so far managed to clear more than 2.5 million anti-personnel, anti-tank, small arms ammunition and unexploded ordnance.

Out of 254 square kilometers of land that originally needed to be cleared, only about 23 square kilometers are left to deal with. Whether that can be achieved by the 2028 deadline will depend on continued funding.

Nayeemudeen said once the aid suspension was announced, Sri Lanka's foreign ministry appealed and the U.S allowed the usage of its allocated funds pending a review, a decision on which is expected on May 1.

"We hope that on completion of the 90-day review period that commenced from Jan. 24, 2025, the U.S government funding assistance will continue," said Ananda Chandrasiri head of Delvon Assistance for Social Harmony, one of the four demining groups operating in the country.

"Otherwise it will create a grave problem for Sri Lanka to achieve mine-free status by the end of 2027

as targeted ... A huge reduction of staffing levels of the four operators would be inevitable."

'It looked like perfumed powder'

There are around 3,000 workers, most of them recruited from among the civil war-affected communities. With the uncertainty, some groups have already started terminating their staff, Nayeemudeen said.

Sri Lanka's civil war ended in 2009 when government troops crushed the Tamil Tiger rebels, ending their quarter-century separatist campaign. According to conservative U.N. estimates, about 100,000 people were killed in the conflict.

Civilian properties were demined, but large areas were still contaminated when hundreds of thousands of civilians who were displaced by the conflict came back to resettle. Mine awareness campaigns were held, but there were many accidents.

Kumarakulasingham Dinojan has lost his left hand below his wrist and has damaged fingers in his right hand from a mine blast. As a 9-year-old boy, he tried to open a metal container that he found in the woods. His brother, who was playing with him, also suffered wounds.

"My grandmother went into the woods to get firewood and we also followed her. We did not know that she had reached home through another way. We found a container which looked like a perfumed powder, and when we tried to open it, it exploded," said Dinojan.

There were people who were injured or killed trying to open mines and use the explosives for fishing.

Vidya Abhayagunawardena, coordinator of the Sri Lanka Campaign to Ban Land Mines, said it's critical for Sri Lanka to ratify Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War. He also called for the enactment of domestic legislation to enforce the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified in 2016, to bolster the legal rights of the country's disabled population.

Dinojan's older brother, Vilvaraj Vinothan, said his brothers becoming land mine victims made him take action and become involved in mine clearance. He has worked with the Mine Advisory Group for six years.

"Only when the land was being cleared that I understood how we should deal with the mines," he said. "That's when I decided to help, knowing it would benefit the entire community."

Pushparani is grateful that her demining income has allowed her to fulfill her family's needs. She financed one daughter's university education and her marriage. However, she also cares for a daughter injured in crossfire and an elderly mother.

"The reason for my choosing demining for livelihood is not only because of poverty. I also have a desire to see this land to be free of mines," she said.

"I don't want to see our future generations being injured or affected by war. I can say that I am carrying the burden of both my family and of the country on my shoulders."

An explosion at a standoff between rival gold miners in Bolivia kills at least 5 people

SORATA, Bolivia (AP) — A powerful explosion killed at least five people, including a pregnant woman and 1-year-old baby, during a standoff between rival groups of gold miners early Thursday in northwestern Bolivia, police said, a rare instance of territorial disputes between the nation's mining cooperatives turning fatal.

The blast thundered through the Yani mining camp as two rival mining groups dispute access to the gold mine near the mountain town of Sorata, some 150 kilometers (about 90 miles) northwest of the country's administrative capital of La Paz, said Col. Gunther Agudo, a local police officer. Several gold deposits straddle the remote area.

Agudo had initially reported six people killed but revised the toll to five after firefighters finished recovering the bodies from under the rubble. The dead included three men, a pregnant woman and an infant, he said.

Bolivia's deputy interior minister, Jhonny Aguilera, said the suspected perpetrator of the attack was killed by the explosion, which was detonated by remote control.

The predawn explosion at the mine struck a three-story house and set cars and tractors alight. The fires

wrecked several other structures and cut electricity.

Bolivia's mining industry stands out for its huge sector of cooperatives — legal groups of artisanal miners — which drive 58% of mining production, according to the latest government figures. The thousands of groups also wield political clout in the resource-rich country where they have representation in Parliament.

Cooperatives historically emerged in Bolivia as more established mining operations dismissed legions of workers in the risky, boom-and-bust business, compelling miners to organize themselves when commodity prices slumped and lay-offs loomed.

Over the decades, cooperatives have increasingly fought over the chance to extract minerals — hurling rocks and dynamite sticks at each other and against unionized, salaried workers from Bolivia's state-run mining company, Comibol.

Comibol came to dominate the crucial industry under former President Evo Morales, a socialist leader who governed the landlocked Andean nation from 2006 to 2019 and barred foreign companies from having a controlling stake in mineral extraction.

In Thursday's clash, the struggle for control of certain veins of the gold reserve between two rival cooperatives had simmered for years, said Jhony Silva, a legal adviser to one of them. Gold remains one of Bolivia's main mineral exports, with almost \$2.87 billion worth of the mineral shipped out of the country in 2023.

Top Democrats protest after reported firing of National Security Agency director

By LOU KESTEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Top congressional Democrats on Thursday protested the reported firing of Gen. Tim Haugh as director of the National Security Agency, with one lawmaker saying the decision "makes all of us less safe."

The Washington Post reported late Thursday that Haugh and his civilian deputy at the NSA, Wendy Noble, had been dismissed from those roles. Haugh also headed U.S. Cyber Command, which coordinates the Pentagon's cybersecurity operations. The Post report cited two current U.S. officials and one former U.S. official who requested anonymity.

Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., vice chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said in a statement: "General Haugh has served our country in uniform, with honor and distinction, for more than 30 years. At a time when the United States is facing unprecedented cyber threats ... how does firing him make Americans any safer?"

Rep. Jim Himes, D-Conn., the ranking member on the House Intelligence Committee, said he was "deeply disturbed by the decision."

"I have known General Haugh to be an honest and forthright leader who followed the law and put national security first — I fear those are precisely the qualities that could lead to his firing in this Administration," Himes added. "The Intelligence Committee and the American people need an immediate explanation for this decision, which makes all of us less safe."

Earlier Thursday, President Donald Trump said he had fired "some" White House National Security Council officials, a move that came a day after far-right activist Laura Loomer raised concerns directly to him about staff loyalty.

Loomer during her Oval Office conversation with Trump urged the president to purge staffers she deemed insufficiently loyal to his "Make America Great Again" agenda, according to several people familiar with the matter. They all spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive personnel matter.

"Always we're letting go of people," Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One as he made his way to Miami on Thursday afternoon. "People that we don't like or people that we don't think can do the job or people that may have loyalties to somebody else."

The firings come as Trump's national security adviser Mike Waltz continues to fight calls for his ouster

after using the publicly available encrypted Signal app to discuss planning for the sensitive March 15 military operation targeting Houthi militants in Yemen.

Warner said Thursday night, "It is astonishing, too, that President Trump would fire the nonpartisan, experienced leader of the National Security Agency while still failing to hold any member of his team accountable for leaking classified information on a commercial messaging app — even as he apparently takes staffing direction on national security from a discredited conspiracy theorist in the Oval Office."

Haugh met last month with Elon Musk, whose Department of Government Efficiency has roiled the federal government by slashing personnel and budgets at dozens of agencies. In a statement, the NSA said the meeting was intended to ensure both organizations are "aligned" with the new administration's priorities.

Haugh had led both the NSA and Cyber Command since 2023. Both departments play leading roles in the nation's cybersecurity. The NSA also supports the military and other national security agencies by collecting and analyzing a vast amount of data and information globally.

Cyber Command is known as America's first line of defense in cyberspace and also plans offensive cyberoperations for potential use against adversaries. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth recently ordered the office to pause some offensive cyberoperations against Russia, in another sign of how Trump's administration is transforming the work of the nation's intelligence community.

Colleges say the Trump administration is using new tactics to expel international students

By COLLIN BINKLEY, ANNIE MA and MAKIYA SEMINERA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A crackdown on foreign students is alarming colleges, who say the Trump administration is using new tactics and vague justifications to push some students out of the country.

College officials worry the new approach will keep foreigners from wanting to study in the U.S.

Students stripped of their entry visas are receiving orders from the Department of Homeland Security to leave the country immediately — a break from past practice that often permitted them to stay and complete their studies.

Some students have been targeted over pro-Palestinian activism or criminal infractions — or even traffic violations. Others have been left wondering how they ran afoul of the government.

At Minnesota State University in Mankato, President Edward Inch told the campus Wednesday that visas had been revoked for five international students for unclear reasons.

He said school officials learned about the revocations when they ran a status check in a database of international students after the detention of a Turkish student at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. The State Department said the detention was related to a drunken driving conviction.

"These are troubling times, and this situation is unlike any we have navigated before," Inch wrote in a letter to campus.

President Donald Trump campaigned on a promise to deport foreign students involved in pro-Palestinian protests, and federal agents started by detaining Columbia graduate student Mahmoud Khalil, a green-card-holder and Palestinian activist who was prominent in protests at Columbia last year. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said last week students are being targeted for involvement in protests along with others tied to "potential criminal activity."

In the past two weeks, the government apparently has widened its crackdown. Officials from colleges around the country have discovered international students have had their entry visas revoked and, in many cases, their legal residency status terminated by authorities without notice — including students at Arizona State, Cornell, North Carolina State, the University of Oregon, the University of Texas and the University of Colorado.

Some of the students are working to leave the country on their own, but students at Tufts and the University of Alabama have been detained by immigration authorities — in the Tufts case, even before the university knew the student's legal status had changed.

Feds bypass colleges to move against students

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In this new wave of enforcement, school officials say the federal government is quietly deleting foreigners' student records instead of going through colleges, as was done in the past.

Students are being ordered to leave the country with a suddenness that universities have rarely seen, said Miriam Feldblum, president and CEO of the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration.

In the past, when international students have had entry visas revoked, they generally have been allowed to keep legal residency status. They could stay in the country to study, but would need to renew their visa if they left the U.S. and wanted to return. Now, increasing numbers of students are having their legal status terminated, exposing them to the risk of being arrested.

"None of this is regular practice," Feldblum said.

At North Carolina State University, two students from Saudi Arabia left the U.S. after learning their legal status as students was terminated, the university said. N.C. State said it will work with the students to complete their semester from outside the country.

Philip Vasto, who lived with one of the students, said his roommate, in graduate school for engineering management, was apolitical and did not attend protests against the war in Gaza. When the government told his roommate his student status had been terminated, it did not give a reason, Vasto said.

Since returning to Saudi Arabia, Vasto said his former roommate's top concern is getting into another university.

"He's made his peace with it," he said. "He doesn't want to allow it to steal his peace any further."

Database checks turn up students in jeopardy

At the University of Texas at Austin, staff checking a federal database discovered two people on student visas had their permission to be in the U.S. terminated, a person familiar with the situation said. The person declined to be identified for fear of retaliation.

One of the people, from India, had their legal status terminated April 3. The federal system indicated the person had been identified in a criminal records check "and/or has had their visa revoked." The other person, from Lebanon, had their legal status terminated March 28 due to a criminal records check, according to the federal database.

Both people were graduates remaining in the U.S. on student visas, using an option allowing people to gain professional experience after completing coursework. Both were employed full time and apparently had not violated requirements for pursuing work experience, the person familiar with the situation said.

Some students have had visas revoked by the State Department under an obscure law barring noncitizens whose presence could have "serious adverse foreign policy consequences." Trump invoked the law in a January order demanding action against campus antisemitism.

But some students targeted in recent weeks have had no clear link to political activism. Some have been ordered to leave over misdemeanor crimes or traffic infractions, Feldblum said. In some cases, students were targeted for infractions that had been previously reported to the government.

Some of the alleged infractions would not have drawn scrutiny in the past and will likely be a test of students' First Amendment rights as cases work their way through court, said Michelle Mittelstadt, director of public affairs at the Migration Policy Institute.

"In some ways, what the administration is doing is really retroactive," she said. "Rather than saying, 'This is going to be the standard that we're applying going forward,' they're going back and vetting students based on past expressions or past behavior."

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities is requesting a meeting with the State Department over the issue. It's unclear whether more visas are being revoked than usual, but officials fear a chilling effect on international exchange.

Many of the association's members have recently seen at least one student have their visas revoked, said Bernie Burrola, a vice president at the group. With little information from the government, colleges have been interviewing students or searching social media for a connection to political activism.

"The universities can't seem to find anything that seems to be related to Gaza or social media posts or protests," Burrola said. "Some of these are sponsored students by foreign governments, where they specifically are very hesitant to get involved in protests."

There's no clear thread indicating which students are being targeted, but some have been from the Middle East and China, he said.

America's universities have long been seen as a top destination for the world's brightest minds — and they've brought important tuition revenue and research breakthroughs to U.S. colleges. But international students also have other options, said Fanta Aw, CEO of NAFSA, an association of international educators.

"We should not take for granted that that's just the way things are and will always be," she said.

Israeli strike on a school in Gaza kills at least 27 people, Palestinian health officials say

By WAFSA SHURFA and NATALIE MELZER Associated Press

DEIR AL BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli airstrikes killed at least 100 Palestinians across the Gaza Strip on Thursday, including 27 or more sheltering at a school, according to Palestinian medical authorities, in a stepped-up offensive that Israel's military said is intended to pressure Hamas and eventually expel the militant group.

The bodies of 14 children and five women were recovered from the school in the Tuffah neighborhood of Gaza City and the death toll could rise because some of the 70 wounded sustained critical injuries, said Health Ministry spokesman Zaher al-Wahidi. More than 30 other Gaza residents were killed in strikes on homes in the nearby neighborhood of Shijaiyah, he said, citing records at Ahli Hospital.

The Israeli military said it struck a "Hamas command and control center" in the Gaza City area, and said it took steps to lessen harm to civilians. Israel gave the same reason — striking Hamas militants in a "command and control center" — for attacking a United Nations building used as a shelter a day earlier, killing at least 17 people.

Hamas called the strike on the school a "heinous massacre" of innocent civilians.

The strikes came as Israel's military ordered more residents in parts of northern Gaza to move west and south to shelters, warning that it planned to "work with extreme force in your area." A number of the Palestinians leaving the targeted areas did so on foot, with some carrying their belongings on their backs and others using donkey carts.

"My wife and I have been walking for three hours covering only one kilometer," said Mohammad Ermana, 72. The couple, clasping hands, each walked with a cane. "I'm searching for shelters every hour now, not every day," he said.

Israel has issued sweeping evacuation orders for parts of northern Gaza ahead of expected ground operations. The U.N. humanitarian office said around 280,000 Palestinians have been displaced since Israel ended the ceasefire with Hamas last month.

The fresh evacuation orders came a day after senior government officials said Israel would seize large parts of the Palestinian territory and establish a new security corridor across it. To pressure Hamas, Israel has imposed a monthlong blockade on food, fuel and humanitarian aid that has left civilians facing acute shortages as supplies dwindle — a tactic that rights groups say is a war crime.

Hamas says it will only release the remaining 59 hostages — 24 of whom are believed to be alive — in exchange for the release of more Palestinian prisoners, a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli pullout from Gaza. The group has rejected demands that it lay down its arms or leave the territory.

Another deadly day in Gaza

Overnight strikes by Israel killed at least 55 people in the Gaza Strip, hospital officials said Thursday.

In the southern city of Khan Younis, officials said the bodies of 14 people had been taken to Nasser Hospital — nine of them from the same family. The dead included five children and four women. The bodies of another 19 people, including five children aged between 1 and 7 years and a pregnant woman, were taken to the European hospital near Khan Younis, hospital officials said. In Gaza City, 21 bodies were taken to Ahli hospital, including those of seven children.

Later in the day, strikes killed four more people in Khan Younis, according to Nasser Hospital, and another two people were killed in central Gaza and taken to Al Aqsa Hospital.

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The attacks came as the Israeli military promised an independent investigation of a March 23 operation in which its forces opened fire on ambulances in southern Gaza. U.N. officials say 15 Palestinian medics and emergency responders were killed, and their bodies and ambulances were buried by Israeli soldiers in a mass grave.

The military initially said the ambulances were operating suspiciously and that nine militants were killed. The military said the probe would be led by an expert fact-finding body "responsible for examining exceptional incidents" during the war. Rights groups say such investigations are often lacking and that soldiers are rarely punished.

The head of the Palestine Red Crescent Society, Younes Al-Khatib, said Thursday he believed some of the medics were still alive when they were overtaken by Israeli forces. The organization's radio dispatchers heard a conversation in Hebrew between medics and Israeli soldiers after the ambulances had come under fire, Al-Khatib told members of the U.N. Security Council.

Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian U.N. ambassador, told the U.N. Security Council he was turning over a video he obtained, allegedly showing the moments leading up to the Israeli killing of 15 humanitarian workers in Gaza.

Mansour said the video shows that the aid workers, including eight members of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, were traveling in emergency vehicles with the lights on at night to deconflict with Israeli Defense Forces. But, Mansour said, the video "found on the body of one of the martyrs," shows that the Israeli army ambushed the vehicle despite the emergency lights.

Israeli war plans for Gaza

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced Israel was establishing a security corridor across Gaza to pressure Hamas, suggesting it would cut off the southern city of Rafah, which Israel has ordered evacuated, from the rest of the Palestinian territory.

Israel has also reasserted control over the Netzarim corridor, a military zone that separates the northern third of Gaza from the rest of the narrow strip. Both that and another corridor, along Gaza's southern border with Egypt, run from the Israeli border to the Mediterranean Sea.

Netanyahu said Sunday that Israel plans to maintain overall security control of Gaza after the war and implement U.S. President Donald Trump's proposal to resettle much of its population elsewhere through what the Israeli leader referred to as "voluntary emigration."

Palestinians view the proposal as expulsion from their homeland, and human rights experts say the plan would likely violate international law.

Israel's war in Gaza has killed more than 50,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't say whether those killed are civilians or combatants but says more than half of those killed were women and children. Israel says it has killed around 20,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war has left most of Gaza in ruins and at its height displaced around 90% of the population.

The war began when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking 251 hostages, most of whom have since been released in ceasefire agreements and other deals. Israel rescued eight living hostages and has recovered dozens of bodies.

Netanyahu visits Hungary despite arrest warrant

Netanyahu arrived in Hungary early Thursday on his second foreign trip since the world's top war crimes court issued an arrest warrant against him in November over Israel's war in Gaza.

Based in The Hague, Netherlands, the International Criminal Court has said there was reason to believe Netanyahu and former Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant used "starvation as a method of warfare" by restricting humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, and intentionally targeted civilians in Israel's campaign against Hamas — charges that Israeli officials deny.

ICC member countries, such as Hungary, are required to arrest suspects facing a warrant if they set foot on their soil, but the court has no way to enforce that and relies on states to comply. As Netanyahu arrived in Budapest, Hungary said it will begin the procedure of withdrawing from the ICC.

Israeli strike reported in Lebanon

At least two people were killed early Friday in an apparent Israeli airstrike that hit an apartment in a

multistory building in the coastal city of Sidon in Lebanon. An Associated Press photographer at the scene saw two bodies being carried out of the building by emergency responders.

There was no immediate statement from the Israeli military. It was the first time an airstrike had hit Lebanon's third largest city since a tenuous ceasefire agreement brought an end to the latest Israel-Hezbollah war in late November. Israel has continued to carry out regular airstrikes targeting what it has said are facilities and officials of Hezbollah and allied groups since the ceasefire.

Storms kill 7 in the South and Midwest as forecasters warn of catastrophic rains, floods this week

By ADRIAN SAINZ, GEORGE WALKER IV and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

LAKE CITY, Ark. (AP) — Standing alongside the twisted steel tractors on his family farm in northeast Arkansas on Thursday, Danny Qualls looked on while friends and relatives helped him begin cleaning up.

The home where he spent his childhood but no longer lives was flattened by one of many tornadoes that left behind destruction from Oklahoma to Indiana — the first in a round of storms expected to bring historic rains and life-threatening flash floods across the nation's midsection in the coming days.

"My husband has been extremely tearful and emotional, but he also knows that we have to do the work," Rhonda Qualls said. "He was in shock last night, cried himself to sleep."

At least seven people were killed in Tennessee, Missouri and Indiana in the initial wave on Wednesday and early Thursday that spawned powerful tornadoes — one of which launched light debris nearly 5 miles (8 kilometers) into the air above Arkansas.

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee said it was too early to know whether there were more deaths as searches persisted.

"The devastation is enormous. What's most difficult about it is, you know that those are lives destroyed," Lee said in the hard-hit town of Selmer. "In some cases, true life lost, but in other cases, everything people owned, up in trees."

Lee said during an evening news conference that entire neighborhoods in Selmer were "completely wiped out" and warned people across the state not to let their guard down with more severe weather predicted.

Those who died included a Tennessee man and his teen daughter whose home was destroyed, and a man whose pickup struck down power lines in Indiana. In Missouri, 68-year-old Garry Moore, who was chief of the Whitewater Fire Protection District, died while likely trying to help a stranded motorist, according to Highway Patrol spokesperson Sgt. Clark Parrott.

Forecasters warned Thursday of catastrophic weather soon ahead. Satellite imagery showed thunderstorms lining up like freight trains — taking the same tracks over communities in Arkansas, Tennessee and Kentucky, according to the national Weather Prediction Center in Maryland.

The bull's-eye centered on a swath along the Mississippi River and included the more than 1.3 million people around Memphis, Tennessee.

More than 90 million people were at risk of severe weather from Texas to Minnesota to Maine, according to the Oklahoma-based Storm Prediction Center.

Flash flood threat looms over many states

Round after round of heavy rains were expected in the central U.S. through Saturday and could produce dangerous flash floods capable of sweeping away cars. The potent storm system will bring "significant, life-threatening flash flooding" each day, the National Weather Service said.

With more than a foot (30 centimeters) of rain possible over the next four days, the prolonged deluge is something that "happens once in a generation to once in a lifetime," the weather service said. "Historic rainfall totals and impacts are possible."

Water rescue teams and sandbagging operations were being staged across the region, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency was ready to distribute food, water, cots and generators.

Water rescues were already underway in flooded parts of Nashville, Tennessee, where the rain could persist for days after an unnerving night of tornado warnings that drained the batteries of some city si-

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rens, the fire department said.

Western Kentucky braced for record rain and flooding in places that normally do not get inundated, Gov. Andy Beshear said. At least 25 state highways were swamped, mostly in the west, according to a statement from his office.

Flash flooding is particularly worrisome in rural areas of the state where water can quickly rush off the mountains into the hollows. Less than four years ago, dozens died in flooding across eastern Kentucky.

Extreme flooding across the corridor that includes Louisville, Kentucky, and Memphis, which have major cargo hubs, could also lead to shipping and supply chain delays, said Jonathan Porter, chief meteorologist at AccuWeather.

Forecasters attributed the violent weather to warm temperatures, an unstable atmosphere, strong wind shear and abundant moisture streaming from the Gulf.

Tornadoes leave path of damage, and more could be coming

Under darkened skies Thursday morning, the remains of a used car dealership in Selmer stood roofless and gutted, with debris scattered across the car lot and wrapped around mangled trees. Some homes were leveled to their foundations in the Tennessee town, where three tornadoes were suspected of touching down.

"Thank God we came out without a scratch," said Willie Barnes, who had only enough time to get into a bathroom with his wife before the storm wrecked his home.

The Tennessee Highway Patrol released video of lightning illuminating the sky as first responders scoured the ruins of a home, looking for anyone trapped.

In neighboring Arkansas, a tornado near Blytheville lofted debris at least 25,000 feet (7.6 kilometers) high, according to weather service meteorologist Chelly Amin. The state's emergency management office reported damage in 22 counties from tornadoes, wind, hail and flash flooding.

Workers on bulldozers cleared rubble along the highway that crosses through Lake City, where a tornado with winds of 150 mph (241 kph) sheared roofs off homes, collapsed brick walls and tossed cars into trees.

Mississippi's governor said at least 60 homes were damaged. And in far western Kentucky, four people were injured while taking shelter in a vehicle under a church carport, according to the emergency management office in Ballard County.

Brown University to see half a billion in federal funding halted by Trump administration

By CHEYANNE MUMPHREY and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration is planning to halt more than half a billion dollars in contracts and grants awarded to Brown University, adding to a list of Ivy League colleges that have had their federal money threatened as a result of their responses to antisemitism, a White House official said Thursday.

Nearly \$510 million in federal contracts and grants are on the line, said the official, who was not authorized to speak publicly about the plan and spoke on condition of anonymity.

In an email Thursday to campus leaders, Brown Provost Frank Doyle said the university was aware of "troubling rumors" about government action on its research money. "At this moment, we have no information to substantiate any of these rumors," Doyle said.

Brown would be the fifth Ivy League college targeted by President Donald Trump's administration, which is using federal money to enforce its agenda at colleges. Dozens of universities — including every Ivy League school except Penn and Dartmouth — are facing federal investigations into antisemitism following a wave of pro-Palestinian protests last year.

Columbia University was the first one targeted, losing \$400 million in federal money with threats to terminate more if it didn't make the campus safer for Jewish students. The school agreed to several demands from the government last month, including an overhaul of student discipline rules and a review of

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the school's Middle East studies department.

The government later suspended about \$175 million in federal funding for the University of Pennsylvania over a transgender swimmer who previously competed for the school. On Monday, a federal antisemitism task force said it was reviewing almost \$9 billion in federal grants and contracts at Harvard University amid an investigation into campus antisemitism.

And on Tuesday, Princeton University said the administration had halted dozens of its research grants.

The pressure has created a dilemma for U.S. colleges, which rely on federal research funding as a major source of revenue.

Trump's administration has promised a more aggressive approach against campus antisemitism, accusing former President Joe Biden of letting schools off the hook. It has opened new investigations at colleges and detained and deported several foreign students with ties to pro-Palestinian protests. An incoming assistant professor of medicine at Brown was deported to Lebanon last month for having "openly admitted" to supporting a Hezbollah leader and attending his funeral, the Department of Homeland Security said.

During last school year's campus protests against the Israel-Hamas war, Brown stood out for a deal it struck with student activists. In exchange for the students' dismantling an encampment, the university committed to having its governing board vote on whether to divest from companies that protesters said were facilitating Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.

The Corporation of Brown rejected the divestment proposal.

Trump's tariff push is a race against time, and potential voter backlash

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's expansive new tariffs reverse a decades-long global trend of lower trade barriers and are likely, economists say, to raise prices for Americans by thousands of dollars each year while sharply slowing the U.S. economy.

The White House is gambling that other countries will also suffer enough pain that they will open up their economies to more American exports, leading to negotiations that would reduce the tariffs imposed Wednesday.

Or, the White House hopes, companies will reverse their moves toward global supply chains and bring more production to the United States to avoid higher import taxes.

How will Americans react?

But a key question for the Trump administration will be how Americans react to the tariffs. If prices rise noticeably and jobs are lost, voters could turn against the duties and make it harder to keep them in place for the time needed to encourage companies to return to the U.S.

The Yale Budget Lab estimates the Trump administration's tariffs would cost the average household \$3,800 in higher prices this year. That includes the 10% universal tariff plus much higher tariffs on about 60 countries announced Wednesday, as well as previous import taxes on steel, aluminum and cars. Inflation could top 4% this year, from 2.8% currently, while the economy may barely grow, according to estimates by Nationwide Financial.

Investors turned thumbs-down on the new duties Thursday, with the S&P 500 index dropping 4.8% at the close of trading, its worst day since the pandemic. The Dow Jones Industrial Average plunged more than 1,600 points.

Still, Trump was upbeat Thursday when asked about the stock market drop.

"I think it's going very well," he said. "We have an operation, like when a patient gets operated on and it's a big thing. I said this would exactly be the way it is."

The average U.S. tariff could rise to nearly 25% when the tariffs are fully implemented April 9, economists estimate, higher than in more than a century, and higher than the 1930 Smoot-Hawley tariffs that are widely blamed for worsening the Great Depression.

"The president just announced the de facto separation of the U.S. economy from the global economy,"

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said Mary Lovely, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Relations. "The stage is set for higher prices and slower growth over the long term."

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick argued the policies will help open markets overseas for U.S. exports. "I expect most countries to start to really examine their trade policy towards the United States of America, and stop picking on us," he said on CNBC Thursday. "This is the reordering of fair trade."

Mixed feelings among Americans so far

Bob Lehmann, 73, who stopped by a Best Buy in Portland, Oregon, Wednesday opposed the tariffs. "They're going to raise prices and cause people to pay more for daily living," he said.

Mathew Hall, a 64-year-old paint contractor, called the tariffs a "great idea" and said potential price increases in the short term were worth it.

"I believe in the long term, it's going to be good," he said, adding that he felt the U.S. had been taken advantage of.

But a former trade official from Trump's first term, speaking on condition of anonymity to talk candidly about the impact, suggested that Americans, including those who voted for Trump, may have difficulty accepting the stiff duties.

Americans "have never faced tariffs like this," the former official said Thursday. "The downstream impact on clothing and shoe stores, it's going to be pretty significant. So we'll have to see how the Trump voters view this ... and how long their support for these policies goes."

On Thursday, automaker Stellantis, which owns the Jeep, Citroen and Ram brands, said it would temporarily halt production at plants in Canada and Mexico in response to Trump's 25% tax on imported cars. The reduced output means the company is temporarily laying off 900 workers at plants in Michigan and Indiana.

Some exporters overseas may cut their prices to offset some of the tariffs, and U.S. retailers could eat some of the cost as well. But most economists expect much of the tariffs to bring higher prices.

Clothing, shoes, furniture could get more expensive

The tariffs will hit many Asian countries hard, with duties on Vietnamese imports rising to 46% and on Indonesia to 32%. Tariffs on some Chinese imports will be as high as 79%. Those three countries are the top sources of U.S. shoe imports, with Nike making about half its shoes last year and one-third of its clothes in Vietnam.

The Yale Budget Lab estimates all Trump's tariffs this year will push clothing prices 17% higher.

On Thursday, the Home Furnishings Association, which represents more than 13,000 U.S. furniture stores, predicted the tariffs will increase prices between 10% and 46%. Vietnam and China are the top furniture exporters to the U.S.

It said manufacturers in Asia are offsetting some of the costs by discounting their products and lowering ocean freight rates, but that won't be enough to avoid price hikes. Even domestically made furniture often relies on imported components.

"While many in the industry support the long-term goal of reshoring manufacturing, the reality is that it will take at least a decade to scale domestic production," Home Furnishings Association CEO Shannon Williams said in a statement. "Permitting, training a skilled workforce and managing the higher costs of U.S. manufacturing are significant hurdles."

At Gethsemane Garden Center in Chicago, there are Canadian-grown tulip, daffodil and hyacinth bulbs, though only about 5% of center plants are imported. Thousands of lemon cypress trees from Canada are sold year-round and Canadian mums are sold in the fall.

Regas Chefas, whose family has owned Gethsemane for decades, says all the tariffs won't be passed onto customers.

"We're going to absorb some of the increase. The growers will absorb some of the increases and then the customers will pay a little bit higher price," he said.

The Consumer Brands Association, which represents Coca-Cola, General Mills, Nestle, Tyson and Del Monte as well as Procter & Gamble and Colgate-Palmolive, said its companies already make the majority

of their goods in the U.S.

But there are critical ingredients and inputs — like wood pulp for toilet paper — that are imported because of scarce domestic availability. Cinnamon is harvested from trees that can't survive in the U.S.. Domestic production of coffee and cocoa is also limited.

"We encourage President Trump and his trade advisers to fine-tune their approach and exempt key ingredients and inputs in order to protect manufacturing jobs and prevent unnecessary inflation at the grocery store," said Tom Madrecki, the association's vice president of supply chain resiliency.

Outside a Tractor Supply south of Denver, two family members on opposite sides of the political spectrum debated the tariffs.

Chris Theisen, a 62-year-old Republican, said: "I feel a good change coming on, I feel it's going to be hard, but you don't go to the gym and walk away and say, 'God, I feel great.'"

Nayen Shakya, a Democrat and Theisen's great nephew, said higher prices are already a hardship. At the restaurant where he works, menu prices have been raised to account for higher ingredient costs.

"It's really easy sometimes to say some things in a vague way that everyone can agree with that is definitely more complex under the surface," said Shakya. "The burden of the increased prices is already going to the consumer."

Listening to his nephew, Theisen added: "I understand this side of it, too."

"I ain't got no crystal ball. I hope it works out good."

Republicans moving ahead with Trump's 'big' bill of tax breaks and spending cuts amid tariff uproar

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — After a long wait, the Senate is launching action on President Donald Trump's "big, beautiful bill" of tax breaks and spending cuts at a risky moment for the U.S. and global economy.

More than a month after House Republicans surprised Washington by advancing their framework for Trump's \$4.5 trillion in tax breaks and \$2 trillion in spending cuts, Senate Republicans voted Thursday to start working on their version. The largely party-line vote, 52-48, sets the stage for a potential Senate all-nighter Friday spilling into the weekend.

But work on the multitrillion-dollar package is coming as markets at home and abroad are on edge in the aftermath Trump's vast tariffs scheme, complicating an already difficult political and procedural undertaking on what Republicans hope will become their signature domestic policy package.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., opened the chamber Thursday saying they expected to be ready to begin.

Trump says he's on board with the plan and Republicans, in control of Congress, are eager to show the party is making progress toward delivering on their campaign promises. By nightfall, as voting began, one Republican, the libertarian-leaning Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, voted against, as did all Democrats.

Democrats, as the minority party, don't have the votes to stop the GOP plan. But they intend to use the procedural tools available to prolong the process. Democrats argue that Republicans are focusing on tax breaks for the wealthy at the expense of the programs and services millions of Americans rely on for help with health care, child care, school lunches and other everyday needs.

"They're mean, they're nasty, they're uncaring," Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said about the Republicans. "We, tonight and tomorrow, are going to show just who they are."

Senate Democrats started consuming up to 25 hours of their available debate time, holding the floor into the night and railing against potential GOP cuts to Medicaid, veterans programs, DOGE cuts and the impact of Trump's tariffs.

Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon, the ranking Democrat on the Budget committee, repeated a slogan he has been sharing: "Families lose and billionaires win."

"That," he said, "is the Republican plan."

Fundamental to the Senate package is making sure Trump's first-term tax cuts, which are set to expire

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at the end of the year, are continued and made a permanent fixture of the tax code. The senators also will consider adding Trump's proposed tax cuts on tipped wages, Social Security income and others.

The Senate package also would bolster border security funds by some \$175 billion to carry out Trump's mass deportation campaign, which is running short of cash, and it would add national security funds for the Pentagon — all priorities the Senate GOP tucked into an earlier version that was panned by House Republicans.

Republican Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming, the party whip, said that without action tax cuts would expire, becoming a \$4 trillion tax hike on Americans. "Republicans are focused on getting America back on track," he said.

What's unclear is how it will all be paid for, since Republican deficit hawks typically require spending offsets to help defray the lost tax revenue and avoid piling onto the nation's \$36 trillion debt load.

While House Republicans approved their package with \$4.5 trillion in tax breaks and up to \$2 trillion in spending cuts, the Senate Republicans are taking a different tack.

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Lindsey Graham is making the case that since the existing Trump tax breaks are the current policy, they are not considered new, and do not need to be offset with reductions in spending — an approach Democrats compare to "going nuclear" with the normal rules, particularly if the strategy is put to the test with an unfavorable ruling before the Senate parliamentarian.

Instead, Senate Republicans are considering offsets mostly for any new Trump tax breaks. Raising alarms from the most conservative budget hawks, the senators have set a floor of about \$4 billion in budget reductions to health and other programs — a fraction of the package's expected \$4 trillion-plus price tag for tax breaks.

GOP leaders are assuring the deficit hawks within their own ranks that the legislation says the cuts can rise to as much as \$2 trillion.

After an expected Friday night vote-a-rama, with dozens of amendments being offered to the package, the senators are planning to stay into Saturday if needed to take a final vote to approve it, sending it to the House for action.

The House and Senate will ultimately need to merge their frameworks into a final product, expected in May, but House Speaker Mike Johnson's intention to have it all wrapped up by Memorial Day could prove optimistic.

The political environment is uncertain, and the public's appetite for steep budget cuts is being tested in real time, with Trump's Department of Government Efficiency headed by billionaire Elon Musk blazing through federal offices, firing thousands of workers and shuttering long-running government mainstays — from scientific research projects on diseases to educational services for schoolchildren to offices that help with Social Security, tax filing and the weather.

At the same time, the staunchest fiscal conservatives in both the House and Senate, many aligned with the Freedom Caucus, are pushing for even more cuts.

Trump told senators publicly and privately this week he would have their backs, particularly when it comes to standing up for the spending reductions. At a White House announcing the tariffs Wednesday, Trump said the Senate plan had his "complete and total support."

The president's steep tariffs threw the global economy into a tailspin Thursday, with stocks down around the world, the U.S. markets leading the way.

What to know about the severe storms and flash flooding hitting parts of the US

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — At least seven people have been killed in a wide swath of violent storms and tornadoes that hit the South and Midwest, and officials are bracing for more severe weather and flooding in the coming days.

The destruction is part of a potent storm system that the National Weather Service said will bring "sig-

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nificant, life-threatening flash flooding" each day through Saturday.

What happened?

The first wave of storms killed at least five people in Tennessee and one each in Missouri and Indiana on Wednesday and Thursday.

Also in Indiana, emergency crews spent several hours rescuing a woman from a collapsed warehouse.

There was massive destruction in Lake City in eastern Arkansas, where homes were flattened and cars were flipped and tossed into trees. State authorities reported damage in 22 counties due to tornadoes, wind gusts, hail and flash flooding. Seven injuries were reported, but no deaths.

More than 90 million people were at risk of severe weather across an area stretching from Texas to Minnesota and Maine, according to the Oklahoma-based Storm Prediction Center.

What's causing this wave of storms?

Forecasters attributed the violent weather to warm temperatures, an unstable atmosphere, strong wind shear and abundant moisture streaming from the Gulf.

The prolonged deluge, which could dump more than a foot (30 centimeters) of rain over a four-day period, "is an event that happens once in a generation to once in a lifetime," the National Weather Service said.

What's next?

The national Weather Prediction Center in Maryland said satellite images early Thursday morning indicated that "catastrophic" flooding could soon occur in Arkansas, Tennessee and Kentucky.

"Communities in the region should prepare for possible long duration and severe disruptions to daily life," it said.

Private forecasting company AccuWeather said it was concerned about "major disruptions" to business, the supply chain and shipping due to the flooding and severe weather. Shipping giant FedEx, for example, has a massive facility in the danger area, in Memphis Tennessee.

Forecasters said barge transportation on the lower Mississippi River could also be affected.

Water rescue teams and sandbags were being set up across the region in anticipation of flooding, and authorities warned people to take the threat of rising water seriously.

"Especially when we have this much rain, it's the decisions about when to get out, about what to drive through, when to go stay with someone else, that can be the difference between life and death," Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said.

Pentagon watchdog to review Hegseth's use of Signal app to convey plans for Houthi strike

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon's acting inspector general announced Thursday that he would review Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's use of the Signal messaging app to convey plans for a military strike against Houthi militants in Yemen.

The review will also look at other defense officials' use of the publicly available encrypted app, which is not able to handle classified material and is not part of the Defense Department's secure communications network.

Hegseth's use of the app came to light when a journalist, Jeffrey Goldberg of The Atlantic, was inadvertently added to a Signal text chain by national security adviser Mike Waltz. The chain included Hegseth, Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard and others, brought together to discuss March 15 military operations against the Iran-backed Houthis.

"The objective of this evaluation is to determine the extent to which the Secretary of Defense and other DoD personnel complied with DoD policies and procedures for the use of a commercial messaging application for official business," the acting inspector general, Steven Stebbins, said in a notification letter to Hegseth.

The letter also said his office "will review compliance with classification and records retention requirements."

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Hegseth and other members of the Trump administration are required by law to archive their official conversations, and it is not clear if copies of the discussions were forwarded to an official email so they could be permanently captured for federal records keeping.

The Pentagon referred all questions to the inspector general's office, citing the ongoing investigation.

President Donald Trump grew frustrated when asked about the review.

"You're bringing that up again," Trump scoffed at a reporter. "Don't bring that up again. Your editors probably — that's such a wasted story."

In the chain, Hegseth provided the exact timings of warplane launches and when bombs would drop — before the men and women carrying out those attacks on behalf of the United States were airborne.

The review was launched at the request of Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Rhode Island Sen. Jack Reed, the committee's top Democrat.

In congressional hearings, Democratic lawmakers have expressed concern about the use of Signal and pressed military officers on whether they would find it appropriate to use the commercial app to discuss military operations.

Both current and former military officials have said the level of detail Hegseth shared on Signal most likely would have been classified. The Trump administration has insisted no classified information was shared.

Waltz is fighting back against calls for his ouster and, so far, Trump has said he stands by his national security adviser.

On Thursday, Trump fired several members of Waltz's staff after far-right activist Laura Loomer urged the president to purge staffers she deemed insufficiently loyal to his "Make America Great Again" agenda, several people familiar with the matter said.

In his Senate confirmation hearing Tuesday, Trump's nominee for chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Lt. Gen. Dan Caine, would not say whether the officials should have used a more secure communications system to discuss the attack plans.

"What I will say is we should always preserve the element of surprise," Caine told senators.

NYC Mayor Eric Adams will skip the Democratic primary and run for reelection as an independent

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

New York City Mayor Eric Adams withdrew from the city's Democratic primary on Thursday and said he would instead run for reelection as an independent, a move intended to buy him time to save a campaign deeply wounded by a bribery scandal and liberal anger over his warm relationship with President Donald Trump.

In a video announcement, Adams said he will not run in the Democratic primary in June because his recently dismissed criminal case "dragged on too long" while the "false accusations were held over me," preventing him from campaigning.

The decision came after intense speculation over whether Adams would remain in the Democratic primary, which has attracted several serious opponents, including former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

In a practical sense, the move will allow Adams to skip directly to the general election in November, giving him more time to campaign unencumbered by the weight of his criminal charges. But it will also further distance Adams from the city's heavily Democratic electorate and party organization, potentially weakening his chances of winning a second term.

The mayor, who had not formed much of a formal reelection apparatus, has struggled to raise money in recent months and suffered a blow when he was denied access to millions of dollars in public matching funds for his campaign because of questions about gaps in his recordkeeping.

At a Thursday afternoon forum held by the Rev. Al Sharpton's National Action Network, Adams said the criminal case had "overshadowed" his achievements and politically sidelined him.

"I wanted to run in a Democratic primary but I have to be realistic," he said. "I have to let New Yorkers know what I have done."

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A federal judge dismissed Adams' corruption case on Wednesday, ending a legal saga that left the mayor severely damaged and raised questions about his political independence.

The charges, brought last year during President Joe Biden's administration, accused Adams of accepting illegal campaign contributions and travel discounts from a Turkish official and others, in exchange for helping Turkey open a diplomatic building without passing fire inspections, among other things.

The mayor pleaded not guilty and was set for a trial in April, but the case was upended after Trump's Justice Department moved to drop the charges so that Adams could assist with the president's immigration agenda, while leaving open the possibility that the case could be revived.

The highly unusual move set off a firestorm of criticism and resignations and threw Adams' mayoralty in doubt, with many people questioning whether he was beholden to the Trump administration.

In an order dismissing the case, federal Judge Dale E. Ho denied prosecutors the option to refile the charges and wrote that allowing the case to be revived "would create the unavoidable perception that the mayor's freedom depends on his ability to carry out the immigration enforcement priorities of the administration."

In his video announcement, Adams maintained his innocence but acknowledged that the case had "shaken" voters and said he put his trust in the wrong people.

"I know that the accusations leveled against me may have shaken your confidence in me, and that you may rightly have questions about my conduct. And let me be clear, although the charges against me were false, I trusted people I should not have, and I regret that," he said.

Adams, a former police officer, has governed as a centrist Democrat and often done battle with the city's progressives. He was a registered Republican in the 1990s but has spent his political career, which includes time as a state senator and Brooklyn borough president, as a Democrat.

The mayor's political opponents swiftly criticized his decision to run as an independent. Zohran Mamdani, a Democratic state assemblyman running for mayor, said, "Regardless of what party Adams flees to, New Yorkers deserve better than a self-interested, disgraced mayor who has and always will put his needs before their own."

Another candidate, Democratic state Sen. Zellnor Myrie, described the whole ordeal as "a circus."

Jim Walden, a former prosecutor who is running as an independent, promptly challenged Adams to a debate, arguing that the mayor's decision came "out of desperation, not principle."

Adams' announcement was first reported by Politico.

Dow drops 1,600 as US stocks lead worldwide sell-off after Trump's tariffs cause a COVID-like shock

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Wall Street shuddered, and a level of shock unseen since COVID's outbreak tore through financial markets worldwide Thursday on worries about the damage President Donald Trump's newest set of tariffs could do to economies across continents, including his own.

The S&P 500 sank 4.8%, more than in major markets across Asia and Europe, for its worst day since the pandemic crashed the economy in 2020. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 1,679 points, or 4%, and the Nasdaq composite tumbled 6%.

Little was spared in financial markets as fear flared about the potentially toxic mix of weakening economic growth and higher inflation that tariffs can create.

Everything from crude oil to Big Tech stocks to the value of the U.S. dollar against other currencies fell. Even gold, which hit records recently as investors sought something safer to own, pulled lower. Some of the worst hits walloped smaller U.S. companies, and the Russell 2000 index of smaller stocks dropped 6.6% to pull more than 20% below its record.

Investors worldwide knew Trump was going to announce a sweeping set of tariffs late Wednesday, and fears surrounding it had already pulled Wall Street's main measure of health, the S&P 500 index, 10% below its all-time high. But Trump still managed to surprise them with "the worst case scenario for tariffs,"

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according to Mary Ann Bartels, chief investment officer at Sanctuary Wealth.

Trump announced a minimum tariff of 10% on imports, with the tax rate running much higher on products from certain countries like China and those from the European Union. It's "plausible" the tariffs altogether, which would rival levels unseen in roughly a century, could knock down U.S. economic growth by 2 percentage points this year and raise inflation close to 5%, according to UBS.

Such a hit would be so big that it "makes one's rational mind regard the possibility of them sticking as low," according to Bhanu Baweja and other strategists at UBS.

Trump has previously said tariffs could cause "a little disturbance" in the economy and markets, and on Thursday he again downplayed the impact as he left the White House to fly to Florida.

"The markets are going to boom, the stock is going to boom and the country is going to boom," Trump said.

Wall Street had long assumed Trump would use tariffs merely as a tool for negotiations with other countries, rather than as a long-term policy. But Wednesday's announcement may suggest Trump sees tariffs more as helping to solve an ideological goal than as an opening bet in a poker game. Trump on Wednesday talked about wresting manufacturing jobs back to the United States, a process that could take years.

If Trump follows through on his tariffs, stock prices may need to fall much more than 10% from their all-time high in order to reflect the recession that could follow, along with the hit to profits that U.S. companies could take. The S&P 500 is now down 11.8% from its record set in February.

"Markets may actually be underreacting, especially if these rates turn out to be final, given the potential knock-on effects to global consumption and trade," said Sean Sun, portfolio manager at Thornburg Investment Management, though he sees Trump's announcement on Wednesday as more of an opening move than an endpoint for policy.

Trump offered an upbeat reaction after he was asked about the market's drop as he left the White House to fly to his Florida golf club on Thursday.

"I think it's going very well," he said. "We have an operation, like when a patient gets operated on and it's a big thing. I said this would exactly be the way it is."

One wild card is that the Federal Reserve could cut interest rates in order to support the economy. That's what it had been doing late last year before pausing in 2025. Lower interest rates help by making it easier for U.S. companies and households to borrow and spend.

Yields on Treasuries tumbled in part on rising expectations for coming cuts to rates, along with general fear about the health of the U.S. economy. The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.04% from 4.20% late Wednesday and from roughly 4.80% in January. That's a huge move for the bond market.

The Fed may have less freedom to move than it would like, though. While lower rates can goose the economy, they can also push upward on inflation. And worries are already worsening about that because of tariffs, with U.S. households in particular bracing for sharp increases to their bills.

The U.S. economy at the moment is still growing, of course. A report on Thursday said fewer U.S. workers applied for unemployment benefits last week. Economist had been expecting to see an uptick in joblessness, and a relatively solid job market has been the linchpin keeping the economy out of recession.

A separate report said activity for U.S. transportation, finance and other businesses in the services industry grew last month. But the growth was weaker than expected, and businesses gave a mixed picture of how they see conditions.

Worries about a potentially stagnating economy and high inflation knocked down all kinds of stocks, leading to drops for four out of every five that make up the S&P 500.

Best Buy fell 17.8% because the electronics that it sells are made all over the world. United Airlines lost 15.6% because customers worried about the global economy may not fly as much for business or feel comfortable enough to take vacations. Target tumbled 10.9% amid worries that its customers, already squeezed by still-high inflation, may be under even more stress.

All told, the S&P 500 fell. 274.45 points to 5,396.52 The Dow Jones Industrial Average sank 1,679.39 to 40,545.93, and the Nasdaq composite tumbled 1,050.44 to 16,550.61.

In stock markets abroad, indexes fell sharply worldwide. France's CAC 40 dropped 3.3%, and Germany's

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DAX lost 3% in Europe.

Japan's Nikkei 225 sank 2.8%, Hong Kong's Hang Seng lost 1.5% and South Korea's Kospi dropped 0.8%.

Trump's tariffs aren't strictly reciprocal. Here's how he calculated them

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump promised tariffs that would raise U.S. import taxes high enough to mirror what others assess as trade penalties on American goods.

What he's actually imposing is based on far more complicated math.

Here's a look at how the White House got its numbers:

Why do the new tariff rates often differ by country?

The Trump administration has declared an "economic emergency" to bypass Congress and impose a 10% tariff on nearly all countries and territories. It has set even higher levies for about 60 nations that it says are the "worst" offenders.

The 10% global tariffs take effect at 12:01 a.m. Saturday. The higher tariffs set for specific countries are due to kick in at one minute past midnight on April 9.

Among the so-called worst offenders is China, which Trump argues protect its producers through "malicious" trade practices in addition to tariffs. Those efforts include actions such as imposing value added taxes on all goods, dumping overproduced products on markets to artificially deflate prices, or manipulating currency.

To determine how much higher those nations' rates should be, the White House says it calculated the size of each country's trade imbalance on goods with the United States and divided that by how much America imports from that nation.

It then took half that percentage and made it the new tariff rate.

Why not just charge reciprocal rates?

The White House says its calculations kept new tariffs from going even higher for many countries and demonstrate that Trump is being "kind" to global trading partners.

The administration maintains that creating a baseline levy with few exemptions is necessary to keep China and others from skirting the new tariffs by manufacturing goods and then shipping them to Vietnam, Cambodia, Mexico or elsewhere to then be sent to the U.S.

That's why the White House list of tariffed locations includes obscure places like the Heard and McDonald Islands, which are uninhabited. They are 2,550 miles (4,100 kilometers) from the coast of mainland Australia, which claims them as a territory.

Is every country affected?

No. Canada and Mexico are excluded because they already are facing 25% taxes on most imported goods that Trump announced last month, in an attempt to force both to crack down on fentanyl smuggling into the U.S.

The White House originally said all others would be affected by at least the 10% tariff. But administration officials clarified on Thursday that countries already subject to stiff U.S. sanctions — for example, Russia due to its invasion of Ukraine, as well as Iran, North Korea, Cuba, Belarus and Venezuela — will not face the new, 10% global base tariff.

Officials said that is because sanctions and other existing barriers mean the U.S. has so little trade with those places that deficits are minimal.

Why is Trump doing this?

The president has spent months insisting America was at its wealthiest at the end of the Gilded Age in the late 1800s and early 1900s, when it imposed high tariffs as the key means of generating revenue for the federal government.

Trump even suggested Wednesday that the U.S. moving away from higher tariffs and toward a federal income tax in 1913 helped trigger the Great Depression of the 1930s — a claim that economists and his-

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torians roundly reject.

A more contemporary explanation might be found in Project 2025, a comprehensive blueprint compiled by leading conservatives about how to shrink the federal workforce and push Washington further to the right. It spelled out how Trump might impose high tariffs around the globe, giving his administration more room to negotiate lower levies with trading partners in exchange for U.S. priorities.

White House officials insist the new tariffs are more about closing trade deficits, stimulating U.S. manufacturing and generating government revenue than eventually negotiating new trading deals.

But Trump has shown he is willing to back off on threats of tariffs in exchange for offers of concessions. His administration has said the president is always ready to make deals, a sign the new tariffs may prove to be more a bargaining chip than permanent policy.

Flying to Florida aboard Air Force One on Thursday, Trump said of making possible deals to reduce tariffs imposed around the world going forward, "Every country's called us."

"We put ourselves in the driver's seat," he said. "If we would have asked some of these countries, or most of these countries, to do us a favor, they would have said, No. Now they'll do anything for us."

Why does US trade imbalances matter?

American trade policy created a U.S. trade imbalance worth \$1.2 trillion last year, a gap that some experts believe should be addressed in order to ensure the country's long-term economic strength.

But many economists say the trade imbalances that Trump is looking to correct are based on more than countries just using high tariffs or protectionist trade practices to boost their own exports. Basing the White House's tariff math solely on trade deficits, for instance, fails to take into account U.S. consumer demand.

Americans relish buying BMWs assembled in Germany, as well as French wine and coffee beans from Guatemala, and their spending can fuel trade imbalances regardless of the tax and tariff policies of the countries producing those goods.

That means any attempt to close U.S. trade gaps by tariffs will likely mean increasing the cost of imported goods that Americans are buying, which in turn could hurt the economy because of increased inflationary pressures.

Federal judge says she will temporarily block billions in health funding cuts to states

By DEVNA BOSE AP Health Writer

A federal judge will temporarily block President Donald Trump's administration from cutting billions in federal dollars that support COVID-19 initiatives and public health projects throughout the country.

U.S. District Judge Mary McElroy, appointed by Trump in 2019 but first nominated by former President Barack Obama, in Rhode Island said Thursday that she plans to grant the court order sought by 23 states and the District of Columbia.

"They make a case, a strong case, for the fact that they will succeed on the merits, so I'm going to grant the temporary restraining order," said McElroy, who plans to issue a written ruling later.

New York Attorney General Letitia James tweeted about the judge's decision immediately after the hearing, saying: "We're going to continue our lawsuit and fight to ensure states can provide the medical services Americans need."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Leslie Kane objected to the temporary restraining order in court but she said she was limited in the argument she could make against it, adding that her office was unable to thoroughly review the thousands of documents under the time limitation.

The states' lawsuit, filed Tuesday, sought to immediately stop the \$11 billion in cuts. The money was allocated by Congress during the pandemic and mostly used for COVID-related initiatives, as well as for mental health and substance use efforts. The lawsuit said losing the money would devastate U.S. public health infrastructure, putting states "at greater risk for future pandemics and the spread of otherwise preventable disease and cutting off vital public health services."

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has defended the decision, saying that the money

was being wasted since the pandemic is over.

State and local public health departments already have laid off people, including nearly 200 employees at the Minnesota Department of Health. North Carolina says it stands to lose about \$230 million, and California officials put their potential losses at \$1 billion.

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro, who is also part of the lawsuit, said half a billion dollars in public health grants that support long-term care for the elderly and immunizations for children were at stake in his state.

"As a result of taking the Administration to court, these dollars will now start flowing again," he wrote on X.

The temporary block on chopping health funding is the latest legal setback for the Trump administration, which is facing some 150 lawsuits on issues ranging from immigration to deep financial and job cuts at federal agencies to transgender rights. Federal judges have issued dozens of orders slowing — at least for now — the president's ambitious conservative agenda.

Transgender student's arrest for violating Florida bathroom law is thought to be a first

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

A transgender college student declared "I am here to break the law" before entering a women's restroom at the Florida State Capitol and being led out in handcuffs by police. Civil rights attorneys say the arrest of Marcy Rheintgen last month is the first they know of for violating transgender bathroom restrictions passed by numerous state legislatures across the country.

Capitol police had been alerted and were waiting for Rheintgen, 20, when she entered the building in Tallahassee March 19. They told her she would receive a trespass warning once she entered the women's restroom to wash her hands and pray the rosary, but she was later placed under arrest when she refused to leave, according to an arrest affidavit.

Rheintgen faces a misdemeanor trespassing charge punishable by up to 60 days in jail and is due to appear in court in May.

"I wanted people to see the absurdity of this law in practice," Rheintgen told The Associated Press. "If I'm a criminal, it's going to be so hard for me to live a normal life, all because I washed my hands. Like, that's so insane."

At least 14 states have adopted laws barring transgender women from entering women's bathrooms at public schools and, in some cases, other government buildings. Only two — Florida and Utah — criminalize the act. A judge on Wednesday temporarily blocked Montana's new bathroom law.

Rheintgen's arrest in Florida is the first that American Civil Liberties Union attorneys are aware of in any state with a criminal ban, senior staff attorney Jon Davidson said.

Rheintgen was in town visiting her grandparents when she decided to pen a letter to each of Florida's 160 state lawmakers informing them of her plan to enter a public restroom inconsistent with her sex assigned at birth. The Illinois resident said her act of civil disobedience was fueled by anger at seeing a place she loves and visits regularly grow hostile toward trans people.

"I know that you know in your heart that this law is wrong and unjust," she wrote in her letter to lawmakers. "I know that you know in your heart that transgender people are human too, and that you can't arrest us away. I know that you know that I have dignity. That's why I know that you won't arrest me."

Her arrest comes as many Republican-led states that have enacted restroom restrictions grapple with how to enforce them. Laws in Alabama, Kansas, Kentucky and North Dakota do not spell out any enforcement mechanism, and even the state laws that do largely rely on private individuals to report violations.

In Utah, activists flooded a tip line created to alert state officials to possible violations of its bathroom law with thousands of hoax reports in an effort to shield transgender residents and their allies from any legitimate complaints that could lead to an investigation.

The Republican sponsors of the Florida bathroom law, Rep. Rachel Plakon and Sen. Erin Grall, did not immediately respond Thursday to phone messages, emails and visits to their offices to seek comment on

Rheintgen's arrest. They have said the restrictions are needed to protect women and girls in single-sex spaces.

Opponents of the law such as Nadine Smith, executive director of the LGBTQ+ advocacy group Equality Florida, said it creates dangerous situations for all by giving people license to police others' bodies in bathrooms.

"The arrest of Marcy Rheintgen is not about safety," Smith said. "It's about cruelty, humiliation and the deliberate erosion of human dignity. Transgender people have been using restrooms aligned with their gender for generations without incident. What's changed is not their presence — it's a wave of laws designed to intimidate them out of public life."

If Rheintgen is convicted, she worries she could be jailed with men, forced to cut her long hair and prevented temporarily from taking gender-affirming hormones.

"People are telling me it's a legal test, like this is the first case that's being brought," she said. "It's how they test the law. But I didn't do this to test the law. I did it because I was upset. I can't have any expectations for what's going to happen because this has never been prosecuted before. I'm horrified and scared."

USC star JuJu Watkins is the AP Player of the Year and just the fourth sophomore to earn that honor

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — JuJu Watkins, the sensational sophomore who led Southern California to its best season in nearly 40 years, was honored Thursday as The Associated Press women's basketball Player of the Year.

Watkins, whose Trojans won the Big Ten regular-season title for their first conference crown in 31 years, received 29 votes from the 31-member national media panel that votes on the AP Top 25 each week. Notre Dame's Hannah Hidalgo got the other two. Both were first-team AP All-Americans.

"I think what's so significant about this award is that this was a year that didn't have an absence of talent and stars, and JuJu found a way to elevate herself and her team," USC coach Lindsay Gottlieb said.

Watkins became just the fourth player to win the award in her sophomore year, joining Oklahoma's Courtney Paris (2007) and UConn stars Maya Moore (2009) and Breanna Stewart (2014). The AP started giving out the award in 1995 and Watkins is the first Trojans player to win it.

"She makes a lot of things that aren't easy look easy," Gottlieb said. "It's one thing to say she's a generational talent, but another to actually do it and put yourself up with names like Stewie, Maya and Courtney Paris."

Watkins is already in the top 10 on USC's career scoring list, ranking ninth. She was averaging 23.9 points, 6.8 rebounds and 3.4 assists before her season was cut short in the NCAA Tournament with an ACL injury suffered in the second round against Mississippi State.

Watkins accepted the award via Zoom from Los Angeles.

"I'm just so honored to be recognized in this fashion," she said. "I want to thank my teammates, my amazing coaches, my family and friends. They made all this possible. I feel so blessed to be able to do what I love."

AP Coach of the Year Cori Close praised Watkins for what she's done on and off the court.

"I've been able to see what she does for underserved communities and her commitment to really stay true to serve where she came from," Close said. "I know that everybody knows what an amazing basketball player JuJu Watkins is, but I think this is an incredible award because I know her heart of service and I want to congratulate her for what she's done."

Watkins raised her game against the best opponents. In the six games against teams in AP top 10, she averaged 26.2 points, 7.3 rebounds and 2.4 blocks while shooting 35.4% from behind the 3-point line.

"She performed her best at the biggest moments," Gottlieb said. "I thought she really throughout the course of the year learned how to dominate and empower the others."

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Watkins, with her signature “JuJu bun” hairstyle, is already one of the top draws in the sport with endorsement deals to match, and seeing her in person has become a hotter ticket.

The Trojans’ average home attendance rose to 5,932 this season from last year’s 4,421. Celebrities like Snoop Dogg, Kevin Hart, Jason Sudeikis, Michael B. Jordan and Sanaa Lathan, who starred in “Love & Basketball,” one of Watkins’ favorite movies, have shown up. The year before she arrived, attendance averaged 1,037.

“It’s hard to miss Snoop Dogg in his custom JuJu jacket,” Gottlieb said. “This happened organically and authentically. She decided to stay home and cares about her city and has the magnetism to attract people. It’s the way she carries herself. She’s confident, but very humble and true to her community. It’s amazing to see her impact.”

Once pariahs, now winners, Final Four coaches Pearl, Sampson a reflection of a changing game

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — A decade ago, Bruce Pearl of Auburn and Kelvin Sampson of Houston were emerging from exile — two coaches who had been handed the harshest sanction imaginable by the NCAA and were looking to resurrect their once-successful careers.

This week, they’re both coaching at the Final Four, the “show-cause” penalties that once stood as a scarlet letter in college sports now barely visible in their rearview mirrors.

Their ascension from pariahs to the cusp of a championship — Auburn plays Florida in one semifinal Saturday, while Houston faces Duke in the other — look different, but no less impressive when viewed through the lens of the shifting priorities that have overtaken college sports over the last four years.

The recruiting misdeeds that nearly submarined their careers seem almost quaint now in a cash-saturated world of name, image, likeness endorsement deals for players who can move around as freely as the coaches while the coaches worry as much about what the schools can pay them as the players they recruit.

“I can make a case that it’s easier if you have the funds to compete at the NIL level,” Tennessee coach Rick Barnes told The Associated Press recently. “If you don’t, it makes it really difficult. I think that’s where administrators have to realize: Are we giving coaches what they need to be at the level we want to?”

Coaching carousel brings questions about players, too

There’s nothing new about the college coaching carousel kicking into full swing this time of year. What’s unusual about 2025 is the nature of some of the moves.

Five high-profile changes were made by coaches who won at least a game in March Madness. That was two more than last year, four more than in 2023 and two more than 2019, two years before NIL started.

But while virtually all those moves were seen as steps up for the coaches taking new jobs — nobody blinked when, say, Dusty May went from Florida Atlantic to Michigan or Nate Oats left Buffalo for Alabama — this year seems different.

In a move dripping with recriminations, bad feelings and a departing athletic director, Kevin Willard left a Power Four school at Maryland to coach a non-P4 school, albeit one with a better hoops resume, at Villanova. The next domino had Buzz Williams departing the SEC and the Texas A&M program he built to fill the opening at Maryland.

One of the more traditional moves involved Will Wade, also a show-cause casualty from a now seemingly bygone era, parlaying success at McNeese to return to the big time, at North Carolina State of the ACC.

Wade’s involvement in paying for recruits cost him his job at LSU and wrapped him in an FBI investigation that sent coaches to jail and, he said, “ruined a lot of people’s lives for very little reason.” That none of what he did would be considered wrong in today’s world of above-the-table NIL payments to players is no excuse for him, he said.

“It wasn’t right to do then and, you know, I paid for it,” Wade told the AP after his hiring at NC State.

Pearl, Sampson had recruiting tussles that would barely register today

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The stumbling blocks for both Sampson and Pearl also had to do with recruiting.

Sampson made too many phone calls to a player who had already given verbal commitments to another school. Pearl invited a recruit to a barbecue at his house, then lied about it.

Decades before that, Pearl was an assistant at Iowa when he recorded a call in which he asked a player, Deon Thomas, if an Illinois assistant had offered him a car as a recruiting enticement. Pearl didn't get in trouble for that one, though his reputation suffered and it took him nearly 15 years before he'd get another chance in the big time.

All that feels antiquated these days, when headlines about Duke's Cooper Flagg making \$4.8 million or BYU star recruit AJ Dybantsa making \$7 million in NIL raise eyebrows not because it's against the rules, but simply because it lays out the vastly different stakes involved in college sports.

A resource grab at schools that need football

Pearl and Sampson are creatures of basketball at schools and conferences that need football to succeed. Neither of their athletic departments could be blamed for pushing their NIL resources heavily in the direction of the sport that produces the most revenue.

Pearl remains confident that the Southeastern Conference, which placed a record 14 teams in March Madness this year, is on solid footing.

"I'm sure in the SEC we're going to be committed to being excellent in everything across the board — men, women, all sports," Pearl said, while acknowledging the reality that the rulebook for this new era is still being written.

Even with the Big 12's perennial success in basketball — the conference has had a Final Four team in seven of the past 10 seasons — Houston still has strides to make with a football program that went 4-8 last year. The question there, and many other places, is whether the Cougars have the resources to rebuild football while staying great at hoops.

"If one school decides to give 70% of its money to football, another school decides to give 75% to football, that 5% is a big number," UMass coach Frank Martin said of the calculations driving athletic department, coaches and players these days. "We all want to be in a fair game. It'd be like asking one team to play in the NCAA Tournament with four players, instead of five."

Myanmar earthquake death toll rises to 3,145 as more bodies found

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — The death toll from the earthquake that hit Myanmar nearly a week ago rose Thursday to 3,145 as search and rescue teams found more bodies, the military-led government said, and humanitarian aid groups scrambled to provide survivors medical care and shelter.

Information Minister Maung Maung Ohn also announced at a meeting in the capital, Naypyitaw, that 4,589 people were injured and 221 others were missing, state television MRTV reported.

The epicenter of the 7.7 magnitude quake on March 28 was near Mandalay, Myanmar's second-largest city. It brought down thousands of buildings, buckled roads and destroyed bridges in multiple regions.

Local media reports of casualties have been much higher than the official figures. With telecommunications widely out and many places difficult to reach, the numbers could rise sharply as more details come in.

A report issued Thursday by the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated that the earthquake and aftershocks have affected more than 17 million people across 57 of the country's 330 townships, including more than 9 million who were severely affected.

"The coming days will be critical in determining the full scale of the disaster's impact and the response required to meet the needs of millions affected," it said.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said U.N. humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher and special envoy Julie Bishop will arrive in Myanmar on Friday.

The secretary-general appealed to the international community to immediately step up funding for quake victims "to match the scale of this crisis," and urged unimpeded access to reach those in need.

"The earthquake has supercharged the suffering — with the monsoon season just around the corner,"

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he said.

The World Health Organization said that according to its initial assessment, four hospitals and one health center had been completely destroyed, while another 32 hospitals and 18 health centers had been partially damaged.

"With infrastructure compromised and patient numbers surging, access to health care has become nearly impossible in many of the worst-hit areas," the U.N. said. "Thousands of people are in urgent need of trauma care, surgical interventions and treatment for disease outbreaks."

A mobile hospital from India and a joint Russian-Belarusian hospital also were now operating in Mandalay.

With many left homeless by the quake, and many others staying away from their homes because of fears that ongoing aftershocks will bring them down, workers in Naypyitaw labored in the 40 C (104 F) heat to busily erect big tents in open fields to provide some shelter.

In Mandalay, local residents gave slices of watermelon to Chinese volunteers taking a break from the high temperatures.

More than 1,550 international rescuers were operating alongside locals on Thursday, according to a statement from the military. Rescue supplies and equipment have been sent by 17 countries.

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

The quake worsened an already dire humanitarian crisis, with more than 3 million people displaced from their homes and nearly 20 million in need even before it hit, according to the United Nations.

As concerns grew that ongoing fighting could hamper humanitarian aid efforts, the military declared a temporary ceasefire Wednesday, through April 22. The announcement followed unilateral temporary ceasefires announced by armed resistance groups opposed to military rule.

The military said that it would still take "necessary" measures against those groups, if they use the ceasefire to regroup, train or launch attacks.

Already on Thursday, there were reports from local media in Kachin state in the north of Myanmar that military attacks continued in several areas, but they couldn't be independently confirmed.

Prior to the earthquake, the military was battling the Kachin Independence Army militia group. The KIA on Wednesday also declared a ceasefire but reserved the right to defend itself. It was unclear how the reported fighting broke out.

The earthquake shook Kachin, but there have been no reports of damage there.

In Bangkok, where the quake brought down a skyscraper under construction, the search for survivors and bodies continued as Gov. Chadchart Sittipunt said that a possible sound of life was detected in the rubble. By near day's end, however, nobody was found.

Twenty-two people were killed and 35 injured in the city, mostly by the collapse of the unfinished building.

Judge says US government may have 'acted in bad faith' as he weighs contempt over deportation order

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST, MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge said Thursday that the Trump administration may have "acted in bad faith" by trying to rush Venezuelan migrants out of the country before a court could block their deportations to El Salvador.

U.S. District Judge James "Jeb" Boasberg in Washington pressed a Justice Department lawyer to explain the government's actions in a high-stakes court hearing to determine whether the administration ignored his orders to turn around planes that were carrying deportees to El Salvador.

The judge said he could issue a ruling as soon as next week on whether there are grounds to find anyone in contempt of court for defying the court order.

The case has become a flashpoint in a battle between the judiciary and the Trump administration amid mounting White House frustrations over court orders blocking key parts of the president's sweeping

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agenda. Trump has called for the judge's impeachment, while the Justice Department has argued the judge is overstepping his authority.

Boasberg ordered the administration last month not to deport anyone in its custody under the Alien Enemies Act, a 1798 wartime law Trump invoked over what he claimed was an invasion by the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua. The judge also ordered that any planes with Venezuelan immigrants that were already in the air be returned to the United States. That did not happen.

Boasberg, who was appointed to the federal bench by Democratic President Barack Obama, said it appeared the administration had tried to get the deportees out of the country as quickly as possible before a court could step in. He told a Justice Department lawyer he suspects the government may have "acted in bad faith throughout that day."

"If you really believed anything you did that day could survive a court challenge, I cannot believe you would have operated the way you did," Boasberg said.

The Justice Department has said the administration didn't violate the judge's order, arguing it didn't apply to planes that had already left U.S. airspace by the time his command came down. The Justice Department has noted that the judge's written order said nothing about flights that had already left the U.S. and that the judge had no power to compel the president to return the planes anyway.

The Trump administration has refused to answer the judge's questions about when the planes landed and who was on board, contending they are considered "state secrets."

Deputy Assistant Attorney General Drew Ensign told the judge that details about the flights could be diplomatically sensitive, since the migrants were being sent to a third country that had agreed with the U.S. to hold them in their prison. Ensign also repeatedly said he didn't know any "operational details" of those March 15 deportation flights.

"I had no knowledge from my client that was the case," Ensign replied when asked if he knew during the court hearing that day that planes were already in the air or were about to take off.

The Trump administration is urging the Supreme Court for permission to resume deportations of Venezuelan migrants to El Salvador under the rarely used Alien Enemies Act. The Justice Department says federal courts shouldn't interfere with sensitive diplomatic negotiations. It also claimed that migrants should make their case in a federal court in Texas, where they are being detained.

Demand for viral 'torpedo' baseball bats has sent a Pennsylvania factory into overdrive

By DAN GELSTON AP Sports Writer

KING OF PRUSSIA, Pa. (AP) — A 70-year-old man who plays in an area senior hardball league popped into Victus Sports this week because he needed bats for the new season. Plus he just had to take some cuts with baseball's latest fad and see for himself if there really was some wizardry in the wallop off a torpedo bat.

Ed Costantini, of Newtown Square, picked up the custom-designed VOLPE11-TPD Pro Reserve Maple, and took his hacks just like MLB stars and Victus customers Anthony Volpe or Bryson Stott would inside the company's batting cage and tracked the ball's path on the virtual Citizens Bank Park on the computer screens.

Most big leaguers use that often indistinguishable "feel" as a qualifier as to how they select a bat.

Costantini had a similar process and thought the hype surrounding the torpedo since it exploded into the baseball consciousness over the weekend was a "hoax." But after dozens of swings in the cage, where he said the balance was better, the ball sounded more crisp off the bat, the left-handed hitter ordered on the spot four custom-crafted torpedo bats at \$150 a pop.

"The litmus test that I used was, I could see where the marks of the ball were," Costantini said. "The swings were hitting the thickness of the torpedo as opposed to the end of the bat."

More than just All-Stars want a crack at the torpedo — a striking design in which wood is moved lower down the barrel after the label and shapes the end a little like a bowling pin — and Costantini's purchase

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highlighted the surge of interest in baseball's shiny new toy outside the majors.

Think of home runs in baseball, and the fan's mind races to the mammoth distances a ball can fly when slugged right on the nose, or a history-making chase that captivates a nation.

Of lesser interest, the ol' reliable wood bat itself.

That was, of course, until Paul Goldschmidt and Cody Bellinger hit back-to-back homers for the New York Yankees last Saturday to open a nine-homer barrage. Victus Sports, known as much for their vibrant bats painted as pencils or the Phillie Phanatic dressed as a King's Guard, had three employees at the game and they started a text thread where they hinted to those back home that, perhaps more than home runs were taking off.

Business was about to boom, too.

Yankees crowed about the torpedo-shape concept that had baseball buzzing -- and pitchers grumbling. The scuttlebutt and headlines stoked their super curious peers, most with an eye out for any legal, offensive edge, into asking Victus and other bat manufacturers about the possibility of taking a swing with the most famous style of bat since Roy Hobbs grabbed a "Wonderboy."

Torpedo bats are driving an unprecedented surge in lumber curiosity

Victus spent most of the last 14 years trying to help shape the future of baseball. The company's founders just never imagined that shape would resemble a bowling pin.

"It was the most talked about thing about bats that we ever experienced," Victus co-founder Jared Smith said.

Victus isn't the only company producing the bulgy bats, but they were among the first to list them for sale online after the Yankees' made them the talk of the sports world. The torpedo bat took the league by storm in only 24 hours, and days later, the calls and orders, and test drives -- from big leaguers to rec leaguers -- are humming inside the company's base, in a northwest suburb of Philadelphia.

"The amount of steam that it's caught, this quickly, that's certainly surprising," Smith said. "If the Yankees hitting nine home runs in a game doesn't happen, this doesn't happen."

Victus was stamped this season as the official bat of Major League Baseball and business was already good: Phillies slugger Bryce Harper is among the stars who stick their bats on highlight reels.

But that torpedo-looking hunk of lumber? It generated about as much interest last season in baseball as a .200 hitter. Victus made its first torpedoes around 2024 spring training when the Yankees reached out about crafting samples for their players. Victus, as dialed-in as anyone in the bat game, only made about a dozen last season, and about a dozen more birch or maple bats this spring.

This week alone, try hundreds of torpedoes.

"Every two minutes, another one comes out of the machine," Smith said.

Who knew there would be a baseball bat craze?

On a good day, Victus makes 600-700 bats, but the influx of pro orders -- the company estimates at least half of every starting lineup uses Victus or Marucci bats -- has sent production into overdrive. The creation of a typical bat is usually a two-day process, but one can be turned around without a finish in about 20 minutes. Victus crafted rush-order bats Monday morning for a few interested Phillies and dashed to Citizens Bank Park for delivery moments before first pitch. All-Star third baseman Alec Bohm singled with one.

Stott tested bats at the Marucci hit lab down in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, churning through styles until the company found the right fit.

"They connect all these wires to you, and you swing 1,000 bats," Stott said. "And they kind of tell you where you're hitting the ball mostly."

Rookie of the year?

Here's the surprising part of the torpedo bat: For all its early hype, the bat is no rookie in the game.

The lethal lumber has been used by some sluggers in baseball for at least a year or two only, well, no one really noticed. Giancarlo Stanton and Francisco Lindor used torpedoes last season. Other players experimented with it and no one -- not the bulk of other players or journalists or fans -- ever really picked up on the newfangled advance in hitting innovation.

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Smith said only “a few baseball junkies” inquired about the bats.

“I think it’s just one of those things that until you’re looking for it, you might not see it,” Smith said. “Now when you look at pictures, you’re like, oh yeah, it’s a torpedo.”

Aaron Leanhardt, a former Yankees front-office staffer who now works for the Miami Marlins, was credited as the one who developed the torpedo barrel to bring more mass to a bat’s sweet spot.

A member of Victus’ parent company, Marucci Sports, worked with Leanhardt in a Louisiana branch of their hit lab last year to get the bat off the ground and into the hands of big leaguers.

“I think getting past the shape being different was the hardest barrier,” Smith said. “Then the team goes out and hits those home runs like they did and everyone is willing to try it.”

Before last weekend, Victus had no plans to mass produce the bat, making it only available to professionals.

Now, Smith said, “I think it’s our job to kind of educate the public in what’s out there.”

The odd shape off the bat — like making a sausage, the meat is simply pushed down the casing — has little to no effect at Victus on the dynamics of making a baseball bat. The cost is the same as a standard bat, too, with a sticker price starting at around \$200. Only the slogan is punched up: Get your hands on the most-talked about bat in the game.

The bat kings deliver their biggest hit yet

Victus was created by Smith and Ryan Engroff in a Blackwood, New Jersey, garage in 2012 and exploded in popularity over the last decade thanks in the large part to its bat art. Bruce Tatum, an in-house artist known as “The Bat King,” calls his memorable designs such as the No. 2 pencil and crayon bats notably used in the Little League Classic “swingable art.” The Victus walls look straight out of an art gallery, only instead of classic paintings, rows and rows of colorful bats emblazoned with everything from Harper’s face to Gritty’s eyes are on display.

“Normally people are here to talk about the Bat King,” Smith said, laughing.

He was busy, sketching ideas for next year’s bats for the baseball All-Star game in Philadelphia.

“Bruce’s cheesesteak bat, I’m just telling you, is going to be the talk of the town,” Smith said. “I guarantee it.”

Victus has over 300 employees and 60 alone inside their King of Prussia headquarters. The company has outgrown its base and is busting at the seams, and when a bat suddenly goes viral, “all our seams are exposed.”

The folks at Victus — who previously have experimented with axe handle and puck knobs — have no fear the bat will become the baseball equal to the NFL’s tush push, a fresh wrinkle that some might try to legislate out of the game.

MLB has relatively uncomplicated bat rules, stating under 3.02: “The bat shall be a smooth, round stick not more than 2.61 inches in diameter at the thickest part and not more than 42 inches in length. The bat shall be one piece of solid wood.” It goes on to state there may be a cupped indentation up to 1 1/4 inches in depth, 2 inches wide and with at least a 1-inch diameter, and experimental models must be approved by MLB.

The torpedo is 100% legal.

Year after year, Victus’ bat business has picked up. Jonny Gomes used a Victus bat when he went deep in the 2013 World Series and Harper stamped the company as a major player when he played for Washington and swung a “We The People” bat and tossed it in the air to win the 2018 Home Run Derby.

“Our product kept getting better and it got to the point where he probably felt like we had the best bat, and we felt like we had the best bat,” Smith said.

Does it work?

There’s not enough data yet to truly know how much oomph — or hits and homers — a torpedo bat may help some hitters. Cincinnati’s Elly De La Cruz picked one up for the first time Monday and had a single, double and two home runs for a career-high seven RBIs.

Not all hitters are believers — or at least feel like they need to tinker with their lumber.

Yankees slugger Aaron Judge, who hit an AL-record 62 homers in 2022 and 58 last year en route to his

second AL MVP award, declined to try the new bat, asking, "Why try to change something?" Phillies All-Star shortstop Trea Turner said the hoopla was "blown out of proportion."

"You've still got to hit the ball," Turner said.

Turner, though, said he was open to trying the torpedo.

Arizona pitcher Zac Gallen grew up a Mark McGwire fan and compared the fad to the bloated barrel used by the retired St. Louis Cardinals' slugger's old Nerf bat.

"The concept seems so simple. For it to take this long is wild," Gallen said.

No matter. The bat is here today and not going anywhere — except perhaps flying off the shelves.

"For bats to be the hot topic out in the zeitgeist is cool," Smith said. "It's kind of like our time to shine, in a way."

Rubio tries to reassure wary allies of US commitment to NATO as Trump sends mixed signals

By MATTHEW LEE and LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and the Trump administration's new envoy to NATO are seeking to reassure wary members of the U.S. commitment to the alliance.

Rubio on Thursday decried "hysteria and hyperbole" in the media about U.S. President Donald Trump's intentions, despite persistent signals from Washington that NATO as it has existed for 75 years may no longer be relevant.

Rubio and newly confirmed U.S. ambassador to NATO Matt Whitaker are in Brussels for a meeting of alliance foreign ministers at which many are hoping Rubio will shed light on U.S. security plans in Europe.

"The United States is as active in NATO as it has ever been," Rubio told reporters as he greeted NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte before the meeting began. "And some of this hysteria and hyperbole that I see in the global media and some domestic media in the United States about NATO is unwarranted."

"President Trump's made clear he supports NATO," Rubio said. "We're going to remain in NATO."

"We want NATO to be stronger, we want NATO to be more visible and the only way NATO can get stronger, more visible is if our partners, the nation states that comprise this important alliance, have more capability," he said.

Whitaker said in a statement that "under President Trump's leadership, NATO will be stronger and more effective than ever before, and I believe that a robust NATO can continue to serve as a bedrock of peace and prosperity." But he added: "NATO's vitality rests on every ally doing their fair share."

Concerns about US commitment to allies

Despite those words, European allies and Canada are deeply concerned by Trump's readiness to draw closer to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who sees NATO as a threat as the U.S. tries to broker a ceasefire in Ukraine, as well as his rhetorical attacks and insults against allies like Canada and Denmark.

Rubio and Danish Foreign Affairs Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen met on the sidelines of the meeting. They didn't respond to a shouted question about Greenland, a semi-autonomous territory in the Kingdom of Denmark which Trump has his eye on, but they smiled and shook hands in front of U.S. and Danish flags.

Trump's imposition of new global tariffs, which will affect allies, have also added to the uncertainty and unease.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot warned that NATO's unity is "being tested by the decisions taken and announced yesterday (Wednesday) by President Trump."

Asked about concerns among European allies about a possible U.S. troop drawdown and the importance of getting clear messages from the Trump administration, Rutte said: "These issues are not new. There are no plans for them to all of a sudden draw down their presence here in Europe."

Indeed, the Trump administration hasn't made its NATO allies aware any plans that it might have. But several European countries are convinced that U.S. troops and equipment will be withdrawn, and they want to find out from Rubio how many and when so they can fill any security gaps.

"We need to preempt a rapid retreat, but we've had nothing precise from the U.S. yet," a senior NATO

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diplomat said before the meeting, briefing reporters on his country's expectations on condition that he not be named.

In Washington, the chairman of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee criticized "mid-level" leadership at the Pentagon for what he branded as a misguided plan to "reduce drastically" the number of U.S. troops based in Europe. The U.S. Defense Department hasn't made public any such proposal.

"They've been working to pursue a U.S. retreat from Europe and they've often been doing so without coordinating with the secretary of defense," U.S. Sen. Roger Wicker, a Mississippi Republican, said at a hearing with U.S. European Command and U.S. Africa Command military leadership.

It wasn't immediately clear what "mid-level bureaucrats" Wicker was talking about.

Rutte's dilemma

NATO's secretary-general is in a bind. European allies and Canada have tasked him with keeping the United States firmly in NATO. Around 100,000 U.S. troops are stationed in Europe along with the Navy's 6th Fleet and nuclear warheads. U.S. firepower ensures that NATO's ability to deter Russia is credible.

This means he can't openly criticize Trump, who is commander in chief of the United States, NATO's biggest and best-equipped armed forces.

What is clear is that U.S. allies must ramp up defense spending even more than they already have since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine more than three years ago, so that they can defend Europe with less American help and keep Ukraine's armed forces in the fight.

"The U.S. expects European allies to take more responsibility for their own security," Dutch Foreign Minister Caspar Veldkamp said, which means that "European NATO countries rapidly have to strengthen the European pillar of NATO and have to increase their defense spending."

Since U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth warned last month that American security priorities lie elsewhere — in Asia and on the United States' own borders — the Europeans have waited to learn how big a military drawdown in Europe could be and how fast it may happen.

In Europe and Canada, governments are working on "burden shifting" plans to take over more of the load, while trying to ensure that no security vacuum is created if U.S. troops and equipment are withdrawn from the continent.

EEOC chief shifts focus to investigating DEI but the methods provoke an outcry

By ALEXANDRA OLSON and CLAIRE SAVAGE AP Business Writers

ARLINGTON, Va. (AP) — The acting chief of the top federal agency for protecting worker rights has signaled a pivot toward prioritizing President Donald Trump's campaign to stamp out diversity, equity and inclusion programs in the private and public sectors.

The initial steps taken by Andrea Lucas, acting chief of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, have earned her strong backing from the Trump administration, which has moved against DEI through embattled executive orders that dismantled programs at federal agencies and threatened investigations and stiff financial penalties for federal contractors that engage in "illegal" diversity-related practices. Trump recently nominated Lucas, who has long been an outspoken critic DEI practices she argues result in discriminatory employment preferences, to a new five-year term as commissioner.

But former Democratic EEOC officials and prominent civil rights groups have accused Lucas of taking shortcuts that supersede her authority and they have urged employers to be wary of her directives and guidance, if not altogether ignore them.

The most recent flashpoint involves two "technical assistance" documents issued by the EEOC along with the Department of Justice attempting to clarify what might constitute "DEI-related Discrimination at Work" and providing guidance on how workers can file complaints over such concerns.

The documents take broad aim at practices such as training, employee resource groups and fellowship programs, warning such programs — depending on how they're constructed — could run afoul of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits employment discrimination based on race and gender.

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The documents followed letters that Lucas sent to 20 prominent law firms demanding information about diversity fellowships and other programs she claimed could be evidence of discriminatory practices.

A group of 10 former Democratic commissioners and counsels released its own letter Thursday warning the legal community the DEI documents give the misleading impression that common programs "are fraught with legal peril" and dismissed them as reflecting Lucas's personal opinion. The letter offered counter-guidance on how employers should continue implementing training and other practices that EEOC policy documents encourage to prevent discrimination.

Last month, seven of the same former EEOC officials sent Lucas a letter warning that she appeared to exceed her authority with her demands for information from the 20 law firms without first launching a formal investigation. A group of prominent civil rights organizations went a step further in their own letter to Lucas, urging the law firms to ignore her demands because they have no legal obligation to reply.

"This isn't how the EEOC works. No single commissioner — not even the Chair — has the authority to send threatening letters demanding private information from employers," said Noreen Farrell, director of Equal Rights Advocates, one of the civil rights organizations that signed onto the response led by the National Women's Law Center. "The EEOC Chair can't just rewrite decades of settled civil rights law with a hastily written memo."

Jenny Yang, a former EEOC commissioner under former President Barack Obama, said Lucas' letters to the 20 law firms were without precedent at the EEOC, which initiates most investigations in response to complaints filed by workers. In very rare cases, a commissioner can file their own charge against an employer but it wouldn't be made public and would require the commissioner to provide evidence of possible discrimination under penalty of perjury, Yang said.

Law firms — including some of the 20 targeted by Lucas — are already coming under pressure to change their approach to diversity and inclusion in response to separate Trump executive orders designed to punish them for taking on the president's rivals as clients and other actions that have angered him. For example, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom recently learned that the president intended to issue an order targeting it over its pro bono legal work and its diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. The firm has consequently agreed to review its hiring practices, among other things.

The 20 law firms targeted in Lucas' letters did not respond to questions from The Associated Press about whether they intended to respond to her demands. Lucas did not respond to request for comment on the DEI technical assistance documents, and the EEOC declined to say whether the law firms have any legal obligation to respond to her letters or whether they would face any penalty for not doing so.

But Lucas, a Republican who was first appointed to the EEOC in 2020, has long argued that she is not reinterpreting civil rights laws but rather sounding the alarm that many companies have adopted DEI practices that cross the line into discrimination. Lucas has argued the EEOC has turned a blind eye to risky company practices, which she said proliferated especially after the 2020 racial justice protests that followed the police killing of George Floyd.

"Far too many employers defend certain types of race or sex preferences as good, provided they are motivated by business interests in 'diversity, equity, or inclusion,'" Lucas said in a statement announcing the new technical assistance on DEI.

Many employers are likely to take heed of her warnings as the EEOC signals that it will become a powerful ally to workers claiming discrimination stemming from DEI practices.

Anuradha Hebbbar, president of CEO Action for Inclusion & Diversity, an arm of the influential Society for Human Resource Management, said the EEOC has especially makes clear that companies should avoid fellowships, internships and other programs that are only open to women or certain racial groups.

Stefan Padfield of conservative think tank National Center for Public Policy Research praised the EEOC's the shift as a much-needed course correction that will open the floodgates for complaints against DEI practices that should be deemed illegal.

Lucas has acknowledged that she cannot unilaterally change some of the agency's guidelines and policies that may contradict Trump's slew of executive orders, though the EEOC has already moved to drop seven lawsuits alleging discrimination against transgender and nonbinary people in response to a presidential

order declaring the government would only recognize the male and female genders.

Changing such policies — including the EEOC's five-year strategic enforcement plan that pledges support for DEI — would require a majority vote by the agency's five commissioners. But Trump recently fired two of those commissioners — both Democrats — before their terms expired in a move that upended 60 years of precedent for an agency established by Congress as independent and bipartisan.

In their letter Thursday, the former EEOC officials accused Lucas of cherry-picking rare instances of discrimination to convey the message that training and other DEI practices are inherently risky when in fact most are legally sound.

"Our federal civil rights offices and officials should not be intimidating or discouraging employers who are working to advance these goals," the letter said.

The delicate dance to preserve the magic of Abbey Road's legendary Studio One

By HILARY FOX Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — In Abbey Road's Studio One, even a lick of paint could ruin everything.

Famous for hosting Adele, Harry Styles and U2, it's where the scores of "Star Wars," "Harry Potter" and "Wicked" were recorded, as well as the soundtracks of blockbuster games like "Call of Duty," "Halo" and "Final Fantasy." It's also where Ryan Gosling delivered his memorable "I'm Just Ken" for "Barbie."

Nearly a century after its opening, Studio One underwent a six-month, multimillion-pound refurbishment, with the main priority being the preservation of one very important thing: the sound.

"What we don't want to do is change the acoustics, so every minute detail in the room has been conserved and preserved, so the sound doesn't shift," said Sally Davies, managing director of Abbey Road Studios.

The reverb of the 4,844-square-foot (450-square-meter) room has been maintained at 2.3 seconds, the same as it was in the 1970s. There's been no redecorating or style makeover, leaving the original Art Deco wall panels untouched.

"We have simply washed down the walls to preserve that sound," said Davies, adding that the floor was re-sanded and oiled, but not varnished. Most of the upgrades, she explained, are technological upgrades in the control room. "This room is just about preserving that magic."

A pilgrimage for music fans

Opened in 1931, this hallowed hall — once a nine-bedroom house on a grand suburban street in London's St. John's Wood neighborhood — became the world's first recording studio. It's where stereo was invented and it's visited every day by music fans from around the world, who are happy just to stand on the street outside.

Davies says that more than a million people a year make a pilgrimage to the crossing outside, many to recreate the cover of The Beatles' "Abbey Road" album — and that number could increase after Sam Mendes' upcoming biopics starring Paul Mescal, Barry Keoghan, Harris Dickinson and Joseph Quinn as the Fab Four.

And while John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr are famously known for using Studio Two, they also made history in the larger Studio One, which they used for the world's first global live performance, a rendition of "All You Need Is Love" beamed to television sets around the world in 1967.

Before The Beatles, Studio One had already cemented its place in music history, when it was opened by British composer Sir Edward Elgar, who recorded his "Land of Hope and Glory" with the London Symphony Orchestra. It's also hosted other music greats like Maria Callas, Igor Stravinsky, Daniel Barenboim, Fats Waller and Glenn Miller.

Due to its huge size, more than double Studio Two, it can fit a 100-piece orchestra and 100-member choir at the same time — which is perfect for recording film soundtracks, and explains why six to seven out of every 10 Hollywood films are scored at Abbey Road, according to the studio.

History being made

Standing on the balcony, overlooking the 40-foot-high (12-meter-high) room, Davies points out the origi-

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nal screen that was used to show "Raiders of the Lost Ark" (1981) while musicians played along to record the soundtrack.

Since then, everything from "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy to Marvel's "Black Panther" and "Guardians of the Galaxy" to "Barbie" were scored in Studio One. For the last, all the musicians came in with something pink, whether a pink instrument or piece of clothing.

Oscar-nominated composer Daniel Pemberton has been recording in Studio One since 2009 and calls his "creative home" a "spectacular space."

"Outside, it just looks like a normal house. And then you come in and you find this space in it that's like almost the size of a football pitch. In fact, I have played football in there once," he laughs.

Pemberton is known for scoring "Spider-Man: Across the Spider Verse," "Ferrari," "The Trial of the Chicago 7" and creating the "Slow Horses" theme song and "Strange Game," with Mick Jagger.

"What's so exciting about a room like Studio One is what happens on the day is what happens for the rest of time," he says. "It's like history is being made, whether it's good history or bad history or whatever, you're making a moment then."

Pemberton notes the stories, whether personal or musical, that have unfolded within the walls of Studio One.

"The ghosts are insane in there," he said.

Davies agrees that the history adds to the enchantment.

"You walk into this room and you can feel it. ... There is a magic in the sound. It sounds phenomenal. There is a spirituality in who has been here, who has performed here," she says. "So when we see artists come through, you know that immediate reaction of, 'Oh my gosh. I'm in Studio One.'"

To celebrate the reopening this week, Abbey Road Studios showcased an unusual art form for the space: dance, which incorporated Pemberton's scores, remixed by resident artist Jordan Rakei and choreographed by Joseph Toonga.

"It kind of like threw me back a bit like, wow, it really is big," said Toonga of the first time he saw the studio. He then incorporated that feeling into a dance which spanned hip-hop, krumping and ballet.

Up next, the first client to record in Studio One since the refurbishment is a hush-hush Hollywood franchise.

But there are lots of secrets at Abbey Road. One of them is Pemberton's plan to record the unique rattling sound of the new railings for a movie soundtrack.

There was concern that the hollow, Art Deco-style bars would upset the acoustics of the room, and a backup plan was made to fill them with sand if they messed with the reverb.

Luckily, the empty bars were allowed to stay because Pemberton is delighted by the noise they make when you run past them with keys — it's another dramatic sound that can only be created in Studio One and will make its way into theaters around the world, via a film score.

Polar bear-inhabited islands affected by Trump tariffs

By ROD MCGUIRK and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — The Trump administration appears to be leaving no stone unturned with its sweeping tariffs around the globe, from rocky outcrops home to polar bears in the Arctic to tiny tropical islands to a former British penal colony whose leader is befuddled that it was targeted.

The American president rattled markets, manufacturers and more Wednesday announcing a baseline of 10% tariffs on imports into the United States — and far higher on goods from some places, notably those with high trade surpluses with the United States.

A few countries like Russia, which is facing U.S. sanctions, and Canada and Mexico — which face separate U.S. tariff measures — were left off. The Holy See, for example, got a pass too from being listed among the dozens of countries and territories targeted by U.S. President Donald Trump.

Here's a look at some target territories that have little to no production, exports or role in the global economy. There was no immediate explanation as to why these places made the cut in a list presented

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on the White House-affiliated "Rapid Response 47" account on the X social media platform.

Jan Mayen

This small Arctic island, possibly featuring more polar bears than people, figures among the more peculiar places on the U.S. target list.

The only inhabitants on Jan Mayen, part of Norway since 1930, are staff of the Norwegian military and the Norwegian Meteorological Institute. The island — 600 kilometers (370 miles) northeast of Iceland — is partly covered by glaciers.

The Norwegian military's main role there is to oversee Norway's claim to sovereignty over the island, it flies C-130 Hercules cargo planes to Jan Mayen about a dozen times a year from Norway.

The planes are able to land only if visibility is good as the airport doesn't have any instrument landing capabilities.

Norway's Foreign and Environment Ministries did not immediately reply to requests for comment Thursday from The Associated Press.

Tokelau

The nation made up of three tropical coral islands and home 1,500 people on a combined land area of 4 square miles (10 sq. km), is also facing 10% U.S. tariffs.

One of the smallest economies in the South Pacific, Tokelau survives on subsistence agriculture, fishing, and finance from New Zealand, which counts the islands as one of its territories.

Roland Rajah, lead economist at the Lowy Institute, an Australian foreign policy think tank, said officials in small island nations would likely struggle to change Washington's mind.

"If those countries didn't get much consideration in terms of what tariffs were imposed on them given their size and obscurity to the Trump administration, that also could make it difficult for them to do anything about negotiating their way out of those tariffs," he said.

Christmas Island

The leader of Christmas Island, which has fewer than 2,000 people, said the Indian Ocean atoll exported nothing to the United States.

"There's no trade between Christmas Island and America except that we do buy mining equipment through Tractors Singapore," said Christmas Island Shire President Gordon Thomson, referring to the regional dealer for the Texas manufacturing giant Caterpillar Inc.

The Australian outpost located 360 kilometers (225 miles) south of the Indonesian capital Jakarta has used U.S. heavy machinery to mine phosphate for decades.

"The trade, if anything, is U.S. product into Christmas Island. The only thing that we export is phosphate and that goes to Malaysia, Indonesia, maybe Thailand and a bit to the Australian mainland," Thomson said.

Heard and McDonald Islands

The Heard and McDonald Islands in the remote Antarctic, which together form another Australian territory — this one uninhabited — is also on the list and subject to 10% tariffs.

The mostly barren islands between Madagascar and Antarctica have two active volcanoes and can only be reached by sea.

Contacted by the AP, the Australian government's Antarctic Division did not immediately respond when asked about how the tariff might affect its operations in the islands.

Norfolk Island

Norfolk Island in the Pacific, another Australian territory with a population of around 2,000 people, received more severe tariff treatment.

The Trump administration, in its calculation, said the former British penal colony charges the United States 58% tariffs — and it responded with a tariff rate of 29% on Norfolk Island, whose economy revolves around tourism. It's about 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) east of Sydney.

Norfolk Island Administrator George Plant, the Australian government's representative on the island, was looking into what was behind it.

"To my knowledge, we do not export anything to the United States," he told the AP. "We don't charge tariffs on anything. I can't think of any non-tariff barriers that would be in place either, so we're scratch-

ing our heads here.”

Speaking to reporters, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese quipped: “I’m not quite sure that Norfolk Island, with respect to it, is a trade competitor with the giant economy of the United States.”

“But that just shows, I think, exemplifies, the fact that nowhere on Earth is exempt from this.”

Trump announces sweeping new tariffs to promote US manufacturing, risking inflation and trade wars

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump announced far-reaching new tariffs on nearly all U.S. trading partners — a 34% tax on imports from China and 20% on the European Union, among others — that threaten to dismantle much of the architecture of the global economy and trigger broader trade wars.

Trump, in a Rose Garden announcement on Wednesday, said he was placing elevated tariff rates on dozens of nations that run meaningful trade surpluses with the United States, while imposing a 10% baseline tax on imports from all countries in response to what he called an economic emergency.

The president, who said the tariffs were designed to boost domestic manufacturing, used aggressive rhetoric to describe a global trade system that the United States helped to build after World War II, saying “our country has been looted, pillaged, raped and plundered” by other nations.

The action amounts to a historic tax hike that could push the global order to a breaking point. It kickstarts what could be a painful transition for many Americans as middle-class essentials such as housing, autos and clothing are expected to become more costly, while disrupting the alliances built to ensure peace and economic stability.

Trump said he was acting to bring in hundreds of billions in new revenue to the U.S. government and restore fairness to global trade.

“Taxpayers have been ripped off for more than 50 years,” he said. “But it is not going to happen anymore.”

Trump declared a national economic emergency to levy the tariffs. He has promised that factory jobs will return to the United States as a result of the taxes, but his policies risk a sudden economic slowdown as consumers and businesses could face sharp price hikes.

Trump was fulfilling a key campaign promise as he imposed what he called “reciprocal” tariffs on trade partners, acting without Congress under the 1977 International Emergency Powers Act. But his action Wednesday could jeopardize Trump’s voter mandate in last year’s election to combat inflation. Several Republican senators, particularly from farm and border states, have questioned the wisdom of the tariffs. U.S. stock market futures sold off sharply overnight in anticipation of the economy weakening, after having already dropped since the start of this year.

“With today’s announcement, U.S. tariffs will approach levels not seen since the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930, which incited a global trade war and deepened the Great Depression,” said Scott Lincicome and Colin Grabow of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

The president’s higher rates would hit foreign entities that sell more goods to the United States than they buy. The administration essentially calculated its tariff rates to raise revenues equal in size to the trade imbalances with those nations. Trump then halved that rate in an act that he described as “very kind.”

The White House says the tariffs and other trade imbalances led to an \$1.2 trillion imbalance last year. Administration officials suggested it could take an extended set of actions by other countries to bring down the new tariffs their imports now face, and retaliatory tariffs by those countries could make the situation worse.

Olu Sonola, head of U.S. economic research at Fitch Ratings, said the average tariff rate charged by the United States would increase to roughly 22% from 2.5% in 2024.

“Many countries will likely end up in a recession,” Sonola said. “You can throw most forecasts out the door, if this tariff rate stays on for an extended period of time.”

The new tariffs will come on top of recent announcements of 25% taxes on auto imports; levies against

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China, Canada and Mexico; and expanded trade penalties on steel and aluminum. Trump has also imposed tariffs on countries that import oil from Venezuela and he plans separate import taxes on pharmaceutical drugs, lumber, copper and computer chips.

Canada and Mexico would not face higher rates on what they're already being charged by Trump in what he says is an effort to stop illegal immigration and drug smuggling. As of now, goods that comply with the USMCA North American trade pact would be excluded from those tariffs.

But the 20% charged on imports from China due to its role in fentanyl production would largely be added to the 34% announced by Trump. The specific products that Trump is tariffing, such as autos, would be exempt from the tariffs unveiled Wednesday, as would products such as pharmaceutical drugs that he plans to tariff at a later date.

Threats of backlash

None of the warning signs about a falling stock market or consumer sentiment turning morose have caused the administration to publicly second-guess its strategy, despite the risk of political backlash.

Senior administration officials, who insisted on anonymity to preview the new tariffs with reporters ahead of Trump's speech, said the taxes would raise hundreds of billions of dollars annually in revenues. They said the 10% baseline rate existed to help ensure compliance, while the higher rates were based on the trade deficits run with other nations and then halved to reach the numbers that Trump presented in the Rose Garden.

The 10% rate would be collected starting Saturday and the higher rates would be collected beginning April 9.

Trump removed the tariff exemptions on imports from China worth \$800 or less. He plans to remove the exemptions other nations have on imports worth \$800 or less once the federal government certifies that it has the staffing and resources in place.

Based on the possibility of broad tariffs that have been floated by some White House aides, most outside analyses by banks and think tanks see an economy tarnished by higher prices and stagnating growth.

Trump would be applying these tariffs on his own; he has ways of doing so without congressional approval. That makes it easy for Democratic lawmakers and policymakers to criticize the administration if the uncertainty expressed by businesses and declining consumer sentiment are signs of trouble to come.

Rep. Suzan DelBene, D-Wash., said the tariffs are "part of the chaos and dysfunction" being generated across the Trump administration. The chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee stressed that Trump should not have the sole authority to raise taxes as he intends without getting lawmakers' approval, saying that Republicans so far have been "blindly loyal."

"The president shouldn't be able to do that," DelBene said. "This is a massive tax increase on American families, and it's without a vote in Congress. ... President Trump promised on the campaign trail that he would lower costs on day one. Now he says he doesn't care if prices go up — he's broken his promise."

Even Republicans who trust Trump's instincts have acknowledged that the tariffs could disrupt an economy with an otherwise healthy 4.1 % unemployment rate.

"We'll see how it all develops," said House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La. "It may be rocky in the beginning. But I think that this will make sense for Americans and help all Americans."

Allies brace themselves

Longtime trading partners are preparing their own countermeasures. Canada has imposed some in response to the tariffs that Trump tied to the trafficking of fentanyl. The European Union, in response to the steel and aluminum tariffs, put taxes on 26 billion euros (\$28 billion) worth of U.S. goods, including on bourbon, which prompted Trump to threaten a 200% tariff on European alcohol.

Many allies feel they have been reluctantly drawn into a confrontation by Trump, who routinely says America's friends and foes have essentially ripped off the United States with a mix of tariffs and other trade barriers.

The flip side is that Americans also have the incomes to choose to buy designer gowns by French fashion houses and autos from German manufacturers, whereas World Bank data show the EU has lower incomes

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per capita than the U.S.

The Chinese government delivered a measured response to the new tariffs, saying in a statement: "China believes that protectionism leads nowhere, and trade and tariff wars have no winners. This has been widely recognized in the international community."

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said Trump's new tariffs would "fundamentally change the international trading system." He noted that the tariffs already in place against his country and those Trump says he plans to add will be fought with countermeasures.

"In a crisis, it's important to come together and it's essential to act with purpose and with force and that's what we will do," Carney said.

Italy's conservative Premier Giorgia Meloni said Trump's new tariffs against the EU were "wrong" and Italy would work toward an agreement with the United States to avoid a trade war that would weaken all involved.

Basic Fun CEO Jay Foreman, whose company is behind such classic toys as Tonka trucks, Lincoln Logs and Care Bears, has been working hard to come up with new ways to cut tariff-related costs like reduce packaging and eliminate batteries with the products.

But Trump's announcement that he plans a 34% increase in tariffs on Chinese imports has solidified his decision to hike prices. Most of the company's toys are made in China. He said the Tonka Mighty Dump Truck will go from \$29.99 to \$39.99 this holiday season, possibly even \$45.

"There is no other way," he said.

Today in History: April 4

Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated in Memphis

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, April 4, the 94th day of 2025. There are 271 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On April 4, 1968, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., 39, was shot and killed while standing on a balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. King's death triggered a wave of unrest in cities across the United States that killed 43 people and injured more than 3,000.

Also on this date:

In 1841, President William Henry Harrison succumbed to pneumonia one month after his inauguration, becoming the first U.S. chief executive to die in office; Harrison's vice president, John Tyler, was sworn in as president two days later.

In 1949, 12 nations, including the United States, signed the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington, D.C., establishing NATO.

In 1973, the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center were officially dedicated.

In 1975, Bill Gates and Paul Allen founded Microsoft in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

In 1991, Sen. John Heinz, R-Pa., and six other people, including two children, were killed when a helicopter collided with Heinz's plane over a schoolyard in Merion, Pennsylvania.

In 2012, a federal judge sentenced five former New Orleans police officers to prison for the deadly Danziger Bridge shootings in the chaotic days following Hurricane Katrina. (The verdicts in the case were later set aside by the judge, who cited prosecutorial misconduct; the officers pleaded guilty in 2016 to reduced charges.)

In 2015, in North Charleston, South Carolina, Walter Scott, a 50-year-old Black motorist, was shot to death while running away from a traffic stop; Officer Michael Thomas Slager, seen in a cellphone video opening fire at Scott, was charged with murder. (The charge, which lingered after a first state trial ended in a mistrial, was dropped as part of a deal under which Slager pleaded guilty to a federal civil rights violation; he was sentenced to 20 years in prison.)

In 2023, Prosecutors in New York unsealed a historic 34-count felony indictment of Donald Trump, al-

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leging that he conspired to illegally influence the 2016 election through a series of hush money payments designed to stifle claims that could be harmful to his candidacy. Trump became the first former U.S. president to face criminal charges. (He would be found guilty on all counts the following month.)

Today's Birthdays: Recording executive Clive Davis is 93. Golf Hall of Famer JoAnne Carner is 86. Actor Craig T. Nelson is 81. Actor Christine Lahti is 75. Football Hall of Famer John Hannah is 74. TV writer-producer David E. Kelley is 69. Actor Hugo Weaving is 64. TV host-comic Graham Norton is 62. Actor David Cross is 61. Actor Robert Downey Jr. is 60. Singer Jill Scott is 53. Magician David Blaine is 52. Baseball Hall of Famer Scott Rolen is 50. Hockey Hall of Famer Roberto Luongo is 46. Actor Natasha Lyonne is 46. Actor-comedian Eric André is 42. Actor-singer Jamie Lynn Spears is 34.