

Groton Daily Independent

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The Groton Transit Bus will be going to Madison on Sunday, April 27 for baseball games.

For more information contact the Transit at 605-397-8661.

Saturday, April 19

Sunday, April 20

EASTER

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 7 a.m.; Breakfast by league; Worship with communion, 9:30 a.m.; 1st communion for fifth graders.

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; No Sunday School; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.

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.

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



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

Groton CM&A: Easter Breakfast, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 10:30 a.m. (No Sunday School)

St. John's Lutheran: Sunrise service at St. John's, 7 a.m.; Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m.; and at Zion, 11 a.m.; No Sunday School.

Monday, April 21

Senior Menu: Chicken and rice casserole, broccoli, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.

NO SCHOOL - Easter Break

Groton Senior Citizens Meet, 1 p.m., Groton Community Center

Baseball at Miller, Varsity at 6 p.m.; JV at 8 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 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.

Credit Card Megamerger

US banking regulators have approved Capital One's \$35B acquisition of Discover Financial, clearing the last major hurdles for a deal that will create America's largest credit-card issuer by total loan volume (roughly \$250B). The combined entity will also account for approximately 22% of the US credit card market. The deal is expected to close next month.

The Federal Reserve and the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency concluded the merger would not significantly harm competition. Their reasoning included that the combined entity wouldn't jeopardize the convenience and needs of the communities either of the banks serve. However, the approval comes with certain conditions: Capital One must address ongoing enforcement issues at Discover. In addition to approving the deal, the Fed fined Discover \$100M for overcharging merchants certain fees between 2007 and 2023. Similarly, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. asked Discover to pay \$1.2B in restitution and a \$150M civil penalty.

The merger also gives Capital One access to Discover's credit card payment network. Currently, Visa and Mastercard are America's largest credit card payment networks, with American Express in third place ahead of Discover.

Deadly US airstrike on Yemeni oil port kills more than 70 people.

A US airstrike targeted the Houthi-controlled oil terminal in Yemen in an escalation aimed at cutting off a key source of fuel and revenue for the Iran-backed Houthis, who have been attacking ships in the Red Sea. The incident is one of the deadliest since the Trump administration began a bombing campaign in March and coincides with upcoming US-Iran nuclear talks.

Victims identified in Florida State University shooting.

The two men killed in Thursday's shooting at FSU's Tallahassee campus were identified as campus dining coordinator Robert Morales and Tiru Chabba, an executive for campus vendor Aramark. New details also emerged about the shooter, who was initially described by police as the son of a veteran Leon County sheriff's deputy; however, court documents say he is the sheriff's deputy's stepson. Records also show the 20-year-old shooter changed his name after his parents' custody battle.

National Archives releases 10,000 documents on RFK assassination.

The trove of records relates to the 1968 assassination of Robert F. Kennedy, fulfilling an order made by President Donald Trump to declassify national records on the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The release includes roughly 229 files, some of which had not been digitized and were in storage for decades.

Federal judge pauses US plans for mass layoffs at consumer bureau.

The federal judge temporarily blocked the Trump administration from laying off about 90% of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's staff in order to consider whether such layoffs could violate a previous court order intended to preserve the agency's operations and determine compliance with the law. The layoffs could affect up to 1,500 employees.

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Genomic analysis finds all roses were once yellow.

Roses of all colors, such as white, red, pink, and peach, belong to the genus *Rosa* in the Rosaceae family. Reconstructing the ancestral traits through genomic analysis of 205 samples of over 80 different *Rosa* species revealed that all roses trace back to a common ancestor—a yellow, single-petal flower with seven leaflets.

Rare “Star Wars”-like planet orbits twin stars outside solar system.

Astronomers using the European Southern Observatory’s Very Large Telescope have discovered an exoplanet, named 2M1510 (AB) b, orbiting at a 90-degree angle around a rare pair of brown dwarfs, also known as failed stars. The finding is the first confirmed case of a “polar planet” and reveals how a planet’s gravity can influence the orbits of two stars in what researchers describe as a celestial dance.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we’re sharing a story from readers Sandi and Dave R. in Oregon.

“Today, just after we checked out at the grocery store, as I was putting away my receipt before heading to our car, a young man walked up to me and handed me a bouquet of flowers with instructions to give them to my wife. ‘She deserves them,’ he said. What a kind thing to do! We did not recognize him as anyone we know. Just someone being thoughtful. Then, on the way out, as she was carrying the bouquet, two other men said to her, ‘I hope you didn’t buy those for yourself.’ She responded, ‘No, a nice young man gave them to me, and I don’t even know who he was.’ They responded, ‘That’s wonderful, have a great day.’”

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Newsweek

The
Bulletin

YOUR DAILY BRIEFING OF
EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

WORLD IN BRIEF

Houthi claim attack on US aircraft carrier: The Iran-backed Houthi group in Yemen claimed an attack on two U.S. aircraft carriers based in the Middle East, including the recently deployed USS Carl Vinson.

China-Taiwan tensions: Beijing's pressure campaign on Taipei continues, with fresh points of diplomatic friction emerging this week.

Travel warning for journalists entering the US: The Committee to Protect Journalists has advised journalists traveling to the United States to take special precautions, citing growing concerns over potential new travel restrictions and increased scrutiny at U.S. borders under President Trump's administration.

Gun age law in Florida: Florida Republican lawmakers are continuing to push for a repeal of a gun safety law passed in the state after the Parkland massacre in 2018, despite mass shootings still occurring in the United States.

IRS chief axed: The acting head of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) was replaced after Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent complained to President Trump that he was installed by billionaire SpaceX CEO Elon Musk.

Trump Could Struggle to Force Europe's Hand on China

As relations between the U.S. and China deteriorate, the European Union risks becoming caught in the crosshairs.

And any attempt by President Donald Trump to force the EU to choose between the two countries is unlikely to succeed, experts told Newsweek.

Trump initially went for a wide-ranging tariff hike on all trading partners, with China hit hardest. He would pause the majority of what he called "reciprocal" tariffs, including the 20 percent targeting the EU, while still maintaining the baseline 10 percent on all countries. But with China, he would engage in tit-for-tat rises with President Xi Jinping, which have culminated to 245 percent on most Chinese goods.

TL/DR: "China seems willing to sell U.S. treasuries, even if it means absorbing capital losses," Olivier Blanchard, the Robert M. Solow Professor of Economics emeritus at MIT, wrote in a post on X on April 10.

What happens now? For China, a sudden sell-off of U.S. Treasuries would also be extremely costly, increasing the value of its currency and, thus, the cost of Chinese exports even further. Meanwhile, the only keys to the exit door from this trade war "are in President Trump's desk drawer," said Steve H. Hanke, who served on President Ronald Reagan's Council of Economic Advisers.

Toby Erickson Celebration

Celebration of life for Toby Erickson at Olive Grove Golf Course Clubhouse, Groton, SD

Saturday, April 19 from 1-4 PM.

Come prepared to share stories, laugh and reminisce with Toby's family.

Groton Citywide 2025 Spring Cleanup

April 28-May 2

**ALL ITEMS NEED TO BE DROPPED OFF
BEFORE 10AM ON 5/2/25!!**



Bring anything you wish to dispose of to the City Shop-10 E Railroad Ave starting April 28th.

Please place items in the appropriate pile.

RESIDENTIAL ONLY!!

Keep Metal, Tires, Paint, Batteries & Chemicals Separate

Pickup can be arranged for
Monday, April 28th to Friday, May 2nd ENDING AT 10AM
by calling City Hall 605-397-8422.

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Scooter for Sale

For sale a Kymco scooter super 8 for sale. In good shape. Asking \$1,000 for it. Contact Tina at 605-397-7285. Cash only



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

Cow basket - \$20



Rainbow basket - \$25



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

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

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Pink basket - \$20



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



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

South Dakota turned to paraprofessionals to attack a teacher shortage, and hundreds responded

'I want to reach as many students as I can,' says one of program's first graduates

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - APRIL 18, 2025 3:03 PM

Jaimie Bartmann planned to quit her job in education.

She loved being a paraprofessional in the Montrose School District in southeastern South Dakota, but after nine years assisting teachers and students, she wanted to make a bigger impact.

"I felt limited," Bartmann said. "A family trusts you with their child — whether you're a paraprofessional or a teacher. But as a 'para,' you only assist them. I couldn't make suggestions or make changes I thought would help them."

A day after she made up her mind, but before she submitted her resignation, her district emailed her with an opportunity: the South Dakota Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway.

The 3-year-old state program allows full-time paraprofessionals to pursue a teaching degree

online through Dakota State University in elementary or special education, or through Northern State University in secondary education at a steep discount while retaining their position.

The program's mission is filling teaching vacancies in school districts across the state, which have worsened in recent years. More than 350 positions were unfilled in July 2024, weeks before the school year started, according to the Associated School Boards of South Dakota. There were 256 the same time in 2023, 225 in 2022 and 174 in 2021.

South Dakota Department of Education Secretary Joe Graves is optimistic that the apprenticeship program will help.

"I'm hoping this year, because we've already graduated seven out of the program and believe we might be able to see another 56 to 60 graduate this spring, that would take a large whack out of the shortage," Graves said.

All seven graduates, including Bartmann, are working in classrooms as teachers or have contracts to begin teaching in a South Dakota school district in the fall.



Jaimie Bartman, a special education teacher for the Canistota School District, poses for a photo in her classroom on April 4, 2025. (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

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The program does not contractually require graduates to stay in the teaching profession or in South Dakota. The assumption is that paraprofessionals who've worked in the profession for years care about the children in their school, and have built their lives in the community where they work.

"The solution was to identify a group of people who otherwise wouldn't get into the profession who belong in it," Graves said.

The state Department of Education accepted Bartmann in its first cohort of 90 participants in 2023. Another 70 enrolled in the 2024 cohort. Up to 50 more will enroll in the next cohort this year.

Bartmann moved from the Montrose School District to the nearby Canistota School District in the fall to teach special education for fifth through seventh graders. She taught her students under an advanced teaching certificate before earning her degree in December.

Now she teaches 18 children. She works with two other special education teachers at the elementary and high school levels, and nine paraprofessionals.

Her background is a strength, since "paras are the heart" of special education. She knows the challenges paras face, and listens to them because she understands they see a different side of a student.

"I'm passionate about making sure that I'm fully taking care of a student emotionally and socially, while making sure I see them academically," Bartmann said.

Graves, with the state Education Department, said the future of the program is uncertain. It was originally intended as a one-time effort, using \$815,000 in federal funds and about \$446,000 in state funds.

The program launched its second cohort under the state Department of Labor and Regulation in 2024 due to demand after the Legislature appropriated \$800,000 of state funds for the program. The second cohort cost another \$410,000 in funding from the department and \$9,000 from the federal government.

A spokeswoman for the state Department of Labor and Regulation said the third cohort will be funded with a combination of federal and state grants, though she said the exact amounts will be determined after the apprentices start their coursework. The federal funding will come from the U.S. Department of Labor's Apprenticeship Building America grant. School districts pay \$1,000 a year per employed apprentice.

If federal funding is cut, Graves said, the program would end or universities might take it over. The department lost \$58,178 in funds last month intended for the program, after the federal Department of Education dissolved approved extensions of COVID relief funding. South Dakota lost more than \$5 million intended for several education programs.

Graves questions whether the program should continue indefinitely, saying it could be abused to avoid a traditional, more expensive college education.

Students are responsible for up to \$1,000 a year in tuition, books and state assessments. Bartmann completed 81 credits of classes within 15 months, costing her a total of \$1,500. Sometimes she took more than a full course load in a semester while working full time and raising one of her four children who's still at home.

"I'd go to school, come home, stay up until 2 a.m. studying and doing homework, sleep until 6 a.m. and then go back to work," Bartmann said. "Weekends were focused on studying to get done faster."

Instead of discontinuing the program entirely, she wonders if it could be limited to paraprofessionals who've been in the field for a few years. Experienced paras would be less likely to use the pathway as an alternative to the traditional college courses, she said, and the people who would apply would be committed, yet could be financially limited and likely to have obligations — such as children — that might prevent them from pursuing a traditional degree.

Less than four months after earning her degree, Bartmann is already considering earning another degree or certification to improve her teaching. After most workdays, she walks through the school hallways, looking at the colorful student artwork on display and feeling grateful for the new life breathed into her career.

At 46, she has colleagues her age who've been teaching for two decades and are planning ahead for retirement.

"I have to pack all those years of experience and impact they made into the years I've got left," Bartmann said. "I want to reach as many students as I can."

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State efforts to address South Dakota's teacher shortage

Aside from the Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway, the state Department of Education and school districts have made other investments to alleviate the teacher shortage in the state, according to Secretary Joe Graves.

Paying student teachers and making them the teacher of record

South Dakota lawmakers and the governor approved \$500,000 for the creation of a statewide student-teacher stipend program this session. The state Department of Education can use the money to provide grants of up to \$5,000 per school district, for payment to one or more student-teachers. The program is intended to keep South Dakota school districts competitive with other states.

"Where you begin your teaching profession is often where you continue it," Graves said.

School districts can also establish student teachers as the "teacher of record," meaning the student is the main teacher for a classroom, developing lesson plans and instructing students. If a student teacher becomes the "teacher of record," a district is required to pay them, Graves said. Student teachers who are paid and regarded as an official teacher of record, he added, are more likely to commit to the district after they graduate, Graves said.

Employing international teachers

School districts across the state are increasingly employing teachers from different countries under working visas. The state Department of Education offers an International Exchange Teacher Permit. About 50 public school districts had international teachers on staff in 2024, according to the department.

Setting a minimum teacher salary and mandating annual increased compensation

The department was a major player in passing legislation in 2024 requiring school districts to meet a minimum teacher salary and increase teacher compensation yearly based on increased funding in state aid.

"We saw immediately that a bunch of school districts moved their minimum teacher salary up, even though the requirement is not going into effect until next year," Graves said.

Mentoring new teachers

The state department's mentoring program connects a veteran educator to a new teacher to help guide them through challenges in their first few years of the profession. The first five years is "really the test," Graves said. When new teachers are mentored, there's a 15% increased chance they'll stay within the profession.

Supporting a high school teaching career interest

Educators Rising is a career interest group working to entice high school students to become South Dakota educators. The group holds a "sign up day" similar to athletes for high school members dedicated to earning their teaching degree. The South Dakota Board of Regents approved a program last year to give high school students a jump-start toward their teaching degree by taking career-specific dual credit courses that will count toward a college degree and high school graduation.

Streamlining state reciprocity

Graves said the department has worked to streamline the teacher certification reciprocity process, getting out-of-state teachers employed at local school districts more quickly.

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.

South Dakota leads U.S. hemp industry, though USDA report shows Texas rapidly gaining ground

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - APRIL 18, 2025 11:57 AM

South Dakota continued to expand its industrial hemp footprint in 2024 as Texas quickly gained ground, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Hemp Report.

As defined in the 2018 Farm Bill, the term "hemp" is a cannabis plant with a no more than 0.3% concentration of the chemical that results in a high, known as THC.

According to the report, which was released on Thursday, South Dakota farmers planted 3,900 acres of hemp – a 22% increase from 2023. They harvested 3,700 acres, up 27.6%. Most of that growth came from hemp grown for fiber, a product for which South Dakota reigns as the nation's top supplier.

Texas farmers planted 4,900 acres, a 1,860% increase from last year. Only 1,500 acres of that was harvested, though.

Former Democratic state lawmaker Oren Lesmeister, a rancher from Parade, championed the bills that created South Dakota's hemp industry. He now serves on the South Dakota Industrial Hemp Association's board of directors. He said Texas' numbers mean little if farmers do not have a place to process their hemp.

"We're kicking a– and taking names when it comes to production and processing," Lesmeister said.

South Dakota leads the nation in hemp processing and the production of hemp fiber, according to the report.

There were 13.6 million pounds of hemp harvested for fiber in South Dakota last year. That's a 14% decrease, even as the number of acres harvested, 3,550, increased by 22%. Every harvested pound was processed, according to the report. About 23% of the 59 million pounds of hemp processed in the U.S. was processed in South Dakota.

The mismatch between pounds harvested and acres planted is the result of lower per-acre yields for farmers. The average yield in the state dropped sharply by 30% in 2024, to 3,840 pounds per acre. Despite that, the value of South Dakota's fiber hemp climbed to \$3.54 million, a 50% year-over-year increase, buoyed by a 73% rise in price per pound.

Governor Larry Rhoden trumpeted the news in a statement sent to South Dakota Searchlight. He said rules and regulations that the USDA has implemented in recent years have allowed for the hemp industry to thrive in South Dakota "while ensuring the health and public safety of our residents."

"Ag is king in South Dakota, and we are encouraged that our fiber-focused hemp industry continues to lead the nation," he said.



Hemp plant (NRCS photo, Brandon O'Connor)

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.

COMMENTARY

Elected Christians partake in persecuting fellow Christians through mass deportations

by Brad Johnson

The Bible says pain and agony engulfed Jesus Christ in the final hours before his death, while fear of the future gripped his followers.

Fear once again is prevalent in churches as Christians gather for Easter. This time it is because "roughly one in 12 Christians in the United States are vulnerable to deportation or live with a family member who could be deported."

That's according to a new report, "One Part of the Body: The Potential Impact of Deportations on American Christian Families," published by a coalition of Christian organizations.

"Many American Christians, we suspect, have not realized that among immigrants at risk of deportation, the vast majority — four out of five — are fellow Christians," the report's introductory letter said.

The report's purpose "is to invite American Christians — within our congregations and within the halls of governmental power — to recognize that, if even a fraction of those vulnerable to deportation are actually deported, the ramifications are profound — for those individuals, of course, but also for their U.S.-citizen family members and, because when one part of the body suffers, every part suffers with it, for all Christians."

Four South Dakotans with government power who could make a difference are U.S. Senators John Thune and Mike Rounds, U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson and U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem.

Government action, or inaction as the case may be, is the source of great distress in churches today.

"There is just a strong emphasis on fear," among parishioners, said The Very Rev. Kristopher Cowles, vicar for Hispanic ministry in the Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls. He also serves Our Lady of Guadalupe church in Sioux Falls.

"They don't know from day to day what is going to happen."



Migrants wait throughout the night on May 10, 2023, in a dust storm at Gate 42, on land between the Rio Grande and the border wall, hoping they will be processed by immigration authorities. (Corrie Boudreaux for Source NM)

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Cowles is featured prominently in the report, which said that "80 percent of all of those at risk of deportation are Christians. Sixty-one percent of those at risk of deportation are Catholic, 13 percent are evangelical and 7 percent are adherents to other Christian traditions."

The report notes that President Donald Trump said during his campaign there were as many as 20 million deportable immigrants present in the U.S. How many will be targeted for deportation is unknown.

Noem, who said in a 2021 Newsmax interview that "our faith is everything — we love the Lord," has been the tip of the spear in deporting immigrants.

The report quoted Cowles saying government policies often cause the problem. "So many of our laws make it nearly impossible to have a course forward even if they want to do so legally," he said of immigrants.

He wished there was more empathy among elected leaders.

"I wish lawmakers would understand the sacrifices that so many people have gone through, and what so many of them are running from," he said in the report. "Some are just looking for a better life and some are looking to just survive."

Most people, the report said, want violent criminals and those with final orders of deportation to be the priority for immigration enforcement. But they don't want blanket deportation.

Reforming the immigration system must be a priority. Congress, which largely created this humanitarian problem, has the power to solve it.

Thune, Rounds and Johnson all say religion is central to their lives.

Thune has said his faith in Christ is "the foundation for pretty much everything I do."

Rounds, in an interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network, reflected on faith and his job. "I think part of it goes back to asking for wisdom and asking for the ability and the help to do what's right, to make the right decisions. A lot of decisions are not black and white. It's a matter of making the right decision long term. That saves lives. I think that's something that all of us as Christians should be doing."

Johnson has said "faith, family and freedom are pillars of our nation."

Given their faith, and their powerful political positions and ability to influence this issue, they should not sit on the sidelines. It shouldn't be that hard to sway Congress when 87% of voting members say they are Christians.

Cowles reminded everyone that Jesus was an immigrant. "He made his way from Galilee and Judea into Egypt to flee the persecution of Herod."

He pointed to the Catholic Church's position on immigration. It says people have a right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families. It acknowledges that a country has a right to regulate its borders but that it should regulate them with "justice and mercy."

"That is the issue we are running into right now," he said.

Cowles added that Jesus "would stand with the immigrants because he understands the persecution of people."

As Christians gather in churches this week and gaze at the image of Christ nailed to the cross, the authors of the "One Part of the Body" report have one wish.

"We hope that you will prayerfully ask the Lord what part you should play at a time when so many of your brothers and sisters are fearful of the impacts of deportation."

Brad Johnson is a certified general real estate appraiser and longtime journalist. He is past president of South Dakota Lakes and Streams Association, president of the South Dakota Wildlife Federation, a member of the National Wildlife Federation's board of directors, and served 16 years on the South Dakota Board of Water and Natural Resources. He lives in Rapid City and Watertown.

With AI at their disposal, financial scammers are on the rise

BY: PAIGE GROSS - APRIL 18, 2025 4:03 PM

It started with a seemingly routine reminder for Nancy Hall to update her Norton antivirus software.

The 69-year-old Philadelphia resident sat down at her laptop to file her taxes recently and was prompted to call a number that was said to be the software company's customer support. She had been hacked, the message said.

"It said, 'you must call Microsoft right away, or else, you're in danger of losing everything,'" Hall said.

A man on the line claimed to be in talks with her bank, saying hackers managed to download child pornography to her computer and transfer \$18,000 to Russian accounts overnight.

He told Hall he was transferring her to the fraud department at her bank, where she spoke to someone who knew details about her local branch.

After verifying personal details, that person asked her to come in to make a cash withdrawal that she could then use to purchase cryptocurrency at a specific ATM.

The pair told her she was at threat of being arrested by Homeland Security for what was found on her laptop unless she obliged.

After a few stressful hours of trying to sort out the situation, something clicked, Hall said — a friend was scammed out of \$800,000 in retirement savings last year after being persuaded to purchase cryptocurrency in an emergency. Hall hung up the phone, then blocked the number when it continually called her back.

Financial crimes, or scams like these, have always been around, experts say. But the rise of artificial intelligence, access to sensitive information on the dark web, and a lack of federal oversight for these crimes means it's never been easier to be a scammer, security experts say.

"AI has made these things so believable," said Melissa O'Leary, a Portland, Maine-based partner and chief strategy officer at cybersecurity firm Fortalice Solutions. "Sometimes you can't tell, 'is this legitimate or not?'"

Hall's experience mirrors many of the thousands of well-established attempts at tech-enabled financial crimes currently underway in the U.S. Scammers often pose as trusted corporations, government departments or as someone a victim knows. Many companies that have been spoofed, like Norton, put out warnings about these scams.

They also use heightened emotional responses and a sense of urgency to get you to transfer money or release personal details, cybersecurity experts say.

"Now I look back on it, I'm like, 'how was I so stupid to say stay on the line that long?'" Hall said. "But then I look at this girl I know, and they managed to get her to go all the way."



Technology is making it easier to pull off financial crimes, and the U.S. is lacking a central agency to track them, experts say. (Getty Images)

The business of scamming

The Federal Trade Commission reported the overall loss Americans experienced via financial scams in the

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2023-2024 fiscal year to be between \$23.7 billion and \$158.3 billion. The figures differ so much because so many losses go under or unreported, the FTC said in the report.

Matthew Radolec, D.C.-based vice president of Incident Response and Cloud Operations at data security firm Varonis, said he sees these phishing attempts in two parts; the scam is the technique being used to get access to money, and the actual crime itself is the loss of the money.

Because these crimes are digital, it's hard to know who to report them to, or how to follow up. Many scammers also ask for cryptocurrency payments, or transfer them to crypto accounts shortly after the transaction.

"There's no insurance for accidentally wiring someone \$10,000," Radolec said. "If you fall for a ruse, you fall for a ruse. It's like a carnival trick, a sleight of hand. It's a digital form of that."

Kimberly Sutherland, the Alpharetta, Georgia-based vice president of fraud and identity at LexisNexis Risk Solutions, said they've seen a 20% year-over-year increase in digital fraud since 2021, affecting as much as 1.5% of all transactions, though many of those attempts are caught before they can go through.

A large part of their efforts are focused on monitoring new account openings and payments, as fraudsters want to either create a fraudulent account at the start, or they want to be able to intercept transactions as they're happening, Sutherland said. They've also had to evolve their monitoring strategies, as over the last few years, there's been a shift from laptop and desktop targeting to mobile attacks, she said.

A few decades ago, scammers were focused on getting enough information from a company or individual to pull off a fake transaction. But as data breaches have become more common, the personal data unearthed makes it easier to pose as someone a victim knows, or give them details to become trustworthy.

Sutherland said the concept of synthetic identities — carefully crafted digital profiles of someone who doesn't actually exist — have also deepened criminal's abilities to get access inside of a variety of institutions like banks, colleges and corporations.

"You don't have to steal an identity of someone; why not create a brand new one?" Sutherland said. "It started with jokes like, 'I can get a credit card in the name of my dog,' and it became sophisticated fraud rings who could actually create identities and nurture them to be used by others."

Individuals and companies are not the only ones at risk of financial scams — government institutions have reported an increase in financial crimes in recent years. In California, community colleges have reported at least \$5 million in losses to AI-simulated students who applied for financial aid.

One of the most current, wide-spread scams are texts and alerts from toll payment agency E-ZPass, asking a user to pay an outstanding bill at the included link. Last year, E-ZPass said the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center had received more than 2,000 complaints about the texts. Those who had filled out the included form should contact their banks, the company said.

It's similar to a longstanding scam posing as UPS trying to deliver a package — it plays on our human nature of trust and curiosity, O'Leary said.

How AI is playing a role

AI has lowered the barrier for setting up a scam, O'Leary said. Those looking to lure someone to wire money or purchase cryptocurrency need some space on a server or in the cloud, and some sort of infrastructure to reach out to victims. Many programs that can be used to fake a persona, to send out mass text messages or phishing links are as easy as downloading an app.

"It's almost a step by step for someone who wants to make a quick buck," O'Leary said.

Large language models and AI chatbots can easily be prompted to sound like someone else, and give non-English speakers a much easier ability to communicate, O'Leary said.

Radolec has seen an uptick in AI bots being used to gain credentials to company databases or pay systems. Bots can hold legitimate conversations with a target to build rapport, and plant phishing scams to gain passwords in standard documents.

"The next thing you know, you can log in as me," Radolec said.

From there, scammers can divert paychecks to offshore accounts, sell data on the dark web or plant

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further phishing attempts in internal systems.

Because of the rapid advancements in AI technologies, phishing attempts and scam strategies are constantly changing. Now, AI tools can help alter legitimate images, and create deepfakes, or likenesses of someone's image or voice, in just a few minutes. It's the strategy behind an increasingly common scam on grandparents — they get a call from someone that sounds exactly like their grandchild, saying they need a wire transfer or cash for bail.

Many digital scams target older people, both because they're expected to have less technical knowledge to spot a ruse, and because they tend to have larger sums of money accessible, Radolec said. In its report, the FTC estimated between \$7.1 billion and \$61.5 billion in losses for older adults.

This week, AARP, Amazon, Google and Walmart partnered on a new initiative that will be based out of Pittsburgh, called the National Elder Fraud Coordination Center, an attempt to tap in private companies who have resources in data privacy to assist in national law enforcement investigations. Its founder and CEO, former FBI agent Brady Finta, said that the technical side of these crimes are often partnered with an emotional side, like pretending to be a family member in trouble.

"They're talking you through the crime," Finta said. "They're adding this anxiety and thought process to you and to overcome your normal decision making processes."

Legislation and enforcement

There are hundreds of thousands of victims of financial scams each year, and they're reporting them to different places — local police, state organizations, federal agencies, and the tech platforms where the crimes occurred, Finta said. Part of the reason some financial scams go unreported is that there's not one clear route, government agency or law enforcement agency that has ownership over them.

That was also the consensus of a new report by the Government Accountability Office, FedScoop reported this month. There are 13 federal agencies, including the FBI, CFPB and the FTC, that work to counter scams, but they do not share one overarching strategy.

Finta is hoping that leveraging the private sector data from their partner corporations can help connect some fraud cases across the country and make these investigations more comprehensive.

While the FTC has the Fraud and Scam Reduction Act, which aims to raise awareness of financial scams, there's no official federal protection or legislation on this topic. Some states are passing consumer protection laws that put some liability on banks to do due diligence on fraud and even reimburse customers for fraudulent transactions.

And the U.S. may be facing less protections than it currently has. Susan Weinstock, CEO of the Consumer Federation of America, said she's worried that Congress just voted on a resolution under the Congressional Review Act that removed the rule that required digital payment apps like Venmo and Apple Pay to be regulated for fraud.

"Years ago, nobody had heard of Venmo or CashApp, and now these things are ubiquitous," Weinstock said. "So it puts consumers in a really tough, scary position to be subject to fraud and not have the ability to deal with it."

Because the strategies behind these financial scams change often and because there are few ways to track these crimes after they happen, a lot of responsibility falls on individuals and institutions to be able to spot them. Radolec's first piece of advice is to slow down. If it really is your grandson calling from jail? Is it the end of the world if he spends a night in jail, he said.

Adding another person into the loop of communication is another strategy that will usually knock off an impersonator. If it appears to be a higher-up at work making a strange request for access to your finances, there's no harm in looping in another person to review, Radolec said.

Lastly, the cybersecurity experts all said, it's always safer to get in contact with the original source. If someone on the phone says they're with your bank, hang up and call the bank directly to verify information.

"A lot of times they're trying to create a sense of urgency that's from a false place, so how can we ground ourselves?" Radolec said. "And can we ask, is this truly like a life or death situation that you have

to act on right now? Or can time be in our favor?"

Paige Gross is a Philadelphia-based reporter covering the evolving technology industry for States Newsroom. Her coverage involves how congress and individual states are regulating new and growing technologies, how technology plays a role in our everyday lives and what people ought to know to interact with technology.

Van Hollen says wrongly deported man doing 'OK,' transferred to new prison

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - APRIL 18, 2025 3:50 PM

Kilmar Armando Abrego Garcia, the Maryland resident the Trump administration erroneously deported to his native El Salvador, appeared to be in good health and had been moved from a notorious mega-prison to another detention center, as his case tests the limits of executive power to override due process rights in the United States, Sen. Chris Van Hollen told reporters Friday.

Van Hollen, a Maryland Democrat, met Thursday with Abrego Garcia and briefed reporters on the visit after landing Friday afternoon at Dulles International Airport outside Washington, D.C.

The meeting with Van Hollen was Abrego Garcia's first contact outside of the U.S. and El Salvador immigration and legal systems since he was deported in March, the senator said.

"His conversation with me was the first communication he'd had with anybody outside a prison since he was abducted," Van Hollen said Friday.

Accompanied by Abrego Garcia's wife, mother and brother at Dulles, Van Hollen said he'd been preparing to catch his plane out of El Salvador Thursday evening when he got word from the U.S. embassy that he would be able to meet with Abrego Garcia.

The meeting came at the end of Van Hollen's second day in the country, where he faced difficulties securing an in-person meeting or phone call with the Salvadoran citizen. The second-term senator traveled to the Central American country this week to urge the Salvadoran government to release Abrego Garcia and to meet with him.

Abrego Garcia told Van Hollen he'd been taken to a detention center in Baltimore, Van Hollen said Friday. From there, he was transported to Texas and then flown to El Salvador, where he was detained at the notorious mega-prison Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo, or CECOT.

Abrego Garcia was moved on April 9 from CECOT to another El Salvador detention center, Van Hollen reported. The conditions at the new prison were better, but Abrego Garcia was still denied access to the



U.S. Sen. Chris Van Hollen, right, meets with Maryland resident Kilmar Abrego Garcia in El Salvador on April 17, 2025. Van Hollen, a Maryland Democrat, had been seeking a meeting with Abrego Garcia after the administration said it mistakenly deported him to a mega-prison in his home country. (Photo via Van Hollen on X.)

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outside world, including communication with his family or lawyers, which is a violation of international law, Van Hollen said.

The meeting occurred under close supervision from Salvadoran officials, Van Hollen said, but Abrego Garcia appeared in adequate health.

"On a very cursory examination, he appeared OK," Van Hollen said.

Van Hollen on Thursday shared a picture on social media of his meeting with Abrego Garcia, who appeared in civilian clothes.

Constitutional conflict

While he said Abrego Garcia's individual case was tragic, Van Hollen said it had even larger implications for the strength of constitutional rights to due process.

"This should not be an issue for Republicans or Democrats," he said. "This is an issue for every American who cares about our Constitution, who cares about personal liberty, who cares about due process and who cares about what makes America so different, which is adherence to all of those things. This is an American issue."

Noting that the administration has ignored federal courts at every level — including a U.S. Supreme Court ruling last week that President Donald Trump's administration must "facilitate" Abrego Garcia's return to the United States — Van Hollen said officials at the U.S. embassy in El Salvador told him they had not received any instruction from the administration to seek his release.

"It's very clear that the president, the Trump administration, are blatantly, flagrantly disagreeing with, defying, the order from the Supreme Court," he said.

White House says 'he's NOT coming back'

The Trump administration, which has admitted in court that Abrego Garcia's deportation stemmed from an "administrative error," continued Friday to be steadfast in refusing to return him.

The Trump administration has criticized Van Hollen's advocacy for Abrego Garcia, and the White House targeted the senator on social media Friday.

"Oh, and by the way, @ChrisVanHollen — he's NOT coming back," a post on X from the official White House account read. The post included an illustration of a New York Times headline on the meeting, with two sections crossed out and replaced with administration claims about Abrego Garcia.

The administration has claimed there are logistical reasons it cannot repatriate Abrego Garcia, but some — including a Reagan-appointed federal appeals court judge on Thursday — have said the executive branch is defying the Supreme Court order.

Payments to El Salvador

Van Hollen said the Trump administration has promised to pay El Salvador up to \$15 million to detain the prisoners, but noted that Democrats in the U.S. Senate are not "totally powerless" to stop those payments.

"Appropriations need to go through the Congress, and that \$15 million, you can be sure we're going to be looking for where it is because that wasn't authorized in previous appropriations," he said.

He said that while Democrats are in the minority in both houses of Congress, they could block any Senate funding bill that included payments for detention in El Salvador.

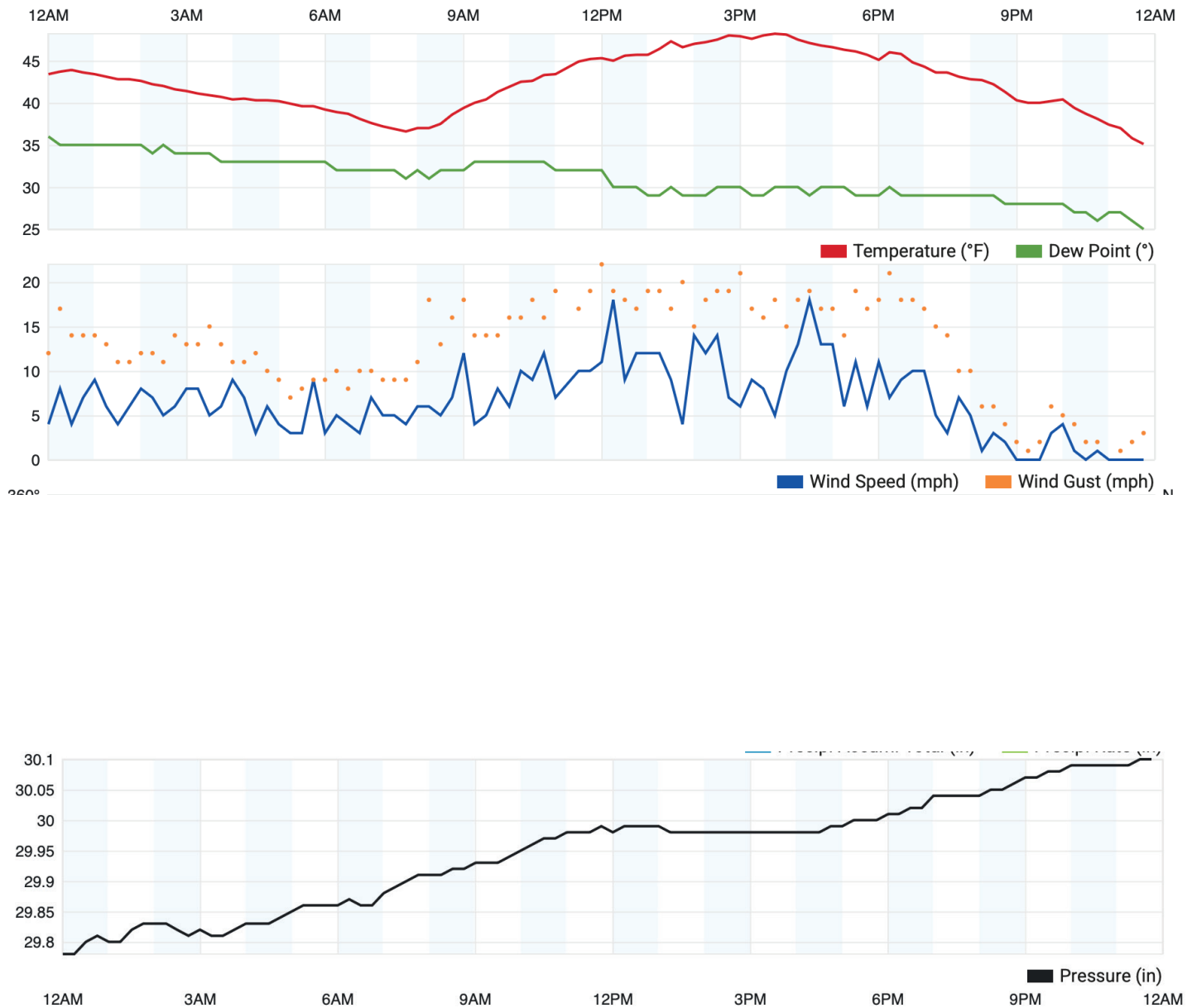
"You can be sure that I won't support the use of one penny of taxpayer dollars to keep Abrego Garcia illegally detained in El Salvador," he said.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 59 °F

Becoming
Sunny

Tonight



Low: 35 °F

Clear

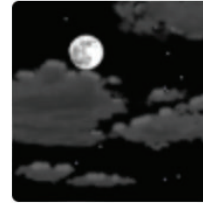
Sunday



High: 66 °F

Sunny and
Breezy

Sunday Night



Low: 33 °F

Partly Cloudy

Monday



High: 69 °F

Sunny

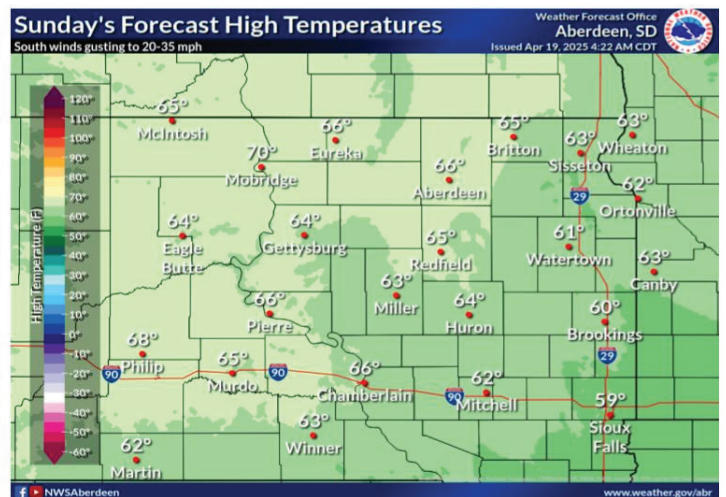
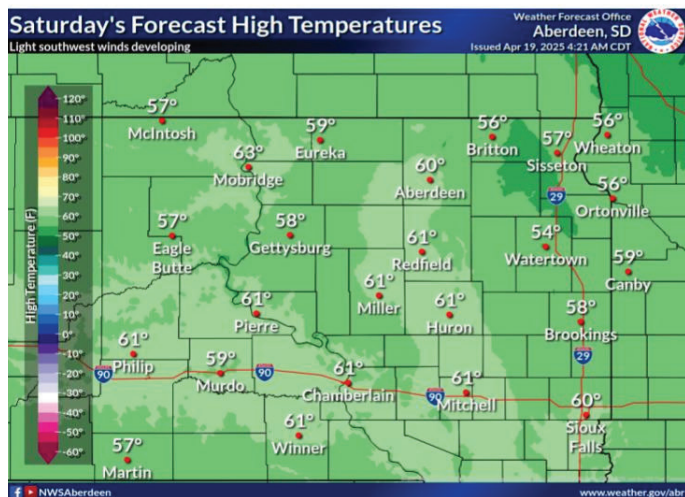


Pleasant Weekend in Store!

April 19, 2025
4:43 AM

Widespread temperatures in the 60s by Sunday

- Dry conditions expected through the weekend. Elevated fire danger due to low humidity and breezy conditions (more so on Sunday).
- Light southwest breezes today, southerly winds gusting from 20 to 35 mph on Sunday.
- Rain chances return to the forecast on Monday (generally less than 0.50in).



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Dry conditions can be expected this weekend, along with warming temperatures into the 60s by Sunday. Grassland fire danger will be elevated today and Sunday due to low humidity from 20 to 30 percent and increasing southerly winds by Sunday (gusting to 20-35 mph). Rain chances return to the forecast Monday evening as a system moves eastward across the Dakotas.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 49 °F at 3:33 PM

Low Temp: 36 °F at 11:26 PM

Wind: 23 mph at 1:02 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 48 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1923

Record Low: 12 in 1988

Average High: 59

Average Low: 33

Average Precip in April.: 0.97

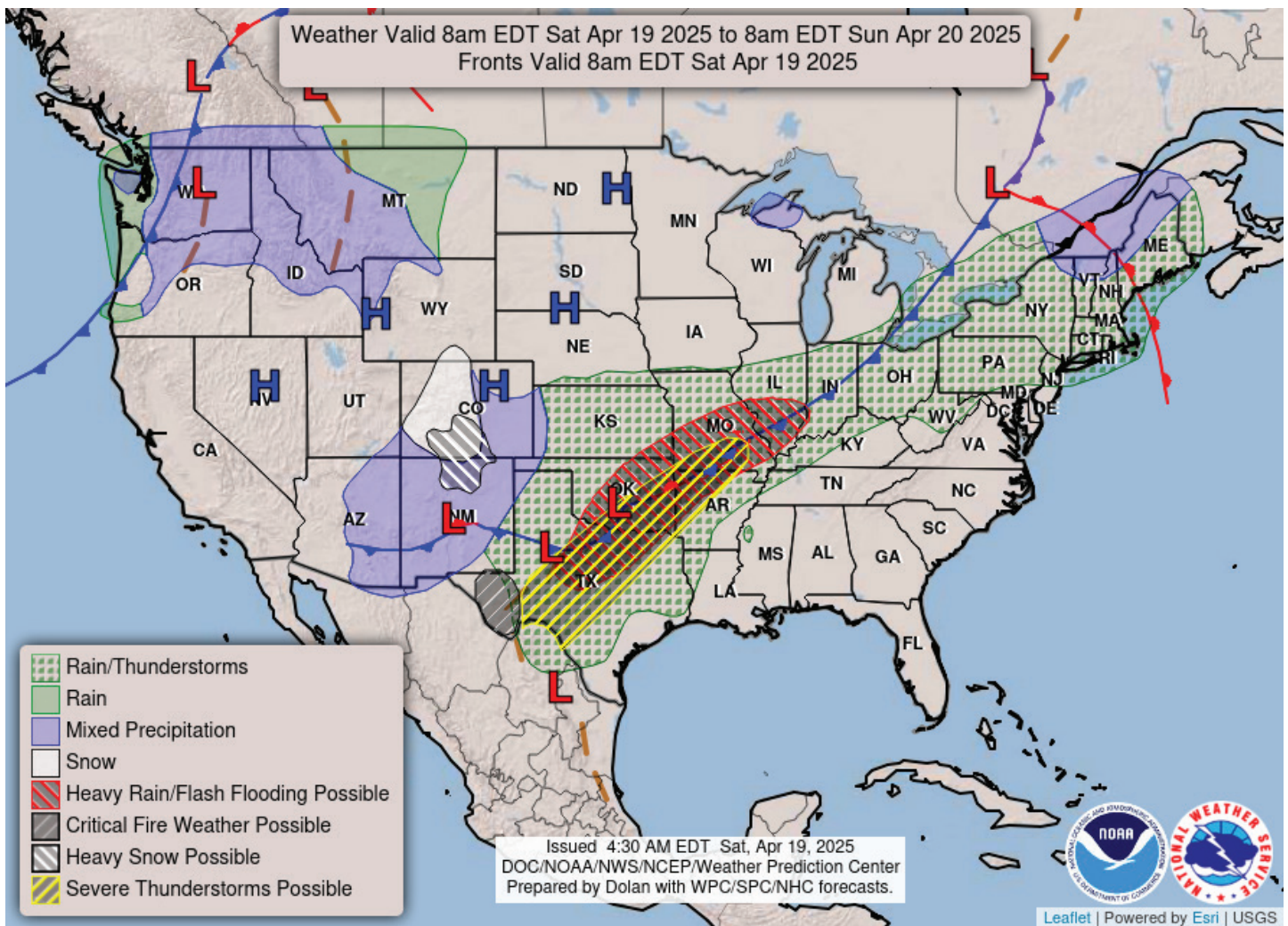
Precip to date in April.: 1.09

Average Precip to date: 3.03

Precip Year to Date: 1.72

Sunset Tonight: 8:25:28 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:35:38 am



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Today in Weather History

April 19th, 1955: An F2 tornado moved NNW from 16 miles southwest of Aberdeen in the Townships of Good Hope and Highland. Only the houses were left intact on the four torn farms. Also, an F2 tornado destroyed barns 8 miles Southeast of Gettysburg, causing \$8,000 in damage. In Corson and Dewey Counties, two F0 tornadoes touched down, one after the other, causing over \$3,000 worth of damage and injuring two people. An additional F2 tornado moved NNW in Clear Lake and Richland Townships. Buildings were destroyed on five farms.

April 19th, 1971: An unofficial rainfall amount of 6 inches in 24 hours was reported at White River. An official number of 4 plus inches was reported at Murdo, causing the washout of a railroad and derailment of a freight train. The Ghost Hawk Dam broke on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, and the flood waters damaged a trailer home and two cars. Flooding occurred along the Bad, White, Little White Rivers and Pine Creek.

April 19th, 2006: An intense spring snowstorm swept across the Dakotas, dumping up to 5 feet of snow. The heaviest snow fell in the Black Hills, 59.4 inches at Lead, SD. Bowman, ND, reported 18 inches. The storm closed highways, including I-94 in North Dakota, cutting power to thousands, and was responsible for at least four deaths. Further west, 1 to 3 feet of snow and 50 to 60 mph winds caused drifts up to 10 feet, widespread power outages, and livestock losses.

1775 - The first engagement of the Revolutionary War took place under clear crisp weather at Lexington-Concord. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1941 - The temperature at Sodus, NY, soared to 95 degrees. The next day Albany, NY, reported a record for April of 93 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1973 - Glenrock, WY, received 41 inches of snow in just 24 hours, and a storm total of 58 inches, to establish two state records. (18th-20th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1976 - The northeastern U.S. was in the midst of an early season heat wave, and the Boston Marathon took place in 90 degree heat. At Providence RI the mercury hit 98 degrees. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Forty cities in the central U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date as readings soared into the 80s and lower 90s for Easter Sunday. Fort Smith AR reported a record high of 95 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms over the southeastern U.S. early in the day spawned a strong (F-3) tornado which destroyed seventeen homes and severely damaged thirty houses near Madison FL killing four persons and injuring eighteen others. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A dozen cities in the southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 98 degrees at Hanksville UT equalled their record for April. Tucson AZ reported their earliest 100 degree reading of record. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Five cities in the northeastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date as readings dipped into the 20s and upper teens. Elkins WV reported a record low of 20 degrees. Thunderstorms over the Southern Plains produced golf ball size hail at San Angelo TX, and up to four inches of rain in southwestern Oklahoma. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1996 - One of the most memorable tornado outbreaks in Illinois history occurred on April 19, 1996. During the day, 33 tornadoes were reported as supercells erupted and moved across the state during the afternoon and evening hours. Wind estimates in excess of 170 mph were associated with some of the stronger tornadoes, one of which ripped through nearby Ogden, IL. (University of Illinois WW2010)

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Daily Devotion

A Dark Sabbath

If God seems absent, remember the resurrection and know that joy is coming.

John 19:31-42: Jesus' Side Is Pierced

³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. ³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. ³⁵ He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. ³⁶ For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." ³⁷ And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."

Jesus Is Buried

³⁸ After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. ³⁹ Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. ⁴⁰ So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹ Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. ⁴² So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

Just as Christ once rested in the stern of a boat through a raging storm, His lifeless body lay in the tomb as storms raged within His disciples. A day after they saw Jesus die, their minds must have been filled with an endless cycle of fear, doubt, and grief. Memories of life with Him must have played there, too: how it felt to stand upon a rolling sea, to feed thousands with a few loaves and a couple of fish, to see a demon-possessed man restored to himself and his community, and to see Lazarus walk out of his tomb.

The disciples' feeble faith shouldn't surprise us because, if we're honest, we're at times the same way. Those "of little faith," as Jesus often called them, failed to believe or recall things the Lord said of Himself—especially that He'd lay down His life and take it up again. Had His followers held these things in their hearts, that Sabbath day might have been a time of joyful anticipation.

At times in our life, God may seem absent, but ultimately we know He will never leave us (Heb. 13:5). When we are tempted to rely on our own solutions, we need to recall the wonder-working power of Christ's resurrection. If we are willing to wait through the darkness of night, we can rest in the knowledge that morning will surely come.

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.18.25

5 13 15 17 28 1

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$50,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.16.25

2 5 45 47 48 8

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$31,400,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 37 Mins 30
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.18.25

29 34 39 42 46 16

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 52 Mins 29
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.16.25

5 9 11 18 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$113,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 52 Mins 30
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.16.25

7 36 40 47 59 9

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 21 Mins 29
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.16.25

20 24 42 43 49 19

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$131,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 21 Mins 29
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

DEI rollbacks hit campus support systems for students of color

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Campus mentors. Move-in events. Scholarships. Diversity offices that made them feel welcome on predominantly white campuses.

As U.S. colleges pull back on diversity, equity and inclusion practices, students of color say they are starting to lose all of these things and more.

The full scope of campus DEI rollbacks is still emerging as colleges respond to the Trump administration's orders against diversity practices. But students at some schools said early cuts are chipping away at the sense of community that helped open the door to higher education.

"It feels like we're going back. I don't know how else to describe it," said Breeana-Iris Rosario, a junior at the University of Michigan, which is closing its DEI office and scrapping a campus-wide inclusion plan. "It's like our voices aren't being heard."

The retreat from DEI has been building for years, driven by Republican-led states that have ordered public colleges to close DEI offices and eliminate programs. But it has accelerated under President Donald Trump and his threats to cut federal funding.

Trump's administration escalated the battle when it suggested in a letter to Harvard University that the school should lose its nonprofit status for defying federal orders, including a demand to eliminate DEI "to the satisfaction of the federal government."

At Michigan, students have been told the casualties include orientation events for new Latino, Arab and Asian American students, along with the LEAD Scholars program, a financial aid award for Black, Latino and Native American students.

Coming from a low-income part of Detroit, Rosario said winning the scholarship cemented her decision to attend Michigan. She later met some of her best friends at a move-in event for Latino students called Alma. Losing those programs, she fears, could reinforce a sense of isolation among Hispanic students, who make up 6% of the school's undergraduates.

"It would be hard to find my community if I didn't have access to these resources," she said.

Colleges respond to federal orders

A February memo from the Education Department directed schools and colleges to eliminate race from any decision-making around hiring, admissions, housing, financial aid and student life. It warned violators could lose access to federal money.

Dozens of universities have since come under investigation, all while the Trump administration freezes billions of dollars at Harvard and other colleges accused of defying orders on campus antisemitism and transgender athletes.

Michigan was among the first to make major DEI rollbacks, and others have followed to avoid federal scrutiny. Others have rebranded DEI offices and scrubbed the term from websites, and others still are standing firm in support of DEI.

At Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, officials cited the federal orders when they moved to close the campus DEI office last month.

"It is clear we must be in compliance with them to receive the federal funding that is critical to our present and future," said Eric Kaler, Case's president, in a campus message.

Kaler said the office will be replaced by an Office for Campus Enrichment and Engagement, though it's unclear what that will entail. The private university receives about \$250 million a year in federal research funding, 16% of its total revenue, according to university data.

Justen Pippens said the DEI office was like a second home on campus. The junior called it a "stress-free zone" where he could get personal and academic guidance. He grew so close with one staff member that he came to know her as Auntie. He said it's unclear whether those employees will have jobs at the new

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office.

Case also is halting its Envision Weekend, an orientation event for underrepresented students. Pippens said it's a setback for him and other Black students, who make up just 6% of undergraduates at Case.

"Now," he said, "we no longer have our central support systems on campus."

A victory for DEI opponents

In Virginia, Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin celebrated when the University of Virginia's governing board voted to end DEI programs in March.

"DEI is done at the University of Virginia," Youngkin said in a statement, calling it a shift toward "merit-based opportunity."

Tyler English, a senior at UVA, said students have been told scholarships and graduate programs focused on minority students are being scaled back or eliminated. Among other changes, a student group called Men of Color, Honor and Ambition is replacing the word "color" with "character," he said.

"For a portion of us, we now question whether our identities and voices are truly valued in this space," said English, a member of the campus' Black Student Alliance.

University spokesperson Brian Coy wouldn't provide details on DEI rollbacks and said he couldn't confirm changes to scholarships.

The government's anti-DEI campaign is being challenged in court by opponents who say it offers little clarity on exactly which practices are outlawed, leaving schools to weed out anything that could be construed as DEI.

As a result of the vague directives, "those who are advocating against this work are getting a higher return on their investment than they should," said Paulette Granberry Russell, president of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education.

Yet opponents are pressing the White House to go further. Christopher Rufo, a conservative strategist who has fought DEI, said the government should root out DEI using tools that forced desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement.

"DEI is a violation of the Civil Rights Act," Rufo said on X. "Any publicly funded institution that continues to practice DEI should face a federal investigation, consent decree, termination of funds, and loss of non-profit status. If that doesn't work, send in the 101st Airborne."

Some fear diversity setbacks

In Michigan, the rollbacks are targeting programs that aimed to preserve racial diversity after the state banned affirmative action in 2006, including the LEAD program.

University of Michigan officials declined to discuss changes, but a campus message from President Santa Ono said the school will find other ways to support students, including an expansion of scholarships for low-income students.

Rosario and other LEAD scholarship winners received an email saying there would be "no adverse financial impact" to their financial aid, with no further explanation.

Rosario doesn't entirely blame the university for the cuts, but she wonders why Michigan moved quickly to make changes while some colleges held firm. The first in her family to attend college, she fears what it means for the next generation of students.

"They've taken away our sense of community," she said. "It just makes it that much harder for people of color to feel comfortable pursuing higher education."

Iran and the US prepare for a second round of negotiations over Tehran's nuclear program in Rome

By MATTHEW LEE and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Iran and the United States prepared Saturday for a second round of negotiations over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program in Rome.

The talks in Italy over Easter weekend again will hinge on U.S. billionaire Steve Witkoff, the U.S. Mideast envoy of President Donald Trump, and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi. Whether the two men find

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common ground in the high-stakes negotiations could mean success or failure in the talks. Both arrived late Saturday morning for the talks at the Omani Embassy in Rome's Camilluccia neighborhood.

That talks are even happening represents a historic moment, given the decades of enmity between the two countries since the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the U.S. Embassy hostage crisis. Trump, in his first term, unilaterally withdrew from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers in 2018, setting off years of attacks and negotiations that failed to restore the accord that drastically limited Tehran's enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

At risk is a possible American or Israeli military strike on Iran's nuclear sites, or the Iranians following through on their threats to pursue an atomic weapon. Meanwhile, tensions in the Middle East have spiked over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip and after U.S. airstrikes targeting Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels killed more than 70 people and wounded dozens more.

"I'm for stopping Iran, very simply, from having a nuclear weapon," Trump said Friday. "I want Iran to be great and prosperous and terrific."

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei wrote Saturday on the social platform X that Iran "always demonstrated, with good faith and a sense of responsibility, its commitment to diplomacy as a civilized way to resolve issues."

"We are aware that it is not a smooth path, but we take every step with open eyes, relying also on the past experiences," he added.

Araghchi met Saturday morning with Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani ahead of "indirect" talks with Witkoff, Iranian state television reported. It said the meeting would begin at 11 a.m. local (0900 GMT).

Araghchi, Witkoff both traveled ahead of talks

Both men have been traveling in recent days. Witkoff had been in Paris for talks about Ukraine as Russia's full-scale war there grinds on. Araghchi will be coming from Tehran, Iran, after a visit to Moscow, where he met with officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Russia, a member of the world powers involved in Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal, could be a key participant in any future deal reached between Tehran and Washington. Analysts suggest Moscow could potentially take custody of Iran's uranium enriched to 60% purity — a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%.

Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi, who mediated the first round, has already arrived in Rome and met with his Italian counterpart on Friday. Baghaei said al-Busaidi again mediate between the countries.

Oman, a sultanate on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula, has long served as an interlocutor between Iran and the West. Muscat hosted the first round of negotiations between Araghchi and Witkoff last weekend, which saw the two men meet face to face after indirect talks.

Iran seeks a deal to steady troubled economy

Iran's internal politics are still inflamed over the mandatory hijab, or headscarf, with women still ignoring the law on the streets of Tehran. Rumors also persist over the government potentially increasing the cost of subsidized gasoline in the country, which has sparked nationwide protests in the past

Iran's rial currency plunged to over 1 million to a U.S. dollar earlier this month. The currency has improved with the talks, however, something Tehran hopes will continue.

Meanwhile, two used Airbus A330-200 long sought by Iran's flag carrier, Iran Air, arrived at Tehran's Mehrabad International Airport on Thursday, flight-tracking data analyzed by The Associated Press showed. The planes, formerly of China's Hainan Airlines, had been in Muscat and re-registered to Iran.

The aircraft had Rolls-Royce engines, which included significant American parts and servicing. Such a transaction would need approval from the U.S. Treasury given sanctions on Iran. The State Department and Treasury did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Under the 2015 deal, Iran could purchase new aircraft and had lined up tens of billions of dollars in deals with Airbus and Boeing Co. However, the manufacturers backed away from the deals over Trump's threats to the nuclear accord.

JD Vance visits the Vatican following remarkable papal rebuke over Trump's migrant crackdown

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — U.S. Vice President JD Vance met Saturday with the Vatican's No. 2 official, following a remarkable papal rebuke of the Trump administration's crackdown on migrants and Vance's theological justification of it.

Vance, a Catholic convert, arrived Saturday in Vatican City for an appointment with the secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin and the foreign minister, Archbishop Paul Gallagher. There was speculation he might also briefly greet Pope Francis, who has been resuming some official duties during his recovery from pneumonia.

The Holy See has responded cautiously to the Trump administration, in keeping with its tradition of diplomatic neutrality. It has expressed alarm over the administration's crackdown on migrants and cuts in international aid while insisting on peaceful resolutions to the war in Ukraine and Gaza.

"It is clear that the approach of the current U.S. administration is very different from what we are used to and, especially in the West, from what we have relied on for many years," Parolin told La Repubblica on the eve of the Vance visit.

As the U.S. pushes to end the war in Ukraine, Parolin reaffirmed Kyiv's right to its territorial integrity and insisted that any peace deal must not be "imposed" on Ukraine but "is built patiently, day by day, with dialogue and mutual respect."

Vance was spending Easter weekend in Rome with his family and attended Good Friday services in St. Peter's Basilica after meeting with Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni.

Papal rebuke on migration

Francis and Vance have tangled sharply over migration and the Trump administration's plans to deport migrants en masse. Francis has made caring for migrants a hallmark of his papacy and his progressive views on social justice issues have often put him at odds with members of the more conservative U.S. Catholic Church.

Vance, who converted to Catholicism in 2019, identifies with a small Catholic intellectual movement, viewed by some critics as having reactionary or authoritarian leanings, that is often called "postliberal."

Postliberals share some longstanding Catholic conservative views, such as opposition to abortion and LGBTQ+ rights. They envision a counterrevolution in which they take over government bureaucracy and institutions like universities from within, replacing entrenched "elites" with their own and acting upon their vision of the "common good."

Just days before he was hospitalized in February, Francis blasted the Trump administration's deportation plans, warning that they would deprive migrants of their inherent dignity. In a letter to U.S. bishops, Francis also appeared to respond to Vance directly for having claimed that Catholic doctrine justified such policies.

A Latin concept of love

Vance had defended the administration's America-first crackdown by citing a concept from medieval Catholic theology known in Latin as "ordo amoris." He has said the concept delineates a hierarchy of care — to family first, followed by neighbor, community, fellow citizens and lastly those elsewhere.

In his Feb. 10 letter, Francis appeared to correct Vance's understanding of the concept.

"Christian love is not a concentric expansion of interests that little by little extends to other persons and groups," he wrote. "The true ordo amoris that must be promoted is that which we discover by meditating constantly on the parable of the 'Good Samaritan,' that is, by meditating on the love that builds a fraternity open to all, without exception."

Vance has acknowledged Francis' criticism but has said he would continue to defend his views. During a Feb. 28 appearance at the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast in Washington, Vance didn't address the issue specifically but called himself a "baby Catholic" and acknowledged there are "things about the faith that I don't know."

While he had criticized Francis on social media in the past, Vance recently has posted prayers for Francis'

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recovery.

On Friday, Vance, his wife and three young children had front-row seats at the Vatican's Good Friday service in St. Peter's, a two-hour solemn commemoration featuring Latin and Italian readings. Francis did not attend.

But the pope has begun receiving visitors, including King Charles III, and this week ventured out of the Vatican to meet with prisoners at Rome's central jail to keep a Holy Thursday appointment ministering to the most marginalized.

He has named other cardinals to preside over Easter services this weekend, but officials haven't ruled out a possible brief greeting with Vance.

"I'm grateful every day for this job, but particularly today, where my official duties have brought me to Rome on Good Friday," Vance posted on X. "I wish all Christians all over the world, but particularly those back home in the US, a blessed Good Friday."

Supreme Court blocks, for now, new deportations under 18th century wartime law

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

The Supreme Court on Saturday blocked, for now, the deportations of any Venezuelans held in northern Texas under an 18th century wartime law.

In a brief order, the court directed the Trump administration not to remove Venezuelans held in the Bluebonnet Detention Center "until further order of this court."

Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito dissented.

The high court acted in an emergency appeal from the American Civil Liberties Union contending that immigration authorities appeared to be moving to restart removals under the Alien Enemies Act of 1798. The Supreme Court had said earlier in April that deportations could proceed only if those about to be removed had a chance to argue their case in court and were given "a reasonable time" to contest their pending removals.

"We are deeply relieved that the Court has temporarily blocked the removals. These individuals were in imminent danger of spending the rest of their lives in a brutal Salvadoran prison without ever having had any due process," ACLU lawyer Lee Gelernt said in an email.

On Friday, two federal judges refused to step in as lawyers for the men launched a desperate legal campaign to prevent their deportation, even as one judge said the case raised legitimate concerns. Early Saturday, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals also refused to issue an order protecting the detainees from being deported.

The administration is expected to return to the Supreme Court quickly in an effort to persuade the justices to lift their temporary order.

The ACLU had already sued to block deportations of two Venezuelans held in the Bluebonnet facility and sought an order barring removals of any immigrants in the region under the Alien Enemies Act.

In an emergency filing early Friday, the ACLU warned that immigration authorities were accusing other Venezuelan men held there of being members of the Tren de Aragua gang, which would make them subject to President Donald Trump's use of the act.

The act has only been invoked three previous times in U.S. history, most recently during World War II to hold Japanese-American civilians in internment camps. The Trump administration contended it gave them power to swiftly remove immigrants they identified as members of the gang, regardless of their immigration status.

Following the unanimous high court order on April 9, federal judges in Colorado, New York and southern Texas promptly issued orders barring removal of detainees under the AEA until the administration provides a process for them to make claims in court.

But there had been no such order issued in the area of Texas that covers Bluebonnet, which is located

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24 miles north of Abilene in the far northern end of the state.

U.S. District Judge James Wesley Hendrix, a Trump appointee, this week declined to bar the administration from removing the two men identified in the ACLU lawsuit because Immigration and Customs Enforcement filed sworn declarations that they would not be immediately deported. He also balked at issuing a broader order prohibiting removal of all Venezuelans in the area under the act because he said removals hadn't started yet.

But the ACLU's Friday filing included sworn declarations from three separate immigration lawyers who said their clients in Bluebonnet were given paperwork indicating they were members of Tren de Aragua and could be deported by Saturday. In one case, immigration lawyer Karene Brown said her client, identified by initials, was told to sign papers in English even though the client only spoke Spanish.

"ICE informed F.G.M. that these papers were coming from the President, and that he will be deported even if he did not sign it," Brown wrote.

Gelernt said in a Friday evening hearing before District Judge James E. Boasberg in Washington, D.C., that the administration initially moved Venezuelans to its south Texas immigration facility for deportation. But since a judge banned deportations in that area, it has funneled them to the Bluebonnet facility, where no such order exists. He said witnesses reported the men were being loaded on buses Friday evening to be taken to the airport.

With Hendrix not agreeing to the ACLU's request for an emergency order, the group turned to Boasberg, who initially halted deportations in March. The Supreme Court ruled the orders against deportation could only come from judges in jurisdictions where immigrants were held, which Boasberg said made him powerless Friday.

"I'm sympathetic to everything you're saying," Boasberg told Gelernt. "I just don't think I have the power to do anything about it."

Boasberg this week found there's probable cause that the Trump administration committed criminal contempt by disobeying his initial deportation ban. He was concerned that the paper that ICE was giving those held did not make clear they had a right to challenge their removal in court, which he believed the Supreme Court mandated.

Drew Ensign, an attorney for the Justice Department, disagreed, saying that people slated for deportation would have a "minimum" of 24 hours to challenge their removal in court. He said no flights were scheduled for Friday night and he was unaware of any Saturday, but the Department of Homeland Security said it reserved the right to remove people then.

ICE said it would not comment on the litigation.

Also Friday, a Massachusetts judge made permanent his temporary ban on the administration deporting immigrants who have exhausted their appeals to countries other than their home countries unless they are informed of their destination and given a chance to object if they'd face torture or death there.

Some Venezuelans subject to Trump's Alien Enemies Act have been sent to El Salvador and housed in its notorious main prison.

What to know about the tensions between Iran and the US before their second round of talks

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran and the United States will hold talks Saturday in Rome, their second round of negotiations over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program.

The talks follow a first round held in Muscat, Oman, where the two sides spoke face to face.

Trump has imposed new sanctions on Iran as part of his "maximum pressure" campaign targeting the country. He has repeatedly suggested military action against Iran remained a possibility, while emphasizing he still believed a new deal could be reached by writing a letter to Iran's 85-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to jump start these talks.

Khamenei has warned Iran would respond to any attack with an attack of its own.

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Here's what to know about the letter, Iran's nuclear program and the tensions that have stalked relations between Tehran and Washington since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Why did Trump write the letter?

Trump dispatched the letter to Khamenei on March 5, then gave a television interview the next day in which he acknowledged sending it. He said: "I've written them a letter saying, 'I hope you're going to negotiate because if we have to go in militarily, it's going to be a terrible thing.'"

Since returning to the White House, the president has been pushing for talks while ratcheting up sanctions and suggesting a military strike by Israel or the U.S. could target Iranian nuclear sites.

A previous letter from Trump during his first term drew an angry retort from the supreme leader.

But Trump's letters to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in his first term led to face-to-face meetings, though no deals to limit Pyongyang's atomic bombs and a missile program capable of reaching the continental U.S.

How did the first round go?

Oman, a sultanate on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula, hosted the first round of talks between Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and U.S. Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff last weekend. The two men met face to face after indirect talks and immediately agreed to this second round.

Witkoff later made a television appearance in which he suggested 3.67% enrichment for Iran could be something the countries could agree on. But that's exactly the terms set by the 2015 nuclear deal struck under U.S. President Barack Obama, from which Trump unilaterally withdrew America.

Witkoff hours later issued a statement underlining something: "A deal with Iran will only be completed if it is a Trump deal." Araghchi and Iranian officials have latched onto Witkoff's comments in recent days as a sign that America was sending it mixed signals about the negotiations.

Why does Iran's nuclear program worry the West?

Iran has insisted for decades that its nuclear program is peaceful. However, its officials increasingly threaten to pursue a nuclear weapon. Iran now enriches uranium to near weapons-grade levels of 60%, the only country in the world without a nuclear weapons program to do so.

Under the original 2015 nuclear deal, Iran was allowed to enrich uranium up to 3.67% purity and to maintain a uranium stockpile of 300 kilograms (661 pounds). The last report by the International Atomic Energy Agency on Iran's program put its stockpile at 8,294.4 kilograms (18,286 pounds) as it enriches a fraction of it to 60% purity.

U.S. intelligence agencies assess that Iran has yet to begin a weapons program, but has "undertaken activities that better position it to produce a nuclear device, if it chooses to do so."

Ali Larijani, an adviser to Iran's supreme leader, has warned in a televised interview that his country has the capability to build nuclear weapons, but it is not pursuing it and has no problem with the International Atomic Energy Agency's inspections. However, he said if the U.S. or Israel were to attack Iran over the issue, the country would have no choice but to move toward nuclear weapon development.

"If you make a mistake regarding Iran's nuclear issue, you will force Iran to take that path, because it must defend itself," he said.

Why are relations so bad between Iran and the U.S.?

Iran was once one of the U.S.'s top allies in the Mideast under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who purchased American military weapons and allowed CIA technicians to run secret listening posts monitoring the neighboring Soviet Union. The CIA had fomented a 1953 coup that cemented the shah's rule.

But in January 1979, the shah, fatally ill with cancer, fled Iran as mass demonstrations swelled against his rule. The Islamic Revolution followed, led by Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and created Iran's theocratic government.

Later that year, university students overran the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, seeking the shah's extradition and sparking the 444-day hostage crisis that saw diplomatic relations between Iran and the U.S. severed. The Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s saw the U.S. back Saddam Hussein. The "Tanker War" during that conflict saw the U.S. launch a one-day assault that crippled Iran at sea, while the U.S. later shot down an Iranian

commercial airliner that the American military said it mistook for a warplane.

Iran and the U.S. have see-sawed between enmity and grudging diplomacy in the years since, with relations peaking when Tehran made the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. But Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the accord, sparking tensions in the Mideast that persist today.

Trump administration makes major cuts to Native American boarding school research projects

By HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

At least \$1.6 million in federal funds for projects meant to capture and digitize stories of the systemic abuse of generations of Indigenous children in boarding schools at the hands of the U.S. government have been slashed due to federal funding cuts under President Donald Trump's administration.

The cuts are just a fraction of the grants canceled by the National Endowment for the Humanities in recent weeks as part of the Trump administration's deep cost-cutting effort across the federal government. But coming on the heels of a major federal boarding school investigation by the previous administration and an apology by then-President Joe Biden, they illustrate a seismic shift.

"If we're looking to 'Make America Great Again,' then I think it should start with the truth about the true American history," said Deborah Parker, CEO of the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition.

The coalition lost more than \$282,000 as a result of the cuts, halting its work to digitize more than 100,000 pages of boarding school records for its database. Parker, a citizen of the Tulalip Tribes in Washington state, said Native Americans nationwide depend on the site to find loved ones who were taken or sent to these boarding schools.

Searching that database last year, Roberta "Birdie" Sam, a member of Tlingit & Haida, was able to confirm that her grandmother had been at a boarding school in Alaska. She also discovered that around a dozen cousins, aunts and uncles had also been at a boarding school in Oregon, including one who died there. She said the knowledge has helped her with healing.

"I understand why our relationship has been the way it has been. And that's been a great relief for myself," she said. "I've spent a lot of years very disconnected from my family, wondering what happened. And now I know — some of it anyways."

An April 2 letter to the healing coalition that was signed by Michael McDonald, acting chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, says the "grant no longer effectuates the agency's needs and priorities."

The Associated Press left messages by phone and email for the National Endowment for the Humanities. White House officials and the Office of Management and Budget also did not respond Friday to an email requesting comment.

Indigenous children were sent to boarding schools

For 150 years the U.S. removed Indigenous children from their homes and sent them away to the schools, where they were stripped of their cultures, histories and religions, and beaten for speaking their native languages.

At least 973 Native American children died at government-funded boarding schools, according to an Interior Department investigation launched by former Interior Secretary Deb Haaland. Both the report and independent researchers say the actual number was much higher.

The forced assimilation policy officially ended with the enactment of the Indian Child Welfare Act in 1978. But the government never fully investigated the boarding school system until the Biden administration.

In October, Biden apologized for the government's creation of the schools and the policies that supported them.

Haaland, a Laguna Pueblo citizen who's running for governor in New Mexico, described the recent cuts as the latest step in the Trump administration's "pattern of hiding the full story of our country." But she said they can't erase the extensive work already done.

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"They cannot undo the healing communities felt as they told their stories at our events to hear from survivors and descendants," she said in a statement. "They cannot undo the investigation that brings this dark chapter of our history to light. They cannot undo the relief Native people felt when President Biden apologized on behalf of the United States."

Boarding school research programs are feeling the strain

Among the grants terminated earlier this month was \$30,000 for a project between the Koahnic Broadcast Corporation and Alaska Native Heritage Center to record and broadcast oral histories of elders in Alaska. Koahnic received an identical letter from McDonald.

Benjamin Jacuk, the Alaska Native Heritage Center's director of Indigenous research, said the news came around the same time they lost about \$100,000 through a Institute of Museum and Library Services grant for curating a boarding school exhibit.

"This is a story that for all of us, we weren't able to really hear because it was so painful or for multitudes of reasons," said Jacuk, a citizen of Kenaitze Indian Tribe. "And so it's really important right now to be able to record these stories that our elders at this point are really opening up to being able to tell."

Former Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Bryan Newland described the cuts as frustrating, especially given the size of the grants.

"It's not even a drop in the ocean when it comes to the federal budget," said Newland, a citizen of the Bay Mills Indian Community (Ojibwe). "And so it's hard to argue that this is something that's really promoting government efficiency or saving taxpayer funds."

In April 2024, the National Endowment for the Humanities announced that it was awarding \$411,000 to more than a dozen tribal nations and organizations working to illustrate the impact of these boarding schools. More than half of those awards have since been terminated.

The grant cuts were documented by the non-profit organization National Humanities Alliance.

John Campbell, a member of Tlingit and the Tulalip Tribes, said the coalition's database helped him better understand his parents, who were both boarding school survivors and "passed on that tradition of being traumatized."

When he was growing up, his mother used to put soap in his mouth when he said a bad word. He said he learned through the site that she experienced that punishment beginning when she was 6-years-old in a boarding school in Washington state when she would speak her language.

"She didn't talk about it that much," he said. "She didn't want to talk about it either. It was too traumatic."

Questions emerge about how a deputy's stepson became the accused gunman in deadly FSU shooting

By KATE PAYNE and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Amid the abandoned chemistry notes and other debris left behind after a deadly shooting at Florida State University are lingering questions about how the stepson of a beloved sheriff's deputy tasked with school safety at a middle school became the accused gunman.

Political science student Phoenix Ikner was a long-standing member of a sheriff's office youth advisory council and was steeped in the family-like culture of the agency. When officers rushed to the university's student union on reports of gunfire, authorities say it was the 20-year-old who used his stepmother's former service weapon to open fire, killing two men and wounding six others.

As people fled in terror, Ikner was shot and taken into custody. He invoked his right not to speak to investigators, and his motive remains unknown as he lies in a hospital bed.

The prosecutor's office is weighing possible charges as stories emerge about a darker side. One classmate recalled him being kicked out of a student club over comments that other members found troubling.

"This is horrific," Jimmy Williams, the chief of safety for Leon County Schools, said of the shooting. "This is a horrible, horrible event."

Williams, who has known Ikner's stepmother, Jessica Ikner, for a decade, said the allegations underscore

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that "none of us are immune to tragedy."

Suspect is the stepson of a beloved deputy

His stepmother, whose own alma mater is Florida State, was reassigned from her position as a school resource officer Friday and granted the personal leave she requested, a sheriff's office spokesperson told The Associated Press.

When the alert went out of an active shooter at Florida State University, Jessica Ikner was on duty around 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) away at Raa Middle School. A sheriff's office spokesperson said Jessica Ikner worked to secure the campus to prevent anyone from entering as Raa went into "lockout mode," along with all of the county's public schools. She was practiced at this work.

Last year, she was named an "employee of the month" by the sheriff's office, where she has worked for 18 years.

Police said they believed Phoenix Ikner shot the victims using his stepmother's former service handgun, which she had kept for personal use after the force upgraded its weapons.

Leon County Sheriff Walter McNeil described Phoenix Ikner on Thursday as having been "steeped in the Leon County Sheriff's Office family" and engaged in a number of sheriff's office training programs, adding that it wasn't a surprise that he would have access to guns.

There was no record of him having a criminal record. And in Florida, training and a background check are not required to carry concealed guns in public.

Custody disputes and name change in his childhood

When Ikner was a child, his parents were involved in several custody disputes with his biological mother, court records show.

In 2015, when he was 10, his biological mother, Anne-Mari Eriksen, said she was taking him to South Florida for spring break in 2015 but instead traveled to Norway. After returning to the U.S., she pleaded no contest to removing a minor from the state against a court order and was sentenced to 200 days in jail. She later moved to vacate her plea, but that was denied.

In the fall of that same year, Eriksen filed a civil libel-slander complaint against Jessica Ikner, along with several other family members. The complaint, which was later dismissed, accused them of harassing Eriksen and abusing Ikner's position at the sheriff's office.

In 2020, at age 15, the suspect received court approval to change his name from Christian Eriksen to Phoenix Ikner, court documents show. His old name was a constant reminder of a "tragedy" he suffered, in the words of administrative magistrate James Banks, who approved the request, NBC News reported.

Banks observed that Ikner was a "mentally, emotionally and physically mature young adult who is very articulate" and "very polite" said he chose the new name as a representation of "rising from the ashes anew."

Classmate says there were concerns about the accused shooter

Reid Seybold and his classmates were working on a group project in a building located a short, three-minute walk from the student union when someone ran in and warned them about the gunfire. They huddled together, the 22-year-old said, frantically firing off what they thought might be their final text messages to loved ones.

When Seybold found out who the suspect in the shooting was — that it was someone he knows — he was overcome with anger. Seybold was the president of a club that Phoenix Ikner joined when they were both studying at the local community college, now called Tallahassee State College.

Seybold said Ikner was known for espousing racist and white supremacist views that so alienated other members that the club asked him to leave the group.

"He made people that uncomfortable," said Seybold, who now also is studying political science at Florida State. "I personally know him to have complained about how multiculturalism and communism are ruining America."

Accused shooter transferred to Florida State from community college

Ikner transferred to Florida State after earning an associate degree at the community college, school officials said.

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He didn't attract the attention of the school paper, other than commenting in a FSU story about a rally on campus against President Donald Trump.

Ikner, a registered Republican, described the protesters as "entertaining" because Trump was already set to be inaugurated. The comments have since been removed from the story, an editor's note saying the move was to "avoid amplifying the voice of an individual responsible for violence."

Before Ikner's Instagram was taken down, his bio quoted a verse from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah. "Thou art my battle ax and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms," reads Jeremiah 51:20, which scholars have interpreted to depict God's judgment on Babylon. The empire is a symbol in the Bible of sinfulness and immorality.

Deputy's family has stayed quiet for now

A Tallahassee Police Department patrol car was stationed Thursday evening near the street where the family lives, blocking reporters from approaching the family's home in a well-kept suburban neighborhood on the city's east side.

Phone messages left for Jessica Ikner at a number listed for her on a school resource website and another phone connected to her through public records were not immediately returned Friday. And a sheriff's office spokeswoman said she is not aware of the family putting out a statement or having a family spokesperson.

The only insight comes from the past statements. Nearly a decade ago, Jessica Ikner wrote a story posted on the Tallahassee Family Magazine website about children's safety while surfing the internet, including tips to strengthen family bonds.

"Build a trusting relationship with your child," she wrote. "Let them know that if they do make a mistake they can still come to you about anything."

Four centuries later, Easter's date remains divisive. Some church leaders want that to change

By DEREK GATOPOULOS, COLLEEN BARRY and LEFTERIS PITARAKIS Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — For more than 400 years, Catholic and Orthodox churches have used different ways to determine the date of Easter. But this Sunday will mark a special moment for Christians, as the churches celebrate of Jesus' resurrection on the same day.

What's more, top religious leaders — including Pope Francis — are expressing a desire to keep it that way. But the unusual alignment has stirred underlying mistrust between the two major Christian communions.

Calendars and calculations differ

The movable date for Easter follows a seemingly straightforward rule: the Sunday following the first full moon on or after the spring equinox. But the two churches started using different calendars after Pope Gregory XIII's adaptation in 1582, when the Western church adopted the Gregorian calendar while the Eastern Orthodox Church kept the older Julian one.

Moreover, each church uses its own ecclesiastical calculations for lunar cycles and the equinox, which don't neatly match scientific projections.

The result is that Easter dates can be as much as five weeks apart. They can coincide in back-to-back years, or a decade can pass without it happening.

Pope Francis' wish

Days before his five-week hospitalization, Pope Francis referred to this year's Easter celebration while invoking the 1,700th anniversary of the historic Council of Nicaea, when Christian leaders gathered to settle foundational disputes about the faith.

"Once again, I renew my appeal: Let this coincidence serve as a sign — a call to all Christians to take a decisive step toward unity around a common date for Easter," Francis said while leading prayers at the Basilica of St. Paul in Rome.

Francis' invitation, delivered at the end of a prayer for Christian Unity with Orthodox priests present, wasn't new. Returning from a trip to Turkey in 2014, he told reporters on the plane that a unified date

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would be logical.

"It is a bit ridiculous," he said, then staged a pretend conversation: "Tell me, your Christ, when is he resurrected? Next week? Mine was resurrected last week."

He has found an ally in Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, a fellow octogenarian and spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians. The two "speak to one another like brothers," Francis has said. For his part, Bartholomew has called Francis "our elder brother" and described the Easter initiative as "a real step toward repairing old conflicts."

Only winners, no losers?

The idea of a common Easter has been discussed since the 1960s, with interest often peaking when celebrations coincide. The key obstacle has always been the implication that one side would need to concede.

Protestants, who follow the same calendar as Catholics, have also been in on the discussions.

The Geneva-based World Council of Churches — a fellowship of Orthodox and Protestant bodies — has proposed a compromise. It suggests using modern astronomy, basing the calculation on Jerusalem time and following the same basic rule set centuries ago.

"It has never been more important than now, because we live in a polarized world and people all over the world yearn for more unity," Lutheran Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, a senior WCC official, told The Associated Press from his home outside Berlin. "All other questions — on calendar, on time, on the moon and the stars and everything — it's not primary; it's secondary."

'Strings attached'

While the pope's wishes may carry powerful influence through the Vatican's highly centralized authority, Bartholomew's role is largely symbolic over the self-governed national and local churches. And discussions between Russia, the Orthodox world's most populous country, and churches of other Orthodox-majority countries remain stalled due to the war and church divisions in Ukraine.

Further complicating prospects for consensus is a history characterized by centuries of mistrust, largely driven by wariness in the East about the Vatican's supremacy.

At a Holy Week service Monday in Athens, Father Anastasios welcomed parishioners into the Church of Saint Dimitrios Loumbardiari, a restored stone chapel near the Acropolis. He said he supports forging bonds with Christianity's other branches — but with caution.

"We can try to build bridges, but we cannot distort our faith or the traditions of our ancestors, or the dogmas Christ himself handed down," he said. "There are deeply rooted differences. From my view and that of many people here, the unity sought in the past by the Roman Catholic Church often wasn't sincere; it came with strings attached, was more about dominance than genuine reconciliation."

'Great harmony'

As dialogue between the churches slowly unfolds, common Easter celebrations are already a practical reality in a few places. The Orthodox Church in Finland switched dates in the 1920s to align celebrations with the Lutheran majority. And Catholics in Greece — while making no official change to their calendar — have celebrated with the rest of the country since 1970.

Joseph Roussos, a member of a Catholic community on the Greek island of Syros, took his first trip to the Vatican last month.

At age 67, he remembers when Easters in Greece were separate: when schools and shopkeepers on the island closed for different holidays, and the church bells tolled mournfully during two distinct Holy Weeks.

"It wasn't a good situation. But when we did celebrate Easter together, there was great harmony," he said. "We live very well (today), and it's truly beautiful. I hope it stays that way."

How Trump backed away from promising to end the Russia-Ukraine war in 24 hours

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

During his campaign, Donald Trump said repeatedly that he would be able to end the war between Russia and Ukraine "in 24 hours" upon taking office. He has changed his tone since becoming president again.

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As various U.S. emissaries have held talks looking for an end to the war, both Trump and his top officials have become more reserved about the prospects of a peace deal. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Friday suggested the U.S. might soon back away from negotiations altogether without more progress, adding a comment that sounded like a repudiation of the president's old comments.

"No one's saying this can be done in 12 hours," he told reporters.

The promises made by presidential candidates are often felled by the realities of governing. But Trump's shift is noteworthy given his prior term as president and his long histories with both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The White House on Friday did not immediately respond to a message seeking comment on Trump's evolving deadline comments.

Here's a look at Trump's evolution on the way he talks about the Russia-Ukraine war:

'A very easy negotiation'

MARCH 2023: "There's a very easy negotiation to take place. But I don't want to tell you what it is because then I can't use that negotiation; it'll never work," Trump told Fox News Channel host Sean Hannity, claiming that he could "solve" the war "in 24 hours" if he were back in the White House.

"But it's a very easy negotiation to take place. I will have it solved within one day, a peace between them," Trump said of the war, which at that point had been ongoing for more than a year since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

MAY 2023: "They're dying, Russians and Ukrainians. I want them to stop dying. And I'll have that done — I'll have that done in 24 hours," Trump said during a town hall on CNN.

JULY 2024: When asked to respond to Trump's one-day claim, Russia's United Nations Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia told reporters that "the Ukrainian crisis cannot be solved in one day." Afterward, Trump campaign spokesperson Steven Cheung said that "a top priority in his second term will be to quickly negotiate an end to the Russia-Ukraine war."

AUGUST 2024: "Before I even arrive at the Oval Office, shortly after I win the presidency, I will have the horrible war between Russia and Ukraine settled," Trump told a National Guard Conference. "I'll get it settled very fast. I don't want you guys going over there. I don't want you going over there."

After Trump wins in November

DEC. 16, 2024: "I'm going to try," Trump said during a news conference at his Mar-a-Lago club, asked if he thought he could still make a deal with Putin and Zelenskyy to end the war.

JAN. 8, 2025: In a Fox News Channel interview, retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg — now serving as Trump's special envoy to Ukraine and Russia — proposed a 100-day deadline to end the war. Friday marked 100 days since that interview. The 100th day of Trump's presidency is April 30.

Trump becomes president and starts negotiations

JAN. 31: Trump says his new administration has already had "very serious" discussions with Russia and says he and Putin could soon take "significant" action toward ending the grinding conflict.

"We will be speaking, and I think will perhaps do something that'll be significant," Trump said in an exchange with reporters in the Oval Office. "We want to end that war. That war would have not started if I was president."

FEB. 12: Trump and Putin speak for more than an hour and Trump speaks afterward with Zelenskyy. Trump says afterward, "I think we're on the way to getting peace."

FEB. 19: Trump posts on his Truth Social site that Zelenskyy is serving as a "dictator without elections." He adds that "we are successfully negotiating an end to the War with Russia, something all admit only 'TRUMP,' and the Trump Administration, can do."

FEB. 28: Trump and Zelenskyy have a contentious Oval Office meeting. Trump berates Zelenskyy for being "disrespectful," then abruptly calls off the signing of a minerals deal that Trump said would have moved Ukraine closer to ending the war.

Declaring himself "in the middle" and not on the side of either Ukraine or Russia in the conflict, Trump went on to deride Zelenskyy's "hatred" for Putin as a roadblock to peace.

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"You see the hatred he's got for Putin," Trump said. "That's very tough for me to make a deal with that kind of hate."

The Ukrainian leader was asked to leave the White House by top Trump advisers shortly after Trump shouted at him. Trump later told reporters that he wanted an "immediate ceasefire" between Russia and Ukraine but expressed doubt that Zelenskyy was ready to make peace.

MARCH 3: Trump temporarily pauses military aid to Ukraine to pressure Zelenskyy to seek peace.

Trump claims his 24-hour promise was 'sarcastic'

MARCH 14: Trump says he was "being a little bit sarcastic" when he repeatedly claimed as a candidate that he would have the Russia-Ukraine war solved within 24 hours.

"Well, I was being a little bit sarcastic when I said that," Trump says in a clip released from an interview for the "Full Measure" television program. "What I really mean is I'd like to get it settled and, I'll, I think, I think I'll be successful."

MARCH 18-19: Trump speaks with both Zelenskyy and Putin on successive days.

In a March 18 call, Putin told Trump that he would agree not to target Ukraine's energy infrastructure but refused to back a full 30-day ceasefire that Trump had proposed. Afterward, Trump on social media heralded that move, which he said came "with an understanding that we will be working quickly to have a Complete Ceasefire and, ultimately, an END to this very horrible War between Russia and Ukraine."

In their own call a day later, Trump suggested that Zelenskyy should consider giving the U.S. ownership of Ukraine's power plants to ensure their long-term security. Trump told Zelenskyy that the U.S. could be "very helpful in running those plants with its electricity and utility expertise," according to a White House statement from Secretary of State Marco Rubio and national security adviser Mike Waltz.

APRIL 14: Trump says "everybody" is to blame: Zelenskyy, Putin and Biden.

"That's a war that should have never been allowed to start and Biden could have stopped it and Zelenskyy could have stopped it and Putin should have never started it," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office.

Talk of moving on

APRIL 18: Rubio says that the U.S. may "move on" from trying to secure a Russia-Ukraine peace deal if there is no progress in the coming days.

He spoke in Paris after landmark talks among U.S., Ukrainian and European officials produced outlines for steps toward peace and appeared to make some long-awaited progress. A new meeting is expected next week in London, and Rubio suggested it could be decisive in determining whether the Trump administration continues its involvement.

"We are now reaching a point where we need to decide whether this is even possible or not," Rubio told reporters. "Because if it's not, then I think we're just going to move on. It's not our war. We have other priorities to focus on."

He said the U.S. administration wants to decide "in a matter of days."

Later that day, Trump told reporters at the White House that he agreed with Rubio that a Ukraine peace deal must be done "quickly."

"I have no specific number of days but quickly. We want to get it done," he said.

Saying "Marco is right" that the dynamic of the negotiations must change, Trump stopped short of saying he's ready to walk away from peace negotiations.

"Well, I don't want to say that," Trump said. "But we want to see it end."

Men toting chains and pierced with cactus keep a Good Friday tradition in Atlixco, Mexico

By FERNANDA PESCE Associated Press

ATLIXCO, Mexico (AP) — Every year, crowds fill the streets of the central Mexican town of Atlixco on the Catholic holiday of Good Friday to witness the sight.

Throngs of half-naked men walk through the scorching streets blindfolded, toting 70-pound chains and

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pieces of cactus lodged in their arms and legs. It's part of a tradition in the town where participants say they are paying penance for their sins.

But participation has dipped in recent years, and a tradition that once involved more than 100 people now has just 35. It coincides with a larger dip in people who consider themselves Catholic in the Latin American nation.

Locals and organizers believe it's due to the loss of faith among young people, who find the practice too burdensome.

Since 1990, the share of Mexicans who identify themselves as Catholic has dropped from just over 90% to 78%, according to Mexico's 2020 census.

"Young people, they're losing their faith," said 68-year-old Atlixco businessman Vicente Valbuena, who conceded: "Also, the physical toll is pretty tough."

Israeli strikes kill at least 25 in Gaza and Huckabee makes first appearance as US ambassador

By WAFSA SHURFA and FATMA KHALED Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli airstrikes across Gaza killed at least 25 people on Friday including children, hospital workers said, as the new U.S. ambassador to Israel made his first public appearance in Jerusalem.

The dead included 15 people killed in three strikes on the southern city of Khan Younis, according to Nasser Hospital, which received the bodies. Ten people were killed in Jabaliya, including eight from the same home, according to the Indonesian Hospital, where the bodies were brought.

The strikes came a day after more than two dozen people died in Gaza as Israel continued attacks, pressuring Hamas to disarm and return hostages it took in October 2023.

Ambassador arrives in Jerusalem

U.S. Ambassador Mike Huckabee visited the Western Wall on Friday, the holiest Jewish prayer site in Jerusalem's Old City. He inserted a prayer into the wall, which he said was handwritten by U.S. President Donald Trump. "Those are his initials, D.T.," said Huckabee while showing the note to the media.

In his first act as ambassador, Huckabee said Trump told him to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Huckabee also said every effort was being made to bring home the remaining hostages held by Hamas. A one-time presidential hopeful, Huckabee has acknowledged his past support for Israel's right to annex the West Bank and incorporate its Palestinian population into Israel but said it would not be his "prerogative" to carry out that policy.

During his first term, Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital over Palestinian objections and moved the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv. Palestinians seek the eastern part of the city, captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war, as their future capital.

Huckabee's arrival comes at a pivotal time in the 18-month war, as international mediators including the U.S. are trying to get a broken ceasefire back on track.

Israel is demanding that Hamas release more hostages at the start of any new ceasefire and ultimately agree to disarm and leave the territory. Israel has said it plans to occupy large "security zones" inside Gaza.

Khalil al-Hayya, head of Hamas' negotiating delegation, said Thursday the group had rejected Israel's latest proposal along those lines. He reiterated Hamas' stance that it will return hostages only in exchange for the release of more Palestinian prisoners, a full Israeli withdrawal and a lasting truce, as called for in the now-defunct ceasefire agreement reached in January.

Hamas currently holds 59 hostages, 24 of whom are believed to be alive.

Friday's airstrikes came a day after aid groups raised alarm over Israel's blockade of Gaza, where it has barred entry of all food and other goods for more than six weeks. Thousands of children have become malnourished, and most people are barely eating one meal a day as stocks dwindle, the United Nations said.

Israel's Defense Minister says the blockade is one of the "central pressure tactics" against Hamas, which Israel accuses of siphoning off aid to maintain its rule. Aid workers deny there is significant diversion of

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aid, saying the U.N. closely monitors distribution. Rights groups have called it a "starvation tactic."

Gaza's Christians mark Good Friday

As Israel continued its offensive, Palestinian Christians gathered inside Gaza's Greek Orthodox Church of St. Porphyrios to mark the Good Friday holiday. Worshippers clad in black bowed their heads in prayer and lit votive candles to commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus.

A building in the St. Porphyrios compound was hit soon after the war began in October 2023, killing more than a dozen people taking refuge there. Friday's holiday was the second Good Friday celebrated in Gaza since then. St. Porphyrios is believed to be the third oldest church in the world, according to the World Council of Churches.

Gaza was home to about 1,300 Christians before the start of the war, according to the U.S. State Department.

The war began when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting 251. Most of the hostages have since been released in ceasefire agreements or other deals.

Israel's offensive has since killed over 51,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants. The war has destroyed vast parts of Gaza and most of its food production capabilities. The war has displaced around 90% of the population, with hundreds of thousands of people living in tent camps and bombed-out buildings.

Trump says Ukraine-Russia talks 'coming to a head' and 'no one is playing' him in push to end war

By ANGELA CHARLTON and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

PARIS (AP) —

President Donald Trump on Friday said negotiations between Ukraine and Russia are "coming to a head" and insisted that neither side is "playing" him in his push to end the grinding war.

Trump spoke shortly after Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned that the U.S. may "move on" from trying to secure a Russia-Ukraine peace deal if there is no progress in the coming days, after months of efforts have failed to bring an end to the fighting.

"Now, if for some reason, one of the two parties makes it very difficult, we're just going to say you're foolish. You are fools, you horrible people," Trump said. "And we're going to just take a pass. But hopefully, we won't have to do that."

Rubio's dour assessment came after landmark talks in Paris among U.S., Ukrainian and European officials produced outlines for steps toward peace and appeared to make some long-awaited progress. Another meeting is expected next week in London, and Rubio suggested it could be decisive in determining whether the Trump administration continues its involvement.

"We are now reaching a point where we need to decide whether this is even possible or not," Rubio told reporters in Paris. "Because if it's not, then I think we're just going to move on. It's not our war. We have other priorities to focus on."

He said the U.S. administration wants to decide "in a matter of days."

The State Department said Rubio issued the same warning in a phone call Friday with NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte, telling him that "if a clear path to peace does not emerge soon, the United States will step back from efforts to broker peace."

Trump said "Marco is right" that the dynamic of the negotiations must change, but stopped short of saying he's ready to walk away.

"Well, I don't want to say that," Trump said. "But we want to see it end."

Rubio's comments stepped up pressure on both sides to reach a peace deal, even as the U.S. and Ukraine made progress on a minerals agreement that Trump has sought to recoup billions of dollars in military assistance that Washington has sent Kyiv since Russia's full scale invasion in February 2022.

They also indicated the road to a complete truce will be long and mired with contention, despite Trump

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repeatedly claiming on the campaign trail that he could end the war within a day. Trump said last month that he was "being a little bit sarcastic."

Coming out of the Paris talks, the Americans are ready to use both carrot and stick strategies with Russia and understand the need for "a relationship of force that allows them to get commitments from both sides," said a French diplomatic official who took part in the talks but was not authorized to comment publicly.

The Americans and Europeans discussed sanctions but "not the question of easing sanctions" on Russia. The official said the European Union needs to use "all instruments at our disposition," notably to have levers of influence over the Russians to ensure they commit to eventual promises.

U.S. Vice President JD Vance struck a more hopeful tone in Rome on Friday, ahead of talks with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

"We think we have some interesting things to report on, of course in private," he said. On the negotiations, "I won't prejudge them, but we do feel optimistic that we can hopefully bring this war, this very brutal war, to a close."

He didn't give more details.

Progress on minerals deal

The U.S. and Ukraine are nearing a long-delayed deal granting the U.S. access to Ukraine's vast mineral resources, which has been intertwined with Trump's peace push. Trump said Thursday: "We have a minerals deal." Ukraine's economy minister said Friday that the two countries signed a memorandum of intent ahead of a possible fuller agreement later.

The deal, which Ukrainian Economy Minister Yuliia Svyrydenko said she signed with U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, is expected to pave the way for significant investments, infrastructure modernization and long-term cooperation.

The framework of the mineral deal had stalled in February following a contentious Oval Office meeting between Trump, Vance and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Russia says its 'open to dialogue'

Despite apparent impatience with the peace efforts, Rubio called Thursday's Paris talks constructive. He said he informed Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov about the outlines that emerged, but wouldn't say how Lavrov reacted.

When asked about Rubio's comments on Friday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that "fairly complex" negotiations are ongoing between Russia and the U.S. He did not give details.

"Russia is striving toward resolving this conflict, securing its own interests, and is open to dialogue. We are continuing to do this," he said.

Peskov stressed that a limited, 30-day ceasefire backed by Washington that both Russia and Ukraine last month embraced in principle has now lapsed, but did not say what steps Moscow might take next.

While voicing their readiness to implement the agreement, the warring parties issued conflicting statements soon after their separate talks with U.S. officials in Saudi Arabia. They differed on the start time of halting strikes, and alleged near-immediate breaches by the other side.

After weeks of tensions with European allies, Rubio said the European negotiators proved helpful. "The U.K. and France and Germany can help us move the ball on this."

European concerns are growing about Trump's readiness to draw closer to Russia. The talks in Paris were the first time since Trump's inauguration that top American, Ukrainian and European officials met to discuss an end to the war, which has posed the biggest security challenge to Europe since World War II.

The meetings addressed security guarantees for Ukraine in the future, but Rubio wouldn't discuss any possible U.S. role in that. Some kind of U.S. support for Ukraine is seen as crucial to ensuring that Russia would not attack again after a peace deal is reached.

Rubio and presidential envoy Steve Witkoff have helped lead U.S. efforts to seek peace, and Witkoff has met three times with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Rubio said. Several rounds of negotiations have been held in Saudi Arabia.

Moscow has effectively refused to accept a separate, comprehensive ceasefire that Trump has pushed

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and Ukraine has endorsed. Russia has made it conditional on a halt in Ukraine's mobilization efforts and Western arms supplies, which are demands rejected by Ukraine.

Asked if Putin was dragging his feet on negotiations, Trump replied, "I hope not. We'll know about that soon if he is."

Thomas Wright, a former National Security Council adviser closely involved in the Biden administration's efforts on the war, said Trump's approach to the negotiations "was sort of remarkable" for putting all the pressure for concessions on Ukraine. It suggests, he said, that Trump might want to "sidestep the war" and move forward to deepen ties with Russia.

Wright said if the Trump administration were to pull support from Ukraine, it would help Russia but it wouldn't end the war.

"The only way to bring the war to an end is to somehow increase pressure on Putin to negotiate seriously," said Wright, now a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington. "And the only way you can really do that is by ... maintaining and intensifying support for Ukraine on the battlefield."

Ukrainian cities attacked

Meanwhile, Russia kept up its deadly strikes on Ukrainian cities, wounding scores of civilians days after missiles killed at least 34 during Palm Sunday celebrations in the northern city of Sumy.

One person died and 98 others, including six children, were hurt as Russia hit Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, on Friday, its mayor Ihor Terekhov reported. He said cluster munitions struck a densely populated neighborhood four times.

Russian drones also targeted a bakery in Sumy, less than a week after the deadly Palm Sunday strike there, killing a customer and wounding an employee, the regional prosecutor's office said. Photos released by the agency showed rows of Easter cakes stacked inside a devastated building, covered in thick dust, as a huge hole gaped in the wall behind them and rubble piled up on the floor.

Last Sunday's strike on Sumy, resulting in mass casualties, was the second large-scale missile attack to claim civilian lives in just over a week. Some 20 people, including nine children, died on April 4 as missiles struck Zelenskyy's hometown of Kryvyi Rih.

Deadly US airstrike on Yemeni oil port escalates Trump's campaign against the Houthis

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A U.S. airstrike on an important oil port held by Yemen's Houthi rebels killed more than 70 people and wounded many others, the Iranian-backed rebel group said Friday, marking a major escalation in the military campaign President Donald Trump launched against the faction last month.

The overnight strike on the Ras Isa port sent massive fireballs billowing skyward and turned tanker trucks into burning wrecks. It was the first American attack on a Houthi-controlled oil facility in the new U.S. bombing campaign. It also came just before the resumption of negotiations in Rome between the U.S. and Iran over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program, which Washington has linked to its attacks in Yemen.

The U.S. is targeting the Houthis because of the group's attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, a crucial global trade route, and on Israel. The Houthis are the last militant group in Iran's self-described "Axis of Resistance" that is capable of regularly attacking Israel.

The port is a major hub for incoming fuel shipments that power areas of Yemen held by the Houthis, and analysts say the airstrike could seriously affect daily life there.

The Houthis, who said the attack killed at least 74 people and wounded 171 others, aired graphic footage of the aftermath on their al-Masirah satellite news channel, showing corpses strewn about the port and smashed tanker trucks. They denounced the strike as a "completely unjustified aggression."

"It targets a vital civilian facility that has served the Yemeni people for decades," the group said in a statement.

U.S. Central Command declined to answer any questions about possible civilian casualties but referred

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to a statement in which it said "this strike was not intended to harm the people of Yemen."

"U.S. forces took action to eliminate this source of fuel for the Iran-backed Houthi terrorists and deprive them of illegal revenue that has funded Houthi efforts to terrorize the entire region for over 10 years," it said in its statement.

A U.S. official said the attack sent a message to those supplying fuel to the Houthis despite sanctions. The official spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity to provide details not yet made public.

Hours after the U.S. strike, the Houthis launched a missile toward Israel that was intercepted, the Israeli military said. Sirens sounded in Tel Aviv and elsewhere. Meanwhile, the Houthis said they shot down another American MQ-9 Predator drone, which the U.S. official acknowledged.

The port's strategic significance

The Ras Isa port is a collection of oil tanks and equipment that sits in Yemen's Hodeida governorate along the Red Sea. It is just off Kamaran Island, which has been targeted by intense U.S. airstrikes in recent days.

Before the Houthis took control of Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in 2014 and sent the government into exile, oil from the country's energy-rich Marib governorate moved through Ras Isa for export. But since the Houthis don't control that region, the port now serves as an import hub for gasoline, diesel and liquefied petroleum gas that help power those parts of Yemen the Houthis control.

A deadly escalation of Trump's Yemen campaign

The new U.S. operation against the Houthis under Trump appears more extensive than attacks on the group were under President Joe Biden, an AP review found. The new campaign started after the rebels threatened to begin targeting "Israeli" ships again over Israel blocking aid from entering the Gaza Strip.

From November 2023 until this January, the Houthis targeted more than 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two of them and killing four sailors. That has greatly reduced the flow of trade through the Red Sea corridor, which typically sees \$1 trillion of goods move through it. The Houthis also launched attacks targeting American warships without success.

Assessing the toll of the month-old U.S. airstrike campaign has been difficult because the military hasn't released information about the attacks, including what was targeted and how many people were killed. The Houthis, meanwhile, strictly control access to attacked areas and don't publish complete information on the strikes, many of which likely have targeted military and security sites.

The Ras Isa port airstrike is the deadliest known attack yet in the month-old campaign. The actual cost in lives is hard to assess, said Luca Nevola, the senior analyst for Yemen and the Gulf at the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, a think tank.

"Since they are targeting civilian areas, there's a lot more victims. But it's also difficult to assess how many because the Houthis are releasing these umbrella statements that cover all the victims ... or tend to stress only the civilian victims," Nevola said.

Further complicating the situation is the U.S. strikes hitting military targets, said Mohammed al-Basha, a Yemen expert at the Basha Report risk advisory firm. He pointed to an American attack that Trump highlighted online with black-and-white strike footage, which might have killed about 70 fighters.

"Although the Houthis claimed it was a tribal gathering, they neither released any footage nor named a single casualty, strongly suggesting the victims were not civilians but affiliated fighters," al-Basha said. "However, the overnight strike on the Ras Isa Fuel Port marks the first mass-casualty incident the Houthis have openly acknowledged and publicized."

The AP analyzed satellite images of the port provided by Planet Labs PBC that showed destroyed oil tanks and vehicles, and what appeared to be oil leaking into the Red Sea.

Wim Zwijnenburg, an analyst with the Dutch peace organization PAX, said it appeared at least three fuel storage tanks had been destroyed and that oil had leaked from mooring pipelines.

The U.S. airstrikes continued overnight into early Saturday, with the Houthis reporting them in Yemen's al-Jawf, Sadaa and Sanaa governorates.

The U.S. accuses a Chinese company of aiding Houthi attacks

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A U.S. State Department spokesperson, Tammy Bruce, accused a Chinese commercial satellite image provider, Chang Guang Satellite Technology Co. Ltd., of “directly supporting Iran-backed Houthi terrorist attacks on U.S. interests.”

During a briefing with reporters, Bruce did not elaborate in detail. But she acknowledged a report by The Financial Times that quoted anonymous American officials saying the company linked to the People’s Liberation Army has provided images allowing the rebels to target U.S. warships and commercial vessels traveling through the Red Sea corridor.

Bruce said “Beijing’s support” of the satellite company ... “contradicts their claims of being peace supporters.”

Responding to a question about the allegation, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said Friday: “I am not familiar with the situation you mentioned.” However, he insisted China is seen as urging countries “to make more efforts conducive to regional peace and stability.”

“Since the escalations in the Red Sea situation, China has been playing a positive role in de-escalating the situation,” Lin said. “Who is promoting talks for peace and deescalating the tensions, and who is imposing sanctions and pressure?”

The company didn’t respond to request for comment. The U.S. Treasury sanctioned it in 2023 for allegedly providing satellite images to the Russian mercenary force the Wagner Group as it fought in Ukraine.

It remains unclear whether Chang Guang is linked to the Chinese government. The U.S. government in the past has used images taken by American commercial satellite companies to share with allies, like Ukraine, to avoid releasing its own top-secret pictures.

US senator returns from El Salvador trip, says Abrego Garcia case is about far more than one man

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The dispute over the wrongful deportation and imprisonment of Kilmar Abrego Garcia “is not only about one man” but about Donald Trump’s disregard of the American judicial system as well, Sen. Chris Van Hollen said Friday as he returned from a three-day trip to El Salvador to press for the detained man’s release.

Speaking to reporters just after landing back in the United States, Van Hollen offered few answers about what will come next in Abrego Garcia’s case. But the Maryland Democrat said that he and others will keep speaking out after the Trump administration defied court orders to facilitate his return to the United States and insisted that he would stay in El Salvador — even as officials acknowledged an “error” in deporting him.

“It’s about protecting the constitutional rights of everybody who resides in the United States,” Van Hollen said at Washington Dulles International Airport at a news conference with Abrego Garcia’s supporters behind him. “It’s very clear that the president, Trump administration, are blatantly, flagrantly disagreeing with, defying the order from the Supreme Court.”

Standing next to him, Abrego Garcia’s wife, Jennifer, wiped away tears as the senator shared her husband’s comments about missing his family.

Much uncertainty remains about the future of Abrego Garcia, a Salvadoran citizen who was living in Maryland, after Van Hollen was presented with a carefully staged opportunity to meet with him in El Salvador on Thursday. The Maryland senator said that Abrego Garcia reported he’d been moved from a notorious Salvadoran mega-prison, CECOT, to a detention center with better conditions.

Abrego Garcia’s status after Van Hollen left was not known, and there was no indication that Van Hollen’s trip pushed him any closer to release.

The case has become a focal point in the national immigration debate. Democrats insist that President Donald Trump is overstepping his executive authority and disrespecting the courts; Republicans are criticizing Democrats for defending a man Trump and White House officials claim is an MS-13 gang member, despite the fact that he has not been charged with any gang-related crimes.

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Van Hollen said that Abrego Garcia told him that he'd shared a cell with 25 prisoners and was afraid of many fellow inmates at CECOT before he was moved to another center in Santa Ana, El Salvador. He said that Abrego Garcia reported being treated well — but noted that they were surrounded by government minders at the time.

Democrats are pushing, Republicans aren't budging

The fight over Abrego Garcia is the latest partisan flashpoint as Democrats struggle to break through and push back during the opening few months of Trump's second administration.

More Democratic lawmakers have said they will fly to El Salvador to push for Abrego Garcia's release, but the partisan pressure has yielded no results. President Donald Trump and El Salvador's president, Nayib Bukele, have only dug in on keeping him out of the United States. That stance remained even after the U.S. Supreme Court called on the administration to facilitate his return.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt has said that Abrego Garcia will "never live in the United States of America again."

Bukele posted images of Van Hollen's meeting with Abrego Garcia on Thursday and said that the prisoner "gets the honor of staying in El Salvador's custody." Van Hollen said a Salvadoran government official placed other beverages on the table with salt or sugar on the rim to make it appear they were drinking margaritas. Van Hollen said neither he nor Abrego Garcia drank from the glasses, which in the photo Bukele posted were garnished with cherries.

After days of denying that he knew much about Abrego Garcia, Trump on Friday said he knew Abrego Garcia's prison record was "unbelievably bad" and called him an "illegal alien" and a "foreign terrorist."

The president also responded Friday with a social media post saying Van Hollen "looked like a fool yesterday standing in El Salvador begging for attention."

More members of Congress are visiting the prison, or trying

Several House Republicans have visited the notorious gang prison in support of the Trump administration's efforts. Rep. Riley Moore, a West Virginia Republican, posted Tuesday evening that he'd visited the prison where Abrego Garcia is being held. "I leave now even more determined to support President Trump's efforts to secure our homeland," Moore wrote on social media.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials acknowledged in a court filing earlier this month that Abrego Garcia's deportation was an "administrative error." The government's acknowledgment generated immediate uproar from immigration advocates, but White House officials have stuck with the allegation that he's a gang member.

The fight has also played out in contentious court filings, with repeated refusals from the government to tell a judge what it plans to do, if anything, to repatriate him.

The three-judge panel from the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously refused Thursday to suspend the judge's decision to order sworn testimony by Trump administration officials and said the judiciary will be hurt by the "constant intimations of its illegitimacy" while the executive branch "will lose much from a public perception of its lawlessness."

Judge J. Harvie Wilkinson III, nominated by President Ronald Reagan, a Republican, wrote that he and his two colleagues "cling to the hope that it is not naïve to believe our good brethren in the Executive Branch perceive the rule of law as vital to the American ethos."

Since March, El Salvador has accepted from the United States more than 200 Venezuelan immigrants whom Trump administration officials have accused of gang activity and violent crimes. Bukele's government has placed them inside the country's maximum-security gang prison, just outside San Salvador.

Shooting rampage at Florida State that left 2 dead lasted less than 5 minutes, police say

By KATE PAYNE and CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Several thousand students, staff and faculty packed a plaza at Florida State University for a vigil Friday evening, bowing their heads in a moment of silence honoring the two people

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who were killed and six others who were wounded in a shooting rampage the previous day.

The gunman, identified as the stepson of a sheriff's deputy, arrived on campus an hour before the shooting Thursday and stayed near a parking garage before he walked in and out of buildings and green spaces while firing a handgun just before lunchtime, police said.

In roughly four minutes, officers confronted 20-year-old Phoenix Ikner, a Florida State student, and shot and wounded him, Tallahassee police said.

Officials have not identified the two men who died, but family members said Robert Morales, a university dining coordinator, was one of them. He worked at Florida State since 2015 and studied criminology there in the early 1990s, according to his LinkedIn profile.

The other was Tiru Chabba, 45, a married father of two from Greenville, South Carolina, who was working for food service vendor Aramark, said Michael Wukela, a spokesperson for attorneys hired by the family.

Police have said five others were shot, and another person was hurt running away.

Medical staff at Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare said they treated six people for gunshots, including three who were operated on, and all were expected to survive.

They would not give any information about those people's identities or say whether the suspect was among them. Police said earlier that he was taken to a local hospital.

Some of the wounded were students, according to university President Richard McCullough.

Classes were canceled Friday, but some students came to campus to retrieve backpacks and laptops they left behind when they barricaded classroom doors and eventually fled to safety.

"I don't think any words can do it justice," said Audrey Rothman, one of three members of the Florida State women's volleyball team who brought flowers and held hands in a brief prayer circle.

Police believe Ikner used a former service weapon that belongs to his stepmother, an 18-year veteran of the Leon County Sheriff's Office, Sheriff Walt McNeil said. In recent years she has worked as a middle school resource officer and was the department's employee of the month a year ago in March.

After the shooting she requested and was granted personal leave and also reassigned from her post at the school, said Shonda Knight, executive director of community and media relations for the agency.

Ikner's earlier years

The suspect was a longstanding member of the Leon County Sheriff's youth advisory council, police said. The group was created to build communication between young people and local law enforcement while also teaching teens leadership and team-building skills.

He was a junior at FSU studying political science after earning an associates degree last fall from Tallahassee State College, university spokeswoman Amy Farnum-Patronis confirmed.

Authorities have not yet revealed a motive.

When Ikner was a child, his parents were involved in several custody disputes with his biological mother, court records show.

In 2015, when he was 10, his biological mother, Anne-Mari Eriksen, said she was taking him to South Florida for spring break in 2015 but instead traveled to Norway. After returning to the U.S., she pleaded no contest to removing a minor from the state against a court order and was sentenced to 200 days in jail. She later moved to vacate her plea, but that was denied.

In the fall of that same year, Eriksen filed a civil libel-slander complaint against Jessica Ikner, along with several other family members. The complaint, which was later dismissed, accused them of harassing Eriksen and abusing Ikner's position at the sheriff's office.

In 2020, at age 15, the suspect received court approval to change his name from Christian Eriksen to Phoenix Ikner, court documents show. His old name was a constant reminder of a "tragedy" he suffered, in the words of administrative magistrate James Banks, who approved the request, NBC News reported.

Banks observed that Ikner was a "mentally, emotionally and physically mature young adult who is very articulate" and "very polite" said he chose the new name as a representation of "rising from the ashes anew."

Shooting was not the first at the school

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The shooting erupted just a few hours before a forum on countering hate on campus was to take place in a classroom building nearby.

The event, titled "United Against Hate: Building a Safer Campus and Community Together," was part of a project honoring Maura Binkley, a Florida State student who was killed in a mass shooting at a yoga studio in 2018.

A few students who are now at Florida State also went through the trauma of one of the deadliest school shootings in U.S. history at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School seven years ago in South Florida.

A few miles from the FSU campus, the Bethel Missionary Baptist Church began its Good Friday service with prayers for the shooting victims and families.

The Rev. R.B. Holmes said he visited the victims at the hospital with Tallahassee Mayor John Dailey, who also attended the service.

"We're not going to emphasize the tragedy," Holmes said. "We're going to emphasize hope and healing. Our faith says we shall overcome. I said to the students, we will be there for them."

Pupy the elephant arrives at a Brazil sanctuary after 30 years in Argentine zoo

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Pupy the elephant arrived at her new home in a sanctuary in Mato Grosso, Brazil, Friday following a 2,700-kilometer (1,680-mile) overland journey from a zoo converted into an ecological park in Argentina's capital where she had spent 30 years in conditions criticized by activists.

The Buenos Aires mayor's office said in a statement that the last elephant living in the Argentine city's "Ecopark" arrived at her destination in Brazil's Amazon rainforest "in perfect health."

The 35-year-old African elephant was transported in a large iron crate with thick bars strapped to a truck, a mission for which she had been trained for several months. The truck was flanked by vans filled with caretakers and veterinarians.

Pupy (pronounced POOH'-pee in Spanish) did not require sedation during the five-day journey to Elephant Sanctuary Brazil, the first refuge for elephants in Latin America located in the municipality of Chapadas Dos Guimarães in Mato Gross state, Argentine authorities said.

Upon arriving at the sanctuary, her veterinary escorts opened the door for her, but Pupy was reluctant to leave the iron crate. They said they fed her sugarcane and watermelon, her favorite food, and gave her a bath to refresh her.

Pupy will remain in an outdoor shed while she begins to adapt to her new home, without rushing.

"Everything will happen at her own pace," said the Buenos Aires mayor's office.

In 2016, Buenos Aires launched the transformation of its century-old, urban zoo in Palermo neighborhood into an ecological park for the preservation of biodiversity and the conservation of native species.

As part of this process, more than 1,000 animals — including lions, tigers, bears and apes — have been relocated to other countries where they enjoy better living conditions. An emblematic case was that of the orangutan Sandra, who now lives at the Great Ape Center in Wauchula, Florida, where she has adapted and has friends of her own species.

Pupy, who arrived at the Palermo zoo in 1993, is the latest animal transferred from the Buenos Aires ecological park.

Already enjoying the Brazil Elephant Sanctuary are five Asian elephants — including Mara, a former circus elephant that also ended up in the Argentine preserve's enclosure and five years ago made the same highway trip to the refuge, where she now trudges at least 10 kilometers (6 miles) a day.

Pupy will not be reunited with Mara in her new home, "due to the natural differences between the two species," officials explained. "The sanctuary is designed to keep the groups separate, respecting their biological and behavioral needs."

The Buenos Aires "Ecopark" will continue to house animals that, due to age or logistical impossibility, cannot be transferred to another habitat.

FSU shooting victims include a school employee whose dad was a Cuban exile turned CIA operative

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Two people were killed and six others were injured when a gunman opened fire at Florida State University, sending students fleeing from the student union and putting the Tallahassee, Florida, campus under lockdown.

Authorities have identified the shooter as Phoenix Ikner, a 20-year-old Florida State student who is the stepson of a sheriff's deputy. He began firing with his stepmother's former service weapon before he was shot and wounded by officers when he refused to comply with commands, investigators said.

Authorities have not yet revealed a motive for the shooting, which began around lunchtime Thursday just outside the student union.

Officials have also not identified the victims who died. A family member said that university employee Robert Morales was one of those who were killed. Attorneys for the family of the second victim identified him as Tiru Chabba, a food service vendor executive. Here is what we know about Morales and Chabba.

Robert Morales

Robert Morales was a university dining coordinator who had worked at Florida State since 2015, according to his LinkedIn profile.

"Today we lost my younger Brother, he was one of the victims killed at FSU," Ricardo Morales Jr. posted on social media late Thursday. "He loved his job at FSU and his beautiful Wife and Daughter. I'm glad you were in my life."

Morales had studied criminology at the school in the early 1990s, according to the LinkedIn profile.

The profile also said he was CEO of Black Bean Food Group, though state records show that the business was dissolved a decade ago.

Morales developed innovative menus, especially Cuban food, and was a former assistant football coach at nearby Leon High School, Kyle Clark, a senior vice president at FSU, said Friday afternoon at a vigil.

"He didn't just do a job. He lived the job," Clark said. "He was a stellar person."

The Morales brothers' father, Ricardo Morales, was a Cuban exile turned CIA operative in South Florida with the nickname "Monkey." Ricardo Morales Jr. describes his father's work as a contract agent for the CIA in the forthcoming book, "Monkey Morales: The True Story of a Mythic Cuban Exile, Assassin, CIA Operative, FBI Informant, Smuggler, and Dad," which is expected to be published later this year.

"Dubbed 'The Monkey' for his disruptive and unpredictable escapades, Morales grabbed headlines for decades as tales of his bombings, arrests, assassination attempts (both those he executed and those he suffered), and testimony constructed a real-life spy adventure unlike anything brought to page or screen," reads promotional material from publisher Simon & Schuster.

The elder Morales was fatally shot in a bar brawl in 1982 at the age of 43.

Tiru Chabba

Tiru Chabba was working for food service vendor Aramark when he was killed on the Florida State campus, said Michael Wukela, a spokesperson for attorneys hired by the family.

A LinkedIn profile listed Chabba as a regional vice president of Aramark Collegiate Hospitality who had worked for the company for more than two decades. The 45-year-old Greenville, South Carolina, resident was a married father of two children who had earned an MBA from The Citadel in South Carolina.

"Tiru Chabba's family is going through the unimaginable now," Bakari Sellers, one of the attorneys hired by the family, said in a statement. "Instead of hiding Easter eggs and visiting with friends and family, they're living a nightmare where this loving father and devoted husband was stolen from them in an act of senseless and preventable violence."

Judge says detained Tufts student must be transferred from Louisiana to Vermont

By HOLLY RAMER and KATHY McCORMACK Associated Press

A Tufts University student from Turkey being held in a Louisiana immigration facility must be returned to New England no later than May 1 to determine whether she was illegally detained for co-writing an op-ed piece in the student newspaper, a federal judge ruled Friday.

U.S. District Judge William Sessions said he would hear Rumeysa Ozturk's request to be released from detention in Burlington, Vermont, with a bail hearing set for May 9 and a hearing on the petition's merits on May 22. Ozturk's lawyers had requested that she be released immediately, or at least brought back to Vermont, while the Justice Department argued that an immigration court in Louisiana had jurisdiction.

"The Court concludes that this case will continue in this court with Ms. Ozturk physically present for the remainder of the proceedings," the judge wrote. "Ms. Ozturk has presented viable and serious habeas claims which warrant urgent review on the merits. The Court plans to move expeditiously to a bail hearing and final disposition of the habeas petition, as Ms. Ozturk's claims require no less."

The ruling came more than three weeks after masked immigration officials surrounded the 30-year-old doctoral student as she walked along a street in a Boston suburb March 25 and drove her to New Hampshire and Vermont before putting her on a plane to a detention center in Basile, Louisiana. An immigration judge denied her request for bond Wednesday, citing "danger and flight risk" as the rationale.

Ozturk is among several people with ties to American universities whose visas were revoked or who have been stopped from entering the U.S. after they were accused of attending demonstrations or publicly expressing support for Palestinians. A Louisiana immigration judge has ruled that the U.S. can deport Columbia University graduate student Mahmoud Khalil based on the federal government's argument that he poses a national security risk.

Ozturk's lawyers first filed a petition on her behalf in Massachusetts, but they didn't know where she was and were unable to speak to her until more than 24 hours after she was detained. Ozturk herself said she unsuccessfully made multiple requests to speak to a lawyer.

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

Ozturk's lawyers say her detention violates her constitutional rights, including free speech and due process. In his ruling, Sessions said she has "plausibly pled constitutional violations" but said such pleadings weren't enough to warrant her immediate release.

A Department of Homeland Security spokesperson said last month, without providing evidence, that investigations found that Ozturk engaged in activities in support of Hamas, a U.S.-designated terrorist group.

10,000 pages of records about Robert F. Kennedy's 1968 assassination are released, on Trump's order

By JOSH FUNK and HAYA PANJWANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — About 10,000 pages of records related to the 1968 assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy were released Friday, including handwritten notes by the gunman, who said the Democratic presidential candidate "must be disposed of" and acknowledged an obsession with killing him.

Many of the files had been made public previously, while others had not been digitized and sat for decades in federal government storage facilities. Their release continued the disclosure of historical investigation documents ordered by President Donald Trump.

Kennedy was fatally shot on June 5, 1968, at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles moments after giving a speech celebrating his victory in California's presidential primary. His assassin, Sirhan Sirhan, was convicted of first-degree murder and is serving life in prison.

The files included pictures of handwritten notes by Sirhan.

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"RFK must be disposed of like his brother was," read the writing on the outside of an empty envelope, referring to Kennedy's older brother, President John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated in 1963. The return address was from the district director of the Internal Revenue Service in Los Angeles.

The National Archives and Records Administration posted 229 files containing the pages to its public website.

The release comes a month after unredacted files related to the assassination of President Kennedy were disclosed. Those documents gave curious readers more details about Cold War-era covert U.S. operations in other nations but did not initially lend credence to long-circulating conspiracy theories about who killed JFK.

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the son of Robert Kennedy, commended the release.

"Lifting the veil on the RFK papers is a necessary step toward restoring trust in American government," the health secretary said in a statement.

Documents include interviews with assassin's acquaintances

The files surrounding Robert Kennedy's assassination also included notes from interviews with people who knew Sirhan from a wide variety of contexts, such as classmates, neighbors and coworkers. While some described him as "a friendly, kind and generous person" others depicted a brooding and "impressionable" young man who felt strongly about his political convictions and briefly believed in mysticism.

According to the files, Sirhan told his garbage collector that he planned to kill Kennedy shortly after the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968. The sanitation worker, a Black man, said he planned to vote for Kennedy because he would help Black people.

"Well, I don't agree. I am planning on shooting the son of a bitch," Sirhan replied, the man told investigators.

Larry Sabato, director of the University of Virginia Center for Politics and author of "The Kennedy Half-Century," said there have always been conspiracies surrounding Robert Kennedy's assassination. He believes the rollout of documents Friday would be similar to the JFK documents released earlier this year.

He cautioned that a review needs to be done carefully and slowly, "just in case there is a hint in there or there is an anecdote" that could shed more light on the assassination.

"I hope there's more information," Sabato said. "I'm doubtful that there is, just as I said when the JFK documents were released."

Some redactions remained in the documents posted online Friday, including names and dates of birth. Last month, the Trump administration came under criticism over unredacted personal information, including Social Security numbers, during the release of records surrounding President John F. Kennedy's assassination.

Trump, a Republican, has championed in the name of transparency the release of documents related to high-profile assassinations and investigations. But he has also been deeply suspicious for years of the government's intelligence agencies. His administration's release of once-hidden files opens the door for more public scrutiny of the operations and conclusions of institutions such as the CIA and the FBI.

Trump signed an executive order in January calling for the release of government documents related to the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and King, who were killed within two months of each other.

Lawyers for Kennedy's killer have said for decades that he is unlikely to reoffend or pose a danger to society, and in 2021, a parole board deemed Sirhan suitable for release. But Gov. Gavin Newsom rejected the decision in 2022, keeping him in state prison. In 2023, a different panel denied him release, saying he still lacks insight into what caused him to shoot Kennedy.

RFK still stands as a hero to American liberals

Kennedy remains an icon for liberals, who see him as a champion for human rights who also was committed to fighting poverty and racial and economic injustice. They often regard his assassination as the last in a series of major tragedies that put the U.S. and its politics on a darker, more conservative path.

He was a sometimes divisive figure during his lifetime. Some critics thought he came late to opposing the Vietnam War, and he launched his campaign for president in 1968 only after the Democratic primary in New Hampshire exposed President Johnson's political weakness.

Kennedy's older brother appointed him U.S. attorney general, and he remained a close aide to him until JFK's assassination in Dallas. In 1964, he won a U.S. Senate seat from New York and was seen as the heir to the family's political legacy.

Thousands of pilgrims trek through New Mexico desert to historic adobe church for Good Friday

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

CHIMAYÓ, N.M. (AP) — A unique Holy Week tradition drew thousands of Catholic pilgrims to a small adobe church in the hills of northern New Mexico, in a journey on foot through desert badlands to reach a spiritual wellspring.

For generations, people of the Upper Rio Grande Valley and beyond have walked to reach El Santuario de Chimayó to commemorate Good Friday.

Pilgrims began arriving at dawn. Some had walked through the night under a half moon, carrying glow-sticks, flashlights and walking staffs.

Some travelers are lured by an indoor well of dirt believed to have curative powers. Throughout the year, they leave behind crutches, braces and canes in acts of prayer for infirm children and others, and as evidence that miracles happen.

Easter week visitors file through an adobe archway and narrow indoor passages to find a crucified Nuestro Señor de Esquipulas at the main altar. According to local lore, the crucifix was found on the site in the early 1800s, a continent away from its analog at a basilica in the Guatemalan town of Esquipulas.

A spiritual place

Chimayó, known for its artisan weavings and chile crops, rests high above the Rio Grande Valley and opposite the national defense laboratory at Los Alamos that sprang up in the race to develop the first atomic weapon.

The iconic adobe church at Chimayó was cast from local mud at the sunset of Spanish rule in the Americas in the early 1800s, on a site already held sacred by Native Americans.

Set amid narrow streets, curio shops and brooks that flow quickly in spring, El Santuario de Chimayó has been designated as a National Historic Landmark that includes examples of 19th century Hispanic folk art, religious frescoes and saints carved from wood known as bultos.

A separate chapel is dedicated to the Santo Niño de Atocha, a patron saint of children, travelers and those seeking liberation and a fitting figure of devotion for Chimayó pilgrims on the go.

Hundreds of children's shoes have been left in a prayer room there by the faithful in tribute to the holy child who wears out footwear on miraculous errands. There are even tiny boots tacked to the ceiling.

Pueblo people who inhabited the Chimayó area long before Spanish settlers believed healing spirits could be found in the form of hot springs. Those springs ultimately dried up, leaving behind earth attributed with healing powers.

A way of life

Photographer Miguel Gandert grew up in the Española valley below Chimayó and made the pilgrimage as a boy with his parents.

"Everybody went to Chimayó. You didn't have to be Catholic," said Gandert, who was among those who photographed the 1996 pilgrimage through a federal grant. "People just went there because it was a powerful, spiritual place."

Scenes from that pilgrimage — on display at the New Mexico History Museum in Santa Fe — include children eating snow cones to keep cool, men shouldering large wooden crosses, infants swaddled in blankets, bikers in leather and weary pedestrians resting on highway guardrails to smoke.

A generation later, Good Friday pilgrims still haul crosses on the road to Chimayó. Throngs of visitors often wait hours for a turn to file into the Santuario de Chimayó to commemorate the crucifixion.

Adrian Atencio, 30, knelt and ran his hands through the well of red earth in the floor in the Santuario. Atencio, from nearby San Juan Pueblo, has been making the Good Friday trek since age 7. This time it was

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about the future and new beginnings.

"I have a newborn on the way. I was kind of walking for him today," he said.

It is just one of hundreds of adobe churches anchoring a uniquely New Mexican way of life for their communities. Many are at risk of crumbling into the ground in disrepair as congregations and traditions fade.

A journey on foot

Some pilgrims walk 20 miles (32 kilometers) from Santa Fe, while others travel for days from elsewhere. They traverse an arid landscape speckled with juniper and piñon trees and cholla cactus that finally give way to lush cottonwood trees and green pastures on the final descent into Chimayó.

Vendors sell religious trinkets, coffee and treats. State transportation workers, law enforcement agencies and other volunteers are stationed along the roadway to ensure safety from oncoming traffic, the outdoor elements and exhaustion.

The magnitude of the religious pilgrimage has few if any rivals in the U.S. Many participants say their thoughts dwell not only on Jesus Christ but on the suffering of family, friends and neighbors with prayers for relief.

"You can't come here and not feel something," said Dianna De Leon of Albuquerque, who was joined by her 78-year-old mother, Victoria Trujillo, who carried a weathered crucifix on one shoulder.

Trujillo has been making the journey for 51 years, except when the church closed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's a little piece of heaven — all this faith and all this hope," she said.

Judge pauses Trump administration's plans for mass layoffs at Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's attempt to fire nearly everyone at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau was paused on Friday by a federal judge, who said she was "deeply concerned" about the plan and issued an order warning that administration officials appeared to be "thumbing their nose" at the courts.

The decision leaves in limbo a bureau created after the Great Recession to safeguard against fraud, abuse and deceptive practices. Trump administration officials argue that it has overstepped its authority and should have a more limited mission.

On Thursday, the administration officials moved to fire roughly 1,500 people, leaving around 200 employees, through a reduction in force that would dramatically downsize the bureau.

U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson said she was worried the layoffs would violate earlier court decisions. In her written order, she said the administration was poised to "decimate the agency and render it unable to comply with its statutory duties." If the plan were allowed to proceed, "there will be no agency standing" by the time she renders a decision on an earlier lawsuit filed by an employee union that wants to preserve the bureau.

Her harsh language is the latest example of friction between the executive and judicial branches, which has increased as Trump aggressively flexes his presidential power.

"There is reason to believe," Jackson wrote, that administration officials "are thumbing their nose" at judges who have ruled against them.

She scheduled a hearing on April 28 to hear testimony from officials who worked on the reduction in force, or RIF.

"I'm willing to resolve it quickly, but I'm not going to let this RIF go forward until I have," she said during a hearing on Friday.

Trump's plans have often faced legal hurdles as he works to reshape the federal government, saying it's rife with fraud, waste and abuse. Other layoffs and policies have been subjected to stop-and-go litigation and court orders.

The CFPB has long frustrated businesses with its oversight and investigations, and Trump adviser Elon

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Musk made it a top target of his Department of Government Efficiency.

Mark Paoletta, the CFPB's chief legal officer, wrote in a court declaration that "the bureau's activities have pushed well beyond the limits of the law," including what he described as "intrusive and wasteful fishing expeditions."

He said officials have spent weeks developing "a much more limited vision for enforcement and supervision activities" with a "smaller, more efficient operation."

Some of the CFPB's responsibilities are required by law, but would have only one person assigned to them under the Trump administration's plan.

The enforcement division is slated to be cut from 248 to 50 employees. The supervision division faces an even deeper reduction, from 487 to 50, plus a relocation from Washington to the Southeastern region.

Before Friday's hearing, attorneys for the National Treasury Employees Union filed a sworn statement from a CFPB employee identified only by the pseudonym Alex Doe. The employee said Gavin Kliger, a member of DOGE, was managing the agency's RIF team charged with sending layoff notices.

"He kept the team up for 36 hours straight to ensure that the notices would go out yesterday," the employee said. "Gavin was screaming at people he did not believe were working fast enough to ensure they could go out on this compressed timeline, calling them incompetent."

The bureau's chief operating officer, Adam Martinez, told the judge that he believes Kliger is an Office of Personnel Management employee detailed to the CFPB and doesn't work directly for DOGE.

Jackson said she will require Kliger to attend and possibly testify at the April 28 hearing. She said she wants to know why he was there "and what we was doing."

"We're not going to decide what happened until we know what happened," Jackson said.

The pseudonymous employee said team members raised concerns that the bureau had to conduct a "particularized assessment" before it could implement an RIF. Paoletta told them to ignore those concerns and move forward with mass firings, adding that "leadership would assume the risk," the employee stated.

White House officials did not immediately respond to questions about the judge's decision or the employee's court declaration.

An OPM spokesperson said Kliger didn't manage the CFPB reduction in force and dismissed the allegation as part of an effort to diminish DOGE's ability to achieve its mission. The spokesperson spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly.

Judge won't take further steps to enforce his order in AP case against Trump administration

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge who ordered the Trump administration to stop blocking The Associated Press from presidential events refused Friday to take immediate steps to get White House officials to comply — an incremental development in a two-month dispute between the global news agency and administration officials over access.

The case, which has significant free-speech implications under the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment, centers on the government blocking AP's access to cover events because the outlet won't rename the Gulf of Mexico in its reports.

U.S. District Judge Trevor N. McFadden, who handed the AP a victory last week in its efforts to end the ban, said it's too soon to say that President Donald Trump is violating his order — as the AP suggests.

"We are not at the point where we can make much of a determination one way or another," said McFadden, ruling from the bench. "I don't intend to micromanage the White House."

The AP's lawyer, Charles Tobin, wouldn't comment about the judge's decision after the proceedings. The White House issued no immediate comment.

The decision comes after a new press policy at the White House

For two months, the White House has essentially banned AP reporters and photographers from their traditional spot covering events in smaller spaces like the Oval Office and Air Force One. The AP says it's

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a violation of its free-speech rights, enshrined in the First Amendment, to punish a news outlet for an editorial decision — an argument McFadden has endorsed.

In response, the White House this week issued a new press policy that occasionally lets the AP and other wire services into events it used to routinely cover at all times.

Since McFadden's ruling took effect, an AP photographer was allowed into the Oval Office on Thursday after three days of being blocked. A reporter has yet to be allowed back in, but the White House said an AP reporter will be part of the coverage rotation on Saturday — when reporters will follow Trump in a van to where he plans to play golf.

In court, Tobin said the new policy is gamesmanship designed to diminish the outlet's influence. "We think that the new policy really is a thumb in the nose at The Associated Press and this court," he told McFadden.

The White House took clear steps to put last week's ruling into effect, said Jane Lyons, an assistant district attorney who was representing the Trump team. "It is way too soon ... to say that it is a problem," Lyons said.

The judge said he had concerns about the government's actions

McFadden said that the first few days since his order took effect gave him concerns that Trump's team is "not proceeding in compliance here, or perhaps malicious compliance." But the judge, appointed to the court by Trump during the president's first term, said he has to assume that the administration is operating in good faith unless time proves otherwise.

He also wasn't swayed by the AP's argument that it's unconstitutional for the president to have sole discretion over who covers him at these smaller events. The AP, mindful that a dispute over journalists' access isn't likely to move many in the public, has cast it as a broader issue of freedom of speech.

The AP's decisions on what terminology to use are followed by journalists and other writers around the world through its influential stylebook. The outlet said it would continue to use Gulf of Mexico, as the body of water has been known for hundreds of years, while also noting Trump's decision to rename it the Gulf of America.

It's an issue likely to take months to wend its way through the courts. The AP went before a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals Thursday on the same issue about compliance. The Trump administration has said that it will appeal McFadden's initial ruling.

Video shows doctor with measles treating kids. RFK Jr later praised him as an 'extraordinary' healer

By MICHELLE R. SMITH Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — A Texas doctor who has been treating children in a measles outbreak was shown on video with a measles rash on his face in a clinic a week before Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. met him and praised him as an "extraordinary" healer.

Dr. Ben Edwards appeared in the video posted March 31 by the anti-vaccine group Kennedy once led, Children's Health Defense. In it, Edwards appears wearing scrubs and talking with parents and children in a makeshift clinic he set up in Seminole, Texas, ground zero of the outbreak that has sickened hundreds of people and killed three, including two children.

Edwards is asked whether he had measles, and he responded, "Yes," then said his infection started the day before the video was recorded.

"Yesterday was pretty achy. Little mild fever. Spots came in the afternoon. Today, I woke up feeling good," Edwards said in the video.

Measles is most contagious for about four days before and four days after the rash appears and is one of the world's most contagious diseases, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Doctors and public health experts said Edwards' decision to go into the clinic put children, their parents and their community at risk because he could have spread it to others. They said there was no scenario in which Edwards' conduct would be reasonable.

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Kennedy met with Edwards about a week after the video was posted by Children's Health Defense, the group Kennedy led for years until December. In an April 6 post on X, Kennedy said he "visited with these two extraordinary healers," including Edwards and another doctor, and praised their use of two unproven treatments for measles.

Even as measles has exploded in Texas and spread across the country, Kennedy, the nation's top health official, has declined to consistently and forcefully encourage people to vaccinate their children and remind them that the vaccine is safe. Kennedy's post drawing attention to Edwards is inappropriate but unsurprising given Kennedy's record, said Dr. Craig Spencer, a medical doctor who is also a professor at the Brown University School of Public Health.

"I think is unfortunately perfectly on-brand for how he thinks that medicine should be practiced," Spencer said. "And that is what makes me remarkably uncomfortable and extremely concerned and scared for the next three-and-a-half years."

It was unclear whether Kennedy knew that Edwards had gone into his clinic while infected with measles before meeting him. A spokesperson for Kennedy said he is not anti-vaccine and that he is "committed to improving children's health in America and has re-deployed resources to Texas to help with the current outbreak." He did not answer why the health secretary chose to meet with and praise Edwards rather than any of the other doctors in West Texas who have been treating children in the outbreak.

Edwards told The Associated Press in an email that he "interacted with zero patients that were not already infected with measles" during the time he was infectious. "Therefore, obviously, there were no patients that were put in danger of acquiring measles since they already had measles."

But Jessica Steier, a public health scientist, said the video shows Edwards in the room with people who do not appear sick, including parents of sick children and the people who visited the clinic from Children's Health Defense. She also questioned what steps Edwards was taking to confirm people were sick with measles, rather than relying on guesswork.

Steier, who runs the Science Literacy Lab and co-wrote an article about Edwards' conduct, said while there may be some extraordinary emergencies where it would be appropriate for a sick doctor to work, this is not one of those situations because there is no shortage of providers who are not infected. She also pointed out that the video shows Edwards was not wearing a mask.

"You have the HHS secretary lifting him up," she said. "You know, it's so, so dangerous. I really feel for the people who are on the ground."

Children's Health Defense has sued a number of news organizations, among them the AP, accusing them of violating antitrust laws by taking action to identify misinformation, including about the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccines.

Kennedy's promotion of a doctor who has touted unproven measles treatments is "wholly irresponsible" but is in line with Kennedy's long public record of anti-vaccine views, said Dr. Paul Offit, a pediatrician at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. He said Kennedy has carried those views to his new job as the head of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"He's not the director of Children's Health Defense anymore. He's responsible for the health and well-being of children in this country," Offit said. "It's an emergency, but Kennedy is not treating it that way."

Strange sell-off in the dollar raises the specter of investors losing trust in the US under Trump

By BERNARD CONDON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Among the threats tariffs pose to the U.S. economy, none may be as strange as the sell-off in the dollar.

Currencies rise and fall all the time because of inflation fears, central bank moves and other factors. But economists worry that the recent drop in the dollar is so dramatic that it reflects something more ominous as President Donald Trump tries to reshape global trade: a loss of confidence in the U.S.

The dollar's dominance in cross-border trade and as a safe haven has been nurtured by administrations of

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both parties for decades because it helps keep U.S. borrowing costs down and allows Washington to project power abroad — enormous advantages that could possibly disappear if faith in the U.S. was damaged.

"Global trust and reliance on the dollar was built up over a half century or more," says University of California, Berkeley, economist Barry Eichengreen. "But it can be lost in the blink of an eye."

Since mid-January, the dollar has fallen 9% against a basket of currencies, a rare and steep decline, to its lowest level in three years.

Many investors spooked by Trump don't think the dollar will be pushed quickly from its position as the world's reserve currency, instead expecting more of a slow decline. But even that is scary enough, given the benefits that would be lost.

With much of world's goods exchanged in dollars, demand for the currency has stayed strong even as the U.S. has doubled federal debt in a dozen years and does other things that would normally send investors fleeing. That has allowed the U.S. government, consumers and businesses to borrow at unnaturally low rates, which has helped speed economic growth and lift standards of living.

Dollar dominance also allows the U.S. to push around other countries like Venezuela, Iran and Russia by locking them out of a currency they need to buy and sell with others.

Now that "exorbitant privilege," as economists call it, is suddenly at risk.

Dollar drop is odd

"The safe haven properties of the dollar are being eroded," said Deutsche Bank in a note to clients earlier this month warning of a "confidence crisis." Added a more circumspect report by Capital Economics, "It is no longer hyperbole to say that the dollar's reserve status and broader dominant role is at least somewhat in question."

Traditionally, the dollar would strengthen as tariffs sink demand for foreign products.

But the dollar not only failed to strengthen this time, it fell, puzzling economists and hurting consumers. The dollar lost more than 5% against the euro and pound, and 6% against the yen since early April.

As any American traveler abroad knows, you can buy more with a stronger dollar and less with a weaker one. Now the price of French wine and South Korean electronics and a host of other imports could cost more not only due to tariffs but a weaker currency, too.

And any loss of safe-haven status could hit U.S. consumers in another way: Higher rates for mortgages and car financing deals as lenders demand more interest for the added risk.

Federal debt troubles

More worrisome is possible higher interest rates on the ballooning U.S. federal debt, which is already at a risky 120% of U.S. annual economic output.

"Most countries with that debt to GDP would cause a major crisis and the only reason we get away with it is that the world needs dollars to trade with," says Benn Steil, an economist at the Council on Foreign Relations. "At some point people are going to look seriously at alternatives to the dollar."

They already have, with a little help from a U.S. economic rival.

China has been striking yuan-only trading deals with Brazil for agricultural products, Russia for oil and South Korea for other goods for years. It has also been making loans in yuan to central banks desperate for cash in Argentina, Pakistan and other countries, replacing the dollar as the emergency funder of last resort.

Another possible U.S. alternative in future years if their market grows: cryptocurrencies.

Said BlackRock Chairman Larry Fink in his annual shareholder letter about dollar dominance, "If deficits keep ballooning, America risks losing that position to digital assets like Bitcoin."

Not everyone is convinced that a big reason the dollar is falling is because of lost faith in the U.S.

Steve Ricchiuto, an economist at Mizuho Financial, says dollar weakness reflects anticipation of higher inflation due to tariffs. But even if investors aren't as comfortable holding dollars, he says, they really don't have much of a choice. No other currency or other asset, like yuan or bitcoin or gold, is vast enough to handle all the demand.

"The U.S. will lose the reserve currency when there is someone out there to take it away," Ricchiuto

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says. "Right now there isn't an alternative."

Erratic policy spooks investors

Maybe so, but Trump is testing the limits.

It's not just the tariffs, but the erratic way he's rolled them out. The unpredictability makes the U.S. seem less stable, less reliable, and a less safe place for their money.

There are also questions about his logic justifying the policy. Trump says U.S. tariffs will drive down trade deficits, which he cites as evidence that countries are "ripping off" America. But in calculating the tariffs, he looked at trade deficits only in goods, not services in which the U.S. excels. Most economists think trade deficits are not a sign of national weakness anyway because they do nothing to impede economic growth and prosperity.

Trump has also repeatedly threatened to chip away at the independence of the Federal Reserve, raising fears that he will force interest rates lower to boost the economy even if doing so risks stoking runaway inflation. That is a sure fire way to get people to flee the dollar. After Fed Chair Jerome Powell said Wednesday that he would wait to make any rate moves, Trump blasted him, saying "Powell's termination cannot come fast enough!"

Economists critical of Trump's April 2 tariff announcement recall another event, the Suez Crisis of 1956, that broke the back of the British pound. The military attack on Egypt was poorly planned and badly executed and exposed British political incompetence that sank trust in the country. The pound fell sharply, and its centuries-long position as the dominant trading and reserve currency crumbled.

Berkeley's Eichengreen says Liberation Day, as Trump called April 2, could be remembered as a similar turning point if the president isn't careful.

"This is the first step down a slippery slope where international confidence in the U.S. dollar is lost."

Maine's hidden 'Sistine Chapel' inspires artists with 70-year-old frescoes

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

SOLON, Maine (AP) — From the outside, it looks like any other New England church building: a boxy, white structure with a single steeple surrounded by an old stone wall, set against rolling hills and pine forest.

Inside, though, the South Solon Meeting House has a secret unknown even to some who drive through the tiny Maine town every day. The interior of the building is covered in 70-year-old fresco murals that encourage some in the state's art community to describe it as "Maine's Sistine Chapel."

The murals were painted by artists in the 1950s and, while they have long been appreciated by visitors, the recent creation of a website dedicated to them by students at Colby College in Waterville, Maine, has generated new interest in the paintings.

Véronique Plesch, a Colby professor of art, hopes the building inspires more appreciation of frescoes.

"I fell in love with the place, because I have studied frescoes all my life," said Plesch, who is a member of the board of the historical society that cares for the meeting house. She added that the paintings should stay in public places and not be in private institutions.

The meeting house was built in 1842 and hosted church services until the 1940s, though there were periods of closure, such as times of war. A decade later, Margaret Day Blake found the building in a state of disuse and the former student at the nearby Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture put out a call for young artists to paint frescoes under the school's supervision in 1951.

The artists were given creative freedom and told there would be no limits to subject matter, but that Biblical scenes would "offer rich and suitable" imagery. The interior was covered in such scenes from 1952 to 1956 and the walls remain adorned with frescoes, including one that references Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper."

Another fresco depicts the binding of Isaac, in which a hooded Abraham prepares to sacrifice his son on God's orders. The Great Flood is depicted as it was by Michelangelo at the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican.

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Two of the 13 artists — Sigmund Abeles of New York City and Sidney Hurwitz of Newton, Massachusetts — both in their 90s, are still living. Both spoke fondly about their time at the meeting house.

"We would go out there and paint and then take a lunch break in the cemetery behind the building. It was a very idyllic time," Hurwitz said. "I very much enjoyed it."

Today, the meeting house, which is open to the public without locks on its doors, serves as a community gathering and performance space. Many of its old features, including box pews made for smaller people of a different time, are still intact.

Abeles recalled painting the scene of Jacob wrestling with the angel from the Book of Genesis.

"It's a very, very special place, and it was a unique experience" to work on the frescoes, Abeles said.

On a recent Sunday morning, Plesch gave a lecture at the meeting house before a group of members of the Maine Art Education Association as part of the group's spring conference. Long ago, attendants of the building might have been preparing for an Easter service, but on this day it was full of teachers fascinated by the frescoes.

Suzanne Goulet, an art teacher at a nearby high school, said she was previously aware of the frescoes and confessed she had peeked into the windows of the old building, adding that it's great the paintings are still inspiring art lovers decades later.

"The inspiration is that we bring it back to our students," Goulet said.

Judges warn Congress that more money is needed for security at a time of escalating threats

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The federal judiciary is warning that Congress is not providing enough money for judges' security, at a time of escalating threats and chilling efforts at intimidation.

More than five dozen judges handling lawsuits against the Trump administration are receiving "enhanced online security screening" that typically includes scrubbing their personal information from the internet, two federal judges appointed by Republican presidents wrote on behalf of the judiciary in a letter to congressional appropriators.

President Donald Trump, senior aide Stephen Miller and billionaire Elon Musk have railed at judges who have blocked parts of Trump's agenda, threatening impeachment and launching personal attacks. Trump's call to impeach the judge who temporarily halted deportations using an 18th century wartime law prompted a rare quick response from Chief Justice John Roberts.

Roughly 50 people have been charged with crimes in connection with the threats, U.S. Circuit Judge Amy J. St. Eve and U.S. District Robert J. Conrad Jr. said. Trump appointed St. Eve to the federal appeals court in Chicago during his first term.

"In extreme cases, the U.S. Marshals Service has been required to take extraordinary measures to ensure the safety of judges," St. Eve and Conrad wrote.

Authorities have yet to make any arrests in hundreds of increasingly unsettling and unwanted pizza deliveries to the homes of judges and their children, U.S. District Judge Esther Salas said during an online forum on Tuesday.

The most recent deliveries, this week, have been sent in the name of Salas' late son, Daniel Anderl, who was shot dead at the family home by a disgruntled lawyer in 2020.

The message is unmistakable, Salas said. "I know where you live, I know where your kids live, and do you want end up like Judge Salas. Do you want to end up like her son?" she said.

Last month, a sister of Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett was the victim of a bomb threat in Charleston, South Carolina, police said. No bomb was found, police said.

The judges' letter was sent last week, but posted online Friday by the judiciary. It calls the current funding levels unsustainable, nearly \$50 million less than what the courts requested just for security.

Wisconsin governor can lock in 400-year school funding increase using a veto, court says

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — The Wisconsin governor's creative use of his uniquely powerful veto to lock in a school funding increase for 400 years may be "attention grabbing," but it was constitutional, the state Supreme Court ruled Friday.

The 4-3 ruling from the liberal-controlled court affirms the partial veto power of Wisconsin governors, which is the broadest of any state. Both Republicans and Democrats have used the partial veto to reshape spending bills passed by the Legislature.

Wisconsin is the only state where governors can partially veto spending bills by striking words, numbers and punctuation to create new meaning or spending amounts. In most states, governors can only eliminate or reduce spending amounts.

Democratic Gov. Tony Evers told lawmakers at the time that changing the year 2025 to 2425 in the budget was meant to increase school districts' funding "in perpetuity."

A creative budget veto

Evers in 2023 issued a partial veto that increased how much revenue K-12 public schools can raise per student by \$325 a year. Evers took language that originally applied the increase for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school years and instead vetoed the "20" and the hyphen to make the end date 2425, more than four centuries from now.

The Legislature, along with the state's largest business lobbying group Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce, argued that the Evers veto was barred under a 1990 constitutional amendment adopted by voters. That amendment removed the ability to strike individual letters to make new words — known as the "Vanna White" veto, named the co-host of the game show Wheel of Fortune who flips letters to reveal word phrases.

Finding otherwise would give governors unlimited power to alter numbers in a budget bill, they argued.

But Evers countered that the "Vanna White" veto ban applies only to striking individual letters to create new words, not vetoing digits to create new numbers. Evers said that he was simply using the longstanding partial veto process allowed under the law.

The court agreed.

Wisconsin governor's vast veto power

The court's four liberal justices ruled Friday that the state constitution allows the governor to strike digits to create a new year or to remove language to create a longer duration than the one approved by the Legislature.

"We are acutely aware that a 400-year modification is both significant and attention-grabbing," Justice Jill Karofsky wrote for the majority. "However, our constitution does not limit the governor's partial veto power based on how much or how little the partial vetoes change policy, even when that change is considerable."

Republicans and the court's conservative minority blasted the decision.

Justice Brian Hagedorn wrote that Wisconsin was now in a "fantastical state of affairs" that allows the governor to write new law through the use of his partial veto.

"One might scoff at the silliness of it all, but this is no laughing matter," Hagedorn wrote. "The decision today cannot be justified under any reasonable reading of the Wisconsin Constitution."

Evers called the decision "great news for Wisconsin's kids and public schools."

But Republicans, including Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, accused the court of playing partisan politics with a ruling they said gives governors unprecedented power and will result in schools raising property taxes. The increased spending authority permitted under Evers' veto allows schools to get the money from property taxes if there's not enough state aid.

"Evers' 400-year veto goes down in the history books as an embarrassing example of executive overreach, and an equally embarrassing example of a hyper partisan judicial ruling," said Scott Manley, a vice president at Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce.

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Nearly a century of broad veto powers

Wisconsin's partial veto power was created by a 1930 constitutional amendment, but it's been weakened by voters over the years, including in reaction to vetoes by governors from both parties. The Wisconsin Supreme Court in 2020, then controlled by conservatives, undid three of Evers' partial vetoes, but a majority of justices did not issue clear guidance on what was allowed.

Reshaping state budgets through the partial veto is a longstanding act of gamesmanship in Wisconsin between the governor and Legislature, as lawmakers try to craft bills in a way that is largely immune from creative vetoes.

The ruling only increases the chances of gridlock in the Legislature. Republican leaders have said they were waiting for this ruling and another pending case affecting the governor's veto powers before taking up spending bills this session, including the two-year state budget.

The other case centers on whether Evers properly used his partial veto power on a bill that detailed the plan for spending on new literacy programs. The Legislature contends that Evers' partial veto was unconstitutional because the bill did not appropriate money. Evers contends the Legislature is trying to control how the executive branch spends money and limit his partial veto power.

There are alternatives, top court says

In Friday's ruling, the liberal majority detailed ways the Legislature could change the 400-year spending increase by reducing it in future budget bills. Those include passing the constitutional amendment that's currently under consideration curbing the governor's veto power and draft budget bills in a way to prevent the governor from making such a sweeping veto.

"The court takes no position regarding these measures," the liberal majority wrote. "We merely outline them to illustrate legislative alternatives to the action before us."

Hagedorn, in his dissent, called those options "cold comfort coming from a court that simultaneously strips the legislature of its constitutional powers."

Harvey Weinstein can stay in hospital during #MeToo retrial, judge rules

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Harvey Weinstein has been moved to a New York City hospital after a judge approved the ailing ex-studio boss's request to stay there rather than in jail when he's not in court for his #MeToo retrial.

Judge Paul Goetz late Thursday ordered that Weinstein be immediately relocated from the city's notorious Rikers Island jail complex to the prison ward at Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan so he can receive necessary medical treatment.

Weinstein's lawyers lobbied for the move as jury selection got underway this week.

They argued in court papers that being locked up in a sometimes freezing jail cell was exacerbating the Oscar-winning producer's health issues, which include chronic myeloid leukemia, diabetes and walking difficulties that require a wheelchair to get in and out of court.

Goetz's order will remain in effect at least until next Thursday, when he is set to hold a hearing to discuss the matter further.

A different judge, Curtis Farber, is presiding over Weinstein's retrial. The case will resume Monday with more jury selection after nine jurors were picked this week. In all, 12 jurors and six alternates need to be seated.

Weinstein is being tried again on rape and sexual assault charges after New York's highest court, the Court of Appeals, last year overturned his 2020 conviction and 23-year prison sentence and ordered a new trial, finding that improper rulings and prejudicial testimony tainted the original one.

Weinstein has pleaded not guilty and denies raping or sexually assaulting anyone.

Weinstein has been back and forth numerous times to Bellevue in recent months for treatment of various maladies. At a pretrial hearing in January, he railed against his treatment at Rikers, telling Farber he

wanted to "get out of this hellhole as quickly as possible."

Weinstein's lawyers filed a legal claim against New York City last November, alleging he was receiving substandard medical treatment in unhygienic conditions at Rikers. The claim, which seeks \$5 million in damages, argues that Weinstein has been returned to Rikers each time before fully recovering at the hospital.

The troubled jail complex has faced growing scrutiny for its mistreatment of detainees and dangerous conditions. Last year, a federal judge cleared the way for a possible federal takeover, finding the city had placed inmates in "unconstitutional danger."

Is he Christ? Is he Moses? Superman's religious and ethical undertones add to his mystique

By DEEPA BHARATH of The Associated Press and BOB SMIETANA of Religion News Service undefined
Superman was born Kryptonian, raised Methodist and sketched into existence by two Jewish teens in 1930s Cleveland. Faith and morality are his DNA.

There are no overt religious references in Superman comics. But over eight decades, he's been viewed as a divine entity, a savior figure — his sacrifice Christ-like, his will to lead as strong as Moses parting the Red Sea, and his compassion akin to a bodhisattva, an enlightened being who guides Buddhists on the spiritual path.

While scholars, comic book writers and fans alike are struck by the religious undertones in Superman comics, they say what separates Superman from the ever-growing pack of superheroes is his singular ability to bring hope in a hopeless world.

James Gunn's 'Superman' sparks conversation

As fans celebrate Superman Day on Friday, marking the 87th anniversary of the original superhero's birth, they are also eagerly anticipating James Gunn's film "Superman" set for release on July 11. This version starring David Corenswet, the first Jewish actor to play Superman in a major film, promises a return to a version of a vulnerable Man of Steel who is rooted in values espoused by most faiths — goodness, compassion and hope.

The film has sparked a conversation about the place of Superman in the world and his personal code of ethics after several recent depictions of superheroes as anti-heroes. Corenswet said in a recent interview to Fandango that what captivates him about Superman is how he chooses to see good in people and not dwell on the negative.

"Why think about all the terrible things when we can focus on the good things we did today?" he said.

In the same interview, Gunn said his Superman will reinforce the character's core value of preserving life at any cost.

"He believes that the sanctity of life is of the utmost importance," Gunn said, noting the contrast with Superman's archnemesis Lex Luthor, who values scientific advancement over life.

Symbol of hope and positive masculinity

It was precisely this benevolent, hopeful version of Superman that inspired Robert Revington, who teaches at the Vancouver School of Theology at the University of British Columbia, to go skydiving in a Superman costume on his 28th birthday. And yet Revington, a Christian, balks at Christ-like portrayals of his favorite superhero.

"I like Superman and I like Jesus," he said. "I don't necessarily want to conflate the two. To me, the best depiction of Superman is as a symbol of hope."

Revington also sees Superman's relevance today as "an example of positive masculinity."

"He's this version of strong, but compassionate masculinity, which several prominent figures don't necessarily embody," he said.

Revington and many others' beloved iteration of Superman appeared in "All-Star Superman," a 12-issue series published by DC Comics between 2005 and 2008. The superhero saves a young person who is about to take their own life with the endearing message: "You are stronger than you think you are."

Grant Morrison, who wrote those comics, has said his view of Superman was shaped by Giovanni Pico

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della Mirandola's "Oration On The Dignity of Man," which argues that humans ought to be more virtuous than angels.

Superman speaks to our better angels

Humans, Morrison said in a 2008 interview, become what they imitate, which is why he made Superman an inspirational character.

"We live in the stories we tell ourselves," he told Newsarama, a comic book website, and can choose to be "the astronaut or the gangster. The superhero or the super villain. The angel or the devil. It's entirely up to us."

As a result, said Matthew Brake, founder and editor of Pop Culture and Theology, Superman "is an idea that can inspire us to be our best selves."

Superman's character is also shaped by his upbringing as a Kansas farm boy, raised by kindly parents — Jonathan and Martha Kent. They are portrayed as Methodists in the comics.

Superheroes, in recent decades, have received less-than-flattering treatment. In "The Boys," a comic book turned Amazon Prime series, the Superman-like character, Homelander, is a government-sponsored hero whose smiling exterior conceals the heart of a sadist.

"Invincible," a comic turned television series from Robert Kirkman, author of the "Walking Dead," features Omni-man, a Superman-like character who turns out to be an alien invader bent on conquest. The main character, Invincible, is Omni-man's son, and must choose between protecting the Earth or taking his father's side.

"Dune," the famed sci-fi book adapted into blockbuster movies, warns of superheroes' frailty

"Heroes are painful, superheroes are a catastrophe," Dune's author Frank Herbert once wrote. "The mistakes of superheroes involve too many of us in disaster."

A relatable superhero

But Superman has cemented his place in pop culture not just as a beacon of hope, but also as a character relatable to many, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Gene Luen Yang, who has written several Superman comics, is best known for his 2020 graphic novel "Superman Smashes the Klan," a story about a Chinese American family moving to Metropolis in 1946 and facing discrimination from the Klan. The story follows the Lee family as they confront the white supremacist group with Superman's help.

Yang sees his own experience as a Chinese American mirrored in Superman's story.

"The idea that you have to hide who you are or that you're caught in between cultures," he said. "Superman has two names — Kal-El, his Kryptonian name and Clark Kent, his American name. I had a Chinese name at home and an American name in school. So even though I'm a practicing Catholic, I was more drawn to his Jewish roots because that's where I could relate more."

Yang sees Superman as the original superhero who inspired almost religious fervor in the geekdom, featuring cosplayers who reenact scenes as a Christian might reenact biblical episodes around Christmas or Easter. A trip to a comic convention is like a pilgrimage where followers collect original art and "all kinds of relics."

Stories in pop culture also draw from older storytelling traditions, often rooted in religions.

"In some ways, you can think of religions as communities that are built around stories that last centuries," Yang said. "The idea of self-sacrifice, the idea that you do good deeds without the desire to gain recognition. That's the whole point of secret identities."

While his Catholic faith is an important facet of his life, Yang said he never forced religion into his Superman comics.

"I write more about my life and my lived experience of faith, with the doubts and the ragged edges," he said.

Characters like Superman, while not themselves religious, provide a portal to the sacred through the profane, said A. David Lewis, a Boston-based graphic novelist and comic book writer.

"I love that people take something from popular culture and find some level of spirituality or find a greater connection to some divine source through it," he said. "But I would never say Superman is just

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of the Jewish or Christian people. Like some of the best narratives out there, Superman gives us access to something transcendent.”

Superman’s strong Jewish roots

Samantha Baskind, professor of art history at Cleveland State University, is Jewish; she sees numerous parallels between Superman’s story and the history of Jews. Superman’s solitary flight from Krypton in a little spacecraft is reminiscent of how Moses’ mother placed him in a papyrus basket and left him on the Nile, seeing it has his best chance of survival.

Some also compare Superman’s backstory to the Kindertransport, she said, referring to a rescue program that transported nearly 10,000 children, mostly Jewish, from Nazi-controlled territories to Great Britain in 1938 and 1939.

In Superman’s Kryptonian name, Kal-El, chosen by his original Jewish creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, the “El” in Hebrew connotes God. In DC Comics, Superman also frequents the “Bottle City of Kandor,” a Kryptonian city shrunk down and placed in a bottle, representing a fragmented piece of Krypton’s history. Baskind said to her it is reminiscent of how diaspora Jews visit Israel.

“There’s also the thinking that Siegel and Shuster created Superman because they were these two, skinny, young Jewish men who couldn’t go out and fight Hitler, but Superman fought Nazis on the cover of their comic books,” she said. In some early editions, Superman held Hitler by his Nazi uniform as he begged for mercy.

Appeal to the religiously unaffiliated

Despite the religious undertones, Superman’s appeal to those growing religiously unaffiliated remains strong, said Dan Clanton, professor of religious studies at Doane University in Nebraska. He says it’s because Superman’s story “truly encapsulates American civil religion.”

“This idea that there are practices and beliefs that provide all, regardless of religious identity, with a sense of being part of something bigger than themselves,” he said.

Neal Bailey, a contributor for over a decade to Superman Homepage and an atheist, believes Superman at his best is a “philosophical pragmatist” solving the most complex problems with the least amount of harm.

“He actually goes beyond religion to see our commonalities,” he said. “Superman wouldn’t care about people’s religious beliefs. He would care more about whether they are living up to their human potential.”

The US has a single rare earths mine. Chinese export limits are energizing a push for more

By JOSH FUNK AP Business Writer

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — America’s only rare earths mine heard from anxious companies soon after China responded to President Donald Trump’s tariffs this month by limiting exports of those minerals used for military applications and in many high-tech devices.

“Based on the number of phone calls we’re receiving, the effects have been immediate,” said Matt Sloustcher, a spokesperson for MP Materials, the company that runs the Mountain Pass mine in California’s Mojave Desert.

The trade war between the world’s two biggest economies could lead to a critical shortage of rare earth elements if China maintains its export controls long-term or expands them to seek an advantage in any trade negotiations. The California mine can’t meet all of the U.S. demand for rare earths, which is why Trump is trying to clear the way for new mines.

Rare earth elements are important ingredients in electric vehicles, powerful magnets, advanced fighter jets, submarines, smartphones, television screens and many other products. Despite their name, the 17 elements aren’t actually rare, but it’s hard to find them in a high enough concentration to make a mine worth the investment.

Tariffs will impact ore supply and costs

MP Materials, which acquired the idle Mountain Pass site in 2017, said Thursday it would stop sending its ore to China for processing because of the export restrictions and 125% tariffs on U.S. imports China

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imposed. The company said it would continue processing nearly half of what it mines on site and store the rest while it works to expand its processing capability.

"Selling our valuable critical minerals under 125% tariffs is neither commercially rational nor aligned with America's national interests," MP Materials said in a statement.

Experts say the manufacturers that rely on rare earth elements and other critical minerals will see price increases, but there is likely enough of a global supply available to keep factories operating for now.

The California mine yields neodymium and praseodymium, the light rare earths that are the main components of the permanent rare earth magnets in EVs and wind turbines. But small amounts of some of the heavy rare earths that China has restricted, such as terbium and dysprosium are key to helping the magnets withstand high temperatures.

Already, the price of terbium has jumped 24% since the end of March to reach \$933 per kilogram.

"Our estimate suggests that there is enough stockpile in the market to sustain demand for now," Benchmark Mineral Intelligence rare earths analyst Neha Mukherjee said, adding that shortages may emerge later this year.

China holds power over the market

China has tremendous power over the rare earths market. The country has the biggest mines, producing 270,000 metric tons (297,624 tons) of minerals last year compared to the 45,000 tons (40,823 metric tons) mined in the U.S. China supplies nearly 90% of the world's rare earths because it also is home to most of the processing capacity.

The restrictions Beijing put in place on April 4 require Chinese exporters of seven heavy rare earths and some magnets to obtain special licenses. The retaliatory controls reinforced what the Trump administration and manufacturers see as a dire need to build additional U.S. mines and reduce the nation's dependence on China.

Trump has tried, so far unsuccessfully, to strong-arm Greenland and Ukraine into providing more of their rare earths and other critical materials to the United States. Last month, he signed an executive order calling for the federal government to streamline permit approvals for new mines and encourage investments in the projects.

Two companies are trying to develop mines in Nebraska and Montana. Officials at NioCorp and U.S. Critical Materials said they hoped the push from the White House would help them raise money and obtain the necessary approvals to start digging. NioCorp has worked for years to raise \$1.1 billion to build a mine in southeast Nebraska.

"As I sit and I think about how can we deal with this enormous leverage that China has over these minerals that nobody even knows how to pronounce for the most part, we have to deal with this leverage situation," NioCorp CEO Mark Smith said. "And the best way, I think, is that we need to make our own heavy rare earths here in the United States. And we can do that."

MP Materials is working to quickly expand its processing capability, partly with the help of some \$45 million the company received coming out of the first Trump administration. But after investing nearly \$1 billion since 2020, the company doesn't currently have the ability to process the heavy rare earths that China is restricting. MP Materials said it was working expeditiously to change that, and it is building a factory in Texas to produce rare earth magnets for electric vehicles and other products domestically and chip away at China's dominance in that market..

Big U.S. automakers declined to comment about how dependent they are on rare earths and the impact of China's export curbs. Major defense contractors like Boeing and Lockheed Martin, which were specifically targeted in China's restrictions along with more than a dozen other defense and aerospace companies, also remained circumspect.

Military technology is a smaller but important user of rare earths. Trump issued an executive order on Tuesday calling for an investigation into the national security implications of being so reliant on China for the elements.

A spokesperson for Lockheed, which makes the F-22 fighter jet, said the company continuously assesses "the global rare earth supply chain to ensure access to critical materials that support our customers' mis-

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sions.”

Manufacturers prepare for price increases

Some battery makers could start to run short of key elements within weeks, according to Steve Christensen, executive director of the Responsible Battery Coalition, an association representing battery and automakers and battery sellers.

Already, manufacturers have seen the price of antimony, an element used to extend the life of traditional lead-acid batteries, more than double since China restricted exports of it last year. The element isn't one of the 17 rare earths but is among the critical minerals that Trump wants to see produced domestically.

Initially, automakers will likely try to absorb any increase in the cost of their batteries without raising vehicle prices, but that may not be sustainable if China's restrictions remain in place, Christensen said. A 25% tariff Trump put on all imported automobiles and auto parts cars already was expected to increase costs, although the president hinted this week that he might give the industry a temporary reprieve.

The U.S. fulfilled its rare earths needs with domestic sources until the late 1990s. Production largely ended after low-cost Chinese ores flooded global markets. Robots, drones and other new technologies have rapidly increased demand for the raw materials.

NioCorp recently signed a contract to do more exploratory drilling on its site this summer to help prove to the Export-Import Bank that enough rare earth minerals rest underground near Elk Creek, Nebraska, to justify an \$800 million loan to help finance the project.

But a new rare earths mine is years away from operating in the U.S. NioCorp estimates if all goes well with its fundraising, the site where it hopes to mine and process niobium, scandium, titanium and an assortment of rare earths possibly might be running by the end of Trump's presidency.

U.S. Critical Materials plans to dig up several tons of ore in Montana this summer so it can test out processing methods it has been developing. The Sheep Creek project isn't as far along as the Nebraska project, but U.S. Critical Materials Director Harvey Kaye said the site has promising ore deposits with high concentrations of rare earths.

Takeaways from AP's report on the religious and moral undercurrents in Superman comics

By DEEPA BHARATH of The Associated Press and BOB SMIETANA of Religion News Service
Superman comics are not overtly religious. Yet faith and morality have been baked into this superhero character who was born Kryptonian, raised Methodist and created by two young Jewish men in 1930s Cleveland.

Superman's character has been portrayed in the mold of Christ and Moses given how he constantly upholds the ideals of self-sacrifice, powerful leadership and compassion. While scholars, comic book writers and fans alike are struck by the religious undertones in Superman comics, they all agree that what sets Superman apart is his ability to bring hope in a hopeless world.

Superman Day and the 'Superman' summer movie release

Friday (April 18) marks the 87th anniversary of the original superhero's birth. It also is the date Superman made his debut in an Action Comics issue.

There is much excitement in the Superman fanverse this year because of the much-anticipated 'Superman' movie directed by James Gunn, starring David Corenswet, the first Jewish actor to play Superman in a major film.

On his Instagram page on April 18, 2024, Gunn shared a photo of himself, Corenswet and Rachel Brosnahan who plays Lois Lane in the upcoming film, reading among several comic books, a reproduction of Action Comics #1 — the very first one featuring the Man of Steel.

In his Instagram post, Gunn also paid tribute to the superhero, saying: "He gave us someone to believe in, not because of his great physical power, but because of his character and determination to do right no matter what."

Gunn's film promises a return to a version of a vulnerable Superman who is rooted in values espoused

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by most faiths — goodness, compassion and hope.

Superman's Jewish roots

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She says Superman's solitary flight from Krypton in a small spacecraft is reminiscent of how Moses' mother placed him in a papyrus basket and left him on the Nile, seeing it as his best chance of survival.

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In some early editions, Superman held Hitler by his Nazi uniform as he begged for mercy.

Strong appeal to diverse groups

Superman is relatable to diverse populations regardless of religion, race or ethnicity.

Gene Luen Yang, who has written several Superman comics, sees his own experience as a Chinese American mirrored in Superman's story — caught between two worlds and two cultures. Yang says he had one name at home and another at school, just like Superman. So, even though he is a practicing Catholic, Yang says he relates more to Superman's Jewish roots.

Despite the religious undertones, Superman also appeals to those who are religiously unaffiliated, said Dan Clanton, professor of religious studies at Doane University in Nebraska, adding that the superhero's story "truly encapsulates American civil religion."

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"He actually goes beyond religion to see our commonalities," Bailey said. "Superman wouldn't care about people's religious beliefs. He would care more about whether they are living up to their human potential."

Superman inspires humans to do better

Grant Morrison, one of the best-known writers of Superman comic books, said in a 2008 interview that humans become what they imitate, which is why he made Superman an inspirational character.

Superheroes have received less-than-flattering treatment in recent films and television shows. For example, in "The Boys," a comic book turned Amazon Prime series, the Superman-like character, Homelander, is a government-sponsored hero whose smiling exterior conceals the heart of a sadist. Gunn's Superman is expected to change that trajectory with a superhero who will reinforce the character's core value of preserving life at any cost.

An altruistic view of Superman can be found in the recently concluded "Superman & Lois" television series on the CW Network in which after defeating Lex Luthor in a final battle, the couple settles down in a small town and starts a foundation to help others.

"I didn't just want to be a hero that saves people," the Superman character played by Tyler Hoechlin says in an epilogue to the series. "I wanted to connect with them. To change their lives for the better."

Today in History: April 19, the American Revolutionary War begins

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, April 19, the 109th day of 2025. There are 256 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On April 19, 1775, the American Revolutionary War began with the Battles of Lexington and Concord—the start of an eight-year armed conflict between American colonists and the British Army.

Also on this date:

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In 1897, the first Boston Marathon was held. Winner John J. McDermott ran the course in 2 hours, 55 minutes and 10 seconds.

In 1943, during World War II, tens of thousands of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto began a valiant but ultimately futile uprising against Nazi forces.

In 1977, the Supreme Court, in *Ingraham v. Wright*, ruled 5-4 that even severe spanking of schoolchildren by faculty members did not violate the Eighth Amendment ban against cruel and unusual punishment.

In 1989, 47 sailors were killed when a gun turret exploded aboard the USS Iowa during training exercises in the Caribbean.

In 1993, the 51-day siege at the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas, ended as the Davidians set fire to their compound following an FBI tear gas attack. Seventy-five people, including 25 children and sect leader David Koresh, were killed.

In 1995, Timothy McVeigh, seeking to strike at the government he blamed for the Branch Davidian deaths two years earlier, destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people. (McVeigh was convicted of federal murder charges and executed in 2001.)

In 2005, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger of Germany was elected pope in the first conclave of the new millennium; he took the name Benedict XVI.

In 2013, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (joh-HAHR' tsahr-NEYE'-ehv), a 19-year-old college student wanted in the Boston Marathon bombings, was taken into custody after a manhunt that had left the city virtually paralyzed. His older brother and alleged accomplice, 26-year-old Tamerlan (TAM'-ehr-luhn), was killed earlier in a furious attempt to escape police.

In 2015, Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old Black man, died a week after suffering a spinal cord injury in the back of a Baltimore police van while he was handcuffed and shackled. (Six police officers were charged. Three were acquitted and the city's top prosecutor eventually dropped the three remaining cases.)

Today's Birthdays: Singer-songwriter Roberto Carlos is 84. Actor Tim Curry is 79. Motorsports Hall of Famer Al Unser Jr. is 63. Actor Ashley Judd is 57. Latin pop singer Luis Miguel is 55. Actor James Franco is 47. Actor Kate Hudson is 46. Actor Hayden Christensen is 44. Football Hall of Famer Troy Polamalu is 44. Actor-comedian Ali Wong is 43. Baseball Hall of Famer Joe Mauer is 42. Former WNBA star Candace Parker is 39. Former tennis player Maria Sharapova is 38. Actor Simu Liu is 36.