

# 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.**

## Thursday, April 24

Senior Menu: Bratwurst on bun, sauerkraut, corn, fruited Jell-O.

School Breakfast: Pancake on a stick.

School Lunch: Chicken and noodles, mixed vegetables.

Smarter Balance Testing. Grades 3-5 (ELA and Math)

Track at Redfield, 10 a.m.

Middle School Spring Concert, 7 p.m.

## Friday, April 25

Senior Menu: Chicken caccalatore, rice pilaf, Italian beind, apple sauce, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg bake.

School Lunch: Beef vegetable soup, sandwich.

Smarter Balance Testing. Grades 3-5 (ELA and Math)

Junior High Track at Groton Area, 2 p.m.

Baseball hosts. Warner/Ipswich/Northwestern/Frederick, 5:30 p.m.

## Saturday, April 26

Track at Ipswich, 10 a.m.

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

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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.**

## Tariff Tone Softens

President Donald Trump expressed that he was willing to substantially reduce tariffs on Chinese goods earlier this week, signaling a shift following recent tension and reciprocal tariff increases between the world's two biggest economies.

While discussions remain open, an unnamed White House official shared tariffs on Chinese goods are likely to come down to between 50% and 65%. Officials are also considering a tiered approach that phases in different levies over five years. Chinese officials indicated they were open to trade talks yesterday, though not under continued threats from the US. Earlier this month, the US raised tariffs on Chinese goods to 145%, prompting China to respond with a 125% retaliatory tariff and additional measures.

Trump's latest remarks come after a Monday meeting with representatives from US retail giants like Walmart and Target. Recent tariff escalations prompted anxieties among industry leaders, investors, and Americans in general while also causing upsets in global markets and raising fears of recession.

## Draft Day Arrives

The 2025 NFL Draft kicks off tonight (8 pm ET, ABC/ESPN) live from the Green Bay Packers' Lambeau Field. It marks the first time the site has been chosen to host the event in the league's history despite being home to the NFL's third-oldest franchise, established in 1919.

Analysts expect this year's draft to be one of the most wide-open in recent memory. Projections have the Tennessee Titans taking Miami QB Cam Ward with the overall top pick. Other top candidates include Colorado's Travis Hunter (Heisman winner, WR/CB), Penn State's Abdul Carter (DE), Michigan's Mason Graham (DT), and Boise State's Ashton Jeanty (RB).

## YouTube Turns 20

YouTube yesterday celebrated the 20th anniversary of its first-ever video: a grainy 19-second clip of cofounder Jawed Karim at the San Diego Zoo.

Since 2005, YouTube—bought by Google for \$1.65B in 2006—has grown from a simple video-sharing site into a media powerhouse influencing culture and entertainment, with more than 20 billion videos uploaded. YouTube now leads America's TV viewing time, surpassing networks like Paramount, Fox, and Disney. Last year, YouTube was the second-largest media company by revenue (\$54.2B) behind Disney and is expected to take the top spot this year.

YouTube propelled the careers of stars like Justin Bieber, popularized trends like ASMR and unboxing videos, and broke viewership records with music videos like Psy's "Gangnam Style" (the first to reach 1 billion and 2 billion views) and Luis Fonsi's "Despacito" (the first to hit every billion-view milestone from 3 billion to 8 billion).

YouTube also announced new features, including a personalized radio for Premium and Music users and a TV viewing upgrade.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Harvey Weinstein's retrial on rape and sexual assault charges begins in New York with opening statements; Weinstein's previous conviction was overturned last year by a court of appeals.

American Music Awards (May 26) nominations announced with rapper Kendrick Lamar leading all artists with 10 nods.

Los Angeles Chargers and Detroit Lions tapped to kick off 2025 NFL season at the Pro Football Hall of Fame game (July 31).

Three-time Olympic gold medalist Faith Kipyegon will attempt to become first woman to run a sub-four-minute mile June 26 in Paris.

## Science & Technology

An estimated 84% of the world's ocean reefs affected by ongoing global coral bleaching event; phenomenon occurs when external stress, including warming water temperatures, causes coral to expel algae living in their tissue.

Engineers develop ultrathin electronic skins roughly 10 nanometers, fractions of the width of a human hair; advance has applications in a wide range of wearable and medical applications.

Genetic analysis reveals the ancient Phoenician culture spread primarily through cultural transmission, versus mass migration; findings shed light on the development of early Mediterranean society.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +1.7%, Dow +1.1%, Nasdaq +2.5%) on hopes of easing trade tensions between the US and China as well as between President Donald Trump and Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell.

Apple and Meta fined roughly \$570M and \$200M, respectively, by the European Union for allegedly breaching the bloc's Digital Markets Act, which seeks to prevent tech giants from monopolizing digital markets.

Chipotle misses Q1 revenue forecasts after its same-store sales declined for the first time since 2020; earnings report comes a few days after the burrito chain said it was expanding into Mexico.

## Politics & World Affairs

India closes main border crossing with Pakistan, revokes key water treaty, and orders Pakistani nationals to leave; comes a day after suspected militants killed at least 26 tourists in the Indian-controlled region of Kashmir.

US Sen. Dick Durbin—the Senate's No. 2 Democrat—won't seek reelection to a sixth term in 2026, will retire after 44 years in Congress.

Remains of mom, child found near Gilgo Beach identified, though deaths may be unrelated to serial killings; Rex Heuermann was previously charged in deaths of at least seven other women whose remains were found in or near Gilgo Beach.



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225-1192

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Groton Area High School hurdlers attended the NSU Track Clinic Monday evening. Pictured L-R Joel Matehs (NSU Senior), Hannah Sandness, McKenna Tietz, Ella Kettner, Teagan Hanten, Emerlee Jones, Talli Wright, and Renea Taylor (NSU Senior) (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



Groton Area Track Athletes attended the Northern State University Track Clinic Monday evening. L-R McKenna Tietz, Teagan Hanten, Hannah Sandness, Talli Wright, Ella Kettner, Emerlee Jones, and Keegen Tracy. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



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**Groton Hurdlers L-R McKenna Tietz and Emerlee Jones sharpen their skills during the NSU Track Clinic.** (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



**Groton Area Junior standout sprinter Keegen Tracy confers with Groton Coach Carla Tracy and Renea Taylor (NSU).** (Photo by Bruce Babcock)

# GT

on

Groton  
Area  
Tigers  
Groton, SD

# GDILIVE



**Middle School Spring Concert**  
**Thursday, April 24, 2025, 7p.m.**

\$5 ticket or GDI  
Subscription  
required to watch  
this event.

A production of the  
**Groton Daily Independent**

For more info: [GDILIVE.COM](http://GDILIVE.COM)

## Competitive Game Ends In Walkoff As Groton Area Tigers Varsity Falls To Madison/Chester Varsity 2025

By GameChanger Media

A walk-off left Groton Area Tigers Varsity on the wrong end of a 4-3 defeat to Madison/Chester Varsity 2025 on Wednesday. The game was tied at three in the bottom of the seventh when Quincy Kurtz drew a walk, scoring one run.

A double by Jordan Pedersen put Madison/Chester Varsity 2025 on the board in the bottom of the first.

Madison/Chester Varsity 2025 added one run in the second. Madison/Chester Varsity 2025 scored on a passed ball, making the score 3-0.

Groton Area Tigers Varsity tied the game in the top of the third thanks to a double by Brevin Fliehs, and a line out by Carter Simon.

Ben Brooks earned the win for Madison/Chester Varsity 2025. The hurler allowed one hit and zero runs over three innings, striking out five and walking none. Jarrett Erdmann took the loss for Groton Area Tigers Varsity. The starting pitcher went six and one-third innings, surrendering four runs (two earned) on seven hits, striking out four and walking five. JD Prorok led things off on the bump for Madison/Chester Varsity 2025. The starter gave up three hits and three runs (two earned) over four innings, striking out five and walking one.

Fliehs drove the middle of the lineup, leading Groton Area Tigers Varsity with two runs batted in. The number three hitter went 1-for-3 on the day. Lincoln Krause, TC Schuster, Fliehs, and Simon each collected one hit for Groton Area Tigers Varsity.

Pedersen drove the middle of the lineup, leading Madison/Chester Varsity 2025 with two runs batted in. The right-handed hitter went 2-for-3 on the day. Pedersen and Carson Wolf were a force together in the lineup, as they each collected two hits for Madison/Chester Varsity 2025. Madison/Chester Varsity 2025 turned one double play in the game.

Groton Area Tigers Varsity will travel to Howard Varsity Tigers for their next game on Sunday.

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Groton Area Tigers  
Varsity

3 - 4

Madison/Chester Varsity  
2025

📍 Away 📅 Wednesday April 23, 2025

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E
GRTN	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3	4	4
MDSN	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	4	7	1

## BATTING

Groton Area Tigers Varsity	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
L Krause #2 (LF)	3	1	1	0	0	2
N Groeb... #13 (DH)	3	0	0	0	0	2
B Fliehs #6 (CF)	3	0	1	2	0	0
C Simon #4 (1B)	2	0	1	0	0	0
G Englund #18 (3B)	2	0	0	0	1	1
K Fliehs #10 (C)	3	0	0	0	0	1
A Abeln #5 (SS)	3	0	0	0	0	0
T Schust... #21 (RF)	3	1	1	0	0	2
K Antonsen #7 (2B)	3	1	0	0	0	2
CR: J Schwan #11	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	25	3	4	2	1	10

**2B:** B Fliehs, **TB:** T Schuster, L Krause, B Fliehs 2, C Simon, **CS:** J Schwan, **HBP:** C Simon, **LOB:** 3

## PITCHING

Groton Area Tigers Varsity	R	ER	BB	SO	HR		
J Erdm... #00	6.1	7	4	2	5	4	0
Totals	6.1	7	4	2	5	4	0

**L:** J Erdmann, **P-S:** J Erdmann 106-63, **BF:** J Erdmann 32

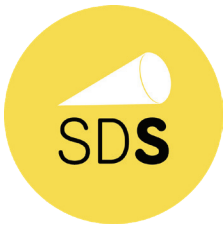
Madison/Chester Varsity 2025	R	H	RBI	BB	SO	
T McGill... #23 (DH)	3	1	1	0	1	0
C Wolf #4 (2B)	3	2	2	0	1	0
J Pedersen #29 (C)	3	0	2	2	1	0
B Brooks #52 (LF)	4	0	0	0	0	0
Q Kurtz #26 (SS)	3	0	0	1	1	2
C Hahn #1 (3B)	2	1	1	0	1	0
#24	0	0	0	0	0	0
Q Flemm... #15 (RF)	3	0	1	0	0	0
C Crabtree #3 (1B)	3	0	0	0	0	0
R Johnson #10 (CF)	2	0	0	0	0	2
O Mees #9	1	0	0	0	0	0
CR: B Olson #6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	27	4	7	3	5	4

**2B:** C Wolf, J Pedersen, **TB:** C Wolf 3, T McGillivray, C Hahn, J Pedersen 3, Q Flemming, **CS:** B Olson, **SB:** C Wolf, **LOB:** 6

Madison/Chester Varsity 2025	R	ER	BB	SO	HR		
J Prorok #12	4.0	3	3	2	1	5	0
B Brooks #52	3.0	1	0	0	0	5	0
Totals	7.0	4	3	2	1	10	0

**W:** B Brooks, **P-S:** B Brooks 37-25, J Prorok 66-42, **WP:** B Brooks, J Prorok, **HBP:** J Prorok, **BF:** B Brooks 10, J Prorok 17





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### A dozen international students report visa cancellations in South Dakota

**Doctoral candidate in Rapid City earns temporary reprieve from revocation**

**BY: JOHN HULT - APRIL 23, 2025 5:15 PM**

At least 10 international students at South Dakota's public universities have reported their visas canceled this year, according to the South Dakota Board of Regents.

Two other reported cancellations were for former students in a program that allows student visa holders to work temporarily in jobs directly related to their field of study. A visa is a document showing a foreigner's permission to visit, work or study in the country.

Board of Regents spokeswoman Shuree Mortenson did not identify which of the state's six public institutions the students attended. A Dakota State University spokeswoman told South Dakota Searchlight, however, that no visa cancellations have been reported by any of the Madison school's 198 international students.

The public has been privy to the details in just one of the cases, that of Indian doctoral candidate Priya Saxena. She sued Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Kristi Noem to prevent any action that would block Saxena from collecting her Ph.D. in chemical and biological engineering on May 10 from South Dakota Mines.

Last week, U.S. District Judge Karen Schreier ordered DHS to reinstate Saxena's student status and leave her be, at least until the judge makes a call on whether to issue a further-reaching preliminary injunction in the case.

On the day Saxena would collect her degree at Mines, Noem will deliver the commencement speech at DSU. A news release from the school, sent Wednesday morning, notes that Noem was extended the invitation to speak while she was still governor of South Dakota, a position she vacated to lead DHS.

Saxena's plight was one of the motivations for about 25 people who demonstrated Wednesday outside City Hall in Rapid City, as part of a protest led by Indivisible Rapid City to "call attention to the increasing disregard for basic constitutional protections — especially the right to due process, which applies to all people, not just U.S. citizens."

Demonstrator Pat Braun held a sign referencing student visa holders and said she is upset that Saxena was targeted.

"It's so ill-informed, so mean-spirited, so ugly," Braun said.



**Pat Braun carries a sign April 23, 2025, in Rapid City to protest the cancellation of student visas, including a recent case at South Dakota Mines.** (Seth Tupper/South

Dakota Searchlight)

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## South Dakota part of nationwide crackdown

The cancellations in South Dakota are among a crush of visa-policing actions taken by the Trump administration as part of a wider push to tighten immigration enforcement, including an uptick in arrests and deportations of undocumented immigrants.

The president issued two executive orders impacting student visas on Jan. 20. One directed DHS and the U.S. State Department to review and revoke the visas of international students engaged in what the order called "anti-Semitic" behavior. The order swept up students critical of Israel's ongoing war against Hamas, including a Turkish woman attending Tufts University who penned a pro-Palestine opinion column, and whose apprehension by agents with Immigration and Customs Enforcement was captured on a widely shared video.

The other executive order directs federal agencies to review visa programs more broadly, and instructs DHS Secretary Noem to "take immediate steps to exclude or remove" anyone in the U.S. who might be considered a threat to public safety.

Issues with visas or legal status have since befallen more than 1,000 students nationwide, The Associated Press reported last week. The wire service compiled the figure using statements from schools and state officials. Another outlet, Inside Higher Education, puts the figure at 1,700.

Several students or groups of students have sued the administration over the visa actions. On the same day Saxena was given a reprieve in her South Dakota case, a federal judge in Georgia signed a similar order meant to temporarily reinstate the student status of 133 international students.

## South Dakota students

South Dakota Searchlight reached out to the Board of Regents and representatives of the state's six public universities to inquire about visa status changes. The most recent report from the regents lists 2,233 international students in the state.

Northern State University and the University of South Dakota did not respond. The schools that did, aside from DSU in Madison, said in statements that their respective international student offices are offering visa guidance to students as needed.

In her statement on behalf of the regents, Mortenson said that "our universities are not directly involved in this process."

"However, with less than three weeks remaining in the spring semester, we will assist affected students with their academic efforts to the best of our ability," she wrote.

Searchlight also reached out to Augustana University, the state's largest private four-year school, whose spokesperson said its international students had not been affected.

## Federal information limited

In separate statements to South Dakota Searchlight, the DHS and State Department declined to say how many foreign students in South Dakota have had visas revoked.

The State Department issues visas for international students. It revokes visas "every day," its statement read, and "will continue to do so."

"When considering revocations, the department looks at information that arises after the visa was issued that may indicate a potential visa ineligibility under U.S. immigration laws, pose a threat to public safety, or other situations where revocation is warranted," the statement read. "This can include everything from arrests, criminal convictions, and engaging in conduct that is inconsistent with the visa classification, to an overstay."

DHS doesn't issue visas, but is involved on the enforcement and monitoring side. It maintains the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), a database created after the 9/11 attacks and used to validate an international student's ability to study in the U.S.

Schools must re-register international students through SEVIS each semester to verify that they're ful-

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filling visa requirements. Schools can terminate the SEVIS record if a student violates their visa terms by, for example, not enrolling in a full course of study.

An international student with a visa needs a SEVIS record set to "active" status to attend school.

The recent SEVIS record terminations have come by way of Noem's federal agency, not from schools.

A DHS spokesperson wrote that it "conducts regular reviews" of SEVIS records "to ensure visa holders remain in compliance with program requirements."

If an issue is flagged, including "criminal arrests and other national security concerns," the statement says, DHS may notify the State Department, which may revoke a student's visa. "Individuals who remain in the U.S. without lawful immigration status may be subject to arrest and removal," the statement reads. "For such individuals, the safest and most efficient option is self-deportation."

## Mines student targeted over Sturgis rally traffic violation

The revocation for Saxena, the doctoral candidate at South Dakota Mines, came after a "criminal records check," according to documents filed in her lawsuit against Noem and the DHS.

Saxena learned of the revocation through the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi on April 7, six days after she defended her doctoral thesis, according to documents filed with her lawsuit.

Conviction for a "crime of moral turpitude," a category that includes offenses like driving under the influence, can be grounds for visa revocation.

Saxena has been in the U.S. since 2020. Her only criminal conviction came in 2021, for the class two misdemeanor of failure to move over for flashing yellow lights. She was ticketed for driving under the influence during the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, but the charge didn't hold up.

A blood test put her blood alcohol content on the evening of the stop at 0.06, which is below South Dakota's 0.08 legal threshold for intoxication. Prosecutors dismissed the DUI charge.

Judge Schreier heard details about the incident during a Friday hearing on Saxena's request for an emergency temporary restraining order.

Later that day, the judge ordered DHS to "set aside" its decision to mark Saxena's visa status as terminated, to return her SEVIS record to "active" status and to refrain from taking any enforcement action against her until May 2, or until "further order from the court."

The doctoral candidate faced "irreparable harm" if DHS moved forward, Schreier wrote.

Saxena's lawyer, Jim Leach of Rapid City, decried the federal government's actions against international students as "government gone wild."

Saxena has authored or co-authored a dozen peer-reviewed papers in her field, a point Leach added to the initial complaint in her lawsuit. That's the kind of person South Dakota and the U.S. ought to treasure, Leach said, not toss out for a traffic violation.

"The great things we have in this country are built on knowledge, on information," Leach said. "They're built by smart people like her, who can do the Ph.D. stuff in chemical and biological engineering that I never could have done."

South Dakota Searchlight's Seth Tupper contributed to this report.

*John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.*



## South Dakota wins concessions for itself and for universities nationwide in settlement with NCAA

**Announcement resolves lawsuit filed by state Attorney General Marty Jackley over payments for college athletes**

**BY: SETH TUPPER - APRIL 23, 2025 4:17 PM**



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

South Dakota won special terms for itself and financial concessions for universities across the country while settling a lawsuit against the National Collegiate Athletic Association, according to a Wednesday announcement from state Attorney General Marty Jackley.

The NCAA is the governing body for the highest level of college athletics. Jackley and the South Dakota Board of Regents sued the NCAA last year. The lawsuit alleged that a proposed \$2.8 billion nationwide agreement to compensate athletes for their past participation in Division I sports would disproportionately burden smaller Division I schools, including South Dakota State University and the University of South Dakota.

Jackley said Wednesday in a news release that the NCAA will use a budget surplus of \$55 million to reduce the amount of money that athletic conferences will have to pay toward the proposed athlete compensation agreement. The reduction will occur during the first year of the proposed decade of payments from conferences.

The NCAA, in a separate news release, said the surplus is available because "the national office surpassed financial goals for the fiscal year." The NCAA's release does not mention South Dakota's lawsuit but says the decision to reduce the financial burden on member schools was made "in consultation with South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley."

A copy of the settlement terms, provided by the Attorney General's Office, shows that the NCAA agreed to credit Jackley "for his efforts in giving small schools and conferences relief."

Jackley said the settlement reduces by 33% the amount that universities will pay toward the first year of the proposed \$2.8 billion athlete compensation agreement, saving approximately \$2 million for the Summit League and the Missouri Valley Conference, which include the two South Dakota schools.

"This settlement is for and about our student athletes," Jackley said in his release.

The settlement also "provides the attorney general an opportunity to work with the NCAA on future reductions and stipulates that funding of the newly created Women's Basketball Performance Fund remain intact with no reductions," Jackley's news release said. The performance fund, created in January, rewards teams that advance to the Division I Women's Basketball Championship, similar to a previously existing arrangement for men's teams.

In South Dakota-specific provisions, the settlement commits the NCAA president and select staff to meet with the presidents of SDSU, USD, the Summit League and Sioux Falls leaders to discuss "NCAA issues

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currently impacting state schools and opportunities to host future NCAA championships in the state.” During that meeting, the settlement terms say, the NCAA president “will acknowledge and credit the Summit League for the large attendance numbers the League has generated at the men’s and women’s basketball championships as a result of hosting the events in South Dakota.”

The NCAA also agreed to pay the South Dakota Board of Regents \$24,815 to reimburse it for expenses incurred during the litigation.

The broader issue underlying the litigation is a 2021 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that the NCAA’s prohibition on athlete compensation was a violation of antitrust laws. That led to a proposed \$2.8 billion agreement last year to settle several class action lawsuits against the NCAA. In that litigation, athletes sued to recover back payment for their participation in college athletics. A federal judge in California is deciding whether to give final approval to the \$2.8 billion agreement, known as the House v. NCAA settlement.

## Settlement terms

The NCAA agreed to the following terms in its settlement with South Dakota, according to the text of communications provided by the state Attorney General’s Office:

The NCAA will credit the South Dakota Attorney General for his efforts in giving small schools and conferences relief when it announces the DI Board of Directors’ decision to reduce the amount of revenue withheld from all Division I conferences needed to make the first of the ten annual payments to settle the House litigation. NCAA will make this public announcement the week of April 21.

The NCAA will meet with the South Dakota Attorney General’s Office to explore possible ways to minimize the impact on the State arising from the NCAA’s future withholding of revenue to pay for the House settlement.

The NCAA President and select staff will meet in-person with the presidents of SDSU and USD, the Summit League, and other Sioux Falls leaders within the next twelve (12) months to discuss NCAA issues currently impacting State schools and opportunities to host future NCAA championships in the State. During the meeting, the NCAA President will acknowledge and credit the Summit League for the large attendance numbers the League has generated at the men’s and women’s basketball championships as a result of hosting the events in South Dakota.

Within thirty (30) days of dismissal of the Lawsuit, the NCAA will make a one-time payment to the South Dakota Board of Regents in the amount of \$24,815 to reimburse expenses incurred by experts.

Please also accept this as confirmation that the NCAA does not intend to use revenue from the newly created Women’s Basketball Fund to pay for the House settlement.

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

## Governor appoints former ag secretary to lead economic development office

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - APRIL 23, 2025 12:58 PM

South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden is appointing a new economic development commissioner and moving the current commissioner into a deputy role.

Joe Fiala, the current commissioner of the Governor’s Office of Economic Development, will become the deputy commissioner less than a year after he was appointed to the position. He’ll be replaced in the top job by former state Secretary of Agriculture Bill Even, the Governor’s Office announced Wednesday.

The department is charged with recruiting, retaining and expanding business within South Dakota, including funding business projects in the state and incentivizing out-of-state businesses to relocate.

“Bill Even is the right leader to continue driving our economy forward,” Rhoden said in a news release. He added that he is “grateful for Joe’s continued service” and said Fiala has been “crucial to GOED for

years, and he will be an important partner to Bill in the future.”

Former Gov. Kristi Noem appointed Fiala to the position last year when it had been open for six months, after then-Commissioner Chris Schilken stepped down to serve as deputy commissioner. Schilken is no longer part of GOED leadership, according to the website. Fiala will take the deputy commissioner job vacated by Jesse Fonkert, who was recently named president and CEO of South Dakota Trade.

Even served as South Dakota’s secretary of agriculture from 2007 to 2010. He left to work for DuPont Pioneer before joining the National Pork Board as CEO in 2016.

Before entering the private sector, he also served as deputy secretary of tourism and state development, director of GOED, director of state energy policy, and as a policy adviser for the Mike Rounds administration.

Even has agricultural degrees from South Dakota State University and Lake Area Technical College, as well as a law degree from Drake University.

He lives in Tea with his wife and three children. He’s a co-owner of Even Farms in Humboldt, a fifth-generation crop and livestock operation homesteaded by his great-grandfather in 1884. His ancestors sought out South Dakota for “new opportunities, room to grow and to raise a family,” he said in the news release.

“I believe that pioneering spirit still exists in America and in South Dakota,” Even said. “I look forward to working with people who share that optimistic mindset and vision of making a life and a living in our great state.”

*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.*



**Bill Even was appointed commissioner of the Governor’s Office of Economic Development by Gov. Larry Rhoden in April 2025.** (Courtesy of GOED)

## Trump signs education orders, including overhaul of college accreditations

**BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - APRIL 23, 2025 7:16 PM**

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump signed a series of education-focused orders Wednesday related to accreditation in higher education, school discipline policies, historically Black colleges and universities, artificial intelligence in education and workforce development.

The executive orders are the latest in a slew of efforts from Trump to dramatically reshape the federal role in education. Last month, Trump called on U.S. Education Secretary Linda McMahon to “take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure” of her own agency.

In one executive order, Trump aims to “overhaul” college accreditation, setting up more of a clash between his administration and higher education as they look to reform the system responsible for ensuring institutions meet quality standards.

The order directs McMahon to hold accreditors accountable by “denial, monitoring, suspension, or ter-



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**President Donald Trump speaks to reporters after signing executive orders in the Oval Office on April 23, 2025. Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick, Secretary of Labor Lori Chavez-DeRemer and Secretary of Education Linda McMahon look on.** (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

Somodevilla/Getty Images)

mination of accreditation recognition, for accreditors' poor performance or violations of federal civil rights law," according to a White House fact sheet.

The order also directs McMahon and Attorney General Pam Bondi to "investigate and take action to terminate unlawful discrimination by American higher education institutions, including law schools and medical schools."

During his presidential campaign, Trump pledged to fire "radical Left accreditors," claiming they "have allowed our colleges to become dominated by Marxist Maniacs and lunatics."

## AI in education

Trump also signed an executive order aimed at advancing artificial intelligence in education. The order calls for a White House task force on AI education that will help agencies implement a "Presidential AI Challenge" and establish public-private partnerships to provide resources for AI

education in K-12 schools.

The order also directs McMahon to "prioritize the use of AI in discretionary grant programs for teacher training and directs the Director of the National Science Foundation (NSF) to prioritize research on the use of AI in education," according to a White House fact sheet.

The order also calls for Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer, by collaborating with the director of the National Science Foundation, to "work with State and local workforce organizations and training providers to identify and promote high-quality AI skills education coursework and certifications across the country."

## Job training

Another order directs McMahon, Chavez-DeRemer and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick to "modernize American workforce programs to prepare citizens for the high-paying skilled trade jobs of the future," according to a White House fact sheet.

The order asks the Cabinet members to review federal workforce programs and refocus programs to train workers in industrial manufacturing.

Trump and Lutnick framed the order as part of the administration's moves this month to place tariffs on every trading partner, with particularly high levies on goods from China.

"All those factories that you're bringing in because of your trade policy, we're going to train people" to work in them, Lutnick said.

Following the signings, Trump took several questions on his tariffs policy, acknowledging the rate on China was "high" but saying that was by design to hurt Chinese manufacturers.

"It basically means China is not doing any business with us, essentially, because it's a very high number," he said. "So when you add that to the price of a product, you know, a lot of those products aren't going to sell, but China is not doing any business."

## Other orders

Other education-related executive orders signed Wednesday include:

An order that makes school discipline policies centered on “objective behavior;”  
an order mandating “full and timely disclosure of foreign funding by higher education institutions;”  
an order establishing a White House initiative on historically Black colleges and universities, or HBCUs, and a “President’s Board of Advisors on HBCUs” within the Education Department.

*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.*

## State plans to dredge flood deposits from McCook Lake

BY: JOHN HULT - APRIL 23, 2025 12:03 PM

The state Department of Game, Fish and Parks will pay a contractor to dredge 20,000 cubic yards of muck from the bed of McCook Lake this spring, a little less than a year after a devastating flood left the southeast South Dakota community in tatters.

The dredging is meant to begin in May, according to a project outline document on the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources’ public notice web portal. GF&P requested a permit for the dredging through the ag department.

The goal is “to restore recreation uses and eliminate hazards” created by floodwater deposits in the 273-acre Union County oxbow lake during historic flooding last June.

“All sediment and debris will be removed from the lake and deposited in an upland location away from waters of the state,” the dredging notice says.

The ag department will take public comment on the plan through April 27, and Secretary Hunter Roberts will consider giving the go-ahead for dredging.

Floodwaters inundated McCook Lake last June when state officials used a levee to divert floodwaters in its direction, setting in motion an emergency plan meant to spare the larger communities of North Sioux City and Dakota Dunes from more significant flooding. The state set up a levee for the same reason during a 2014 flood event, but McCook Lake residents didn’t take on water in that instance.

GF&P told South Dakota Searchlight on Wednesday that Three Oaks Inc., of North Sioux City, will perform the dredging.



**Damages remain visible in the McCook Lake community on July 3, 2024, after a massive flood hit the area on June 23.** (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

## How to comment

Written comments regarding the McCook Lake dredging proposal must be received on or before April 27. Questions or comments may be emailed to [DANRmail@state.sd.us](mailto:DANRmail@state.sd.us); mailed to SD DANR WQ, 523 E Capitol, Pierre, SD 57501; or submitted online through the “Comment Deadline” link at <https://danr.sd.gov/public>. Additional project information, including the application, is also available at that link.

*John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.*



## US ag secretary hears concerns about federal staff cuts during North Dakota visit

BY: JEFF BEACH - APRIL 23, 2025 9:25 AM

FARGO, N.D. — Matt Perdue, government relations director for the North Dakota Farmers Union, on Tuesday told U.S. Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins that staff cuts to the U.S. Department of Agriculture have farmers worried they won't get the help they need in securing federal loans.

"Earlier this year, we had a farm loans webinar. That same webinar last year had 17 attendees. This year it had 107 and I think that is an indication of the financial stress and uncertainty out there," Perdue said. "I think it also is an indication of how important FSA (Farm Service Agency) farm loans are for producers when times get tough."

Rollins, who held a roundtable discussion with farm groups in Fargo on Tuesday, said she understands the concerns as USDA shrinks its workforce but she tried to offer some reassurances.

She said USDA workers were told last week, "If you are FSA or frontline or with the farmers, you are not eligible to take early retirement."

Rollins, invited by Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D., listened to the discussion from ag groups, state officials and North Dakota State University representatives at a gathering on the NDSU campus. She said it was her first visit to a land grant university.

Rollins announced during the event that USDA was releasing \$340 million in disaster assistance for farmers and rural communities impacted by natural disasters.

The aid includes \$5 million for North Dakota rural electric co-ops affected by wildfires during drought conditions last fall.

President Joe Biden had approved a major disaster declaration for North Dakota in December.

Rollins also repeated an announcement from last week of a new sugar tariff. She said that through Sept. 30, products with more than 65% sugar content will face an additional tariff of 33%.

"President Trump loves to deploy tariffs," Rollins said.

Rollins planned to visit a processing plant for sugar beets, a key specialty crop in the Red River Valley. Tariffs, trade and how specialty crops might be treated in farm bill were among the topics covered. Specialty crops such as potatoes, dry beans and sunflowers are a big part of agriculture in North Dakota.

Congress has not been able to reach an agreement on a new farm bill, last year extending the previous version.

Gary Shields, executive director of the Northland Potato Growers Association, relayed a message from the National Potato Council about the possibility of specialty crops being left out of the next stopgap farm legislation.

"The big message is that specialty crop funding needs to be included," Shields said.

On trade, North Dakota Agriculture Secretary Doug Goehring said the last four years have been disappointing for ag trade and the United States should "reengage with the world."



**Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins speaks in Fargo, N.D., on April 22, 2025. She was invited by North Dakota Sen. John Hoeven, left.** (Jeff Beach/North Dakota Monitor)



Rollins said she could not believe how “stunningly bad” the United States was treated on the world stage. Participants also emphasized the importance of decreasing regulation on farmers.

Ryan Ellis, a farmer and president of the North Dakota Grain Growers, described the Environmental Protection Agency’s enforcement of the Endangered Species Act to be “terrifying.”

Rollins was scheduled to get a closeup look at ag research at Grand Farm, a public-private collaboration west of Fargo near Casselton.

*North Dakota Monitor Deputy Editor Jeff Beach is based in the Fargo area. His interests include agriculture, renewable energy and rural issues.*

## Poll: Belief in false measles claims correlated with lower vaccination rates

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - APRIL 23, 2025 8:43 AM

WASHINGTON — Americans are increasingly unsure what to believe about measles as an outbreak spreads throughout the country, according to a survey released Wednesday by the nonpartisan health research organization KFF.

The poll shows that nearly a quarter of those asked believe a commonly repeated false claim that getting a child vaccinated against measles could lead to autism. About the same percentage of those surveyed believe it’s either definitely or probably true that vitamin A can prevent someone from contracting measles, even though it cannot.

And 19% of those surveyed believed untrue statements that the vaccine for measles is more dangerous than contracting the virus.

Parents who believed at least one of the three incorrect claims were more likely to have delayed or skipped some vaccinations for their children. Nearly a quarter, 24%, of those surveyed said they haven’t protected their children via vaccination, more than double the 11% of parents who responded that all three of the false statements about measles were definitely or probably untrue.



**A nurse gives an MMR vaccine at the Utah County Health Department on April 29, 2019, in Provo, Utah. The vaccine is 97% effective against measles when two doses are administered.** (Photo by George Frey/

Getty Images)

### Ongoing outbreak

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that as of late last week there are more than 800 measles diagnoses throughout at least 25 states.

The infections are spread throughout different age groups with 31% of cases in children under five years old, 38% of diagnoses in those between five and 19 years old, 29% in people above the age of 20 and 2% in those with an unknown age, according to the CDC.

Eighty-five patients have been hospitalized and three have died. Nearly all of the confirmed cases, 96%, are in people who have not received the MMR vaccine or who are unsure about their vaccination status, according to the CDC.

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States with confirmed cases include Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont and Washington.

Virginia reported its first case this year over the weekend, though that's not yet included on the CDC's website about the ongoing outbreak.

## Understanding linked with concern

KFF's survey shows that even though there are many people who believe untrue claims about measles or the MMR vaccine — which protects against measles, mumps and rubella — there are higher percentages of people who understand basic facts about the virus and who are concerned about the ongoing outbreak.

Seventy-five percent of those polled said it was incorrect that the MMR vaccine leads to autism, 81% responded it was wrong to say the vaccine is more dangerous than contracting the virus and 75% said it was false that vitamin A can prevent someone from getting measles.

About half, or 51%, of those surveyed said they are at least somewhat concerned about the spread of measles. That worry was highest among Hispanic adults, 62%, and Black adults, 61%.

Most of the people surveyed, 56%, knew that the spread of measles was higher this year than during prior years, though that number varied among people of different political leanings.

Seventy-one percent of Democrats knew that diagnoses of measles have spiked in recent months, compared with 54% of independents and 49% of Republicans.

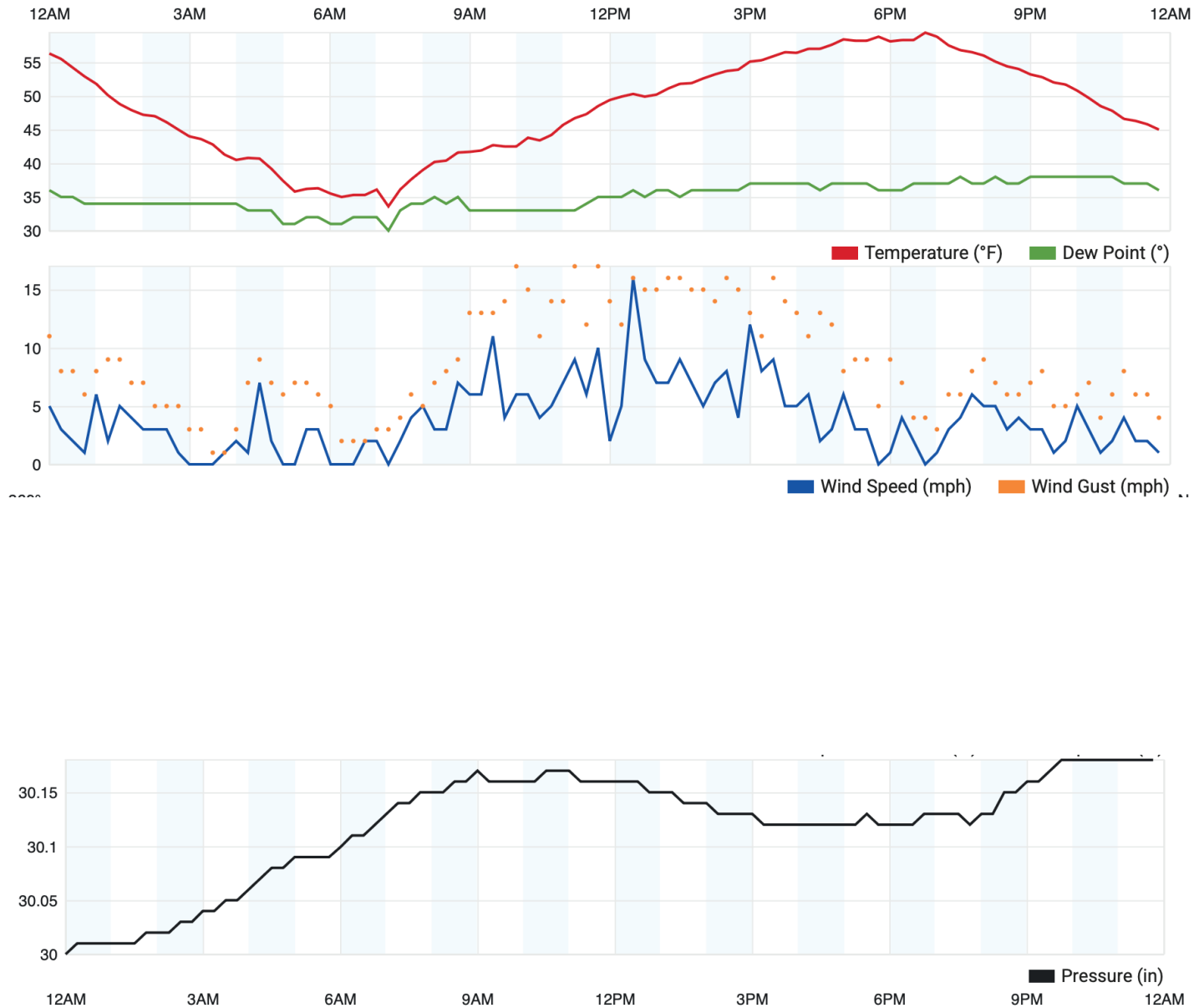
KFF conducted the survey of 1,380 adults between April 8 and April 15 via telephone and online questions.

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

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

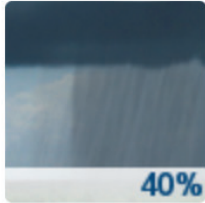




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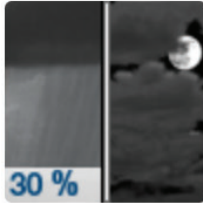
Today



High: 55 °F

Scattered  
Showers

Tonight



Low: 36 °F

Scattered  
Showers then  
Mostly Cloudy

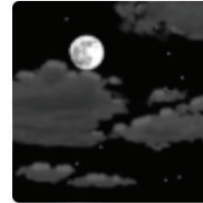
Friday



High: 63 °F

Mostly Sunny

Friday Night



Low: 35 °F

Partly Cloudy

Saturday



High: 65 °F

Partly Sunny  
then Partly  
Sunny and  
Breezy

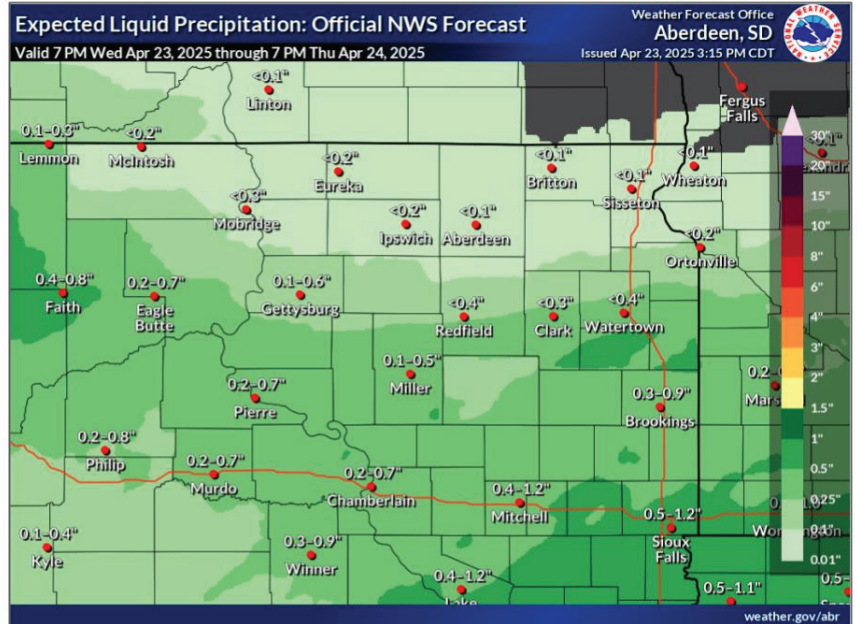


## How Much Rain Is Possible?

April 23, 2025  
4:04 PM

Amounts shown are through 7PM CDT Thursday

- Generally around **0.20-0.70in** rainfall from Hwy 212/Hwy 14 and points southward.
- Northern SD/west central MN likely receiving the **least** amount of rainfall.
- High model spread remains!  
**Drier** scenarios around 0.25in or less, **wetter** scenarios closer to 0.75in
  - *Much of this depends on overall areal coverage of showers (still some uncertainty with this).*



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Showers will begin to increase from south to north across the region through Thursday. Highest chances for precip and amounts will generally align along and south of the US Hwy 212 corridor. Still some uncertainty in this as it all depends on areal coverage of shower activity.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 60 °F at 6:47 PM**

**Low Temp: 34 °F at 7:10 AM**

**Wind: 18 mph at 9:49 AM**

**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 14 hours, 02 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 92 in 1962

Record Low: 17 in 1956

Average High: 62

Average Low: 35

Average Precip in April.: 1.36

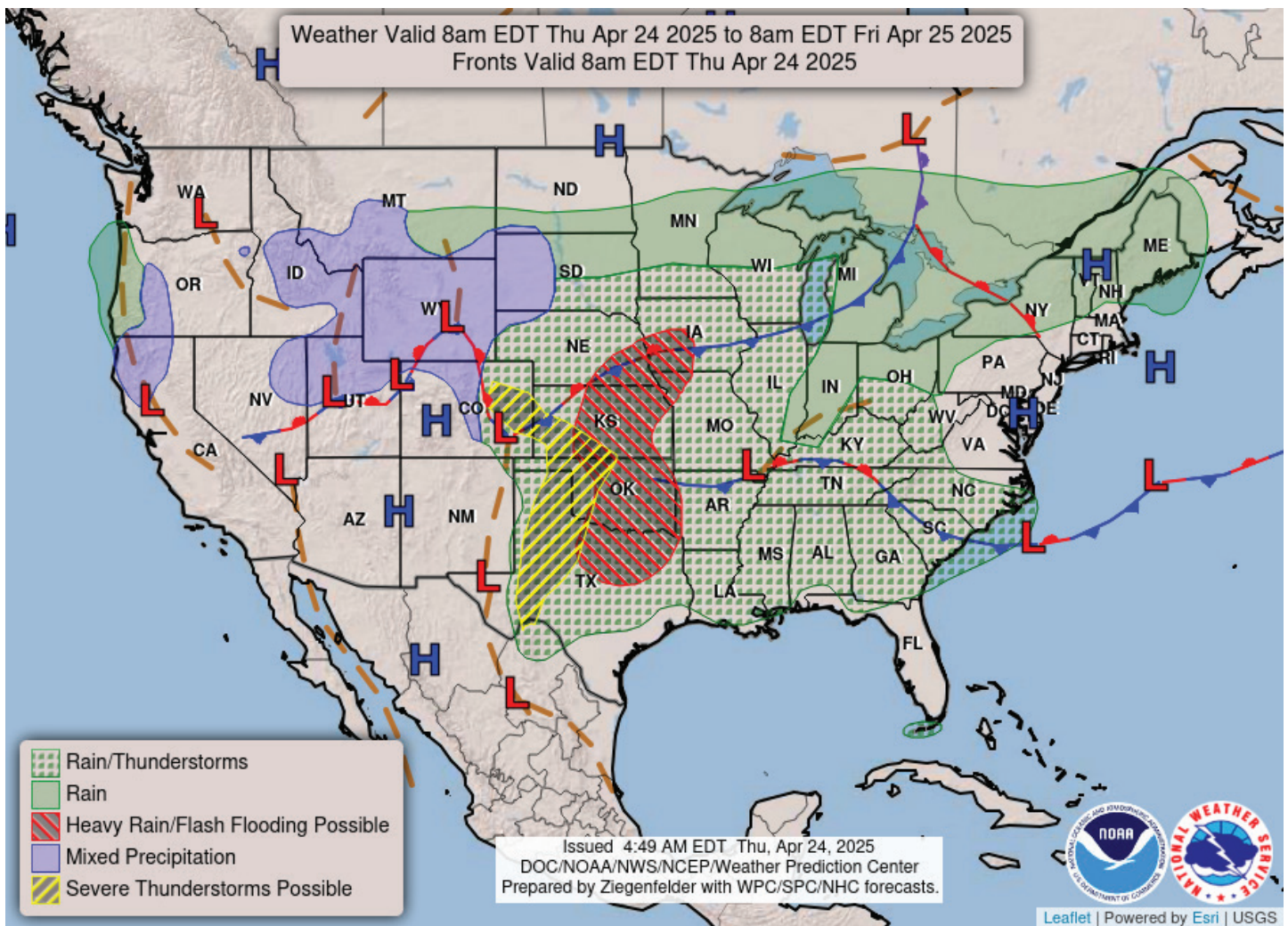
Precip to date in April.: 1.36

Average Precip to date: 3.42

Precip Year to Date: 1.99

Sunset Tonight: 8:31:54 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:27:21 am



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## Today in Weather History

April 24th, 1948: A significant F2 tornado moved northeast from South of Castlewood to near Goodwin. Two farms' barns were destroyed. Also, two other tornadoes were observed in South Dakota on this day. One moved from Turner County on into Minnehaha County, injuring two people. The other touchdown was three miles southeast of Sioux Falls, destroying barns and other buildings on the west edge of Brandon.

1899 - Two women and one son lived to tell the story of being picked up by a tornado and carried more than a fourth of a mile, flying far above the church steeples, before being gently set down again. The young boy and one of the ladies said they had the pleasure of flying alongside a horse. The horse "kicked and struggled" as it flew high above, and was set down unharmed about a mile away. (The Weather Channel)

1908 - Severe thunderstorms spawned eighteen tornadoes over across the Central Gulf Coast States claiming the lives of 310 persons. The state of Mississippi was hardest hit. A tornado near Hattiesburg MS killed 143 persons and caused more than half a million dollars damage. Four violent tornadoes accounted for 279 of the 310 deaths. The deadliest of the four tornadoes swelled to a width of 2.5 miles as it passed near Amite LA. The tornado also leveled most of Purvis MS. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Showers and thunderstorms produced heavy rain in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region. Up to seven inches of rain drenched Virginia in three days. Morgantown WV received 4.27 inches in 24 hours, and flooding was reported in south central West Virginia. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Low pressure produced high winds and severe thunderstorms in the Southern Plains Region. Strong thunderstorm winds destroyed two mobile homes at Whitt TX injuring two persons. Winds associated with the low pressure system gusted to 70 mph at Guadalupe Pass TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Twenty cities in the central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Russell KS was the hot spot in the nation with a reading of 101 degrees. Evening thunderstorms produced severe weather from Colorado to Wisconsin. Hail four and a half inches in diameter was reported at Sargeant NE. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Southern High Plains to north central Kansas. Thunderstorms spawned ten tornadoes, including one which injured four persons and caused 1.5 million dollars damage at Shattuck OK. Thunderstorms also produced softball size hail at Wheeler TX, wind gusts to 85 mph southwest of Arnett OK, and 13.45 inches of rain near Caldwell TX, which resulted in the worst flooding in recent memory for that area. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2010 - An EF-4 tornado up to 1.75 miles wide travels 149.25 miles through Mississippi, the widest and fourth longest path in Mississippi history. It left behind major destruction to businesses, churches and homes, four fatalities in Yazoo City and ten fatalities across the state.



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Daily Devotion

## Praying the Promises of God

**The Bible is a firm foundation, so trust God's words and live boldly.**

Isaiah 40:8: English Standard Version: "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

Jesus said we would endure many hardships. But God provided amazing tools to keep trials from overwhelming us. He placed His Spirit inside us to guide and empower. He gave us prayer so we could not only communicate and stay connected with Him but also bring Him our requests. Today let's look at another of His marvelous gifts: the Bible.

Scripture is the Word of God Almighty. It is truth. It never changes. There are thousands of promises in the Bible—assurances that we can rely on with perfect confidence. And wise believers will turn His promises into prayers, which they express as the cry of their heart.

Let's look at an example that relates to difficult decisions. Psalm 32:8 says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you." We can pray God's words back to Him, saying we believe that He will teach us and reveal His path—and that He'll remain by our side as our caregiver through the entire situation.

When hardships arise, we need a solid foundation. Otherwise, our emotions could easily lead us astray through faulty thinking. God is faithful and unchanging, so we can trust in His promises, which enable us to rest confidently and act boldly.

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.22.25

25 39 49 52 65 22

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$60,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 42 Mins  
55 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.23.25

18 24 34 40 42 8

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$31,550,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 57  
Mins 55 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.23.25

8 14 15 23 24 15

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 12 Mins 54  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.23.25

1 23 26 27 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$124,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 12 Mins  
54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.23.25

37 42 49 54 66 26

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 41 Mins  
54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 04.23.25

15 44 63 66 69 20

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$168,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 41 Mins  
54 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

### **Zelenskyy cuts short South African trip after massive Russian strike on Kyiv kills 9**

By VASILISA STEPANENKO and SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Thursday he is cutting short his official trip to South Africa and returning home after a major Russian strike on the Ukrainian capital Kyiv with missiles and drones killed at least nine people and injured more than 70.

The Russian attack on Kyiv came as weeks of peace negotiations appeared to be coming to a head without an agreement in sight and hours after U.S. President Donald Trump lashed out at Zelenskyy, accusing him of prolonging the “killing field” by refusing to surrender the Russia-occupied Crimea Peninsula as part of a possible deal.

Zelenskyy has repeated many times during the more than three-year war that recognizing occupied territory as Russian is a red line for his country. He noted Thursday that Ukraine had agreed to a U.S. ceasefire proposal 44 days ago, as a first step to a negotiated peace, but that Russia’s attacks had continued.

While talks have been going on in recent weeks, Russia has hit the city of Sumy, killing more than 30 civilians gathered to celebrate Palm Sunday, battered Odesa with drones and blasted Zaporizhzhia with powerful glide bombs.

Senior U.S. officials have warned that the Trump administration could soon give up its efforts to stop the war if the two sides don’t compromise.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said the attack showed Russian President Vladimir Putin is determined to press his bigger army’s advantage on the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line, where it currently holds the momentum.

“Putin demonstrates through his actions, not words, that he does not respect any peace efforts and only wants to continue the war,” Sybiha said on X. “Weakness and concessions will not stop his terror and aggression. Only strength and pressure will.”

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal noted that since Russia’s February 2022 full-scale invasion of its neighbor, Russian attacks have killed some 13,000 civilians, including 618 children.

Kyiv residents spent the night in shelters

At least 42 people were hospitalized following the attack on residential suburbs of Kyiv, Ukraine’s State Emergency Service said.

The Ukrainian air force said Russia fired 66 ballistic and cruise missiles, four plane-launched air-to-surface missiles, and 145 Shahed and decoy drones at Kyiv and four other regions of Ukraine.

Rescue workers with flashlights scoured the charred rubble of partly collapsed homes as the blue lights of emergency vehicles lit up the dark city streets.

At a Kyiv residential building that was almost entirely destroyed, emergency workers removed rubble with their hands, rescuing a trapped woman who emerged from the wreckage covered in white dust and moaning in pain.

An elderly woman sat against a brick wall, face smeared with blood, her eyes fixed to the ground in shock as medics tended to her wounds.

Fires were reported in several residential buildings said Tymur Tkachenko, the head of the city military administration.

The attack, which began around 1 a.m., hit at least five neighborhoods in Kyiv.

Oksana Bilozir, a student, suffered a head injury in the attack. With blood seeping from her bandaged head, she said that she heard a loud explosion after the air alarm blared and began to grab her things to flee to a shelter when another blast caused her home’s walls to crumble and the lights to go off.

“I honestly don’t even know how this will all end, it’s very scary,” said Bilozir, referring to the war against Russia’s invasion. “I only believe that if we can stop them on the battlefield, then that’s it. No diplomacy

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works here.”

The attack kept many people awake all night long as multiple loud explosions reverberated around the city and flashes of light punctuated the sky. Families gathered in public air raid shelters, some of them bringing their pet cat and dog.

Zelenskyy returning from South Africa

Zelenskyy said in a Telegram post that he would fly back to Kyiv after meeting with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa.

The Ukrainian leader had hoped to recruit further South African support in efforts to end his country's war with Russia, now in its fourth year.

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said the Kyiv attack was “yet another appalling violation of international humanitarian law.”

“Civilians must never be targets. This senseless use of force must stop,” it said in a statement.

Anastasiia Zhuravlova, 33, a mother of two, was sheltering in a basement after multiple blasts damaged her home. Her family was sleeping when the first explosion shattered their windows and sent kitchen appliances flying in the air. Shards of glass rained down on them as they rushed to take cover in the corridor.

“After that we came to the shelter because it was scary and dangerous at home,” she said.

## Hong Kong allows outspoken Cardinal Joseph Zen to attend Pope Francis' funeral

By KANIS LEUNG Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong's outspoken Roman Catholic Cardinal Joseph Zen was allowed to leave the southern Chinese city to attend Pope Francis' funeral in Vatican City.

Zen, a 93-year-old retired bishop, left Hong Kong on Wednesday night after applying at a court to get back his passport, his secretary told The Associated Press in a text message on Thursday. Authorities confiscated his passport after his controversial arrest under a Beijing-imposed national security law in 2022.

Zen is among the critics in recent years who have said the Vatican's agreement with Chinese authorities on the appointment of bishops betrays pro-Vatican Chinese Catholics. He has also criticized Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, the official charged with negotiations with Beijing, as a “man of little faith.”

Parolin is considered one of the main contenders to be the next pope, given his prominence in the Catholic hierarchy.

On Tuesday, media reports said Zen had issued a critique of the Vatican, questioning why pre-conclave meetings started as early as Tuesday. The AP could not independently verify the reports, but Zen reposted the reporters' posts about his statement on his X account.

Given his age, Zen will not be among the cardinals voting in the conclave for a new pope.

His secretary said Zen would return to Hong Kong after the late pope's funeral, which is scheduled for Saturday. But she was unsure about his exact return date.

It was not the first time Zen had to go through the city's court to leave Hong Kong. In 2023, he went through similar procedures to pay his respects to the late Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. He met Pope Francis in a private audience during that trip, but suffered health issues and was hospitalized for a time after his return to the city.

Last November, he was seen attending the national security trial of Jimmy Lai, founder of the now-defunct pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily. He could walk on his own at that time.

Zen was first arrested in 2022 on suspicion of colluding with foreign forces under the security law. His arrest sent shockwaves through the Catholic community at that time.

While Zen has not yet faced national security-related charges, he and five others were fined in 2022 after being found guilty of failing to register a now-defunct fund that aimed to help people arrested in widespread 2019 pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong. A hearing on his appeal against the conviction is scheduled for December.

Separately, Hong Kong cardinal Stephen Chow will travel to the Vatican for the conclave, the city's Catholic



Social Communications Office said Thursday.

In 2023, a Beijing bishop who was installed by China's state-controlled Catholic church as an archbishop visited Hong Kong at the invitation of Chow. It was the first-ever official visit by a Beijing bishop to the city. Experts at that time said Chow's invitation was a symbolic gesture that could strengthen the fragile ties between China and the Vatican.

Beijing and the Vatican severed diplomatic ties following the Chinese Communist Party's rise to power and the expulsion of foreign priests. Since the break in ties, Catholics in China have been divided between those who belong to an official, state-sanctioned church and those in an underground church loyal to the pope. The Vatican recognizes members of both as Catholics but claims the exclusive right to choose bishops.

## **Freed Israeli hostage feared the 'many ways to die' in Gaza but kept hope alive**

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Whether the threat was abusive Hamas guards, hunger, illness or Israeli strikes, there were moments during Tal Shoham's 505 days of captivity in Gaza when he didn't think he'd be alive the next morning.

There were "many times that I separated from life and ... tried to accept death," the 40-year-old Israeli, who also holds Austrian citizenship, told The Associated Press. "There are so many ways to die there."

Shoham was one of dozens of hostages released from Gaza in February as part of a ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Israel that has since been broken. His wife, two children and three other family members were also kidnapped on Oct. 7, 2023, and were freed a month later.

Shoham said he spent half his captivity in apartments and the rest in underground tunnels. He was sometimes bound, starved, beaten and threatened with death, and initially didn't know if his family was alive.

After his wife was released, Shoham said, someone identifying himself as a member of Hamas called to warn her not to talk about what she'd been through or they'd kill her husband. So as he recounted his own experience, Shoham said there were details he wouldn't discuss, fearful of endangering remaining hostages.

With ceasefire talks at a standstill, Israel is vowing to advance deeper into Gaza until Hamas releases the 59 hostages still there, more than half of whom are believed dead.

The resumption of fighting has inflamed debate in Israel over the course of the war and the hostages' fate. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has come under mounting domestic pressure for his handling of the hostage crisis. But he also faces demands from his hard-line allies not to accept any deal that falls short of Hamas' destruction.

**The abduction**

Shoham was kidnapped while visiting relatives in Kibbutz Be'eri. When Hamas attacked, he and his family hid in a safe room meant to offer protection from incoming rockets. But as militants pried open a window and used explosives to try to break in, the family surrendered, a decision Shoham credits with saving their lives.

Shoham was thrown into the back of a vehicle and taken into Gaza, not knowing what happened to his wife or children. Be'eri was among the hardest-hit communities that day.

Before being separated, Shoham recalled telling his now 9-year-old son that he didn't know if they were going to die. "I didn't want him to hear a lie from me, if it's the last minutes of our life," he said.

Upon entering Gaza, a militant jumped on the car's roof, pointed his gun at Shoham and told him to kneel. But Shoham refused, not wanting to be killed on their terms, he said.

He said the militant had "murder in his eyes."

**The apartments**

Shoham was first taken to an apartment that his captors said was in northern Gaza. He spent weeks there, handcuffed and confined to a room.

About a month later, he was moved to another apartment and joined by Evyatar David and Guy Gilboa-

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Dalal, hostages he would spend most of his captivity with.

The two men were abducted from a music festival in southern Israel where at least 364 people were killed and dozens more taken hostage. Hearing about the conditions of their captivity made Shoham feel lucky about his own. They'd been kept in more uncomfortable zip-tie handcuffs, with plastic bags on their heads, he said, and fed one pita per day.

The three lived in that apartment for months, where they endured daily beatings. Guards would taunt and humiliate them, asking how the music festival was and making shooting noises, Shoham said.

Forbidden by their captors from speaking, they got to know each other through furtive whispers.

To humanize himself in the eyes of his captors, and hopefully make them less likely to kill him, Shoham learned Arabic and talked with them about his life in Israel.

One of their guards liked massages, Shoham said, so the captives provided daily back rubs in exchange for more variety in their diet, like tuna, sardines and even eggs.

Shoham learned his wife and children were alive about 50 days into his captivity. In what he considered an act of kindness, his captors gave him a letter written by his wife that said she and their children were OK and would be released soon.

He credits that gesture by the guards with giving him more mental strength to focus on his own survival.

The tunnel

Last June, Shoham, David and Gilboa-Dalal were relocated to a tunnel that they estimated to be about 30 meters (98 feet) underground.

Shoham said they were moved after Israel rescued four hostages from apartments in Gaza earlier that month, an operation that killed more than 270 Palestinians.

They were transported in an ambulance, Shoham said, cleanly shaved, dressed in clothes meant to make him blend in and blindfolded. Hamas operates from civilian areas, including hospitals, and Israel accuses Hamas militants of taking cover in ambulances and other emergency vehicles.

The tunnels were dark and damp, and it was hard to breathe, Shoham said. The three men were kept with another hostage, Omer Wenkert, who had been in the tunnels for much longer.

They shared a 12-meter-long (39-foot-long) cell and slept on mattresses on the ground, a meter away from a hole that was their toilet. They showered roughly every 21 days.

Shoham lost about 60 pounds (28 kilograms) while in captivity. He developed a leg infection that was so bad he couldn't walk for weeks. After a doctor visited and provided vitamins, he said his health improved.

What also helped Shoham survive, he said, was focusing on what he could control. He started doing mindfulness activities he had learned from his wife, a psychologist, and discussed his feelings with the other hostages. "The only thing that I have power upon is my inner life," he said.

He told himself each day that he'd eventually be free.

Back home and healing

Shoham and Wenkert were freed together in the last release of living hostages before the ceasefire ended. The last thing Shoham told David and Gilboa-Dalal was to be strong and not lose hope.

Hamas later released a video showing the two men, sitting in a nearby vehicle, distressed as they were forced to watch the handover for released hostages that day. A group representing hostages' families called the video "sickening."

Shoham worries they're running out of time and is urging the government and the international community not to tie the hostages' fate to a ceasefire or a peace agreement.

"I really fear that if they won't be released soon, they probably will die there," he said.

Shoham says his own healing process has been made easier by knowing his family can relate to what he endured.

And his freedom has helped the family properly mourn those killed on Oct. 7, including his wife's father. While he was in captivity, they'd been so focused on his release, he said.

Since returning home, Shoham has gained 35 pounds (16 kilograms), saying he wanted to eat everything and never felt full. Lately he's been trying to get back to his pre-captivity routine of intermittent fasting.

While his leg is still not fully healed, Shoham says he's one of the lucky ones, in that he's not suffering from nightmares. He credits his children with helping him keep moving forward.

"When I can hear my children addressing us, like mother and father, mom and dad, saying both names, it's like music to the ears," he said. "As a family, we're all in the process of recovery now. But we are doing it together."

## Vatican keeps St. Peter's open all night for public viewing of Pope Francis due to strong turnout

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — So many mourners lined up to see Pope Francis lying in state in a simple wooden coffin inside St. Peter's Basilica that the Vatican kept the doors open all night due to higher-than-expected turnout, closing the basilica for just an hour Thursday morning for cleaning.

The basilica is bathed in a hushed silence as mourners from across the globe make a slow, shuffling procession up the main aisle to pay their last respects to Francis, who died Monday after a stroke.

The hours spent on line up the stately via della Conciliazione through St. Peter's Square and through the Holy Door into the basilica has allowed mourners to find community around the Argentine pontiff's legacy of inclusion and humble persona.

Emiliano Fernandez, a Catholic from Mexico, was waiting in line around midnight, and after two hours still had not reached the basilica.

"I don't even care how much time I wait here. It's just the opportunity to (show) how I admired Francisco in his life," said Fernandez, whose admiration for the pope grew during his 2016 visit to Mexico. "I think because of the respect that I have for him and the great person he was, it's worth the wait."

The last numbers released by the Vatican said more than 20,000 people had paid their respects during the first 8 ½ hours of the public viewing on Wednesday. The basilica closed for just one hour Thursday morning, from 6 a.m. until 7 a.m., the planned opening time.

Among the first-day mourners was a church group of 14-year-olds from near Milan who arrived for the now-suspended canonization of the first millennial saint, as well as a woman who prayed to the pope for a successful operation and an Italian family who brought their small children to see the pope's body.

"We came because we didn't bring them when he was alive, so we thought we would bring them for a final farewell," said Rosa Scorpati, who was exiting the basilica Wednesday with her three children in strollers. "They were good, but I don't think they really understood because they haven't yet had to deal with death."

Like many others, the Scorpati family from Calabria was in Rome on an Easter vacation, only to be met with the news of Francis' death on Easter Monday.

Out of devotion to the pope and his message of inclusion, the grieving faithful joined the procession of mourners that wended from St. Peter's Square through the basilica's Holy Door, with the repentant among them winning an indulgence, a form of atonement granted during the Jubilee Holy Year. From there, the line extended down the basilica's central aisle to the pope's simple wooden casket.

By late Wednesday, the wait appeared to be three or four hours and growing. A person doing crowd management estimated that the wait was closer to five hours. The mourners stretched down the center of Via della Conciliazione, in a lane set aside for Jubilee pilgrims.

After three days of public viewing, a funeral Mass including heads of state will be held Saturday in St. Peter's Square. The pope will then be buried in a niche within the St. Mary Major Basilica, near his favorite Madonna icon.

The death of Francis, who was 88, capped a 12-year pontificate characterized by his concern for the poor and his message of inclusion, but he was also criticized by some conservatives who felt alienated by his progressive outlook.

A procession of priests, bishops and cardinals accompanied Francis' body Wednesday on its journey



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from a private viewing inside the Vatican to St. Peter's Square. The pageantry contrasted with the human interactions of rank-and-file mourners at the public viewing.

Francis lay in state in an open casket, perched on a ramp facing mourners, with four Swiss Guards standing at attention. As the crowd reached the casket, many lifted their smartphones to snap a photo.

One nun accompanying an elderly woman with a cane walked away sobbing, "My pope is gone."

Such despair was rare. The mood was more one of gratitude for a pope who had, by example, taught many people to open their minds.

"I am very devoted to the pope," said Ivenes Bianco, who was in Rome from Brindisi, Italy, for an operation. "He was important to me because he brought many people together by encouraging coexistence." She cited Francis' acceptance of the gay community and his insistence on helping the poor.

Humbeline Coroy came to Rome from Perpignan, France, for the planned canonization Sunday of 15-year-old Carlo Acutis, which was suspended after the pope's death. She stayed to pay respects to Francis, enjoying exchanges with Japanese mourners they met as they waited under the sun in St. Peter's Square.

"For me, it is a lot of things. In my job, I work with disabled children, and I traveled to Madagascar to work with poor people. Being here, and close to the pope, is a way of integrating these experiences, and make them concrete," she said. Coroy also brought prayers for her father, who is sick with cancer.

For Alessandra Nardi, the pope's death brought back memories of the death three years ago of her beloved uncle Luigi, who used to call her from St. Peter's Square when he came to see Pope Francis say Mass. He "let me hear the bells toll. It was a beautiful thing."

Riccardo Ojeda from Colombia said his experience waiting in line for two hours to pay respects to the pope had shown him how much "humanity loves the pope."

"He left a very important legacy for everyone," he said, "to make this world happier."

## South Korean truth commission halts probe into adoption fraud, hundreds of cases in limbo

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The South Korean government's fact-finding commission suspended its groundbreaking investigation into the extensive fraud and abuse that tainted the nation's historic foreign adoption program, a decision stemming from internal disputes among commissioners regarding which cases warranted recognition as problematic.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission confirmed human rights violations in just 56 of the 367 complaints filed by adoptees before suspending its investigation Wednesday night, just one month before its May 26 deadline.

The fate of the remaining 311 cases, either deferred or incompletely reviewed, now hinges on whether lawmakers will establish a new truth commission through legislation during Seoul's next government, which takes office after the presidential by-election on June 3.

After a nearly three-year investigation into adoption cases across Europe, the United States, and Australia, the commission concluded in a March interim report that the government bears responsibility for facilitating a foreign adoption program riddled with fraud and abuse, driven by efforts to cut welfare costs and carried out by private agencies that often manipulated children's backgrounds and origins.

However, some adoptees, and even members of the commission, criticized the cautiously-worded report, arguing that it should have more forcefully established the government's complicity. Disputes also arose after the commission's nine-member decision-making panel, dominated by conservative-leaning members appointed by recently ousted President Yoon Suk Yeol and his party, voted on March 25 to defer the assessments of 42 adoptee cases, citing insufficient documentation to conclusively prove the adoptions were problematic.

Commission officials haven't disclosed which documents were central to the discussions. However, they suggested that some commissioners were hesitant to recognize cases where adoptees couldn't definitively prove falsification of biological details in their adoption papers, either through meeting their birth parents

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or verifying information about them.

On Wednesday, the panel resolved the standoff by unanimously agreeing to suspend, rather than completely drop, the investigation into the 42 cases. The approach leaves open the door for the cases to be reconsidered if a future truth commission is established. The panel also agreed to suspend investigations into the remaining 269 cases, citing insufficient time to complete the reviews before the deadline, according to three commission sources who described the discussions to the Associated Press.

No further investigations into adoptions for now

It was unclear if and when another commission will be established. Political attention is now focused on the early presidential election. South Korea's constitutional Court formally removed Yoon from office on April 4, months after the opposition-controlled legislature impeached him over his brief imposition of martial law in December. The ruling triggered a snap presidential election set for June 3. Park Geon Tae, a senior investigator who led the probe into adoptions, said the truth commission would be unable to produce any further investigation reports on adoptions before the end of its mandate, after the terms of five of the nine commissioners ended following Wednesday's meeting. This potentially paralyzes the decision-making process, which requires the support of at least five members. Most Korean adoptees were registered by agencies as abandoned orphans, even though many had relatives who could have been easily identified or located. This practice has often made it difficult—or even impossible—for them to trace their roots.

The reluctance of some commissioners to accept cases in which adoptees have been unable to find information about their birth parents reflects a lack of understanding of the systemic problems in adoption and contradicts the commission's broader findings, which acknowledged the manipulation of children's origins, said Philsik Shin, a scholar at South Korea's Anyang University. Shin's analysis of government, law enforcement, and adoption records concludes that more than 90% of Korean children sent to the West between 1980 and 1987, when adoptions peaked, almost certainly had known relatives.

The commission's findings released in March broadly aligned with previous reporting by The Associated Press. The AP investigations, which were also documented by Frontline (PBS), detailed how South Korea's government, Western countries and adoption agencies worked in tandem to supply some 200,000 Korean children to parents overseas, despite years of evidence that many were being procured through questionable or outright unscrupulous means.

Military governments implemented special laws aimed at promoting foreign adoptions, removing judicial oversight and granting vast powers to private agencies, which bypassed proper child relinquishment practices while shipping thousands of children to the West every year. Western nations ignored these problems and sometimes pressured South Korea to keep the kids coming as they focused on satisfying their huge domestic demands for babies.

South Korea's government has never acknowledged direct responsibility for issues related to past adoptions and has so far not responded to the commission's recommendation to issue an official apology.

Korean efforts to investigate past human rights violations

Modeled after the South African commission established in the 1990s to expose apartheid-era injustices, South Korea originally launched the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2006 to investigate past human rights violations. That ended its work in 2010.

Following the passing of a law that allowed for more investigations, the commission was relaunched in December 2020 under South Korea's former liberal government, with a focus on cases that occurred during the country's military dictatorships from the 1960s to 1980s.

Foreign adoptions were a major subject of the second commission, along with the atrocities at Brothers Home, a government-funded facility in Busan that kidnapped, abused and enslaved thousands of children and adults deemed as vagrants for decades until the 1980s.

In January, the commission confirmed at least 31 cases in which children from Brothers Home were adopted abroad, which came years after The AP exposed adoptions from the facility as part of a vast, profit-driven operation.

## Trump says Zelenskyy is prolonging war in Ukraine by resisting calls to cede Crimea to Russia

By ILLIA NOVIKOV, AAMER MADHANI and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — President Donald Trump on Wednesday lashed out at Ukraine's president, saying Volodymyr Zelenskyy is prolonging the "killing field" after pushing back on ceding Crimea to Russia as part of a potential peace plan.

Zelenskyy on Tuesday ruled out ceding territory to Russia in any deal before talks set for Wednesday in London among U.S., European and Ukrainian officials. "There is nothing to talk about. It is our land, the land of the Ukrainian people," Zelenskyy said.

During similar talks last week in Paris, U.S. officials presented a proposal that included allowing Russia to keep control of occupied Ukrainian territory as part of a deal, according to a European official familiar with the matter who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Trump called Zelenskyy's pushback "very harmful" to talks.

"Nobody is asking Zelenskyy to recognize Crimea as Russian Territory but, if he wants Crimea, why didn't they fight for it eleven years ago when it was handed over to Russia without a shot being fired?" he wrote on social media.

Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 after sending troops to overrun it. Weeks later, Moscow-backed separatists launched an uprising in eastern Ukraine, battling Kyiv's forces.

Trump also asserted they were close to a deal and that Ukraine's leader can have peace or "he can fight for another three years before losing the whole Country," adding that Zelenskyy's statement "will do nothing but prolong the 'killing field,' and nobody wants that!"

'A very fair proposal'

Wednesday's meeting was pared back at the last minute, while Vice President JD Vance said negotiations are reaching a moment of truth.

"We've issued a very explicit proposal to both the Russians and the Ukrainians, and it's time for them to either say 'yes' or for the United States to walk away from this process," Vance told reporters during a visit to India.

He said it was "a very fair proposal" that would "freeze the territorial lines at some level close to where they are today," with both sides having to give up some territory they currently hold. He did not provide details.

Trump, who is set to travel to Rome for Pope Francis's funeral on Saturday, told reporters later on Wednesday that he did not know if he would meet with Zelenskyy or other European leaders to discuss the war while in Italy. He also said that has found dealing with Zelenskyy harder than dealing with the Russians.

Trump who is set to travel to the Middle East next month said it was "possible" that he could meet with Putin while in Saudi Arabia, but that it is more likely he will meet with the Russian leader soon after that trip.

A senior European official familiar with the ongoing talks involving the American team said a proposal the United States calls "final" was initially presented last week in Paris, where it was described as "just ideas" — and that they could be changed.

When those "ideas" surfaced in media reports, Ukrainian officials were surprised to find that Washington portrayed them as final, according to the official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Zelenskyy said Wednesday that Ukraine is ready for any format of negotiations that might bring a cease-fire and open the door to full peace negotiations, as he mourned nine civilians killed when a Russian drone struck a bus earlier in the day.

"We insist on an immediate, complete and unconditional ceasefire," Zelenskyy wrote on social media, in accordance with a proposal he said the U.S. tabled six weeks ago.

Ukraine and some Western European governments have accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of dragging his feet on that proposal as his army tries to capture more Ukrainian land. Western analysts say Moscow is in no rush to conclude peace talks because it has battlefield momentum.



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## Doubts over negotiations

U.K. Foreign Secretary David Lammy said the talks in London to find an end to the more than three-year war would involve only lower-ranking officials, after the U.S. State Department said Tuesday that Secretary of State Marco Rubio was unable to attend because of a scheduling issue.

Rubio's abrupt cancellation raised doubts about the direction of negotiations. He had indicated that Wednesday's meeting could be decisive in determining whether the Trump administration remains engaged.

Commenting on those attending the talks, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that "as far as we understand, they so far have failed to bring their positions closer on some issues." He said the Kremlin was still in consultations with American officials but wouldn't publicly discuss details.

U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff is expected to visit Moscow again later this week, according to Russian officials.

Even achieving a limited, 30-day ceasefire has been beyond the reach of negotiators, as both sides continue to attack each other along the 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line and launch long-range strikes.

A Russian drone struck a bus carrying workers in Marganets, in eastern Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region on Wednesday morning, killing eight women and one man, regional head Serhii Lysak wrote on social media. More than 40 people were injured, he said.

Lysak published photos of a bus with windows blown out and shards of glass mixed with blood spattered on its floor.

## A Ukrainian delegation in London

Trump has pushed for an end to the war and said last week that negotiations were "coming to a head." That comment came after Rubio suggested the U.S. might soon back away from negotiations if they don't progress.

Those still attending Wednesday's meeting include retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg, Trump's envoy for Ukraine and Russia.

Andrii Yermak, the head of Ukraine's presidential office, said on social media that a delegation including him, Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha and Defense Minister Rustem Umerov had arrived in London for the talks despite the alterations.

"The path to peace is not easy, but Ukraine has been and remains committed to peaceful efforts," Yermak said. Officials would "discuss ways to achieve a full and unconditional ceasefire as the first step toward a comprehensive settlement and the achievement of a just and lasting peace."

Several hours later, Yermak said that he, Sybiha and Umerov met with national security and foreign policy advisors from the countries "participating in the coalition of the willing" and "emphasized our commitment" to the U.S. president's peace efforts.

He asserted on social media that "Russia continues to reject an unconditional ceasefire, dragging out the process and trying to manipulate negotiations."

## Trump frustrated with both sides

Trump said repeatedly during his election campaign last year that he would be able to end the war "in 24 hours" upon taking office. But he has expressed frustration with Zelenskyy and Putin. Russia has effectively rejected a U.S. proposal for an immediate and full 30-day halt in the fighting by imposing far-reaching conditions.

Some European allies are wary of the American proposal for Ukraine to exchange land for peace. But an official said there's also acknowledgment by some allies that Russia is firmly entrenched wholly or partially in five regions of Ukraine: Crimea, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson.

If the goal is to obtain a ceasefire immediately, "it should be based on the line of contact as it is," said the senior French official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with French presidential policy.

## Pope Francis sought to make LGBTQ+ people more welcome, but church doctrine didn't change much

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

The papacy of Pope Francis ended with the same core doctrine for LGBTQ+ people that he inherited: The Catholic Church still rejected same-sex marriage and condemned any sexual relations between gay or lesbian partners as "intrinsically disordered."

Yet unlike his predecessors, Francis incrementally conveyed through his actions, formal statements and occasional casual remarks that he wanted the church to be a more welcoming place for them.

Frustrated activists, wary conservatives

Among activists, there was frustration over the lack of a doctrinal breakthrough, but still there was gratitude this week for his unabashed warmth toward them.

Francis, who died Monday, "was a transformational leader who included LGBTQ people in historic ways," said Sarah Kate Ellis, CEO of the U.S.-based advocacy group GLAAD, who met twice with the pope. "His principles of empathetic listening, inclusion, and compassion are exactly what this divided world needs right now."

Many conservative Catholic leaders were wary of his LGBTQ+ outreach — and sometimes were angry and defiant, such as when he decided in 2023 to let priests bless same-sex couples.

Africa's bishops united in refusing to implement the Vatican declaration, saying same-sex relationships were "contrary to the will of God." Individual bishops in Eastern Europe, Latin America and elsewhere also voiced opposition.

The declaration restated traditional church teaching that marriage is a lifelong union between a man and woman. But it allowed priests to offer spontaneous blessings to same-sex couples seeking God's grace, provided such blessings aren't confused with the rites of a wedding.

Francis later acknowledged the declaration had encountered resistance; he faulted opposing bishops for refusing to open a dialogue about it.

"Sometimes decisions are not accepted," he said in a TV interview. "But in most cases, when you don't accept a decision, it's because you don't understand."

"This has happened with these last decisions about blessing everyone," Francis added. "The Lord blesses everyone."

The beneficiaries of Francis' welcoming attitude included a community of transgender women — many of them Latin American migrants who worked in Rome as prostitutes — who visited his weekly general audiences and were given VIP seats.

"Before, the church was closed to us. They didn't see us as normal people. They saw us as the devil," said Colombia-born Andrea Paola Torres Lopez. "Then Pope Francis arrived, and the doors of the church opened for us."

A 2023 synod reflects Francis' mixed legacy

The pope's mixed legacy was epitomized by the Vatican's 2023 synod bringing together hundreds of bishops and lay people to discuss the church's future. The advance agenda mentioned LGBTQ+ issues; one of Francis' hand-picked delegates was the Rev. James Martin, a U.S.-based Jesuit and prominent advocate of greater LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Yet in the final summary of the three-week synod, there was no mention of LGBTQ+ people — reflecting the influence of conservatives who opposed Francis' overtures to that community.

During the synod, the pope met with a small delegation from the Maryland-based New Ways Ministry, which advocates on behalf of LGBTQ+ Catholics in the U.S.

According to the group's executive director, Francis DeBernardo, the pope urged them never to lose hope — a message DeBernardo repeated after being disappointed by the synod's outcome.

"The Catholic LGBTQ+ community must take Pope Francis' message to heart," he said. "The report's shortcomings are an invitation to speak anew about their joys, their sorrows, and their faith. ... Now is not a time to despair."

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Another disappointment came in May 2024, when Francis apologized after Italian media quoted unnamed bishops saying he jokingly used the vulgar term “faggotness” while speaking in Italian during a meeting. He had used the term in reaffirming the Vatican’s ban on allowing gay men to enter seminaries and be ordained priests.

This week, DeBernardo looked back at Francis’ legacy mostly with appreciation, even while acknowledging disappointments.

“Francis was not only the first pope to use the word ‘gay’ when speaking about LGBTQ+ people, he was the first pope to speak lovingly and tenderly to them,” DeBernardo wrote. “His kind words of welcome to this community, traditionally marginalized in the church, rang loudly around the globe.”

An early message — “Who am I to judge?”

It became clear early in Francis’ papacy that he was going to articulate a gentler, more tolerant approach to LGBTQ+ people than any previous pope. The initial high-profile moment came in 2013 — during the first airborne news conference of his pontificate — with his memorable “Who am I to judge” comment when he was asked about a purportedly gay priest.

Signals had come earlier. As archbishop of Buenos Aires, he had favored granting legal protections to same-sex couples. After becoming pope, he went on to minister repeatedly and publicly to the gay and transgender communities, steadily evolving his position. His abiding message: “Everyone, everyone, everyone” — “todos, todos, todos” — is loved by God and should be welcomed in the church.

On some specific LGBTQ+ issues, Francis initially disappointed activists with his decisions, yet later softened or reversed them as part of highlighting his welcoming approach.

Francis was criticized by the Catholic gay community for a 2021 decree from the Vatican’s doctrine office saying the church cannot bless same-sex unions because “God cannot bless sin.” But that stance was effectively repudiated by the 2023 declaration on blessings.

Another reversal came that year in a Vatican statement saying it’s permissible, under certain circumstances, for transgender people to be baptized and serve as godparents

If it did not cause scandal or “disorientation” among other Catholics, a transgender person “may receive baptism under the same conditions as other faithful,” it said.

Similarly, the document said trans adults, even if they had gender-transition surgery, could serve as godparents under certain conditions. That reversed an earlier outright ban.

U.S. transgender-rights advocates welcomed Francis’ inclusive tone, noting that some political and religious leaders were targeting trans people with discriminatory laws and policies.

‘Being homosexual isn’t a crime’

Another issue tackled by Francis pertained to laws in dozens of countries criminalizing homosexual activity.

In 2008, the Vatican declined to sign a U.N. declaration calling for an end to such laws. But in a 2023 interview with The Associated Press, Francis assailed these laws as unjust and called for their elimination.

“Being homosexual isn’t a crime,” Francis said.

Francis acknowledged that Catholic bishops in some regions support laws that criminalize homosexuality or discriminate against LGBTQ+ people. But he attributed such attitudes to cultural backgrounds, and said bishops need to recognize the dignity of everyone.

“These bishops have to have a process of conversion,” he said, suggesting they should apply “tenderness, please, as God has for each one of us.”

Advocates of greater LGBTQ+ inclusion hailed Francis’ comments.

“His historic statement should send a message to world leaders and millions of Catholics around the world: LGBTQ people deserve to live in a world without violence and condemnation, and more kindness and understanding,” said Ellis, the head of GLAAD.

Praise also came from Martin, who was selected by Francis as a synod delegate.

“Few bishops or bishops’ conferences have condemned the criminalizing laws that the pope rejected today,” he wrote of the AP interview.

But Jamie Manson, a lesbian who headed the U.S.-based abortion-rights group Catholics for Choice,



insisted declarations were not enough.

"LGBTQ people need more than nice-sounding words in a newspaper interview in order to be safe in the Catholic Church," she wrote. "We need doctrinal change."

## Rubio says Iran must give up nuclear enrichment in any deal with the US

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in an interview released Wednesday that Iran must give up all nuclear enrichment if it wants to make a deal during talks with the Trump administration and head off the threat of armed conflict.

Iran insists its nuclear program is for civilian energy use and says it does not seek to make weapons-grade uranium to build atomic bombs.

"If Iran wants a civil nuclear program, they can have one just like many other countries can have one, and that is they import enriched material," Rubio said in a podcast interview with journalist Bari Weiss.

But Iran has long refused to give up its ability to enrich uranium. President Donald Trump in his first term pulled the U.S. out of a Obama-era nuclear deal focused on monitoring to ensure Iran did not move toward weapons-grade enrichment.

In the first months of his second term, Trump opened talks that he says will get a tougher agreement on Iran's nuclear program, with a second round of negotiations held Saturday and technical-level talks expected this weekend. Iran wants the easing of sanctions that have damaged its economy and is facing threatened Israeli or U.S. strikes aimed at disabling its nuclear program by force.

"I would tell anyone we're a long ways from any sort of agreement with Iran," Rubio noted. "It may not be possible, we don't know ... but we would want to achieve a peaceful resolution to this and not resort to anything else."

With the region already embroiled in war, he said that "any military action at this point in the Middle East, whether it's against Iran by us or anybody else, could in fact trigger a much broader conflict."

Although Trump "reserves every right to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, he'd prefer peace," Rubio added.

Trump's lead representative in the recently revived talks, Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, initially suggested the U.S. was open to allowing Iran to continue low-level uranium enrichment.

Many American conservatives and Israel, which wants Iran's nuclear facilities destroyed, objected. Witkoff issued what the Trump administration described as a clarification, saying, "Iran must stop and eliminate its nuclear enrichment and weaponization program."

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi responded that his country must be able to enrich. "The core issue of enrichment itself is not negotiable," he said.

Standard international agreements for civilian nuclear programs have the U.S. and international community help governments develop nuclear power for energy and other peaceful uses in exchange for them swearing off making their own nuclear fuel, because of the threat that capacity could be used for weapons.

Also Wednesday, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency said Iran has agreed to allow in a technical team from the United Nations nuclear watchdog agency in coming days to discuss restoring camera surveillance at nuclear sites and other issues.

Rafael Mariano Grossi, speaking to reporters in Washington after meeting with Iranian officials in Tehran last week, said that while the move was not directly linked to the U.S. talks, it was an encouraging sign of Iran's willingness to reach terms in a potential deal.

Iranian leaders were engaged "with a sense of trying to get to an agreement," Grossi said. "That is my impression."

After Trump exited the nuclear deal with world powers in 2018, Iran responded by curtailing monitoring by the IAEA at nuclear sites. It has pressed ahead on enriching and stockpiling uranium that is closer to weapons-grade levels, the agency says.

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The IAEA is not playing a direct role in the new talks, and Trump's Republican administration has not asked it to, Grossi told reporters.

But when it comes to ensuring Iranian compliance with any deal, he said, "this will have to be verified by the IAEA."

"I cannot imagine how you could put ... a corps of invented international or national inspectors to inspect Iran" without having the agency's decades of expertise, he said. "I think it would be problematic and strange."

## Catholic faithful pay their final respects to Pope Francis as public viewing begins

By COLLEEN BARRY and NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Thousands of people began filing through St. Peter's Basilica to pay their final respects to Pope Francis on Wednesday at the start of three days of public viewing ahead of his funeral.

Throngs of the faithful made their way to the 16th century basilica's main altar where Francis' open wooden casket was perched, as Swiss Guards stood at attention. Over the coming days, tens of thousands of people are expected to pass through, and the Vatican said it may extend the viewer hours even longer due to high turnout. In the first 8 1/2 hours, 19,430 people paid their respects to the pope.

Francis was laid out in red robes, clasping a rosary and wearing a bishop's miter, the traditional pointed headdress. Mourners waited hours to reach the casket, which was behind a cordon. Some held their cell phones aloft as they neared to snap photos in what has become a modern ritual.

"It gave me chills," said Ivenes Bianco, as she left. She was in Rome from the southern city of Brindisi for medical care, and came to pay her respects. "He was important to me because he encouraged co-existence. He brought many people together."

Francis' casket wasn't put on an elevated bier — as was the case with past popes — but placed on a ramp, facing the pews. It was in keeping with his wishes for the rituals surrounding a papal funeral to be simplified to reflect his belief that the pope's role is that of simple pastor, not world leader.

Cardinals, meanwhile, met in private to finalize preparations for Saturday's funeral and plan the conclave to elect Francis' successor.

Francis died on Monday at age 88, capping a 12-year pontificate characterized by his concern for the poor and message of inclusion, but also some criticism from conservatives who sometimes felt alienated by his progressive bent.

Francis first lay in state in the hotel where he lived, in a private viewing for Vatican residents and the papal household. Images released by the Vatican on Tuesday showed the pope in an open casket, his hands folded over a rosary.

Wednesday opened with the bells of St. Peter's tolling as pallbearers carried Francis' body into the basilica, in a procession through the piazza where he had delivered his final goodbye. Francis had made a surprise popemobile tour through the faithful on Easter Sunday, after his nurse assured him he could despite his frail health from a bout of pneumonia and long hospitalization.

Cardinal Kevin Farrell, who is running the Vatican until a new pope is elected, led the procession to the altar, with clouds of incense and the choir chanting the Litany of Saints hymn. In pairs, cardinals approached the casket, bowed and made a sign of the cross, followed by bishops, ushers, priests and nuns.

Then the doors were opened to the public. There was the squeak of sneakers, the rustling of kneeling nuns, the murmur of quiet prayers. A cough, a child's cry.

"We knew there were many people, so we approached this with calmness," said Rosa Morghen from Naples, adding: "It's the feeling one experiences when a family member passes away, as he is a father, a grandfather who has gone."

The public viewing ends Friday at 7 p.m., after which Francis' casket will be closed and sealed.

The funeral has been set for Saturday at 10 a.m. in St. Peter's Square. It will be attended by world lead-

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ers, including U.S. President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

After the funeral, the conclave

Francis' death and funeral will usher in a carefully orchestrated period of transition in the 1.4 billion-strong Catholic Church, with cardinals gathering over the coming days before entering a conclave, the secretive ritual voting in the Sistine Chapel to elect a new pope.

There are 133 cardinals who are under 80 years old and eligible to vote, after two bowed out for health reasons, and the new pontiff will likely come from within their ranks. The conclave is not expected to begin before May 5.

South Korean Cardinal Lazarus You Heung-sik, who heads the Vatican's office for priests, predicted a short conclave but acknowledged the transition is full of uncertainties.

"We'll see what the Holy Spirit says," he said Wednesday. Asked if the next pope could come from Asia, where the Catholic Church is growing, he insisted: "For the Lord, there's no East or West."

Papua New Guinea's first and only cardinal, John Ribat, prepared Wednesday to leave for Rome to participate in the vote, pleased to represent the South Pacific island nation of 12 million people and more than 800 languages in a College of Cardinals that Francis greatly diversified.

"To have a representative from here to be in the conclave, it is a big thing," Ribat told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. He said he hoped the next pope would be someone who could lead the church in "a way that is truthful and binds everyone together."

Italian police have tightened security for the events, carrying out foot and horse patrols around the Vatican, where pilgrims continued to arrive for the Holy Year celebrations that Francis opened in December.

"The death of a pope is not a small thing, because we've lost our leader," said Julio Henrique from Brazil. "But still, in a few days, we will have a new leader. So ... the thing of hope remains. Who will assume Peter's throne?"

## Trump will hold a rally in Michigan next week to mark his first 100 days in office

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — President Donald Trump will mark his first 100 days in office next week with a rally in Michigan, his first since returning to the White House earlier this year.

Trump will visit Macomb County on Tuesday, the White House press secretary said. The region just north of Detroit, known as an automotive hub.

"President Trump is excited to return to the great state of Michigan next Tuesday, where he will rally in Macomb County to celebrate the FIRST 100 DAYS!" Karoline Leavitt said Wednesday on social media.

The rally will take place one day before Trump's 100th day in office — a traditional early milestone in which a president's progress is measured against campaign promises. Michigan was one of the key battleground states Trump flipped last year from Democrats on his path back to the White House.

Trump has not traveled much since taking office outside of personal weekend trips. His only other official trip in his second term was during the first week, when he visited disaster zones in North Carolina and California and held an event in Las Vegas to promote his plan to eliminate taxes on tips.

But later this week, Trump will travel to Pope Francis' funeral in Rome, the first foreign trip in his second term.

Trump's upcoming trip to Michigan follows a series of meetings and phone calls with the state's high-profile Democratic governor, Gretchen Whitmer. Once a sharp critic of Trump, Whitmer has said that she hopes to find common ground with the president in his second term.

A key area of potential cooperation that Whitmer has pointed to is Selfridge Air National Guard Base, long a concern for Whitmer and Michigan lawmakers amid uncertainty over its future as the A-10 aircraft stationed there are phased out. The base is located in Macomb County, where he is set to appear Tuesday.

Trump mentioned Selfridge during an April 9 executive order signing in the Oval Office, an event that



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Whitmer was present for, saying he hoped to keep the base "open, strong, thriving."

"I think we're going to be successful, Governor. I think we'll be very successful there," Trump said about Selfridge.

Whitmer — whom Trump praised during his remarks — later said she was unexpectedly brought into the Oval Office during her visit. A photo captured her trying to shield her face from cameras with a folder.

Asked Wednesday if Whitmer would appear with the president in Michigan, a spokesperson for the governor said they "don't have anything to share at this time."

Whitmer and other Michigan officials have long advocated for a new fighter mission to replace the outgoing A-10 squadron at Selfridge.

In a 2023 letter sent during President Joe Biden's administration, Whitmer urged the secretary of the Air Force to act, writing, "I repeat and reiterate what I stated in November and many times before over the past year: a fighter mission at Selfridge to recapitalize the A10s is the right path forward for the State of Michigan, the Air Force, and the nation."

## China's fast-growing EV makers pursuing varied routes to global expansion

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

SHANGHAI (AP) — The world's auto industry is getting a shake-up from Chinese automakers that are quickly expanding across the globe, offering relatively affordable electric vehicles designed to wow car buyers with sleek designs and the latest high-tech interiors.

Companies like BYD, Great Wall, Geely and Chery Automobile are reaching outward as they build the scale they need to survive cut-throat competition in their home market.

These generally are not state-run giants like SAIC, BAIC and Guangzhou Automotive. The founder of Geely started out making refrigerators.

BYD first built up its expertise in battery technology, now its biggest advantage as the world's largest-selling EV maker. Some others are technology companies allied with automakers to offer autonomous driving.

Here are some of the key players:

Great Wall Motors

Great Wall Motors, with the Haval, Wey, Ora, Poer and Tank brands, is banking on overseas sales to keep growing after seeing its sales inside China fall by nearly 15% last year, even as the company's net profit jumped more than 80%. The company has factories in Russia, Thailand and Brazil, where it is challenging Toyota's popular Hilux pickup truck with its GWM Poer, a hybrid pickup of its own. Another mainstay is the Haval H6, a hybrid sports SUV.

Great Wall has smoothed its transition to overseas production by buying factories of other automakers. In Thailand, it took over a factory formerly operated by General Motors Corp. In Brazil, it purchased a former Mercedes-Benz plant.

"It is essential for volume to be big, otherwise the cost of production is too high," Great Wall's chairman, Wei Jianjun, said in a media huddle at the show. Wei, who also goes by the name Jack Wey, was born in Beijing but moved to nearby Hebei, home of the Great Wall. He led the company's transition from vehicle modification to automaking, becoming China's biggest maker of pickup trucks and a leading SUV maker. The company has a joint venture for EVs with BMW.

Chery

State-owned Chery Automobile says it was the first Chinese automaker to export overseas. It has sold more than 15 million of its Chery, Exeed, Omoda and Jetour models overseas, mostly in the developing world and emerging markets, including Turkey and Ukraine. Chery reported selling 2.6 million vehicles overseas last year and is aiming for 3 million in 2025. It's quickly expanding overseas production, setting up factories in Russia and Spain. It is expanding rapidly in Latin America.

Chery's tie-up with EV-maker Visionary Vehicles aimed to sell in North America but has not yet achieved

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that goal. The company has a 50-50 joint venture with Jaguar Land Rover, which is a subsidiary of Tata Motors of India that makes Jaguars and Land Rovers in China. It also collaborates with Huawei Technologies and e-commerce giant Alibaba.

Chery still sells far more fuel-engine cars than EVs. Its battery electric vehicle company, Chery New Energy, makes minivehicles like the eQ1, or Small Ant, and the QQ Ice Cream. Its mainstays are the Tiggo lineup of SUVs and its Arrizo sedans.

BYD

BYD made more electric vehicles last year than Tesla, selling 3.52 million EVs in China, up 28% from a year earlier. Its strength in plug-in hybrids has helped as Chinese increasingly opt for the fallback of a fuel engine.

The company, based in southern China's Shenzhen, recently announced an ultra-fast EV charging system it says can provide a full charge for its latest EVs within five to eight minutes, about as long as a fill-up. It plans to build more than 4,000 of the new charging stations across China.

The Chinese company started out making batteries and has been refining its battery and energy storage technology while building an auto empire that is expanding outside China.

While BYD's fanciest, latest premium models are expected to sell for up to about \$40,000, it also makes much less expensive EVs including the Seagull, which sells for around \$12,000 in China.

BYD barely nudged ahead of Tesla in production of battery-powered EVs in 2024, making 1,777,965 compared with Tesla's 1,773,443.

Geely

Geely Auto is perhaps the most famous Chinese automaker that many people have never heard of. The privately held company was founded as a refrigerator-maker by businessman Li Shufu in 1997 in eastern China's Taizhou, which early on became a hub of private industry.

Li began making strategic overseas acquisitions early on, buying Sweden's Volvo Car Co. from Ford Motor in 2010. Geely's purchase of a 49.9% stake in Malaysia's Proton gave it a 51% stake in luxury sports car brand Lotus. It formed a 50-50 joint venture to make Smart city cars with Germany's Daimler AG. It also works with Renault SA of France on powertrains and owns a stake in Aston Martin Lagonda.

In March, it launched sales of its Geely EX5 SUVs in Australia and New Zealand, adding to its global reach.

Geely also owns New York Stock Exchange-listed Zeekr Intelligent Technology Holding, which makes a premium EV brand. Geely and Volvo own Swedish automaker Polestar, which has struggled in the U.S. market.

Wuling

China's second-best selling EV brand is Wuling, a joint venture of Shanghai's SAIC Motor, General Motors and Guangxi Auto. It sold more than 673,000 EVs in China and has a market share of only 6% compared with BYD's nearly one-third share. Tesla came in third at 659,000 cars sold.

Apart from its Baojun sedans and vans, Wuling mainly makes engines, commercial vehicles and special purpose vehicles like mini-EVs and golf carts.

Others

Other major Chinese brands of EVs include Nio, Xpeng, Li Auto and Leap Motor. State-run giants like Dongfeng Motor Group, which has an alliance with Nissan Motor Corp., and Changan Automobile, a partner with Japan's Mazda Motor Corp. and with Ford Motor Co., are also quickly expanding EV sales.

But the industry is fast-changing and competition in the home market is tough. That's a key reason why the biggest automakers have focused attention on expanding into global markets.

## July Fourth parade mass shooting survivors remember victims as gunman skips sentencing hearing

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

WAUKEGAN, Ill. (AP) — Survivors recounted the horror a gunman caused when he fired dozens of bullets at a 2022 Independence Day parade in suburban Chicago, detailing during a sentencing hearing

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for the man on Wednesday how they fled, hid inside businesses or treated the wounded packed into an emergency room.

But the gunman who killed seven people and injured dozens more didn't hear any of it.

Robert E. Crimo III, 24, refused to appear in court or watch from jail, authorities said.

Crimo pleaded guilty last month, an abrupt reversal moments before his trial was set to begin after years of unpredictable legal proceedings.

His absence didn't stop some survivors or family members of the dead from addressing him in statements detailing their physical or emotional pain since the attack. Some described feeling empty or deeply sad; others said they now fear public gatherings. But most used their time simply to remember the people killed.

"You took my mom," said Leah Sundheim, the only child of Jacquelyn Sundheim. "I will never be able to summarize how simply extraordinary she was, and how devastating and out of balance my life is without her."

Prosecutors also presented evidence including parts of a lengthy videotaped confession during the Lake County courthouse hearing, which is scheduled to resume Thursday.

"It went from watching a parade to utter chaos," testified Dana Ruder Ring, who escaped with her husband and three kids. "We just had to keep going. We just knew that staying still was not a safe idea, and we were terrified."

Her husband frantically searched for the parents of a child covered in blood while seeing "bodies still smoking on the ground," Ruder Ring said.

She learned later that the boy's parents, Kevin McCarthy, 37, and Irina McCarthy, 35, had been killed.

Shooter's confession revealed

In a recording of his confession, which defense attorneys tried to have thrown out, a blank-faced Crimo slumped in a chair, his arms crossed, as he said he briefly reconsidered the attack because of a problem with the gun, but he fixed the weapon.

"I walked up the stairs, jumped on the roof and opened fire," he said.

Crimo was calm and cavalier, even laughing and joking, said Brian Bodden, a Highland Park police officer.

"He was never serious, no remorse," Bodden testified, adding that Crimo was clear that he intended to kill people. He said Crimo had planned the shooting for years.

Crimo said he tried to avoid children, but it was impossible in the crowd. He gave a cryptic reason for the attack, saying he felt like a sleepwalker.

"I don't even think I really wanted to," he said.

A celebration turned horrific

Prosecutors recreated the horror of the day for the upscale community of about 30,000 people north of Chicago.

In one video, a marching band played "You're a Grand Old Flag" before shots were fired. Musicians carrying instruments ran as emergency sirens blared, fleeing along with other attendees.

Many cried during the testimony, while others put their arms around each other.

Retired Highland Park Police Commander Gerry Cameron said he ran toward what sounded like fireworks or a car backfiring when he saw people hurt and others fleeing. He described later helping people who were hiding in businesses.

"They were reluctant to come out," he said. "They were horrified."

Crimo fired from a roof, leaving behind 83 shell casings, authorities said.

Emergency room Dr. Jeremy Smiley escaped the parade while carrying his daughter, got his family to safety and went to the hospital.

"The number of shots, it was just clear that whatever this was, it was going to be bad," he said in court.

He described caring for a child, later identified as the youngest victim, Cooper Roberts, as injured people filled emergency room beds and lined the hallways. Other doctors kept showing up to help.

Meanwhile, authorities collected evidence in the deserted downtown. Bodies were covered in tarps.

"It was pretty eerie, almost postapocalyptic," testified Marc Recca of the FBI.

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Victims and relatives speak

Crimo injured 48 people and killed seven, including the McCarthys and Sundheim; Katherine Goldstein, 64; Stephen Straus, 88; Nicolas Toledo-Zaragoza, 78; and Eduardo Uvaldo, 69.

Some survivors described how they now hate loud noises or are paranoid, scanning for threats around them.

Keely Roberts, whose 8-year-old son Cooper Roberts is paralyzed from the waist down, called Crimo "cowardly" for not attending.

"You will not get my sad stories," she said. "You have no power over my life."

John Straus, the son of Stephen Straus, said the shooting haunts him.

"There's no closure, no sense to be made of it," Straus said. "It is an open wound in our hearts that we will have to nurse forever."

Sheila Gutman was shot in the foot and described her intense recovery, including numerous surgeries.

"The aftermath inflicts a second wound that continues to bleed, a second kind of violence," she said in court.

A life sentence is certain

Crimo will be sentenced for 21 counts of first-degree murder — three counts for each person killed — and 48 counts of attempted murder. Each first-degree murder count carries a maximum life sentence in Illinois.

The case has moved slowly, in part because Crimo backed out of a plea deal, fired his public defenders and reversed his decision to represent himself. He signed his name and Donald Trump's when he waived his right to trial.

Crimo has previously skipped court, including parts of jury selection, despite a judge's warnings that the case would still move forward. Several survivors separately have sued Crimo and gunmaker Smith & Wesson.

Crimo's parents attended most court proceedings but were absent Wednesday. Robert Crimo Jr., who served less than two months in jail for charges in connection to how his son obtained a gun license, declined to comment Wednesday.

## Trump signs executive orders targeting colleges, plus schools' equity efforts

By COLLIN BINKLEY and JOCELYN GECKER AP Education Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has ordered sharper scrutiny of America's colleges and the accreditors that oversee them, part of his escalating campaign to end what he calls "wokeness" and diversity efforts in education.

In a series of executive actions signed Wednesday, Trump targeted universities that he views as liberal adversaries to his political agenda. One order called for harder enforcement of a federal law requiring colleges to disclose their financial ties with foreign sources, while another called for a shakeup of the accrediting bodies that decide whether colleges can accept federal financial aid awarded to students.

Trump also ordered the Education Department to root out efforts to ensure equity in discipline in the nation's K-12 schools. Previous guidance from Democratic administrations directed schools not to disproportionately punish underrepresented minorities such as Black and Native American students. The administration says equity efforts amount to racial discrimination.

Foreign money is at issue in clash with Harvard

Colleges' financial ties with foreign sources have long been a concern among Republicans, especially ties with China and other countries with adversarial relationships with the U.S. It became a priority during Trump's first term and reemerged last week as the White House grasped for leverage in its escalating battle with Harvard University.

The White House said it needed to take action because Harvard and other colleges have routinely violated a federal disclosure law, which has been unevenly enforced since it was passed in the 1980s. Known as Section 117 of the Higher Education Act, the law requires colleges to disclose foreign gifts and contracts



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valued at \$250,000 or more.

Last week, the Education Department demanded records from Harvard over foreign financial ties spanning the past decade, accusing the school of filing "incomplete and inaccurate disclosures." Trump's administration is sparring with Harvard over the university's refusal to accept a list of demands over its handling of pro-Palestinian protests as well as its diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

In the executive order, Trump calls on the Education Department and the attorney general to step up enforcement of the law and take action against colleges that violate it, including a cutoff of federal money.

The Trump administration intends to "end the secrecy surrounding foreign funds in American educational institutions" and protect against "foreign exploitation," the order said.

It was applauded by Republicans, including Rep. Tim Walberg of Michigan, chair of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce. He accused China of exploiting academic ties to steal research and "indoctrinate students."

Accreditors ordered to drop DEI

Another order aims at accrediting bodies that set standards colleges must meet to accept federal financial aid from students. Trump campaigned on a promise to overhaul the industry, saying it was "dominated by Marxist Maniacs and lunatics."

Often overlooked as an obscure branch of college oversight, accreditors play an important role in shaping colleges in many aspects, with standards that apply all the way from colleges' governing boards to classroom curriculum.

Trump's executive order is the opening salvo in what could be a lengthy battle to overhaul the accrediting industry. Chief among his priorities is to strip accreditors of DEI requirements imposed on colleges. Some accreditors have already dropped or stopped enforcing such standards amid Trump's DEI crackdown.

Trump's order calls on the government to suspend or terminate accreditors that discriminate in the name of DEI. Instead, it calls on accreditors to focus more squarely on the student outcomes of colleges and programs they oversee.

The president wants to make it easier for new accreditors to compete with the 19 that are now authorized to work on behalf of the federal government. As it stands, new accreditors looking to be recognized by the government must undergo an arduous process that traditionally takes years. Trump's order said it should be "transparent, efficient, and not unduly burdensome."

"Instead of pushing schools to adopt a divisive DEI ideology, accreditors should be focused on helping schools improve graduation rates and graduates' performance in the labor market," Education Secretary Linda McMahon said in a statement.

De-emphasizing equity in school discipline

Trump also invoked opposition to equity efforts in his order on school discipline. The edict signed Wednesday seeks a return to "common sense school discipline," allowing decisions to be based solely on students' behavior and actions, McMahon said.

Another executive order instructs government agencies and departments to no longer rely on "disparate impact theories." Under the disparate impact standard, policies and practices that disproportionately impact minorities and other protected groups could be challenged regardless of their intent.

In many schools around the country, Black students have been more likely to receive punishments that remove them from the classroom, including suspensions, expulsions and being transferred to alternative schools. A decade ago, those differences became the target of a reform movement spurred by the same reckoning that gave rise to Black Lives Matter. The movement elevated the concept of the "school-to-prison pipeline" — the notion that being kicked out of school, or dropping out, increases the chance of arrest and imprisonment years later.

Federal guidelines to address racial disparities in school discipline first came from President Barack Obama's administration in 2014. Federal officials urged schools not to suspend, expel or refer students to law enforcement except as a last resort, and encouraged restorative justice practices that did not push students out of the classroom. Those rules were rolled back by Trump's first administration, but civil rights regulations at federal and state levels still mandate the collection of data on discipline.

On Wednesday, Trump directed McMahon to issue new school discipline guidance within 60 days. The order also calls for a review of nonprofit organizations that have promoted discipline policies rooted in equity and ensure they don't receive federal money.

Another order creates a federal task force focused on giving America's students training on artificial intelligence as early as kindergarten. It would work to develop new online learning resources.

Trump is also establishing a White House initiative to empower Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Among other efforts, it would seek to promote private-sector partnerships with HBCUs and schools' workforce preparation in industries like technology and finance.

## Knicks star Jalen Brunson wins NBA's clutch player of the year award

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

Jalen Brunson made more baskets than anyone else in the NBA this season when games were considered to be on the line.

He delivered in the clutch. And a trophy is coming his way.

Brunson, the New York Knicks' star guard, won the NBA's clutch player of the year award on Wednesday. He got 70 of the 100 first-place votes, easily beating second-place Nikola Jokic of Denver and third-place Anthony Edwards of Minnesota.

"I think some people are born into it," Brunson said on TNT shortly after the results were revealed. "I think I had to learn. I learned back in high school, kind of got better and better at each stage, and here we are."

Brunson — who made a league-best 52 field goals in clutch time — averaged 5.6 points on 51.5% shooting in those moments, with the Knicks going 17-11 in the games he played that met the criteria for the "clutch" designation.

Brunson was truly at his best in the final 30 seconds of those games. He shot 11 for 17 — 64.7% — in those moments, including 4 for 8 from 3-point range.

A panel of 100 global writers and broadcasters who cover the NBA voted on the award. The NBA's head coaches each submitted five names for consideration, and that list resulted in 20 candidates.

Brunson is the third winner of the award, after De'Aaron Fox (then of Sacramento, now of San Antonio) in 2023 and Golden State's Stephen Curry last year. The award is named for Hall of Famer Jerry West — who was dubbed "Mr. Clutch" when he played as a nod to his exploits when games were on the line.

For a play to be considered clutch, by the NBA's definition, these are the criteria: the score differential has to be five points or less, and the game has to be in either the final five minutes of the fourth quarter or in overtime.

"Oftentimes you'd say, 'Well, he has poise under pressure and he has confidence.' And so, where do those things come from?" Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said of Brunson. "And you understand that it comes from his preparation. You obviously have to have great talent. But because of the way he prepares himself, when he's in those situations he's very confident because of the work that he's put into it."

The clutch player award was the second handed out by the NBA during its awards season. Boston's Payton Pritchard was announced as the league's sixth man of the year on Tuesday. Another award comes Thursday: defensive player of the year, with the finalists being Atlanta's Dyson Daniels, Golden State's Draymond Green and Cleveland's Evan Mobley.

The hustle award will be announced Friday. Announcement dates for the other top honors — MVP, most improved player, rookie of the year, and coach of the year, along with All-NBA and All-Rookie team selections — have not yet been revealed by the NBA.

Edwards led the NBA with 157 clutch points this season, while Brunson was second with 156 and Jokic was fourth with 140. Jokic was also third in clutch-time rebounds with 50 (behind Domantas Sabonis and Giannis Antetokounmpo, both of whom grabbed 53), and Edwards was fourth in clutch rebounds with

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45. Jokic was second in clutch assists with 36 (one fewer than Trae Young), with Brunson third in clutch assists with 28 and Edwards tied for 28th.

"Finding a way to win, I think that's what's most important," Brunson said. "You can have clutch plays, but they literally don't mean anything if you don't win. The winning part is most important for me."

Jokic got 28 first-place votes and Edwards got the other two. Young was fourth, Curry was fifth, Cleveland's Darius Garland was sixth, LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers was seventh, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander of Oklahoma City was eighth, Cleveland's Donovan Mitchell was ninth and three players — Dallas' Kyrie Irving, Philadelphia's Tyrese Maxey and Boston's Jayson Tatum — tied for 10th.

## Tariff turmoil: How Tesla and other companies are dealing with the trade war's uncertainty

By DAMIAN J. TROISE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Uncertainty over tariffs and an unpredictable trade war is weighing heavily on companies as they report their latest financial results and try to give investors financial forecasts.

Some tariffs remain in place against key U.S. trading partners, but others have been postponed to give nations time to negotiate. The tariff and trade picture has been shifting for months, sometimes changing drastically on a daily basis. Those shifts make it difficult for companies and investors to make a reliable assessment of any impact to costs and sales.

On Tuesday, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said he expects a "de-escalation" in the trade war between the U.S. and China, but cautioned that talks between the two sides had yet to formally start.

Here's how several big companies are dealing with the tariff confusion:

Chipotle

Chipotle Mexican Grill said Wednesday that its costs are rising due to the tariffs.

The Tex-Mex chain said it gets some beef from Australia and packaging from Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand. It also sources avocados from Colombia and Peru. All are now subject to a 10% tariff.

The tariffs may also impact the cost of building new restaurants, since items like shelving and parts for equipment come from China, Chipotle Chief Financial Officer Adam Rymer said during a conference call with investors. But Rymer said the impact of the tariffs on imports from China is harder to predict. This week, Trump administration officials have said they expect a "de-escalation" in the trade war between the U.S. and China.

Chipotle reported weaker-than-expected revenue in the January-March period and lowered its outlook for full-year same-store sales.

CEO Scott Boatwright said concern about the economy was the "overwhelming reason" consumers reduced their visits to Chipotle during the quarter. That trend has continued through April, he said.

Tesla

Tesla is in a better position than most car companies to deal with tariffs because it makes most of its U.S. cars domestically. But it still sources materials from other nations and will face import taxes.

The bigger impact will be seen in the company's energy business. The company said the impact will be "outsized" because it sources LFP battery cells from China.

The broader trade war could also hurt the company as China, the world's largest electric vehicle market, retaliates against the U.S. Tesla was forced earlier this month to stop taking orders from mainland customers for two models, its Model S and Model X. It makes the Model Y and Model 3 for the Chinese market at its factory in Shanghai.

CEO Elon Musk, an adviser to President Donald Trump, on Tuesday reiterated that he believes "lower tariffs are generally a good idea for prosperity." But he added that ultimately the president decides on what tariffs to impose.

Akzo Nobel

The Amsterdam-based maker of paints and coatings for industrial and commercial use said the big risk from tariffs could come in the form of lower demand for its products.

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The company said almost all sales of finished goods in the U.S. were locally produced, with the majority of raw materials locally sourced.

"Over the years, we deliberately localized both our procurement and production in the U.S.," said CEO Gregoire Poux-Guillaume, in a conference call with analysts. "We also largely run China for China and use the rest of Asia instead as an export base."

The company's products range from paints and coatings for the automotive industry to the do-it-yourself homeowner. Broader tariffs could squeeze consumers and businesses and hurt sales.

Boston Scientific

The medical device maker said it expects most of the effects of tariffs to hit the company during the second half of the year, but that it can absorb the impact.

The company raised its earnings and revenue forecasts for the year, despite the tariffs. It estimates a \$200 million impact from tariffs in 2025, but said it can offset that through higher sales and reductions in discretionary spending.

The company said it has a long-standing supply chain around the globe and has made significant investments in the U.S.

Boeing

Boeing said much of its supply chain is in the U.S. and many of its imports from Canada and Mexico are exempt from tariffs under an existing trade agreement.

The company does have suppliers in Japan and Italy, but it expects to recover those tariff costs. The net annual cost of higher tariffs on the supply chain is less than \$500 million.

A bigger concern is the potential for retaliatory tariffs, which could impact its ability to deliver aircraft. China, a key target for U.S. tariffs, has retaliated in part by no longer accepting deliveries of Boeing aircraft.

AT&T

AT&T, like its peers in the telecommunications sector, faces higher costs for cellphones and other equipment.

The company said it believes it can manage anticipated higher costs, based on the current pause in some tariffs and its supply chain.

"The magnitude of any increase will depend on a variety of factors, including how much of the tariffs the vendors pass on, the impact that the tariffs have on consumer and business demand," said CEO John Stankey, on a conference call with analysts.

## A dozen states sue the Trump administration to stop tariff policy

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A dozen states sued the Trump administration in the U.S. Court of International Trade in New York on Wednesday to stop its tariff policy, saying it is unlawful and has brought chaos to the American economy.

The lawsuit said the policy put in place by President Donald Trump has been subject to his "whims rather than the sound exercise of lawful authority."

It challenged Trump's claim that he could arbitrarily impose tariffs based on the International Emergency Economic Powers Act. The suit asks the court to declare the tariffs to be illegal, and to block government agencies and its officers from enforcing them.

A message sent to the Justice Department for comment was not immediately returned.

The states listed as plaintiffs in the lawsuit were Oregon, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, New York and Vermont.

In a release, Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes called Trump's tariff scheme "insane."

She said it was "not only economically reckless — it is illegal."

Connecticut Attorney General William Tong said "Trump's lawless and chaotic tariffs are a massive tax on Connecticut families and a disaster for Connecticut businesses and jobs."

The lawsuit maintained that only Congress has the power to impose tariffs and that the president can



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only invoke the International Emergency Economic Powers Act when an emergency presents an “unusual and extraordinary threat” from abroad.

“By claiming the authority to impose immense and ever-changing tariffs on whatever goods entering the United States he chooses, for whatever reason he finds convenient to declare an emergency, the President has upended the constitutional order and brought chaos to the American economy,” the lawsuit said.

Last week, California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, sued the Trump administration in U.S. District Court in the Northern District of California over the tariff policy, saying his state could lose billions of dollars in revenue as the largest importer in the country.

White House spokesperson Kush Desai responded to Newsom’s lawsuit, saying the Trump administration “remains committed to addressing this national emergency that’s decimating America’s industries and leaving our workers behind with every tool at our disposal, from tariffs to negotiations.”

## **Musk damaged Tesla’s brand in just a few months. Fixing it will likely take longer**

By BERNARD CONDON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Elon Musk has been called a Moonshot Master, the Edison of Our Age and the Architect of the Future, but he’s got a big problem at his car company and it’s not clear he can fix it: damage to its brand.

Sales have plunged for Tesla amid protests and boycotts over Musk’s embrace of far right-wing views. Profits have been sliced by two-thirds so far this year, and rivals from China, Europe and the U.S. are pouncing.

On Tuesday came some relief as Musk announced in an earnings call with investors that he would be scaling back his government cost-cutting job in Washington to a “day or two per week” to focus more on his old job as Tesla’s boss.

Investors pushed up Tesla’s stock 5% Wednesday, though there are plenty of challenges ahead.

Who wants a Tesla?

Musk seemed to downplay the role that brand damage played in the drop in first-quarter sales on the investor call. Instead, he emphasized something more fleeting — an upgrade to Tesla’s best-selling Model Y that forced a shutdown of factories and pinched both supply and demand.

While financial analysts following the company have noted that potential buyers probably held back while waiting for the upgrade, hurting results, even the most bullish among them say the brand damage is real, and more worrisome.

“This is a full blown crisis,” said Wedbush Securities’ normally upbeat Dan Ives earlier this month. In a note to its clients, JP Morgan warned of “unprecedented brand damage.”

Musk’s take on the protests

Musk dismissed the protests against Tesla on the call as the work of people angry at his leadership of the Department of Government Efficiency because “those who are receiving the waste and fraud wish it to continue.”

But the protests in Europe, thousands of miles from Washington, came after Musk supported far-right politicians there. Angry Europeans hung Musk in effigy in Milan, projected an image of him doing a straight-arm salute on a Tesla factory in Berlin and put up posters in London urging people not to buy “Swasticators” from him.

Sales in Europe have gone into a free fall in the first three months of this year — down 39%. In Germany, sales plunged 62%.

Another worrying sign: On Tuesday, Tesla backed off its earlier promise that sales would recover this year after dropping in 2024 for the first time a dozen years. Tesla said the global trade situation was too uncertain and declined to repeat the forecast.

Here come the rivals

Meanwhile, Tesla’s competition is stealing its customers.

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Among its fiercest rivals now is Chinese giant BYD. Earlier this year, the EV maker announced it had developed an electric battery that can charge within minutes. And Tesla's European rivals have begun offering new models with advanced technology that is making them real Tesla alternatives just as popular opinion has turned against Musk.

Tesla's share of the EV market in the U.S. has dropped from two-thirds to less than half, according to Cox Automotive.

Pinning hopes on cybercabs

Another rival, Google parent Alphabet, is already ahead of Tesla in an area that Musk has promised will help remake his company: Cybercabs.

One of the highlights of Tesla's call Tuesday was Musk sticking with his previous prediction that it will launch driverless cabs without steering wheels and pedals in Austin, Texas, in June, and in other cities soon after.

But Google's service, called Waymo, already has logged millions of driverless cybercab trips in San Francisco, Phoenix, Los Angeles, and Austin as part of a partnership with ride-hailing leader Uber.

A driverless future for Tesla owners?

Musk also told analysts that this driverless capability will be available on the Tesla vehicles already on the road through software updates over the air, and put a timeline on it: "There will be millions of Teslas operating autonomously in the second half of the year."

But he has made similar promises before, only to miss his deadlines, such as in April 2019 when he vowed full automation by the end of the next year. He repeated the prediction, moving up the date, several more times, in following years.

A big problem is federal investigators have not given the all-clear that Tesla vehicles can drive completely on their own safely. Among other probes, safety regulators are looking into Tesla's so-called Full Self-Driving, which is only partial self-driving, for its tie to accidents in low-visibility conditions like when there is sun glare.

On the positive side

In competition with rivals in the U.S., Tesla currently has one clear advantage: It will get hurt by less by tariffs because most of its vehicles are built in the countries where they are sold, including those in its biggest market, the U.S.

"Tariffs are still tough on a company where margins are still low, but we do have localized supply chains," Musk said Tuesday. "That puts us in a strong position."

The company also reconfirmed that a cheaper version of its best-selling vehicle, the Model Y sport utility vehicle, will be ready for customers in the first half of this year. That could help boost sales.

Another plus: The company had a blow out first quarter in its energy storage business. And Musk has promised to be producing 5,000 Optimus robots, another Tesla business, by the end of the year.

Pricey stock

Even after falling nearly 50% from its December highs, Tesla's stock is still very richly valued based on the one yardstick that really matters in the long run: its earnings.

At 110 times its expected per share earnings this year, the stock is valued more than 25 times higher than General Motors. The average stock on in the S&P 500 index trades at less than 20 times earnings.

That leaves Tesla little margin for error if something goes wrong.

## Wall Street rises and markets rally worldwide as Trump softens his tough talk on tariffs and the Fed

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks rose Wednesday as a worldwide rally came back around to Wall Street after President Donald Trump appeared to back off his criticism of the Federal Reserve and his tough talk in his trade war.

The S&P 500 climbed 1.7% and added to its big gain from Tuesday that more than made up for a steep

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loss on Monday. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 419 points, or 1.1%, and the Nasdaq composite gained 2.5%.

Wall Street's gains followed strong moves higher for stocks across much of Europe and Asia. They also continued a dizzying, up-and-down run for financial markets as investors struggle with how to react to so much uncertainty about what Trump will do with his economic policies.

The market's latest move was up in part because Trump said late Tuesday that he has "no intention" to fire the head of the Federal Reserve. Trump had been angry with Jerome Powell, whom Trump had called "a major loser," because of the Fed's hesitance to cut interest rates.

Trump's tough talk had frightened investors because the Fed is supposed to act independently, without pressure from politicians, so that it can make decisions that may be painful in the short term but are best for the long term.

While a cut to interest rates by the Fed could give the economy a boost, it could also put upward pressure on inflation. Economists say Trump's tariffs are likely both to slow the economy and to raise inflation, at least briefly.

Trump may have recognized the market's fear about a move against Powell. He may also be looking to keep someone around whom Trump could blame later if the economy does fall into a recession, according to Thierry Wizman, a strategist at Macquarie.

"Indeed, if the Fed cuts its policy interest rates aggressively, Trump would have little excuse for a recession apart from the pugnacity of his tariff policies," Wizman said.

Markets also rose after Trump said late Tuesday that U.S. tariffs on imports coming from China could come down "substantially" from the current 145%. "It won't be that high, not going to be that high," Trump said.

The hope along Wall Street has been that Trump would lower his tariffs after negotiating trade deals with other countries, and Trump said Tuesday he would be "very nice" to the world's second-largest economy and not play hardball with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"There is an opportunity for a big deal here," U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said Wednesday.

If Trump brings his tariffs down enough, investors believe a recession could be averted.

U.S. businesses say they're already feeling the effects of the trade war. A preliminary reading of U.S. business activity fell to a 16-month low, as the threat of tariffs helped push up prices charged for goods and services, according to S&P Global's latest survey released Wednesday.

All the uncertainty means one of the few predictions many along Wall Street are willing to make is that sharp swings for financial markets will continue for a while. The market will "more likely than not continue to be dictated by Trump's latest whims regarding tariffs and trade," said Tim Waterer, chief market analyst at KCM Trade.

The S&P 500 remains 12.5% below its record set earlier this year after briefly dropping roughly 20% below the mark. Its swings have been coming not just day to day but also hour to hour as Trump and his administration's officials continue to surprise markets. On Wednesday alone, the S&P 500 charged to a 3.4% gain in the morning, only to more than halve that rise as the day progressed.

Trump's latest comments had a relaxing effect on the bond market, where Treasury yields eased. It's a turnaround from earlier this month, when spiking Treasury yields raised fears that Trump's actions were scaring investors away from the United States and weakening the U.S. bond market's reputation as one of the safest places to keep cash.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.38% from 4.41% late Tuesday. It dropped as low as 4.26% earlier in the morning.

On Wall Street, Big Tech helped lead stock indexes higher.

Nvidia rose 3.9% to claw back more of the sharp losses it took last week, when it said U.S. restrictions on exports of its H20 chips to China could hurt its first-quarter results by \$5.5 billion. The chip company's stock was the strongest single force lifting the S&P 500.

Other stocks in the artificial-intelligence technology ecosystem also drove higher. Vertiv Holdings, which traces its roots to the industry's first manufacturer of computer room air conditioning, jumped 8.5% after

reporting stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected. It said it's continuing to see accelerated demand from AI data centers.

Super Micro Computer, a company that makes servers used in AI, rose 7.6%. Palantir Technologies, which offers an AI platform for customers, climbed 7.3%.

Tesla revved 5.4% higher after CEO Elon Musk said he'll spend less time in Washington and more time running his electric vehicle company after Tesla on late Tuesday reported a big drop in profits. It's been struggling because of backlash against Musk's efforts to lead cost-cutting efforts by the U.S. government.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 88.10 points to 5,375.86. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 419.59 to 39,606.57, and the Nasdaq composite gained 407.63 to 16,708.05.

In stock markets abroad, indexes jumped 2.1% in France, 2.4% in Hong Kong and 1.9% in Japan. Stocks in Shanghai were an exception, where they dipped 0.1%.

## Weinstein's #MeToo rape retrial opens with added allegations from a former model

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Harvey Weinstein's #MeToo retrial opened Wednesday, giving a new jury a fresh look at familiar rape and sexual assault allegations — plus a newly added claim from a former model.

For the first time, prosecutors publicly identified Kaja Sokola and detailed her account of what unfolded between her and the Oscar-winning movie producer in the early 2000s. He is criminally charged with forcing oral sex on her in 2006, but she also accused him in a civil lawsuit of groping her against her will four years earlier, when she was 16.

Like the two other accusers in the case, Sokola alleges a complex series of encounters and reactions — being sexually assaulted, yet staying in touch, wary of Weinstein but wanting to remain on good terms with a power broker who dangled the possibility of an acting career.

"Why did the defendant hold this level of power and control in the eyes of these three women? ... It's because Harvey Weinstein defined the field," prosecutor Shannon Lucey told jurors in an opening statement. "He knew how tempting promises of success were. He produced, he choreographed, he therefore directed, their ultimate silence for years."

Weinstein has pleaded not guilty, and defense lawyer Arthur Aidala countered by portraying the accusers as willing partners in a showbiz quid pro quo.

"The casting couch is not a crime scene," Aidala told the majority-female jury. He compared prosecutors' allegations to the preview of a movie that "falls flat on its face."

A reversal and a retrial

The 73-year-old Weinstein, seated in the wheelchair he now uses because of health problems, didn't look at Lucey or the jury during her presentation. But Weinstein watched intently as Aidala outlined his defense.

The retrial is happening because New York's top court last year threw out Weinstein's conviction, which in 2020 was a watershed moment for the #MeToo movement against sexual misconduct. The high court found that the previous trial judge allowed prejudicial testimony about allegations separate from the charges.

Weinstein's retrial is playing out at a different cultural moment than the first. #MeToo, which exploded in 2017 with allegations against Weinstein, has evolved and ebbed.

When Weinstein's first trial began, chants of "rapist" could be heard from protesters outside. This time, there was none of that.

Sokola's lawyer, Lindsay Goldbrum, has called Weinstein's retrial a "signal to other survivors that the system is catching up — and that it's worth speaking out even when the odds seem insurmountable."

A teenage model and a movie model

While this jury won't hear about the allegations that got the first conviction thrown out, the panel is expected to hear from Sokola. After the high court sent the case back for retrial, prosecutors added a criminal sex act charge based on her allegations.

The Polish-born Sokola met Weinstein in 2002 after traveling alone to New York for a modeling trip at



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age 16, according to prosecutors. She alleges he invited her to lunch to discuss potential acting jobs but detoured to his apartment and demanded she take off her shirt if she wanted to make it in the movie business. Then, Sokola alleges, Weinstein fondled her while making her touch his genitals.

Over the next few years, Sokola stayed in contact with Weinstein, even after telling him off for allegedly groping her in a car around 2004, Lucey told jurors. She said Weinstein arranged for Sokola to be an extra in the 2007 rom-com "The Nanny Diaries," and she invited him to lunch to impress her visiting sister.

After the lunch, he asked Sokola to check out some scripts in his Manhattan hotel room, ordered her to undress, held her down on a bed, and performed oral sex on her while she tearfully implored him not to do so, Lucey said.

In the weeks after, Sokola was photographed with Weinstein and a third person at an event, and his company wrote her an acting-school recommendation, the prosecutor said. Lucey told jurors that power imbalances often "cause victims to behave in ways that laypersons possibly might not expect."

After other allegations emerged against Weinstein in 2017, Sokola sued. Prosecutors said she received \$3.5 million in compensation.

Two of the original charges remain

Aidala said the accusers were "trying to take advantage of Mr. Weinstein when he was at the top," then benefited from making allegations amid his downfall.

Outside court, Sokola's attorney decried Weinstein's defense as full of "victim blaming" and "rape myths."

In addition to the charge related to Sokola, Weinstein is being retried on a criminal sex act charge for allegedly forcibly performing oral sex on then-production assistant Miriam Haley in 2006, and a third-degree rape charge for allegedly assaulting then-aspiring actor Jessica Mann in 2013.

Weinstein's 2020 acquittals on predatory sexual assault and first-degree rape charges still stand.

After the attorneys' statements, testimony started Wednesday with details of Weinstein's high-flying workdays around 2006. Witness Stefan Sterns — who was then one of Weinstein's assistants — expounded on the producer's reputation as a Hollywood kingmaker, recalled dropping him off to meet Haley in a hotel lobby and remembered seeing her name on a call log.

The Associated Press generally does not identify people alleging sexual assault unless they consent to be named, as Haley, Mann and Sokola have done.

## **IRS turmoil: Leadership churn, worker exodus and threats to groups' tax-exempt status roil agency**

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The height of tax season was the height of turmoil at the IRS.

The agency shuffled through three acting directors over the course of a week. It's preparing to lose tens of thousands of workers to layoffs and voluntary retirements. And President Donald Trump is weighing in on which nonprofits should lose their tax-exempt status, an incursion into the agency's typically apolitical stance that threatens to further erode trust in federal institutions and weaponize enforcement efforts.

Just three months into Trump's second term, the government's fly-under-the-radar tax collector has become the latest platform for the Republican administration's vision to cut and control the federal bureaucracy. Tax policy experts fear that taxpayer services and collection efforts will face prolonged delays as a result of the rapid changes.

The quick turnover in leadership and other changes are likely to dampen employee morale at the IRS and hurt the agency's ability to serve taxpayers in a timely manner, says Janet Holtzblatt, a senior fellow at the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center.

"Leadership sets the tone, particularly in this environment," she said.

Already, she notes, the agency has lost decades of institutional knowledge from nonpartisan career civil servants who have left over policy disagreements and layoffs.

Chaos embroils agency amid leadership turnover

The upheaval unfolded as Americans dutifully filed their taxes ahead of the April 15 deadline and as a

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legion of IRS employees undertook work to process returns and dole out refunds. The latest filing season data shows the agency accepted more than 117 million returns this tax season and issued \$228.7 billion in refunds.

"We're committed to improving the efficiency of the Internal Revenue Service," said the agency's newest acting commissioner, Michael Faulkender. "For the last 35 years, we've been five years away from the IRS being modernized. Under the direct leadership of Treasury, the modernization will be done in two years at a fraction of the cost."

Meanwhile, the IRS, like other federal agencies, is hemorrhaging employees over cuts spearheaded by the Department of Government Efficiency, all while the agency churns through acting leaders as it awaits the installation of a permanent leader.

Douglas O'Donnell, the Trump administration's first acting IRS commissioner, announced his retirement in February as furor spread over DOGE gaining access to IRS taxpayer data. Melanie Krause, the second acting commissioner, resigned early this month over a deal between the IRS and the Department of Homeland Security to share immigrants' tax data with Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Gary Shapley, an IRS whistleblower who testified publicly about investigations into Hunter Biden's taxes, was acting commissioner for a matter of days before being replaced by Faulkender, who was elevated just last week. The New York Times reported that Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent had complained to Trump that Shapley had been installed without his knowledge and at the behest of Trump adviser Elon Musk.

Trump's nominee for IRS commissioner, former U.S. Rep. Billy Long of Missouri, is still waiting for a confirmation hearing but faces controversies of his own. Most recently, Senate Democrats have called for a criminal investigation into Long's connections to alleged tax credit loopholes. The lawmakers allege that firms connected to Long duped investors into spending millions of dollars to purchase fake tax credits. Long did not respond to an Associated Press request for comment.

Punishing enemies and rewarding friends

Among other concerns at the agency are fears that Trump will weaponize the IRS against his enemies — and reward his friends.

Some of the Democratic Party's core political institutions, including fundraising platform ActBlue and the protest group Indivisible, are preparing for the possibility that the federal government may soon launch criminal investigations against them.

Trump said last week at the White House that the administration is looking at the tax-exempt status of Harvard University, which has defied the government's attempts to limit activism on campus, and environmental groups. He also mentioned the ethics watchdog organization Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington.

"It's supposed to be a charitable organization," Trump said of CREW. "The only charity they had is going after Donald Trump. So we're looking at that. We're looking at a lot of things."

Jonathan S. Masur, an administrative law professor at the University of Chicago Law School, said it's unlawful for the president to unilaterally take away organizations' tax-exempt status.

"It's illegal for starters. The Supreme Court has established that that step is not allowed," he said, adding that he anticipates that the court system will "very quickly block" any such move from the president.

The Trump administration is also watching out for allies of the president.

Treasury official David Eisner sent an email in March to a top IRS official regarding Mike Lindell, the founder of MyPillow and one of the chief proponents of the lie that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump.

"The 'My Pillow guy' and a high-profile friend of the President recently received an audit letter, from what I understand, his second in two years," Eisner wrote in the email, which was viewed by the AP. The president "is concerned that he may have been inappropriately targeted," Eisner wrote. A Treasury spokesperson in an emailed statement said Eisner is a "dedicated public servant" who "acted appropriately with the expectation that this would be sent to the Inspector General."

"Sharing relevant information with nonpartisan Inspectors General is designed to be an effective and confidential way to help ensure all Americans are treated fairly," they added.

Bringing immigration enforcement to the IRS

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Among other changes in recent weeks are concerns about the IRS' engagement with the Department of Homeland Security over enforcing a new data-sharing agreement signed earlier this month by Bessent and Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem. The agreement will allow ICE to submit names and addresses of immigrants inside the U.S. illegally to the IRS for cross-verification against tax records.

The Treasury Department said the agreement is authorized by a statute that relates to criminal information sharing. However, that agreement is being litigated in federal court.

U.S. District Judge Dabney Friedrich will soon decide whether to refuse or grant a preliminary injunction in a lawsuit filed by nonprofit groups. The groups argue that immigrants in the country illegally who pay taxes are entitled to the same privacy protections as U.S. citizens and immigrants who are legally in the country.

The Treasury Department says the agreement will help carry out Trump's agenda to secure U.S. borders and is part of his larger nationwide immigration crackdown, which has resulted in deportations, workplace raids and the use of an 18th-century wartime law to deport Venezuelan migrants.

Holtzblatt said the agreement is indicative of the turmoil at the IRS.

"There's an emphasis on improving technology and sharing information," but it's unclear for what reason, she said.

## **Palestinian student remains detained in Vermont with a hearing set for next week**

By AMANDA SWINHART Associated Press

BURLINGTON, Vt. (AP) — A large crowd of supporters and advocates gathered outside a Vermont courthouse Wednesday to support a Palestinian man who led protests against the war in Gaza as a student at Columbia University and was arrested during an interview about finalizing his U.S. citizenship.

Mohsen Mahdawi, a legal permanent resident for 10 years, was arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents on April 14. He made an initial court appearance Wednesday during which a judge extended a temporary order keeping Mahdawi in Vermont and scheduled a hearing for next week.

Mahdawi's lawyers say he was detained in retaliation for his speech advocating for Palestinian human rights.

"What the government provided thus far only establishes that the only basis they have to currently detaining him in the manner they did is his lawful speech," attorney Luna Droubi said after the hearing. "We intend on being back in one week's time to free Mohsen."

In court documents, the government argues that Mahdawi's detention is a "constitutionally valid aspect of the deportation process" and that district courts are barred from hearing challenges to how and when such proceedings are begun.

"District courts play no role in that process. Consequently, this Court lacks jurisdiction over Petitioner's claims, which are all, at bottom, challenges to removal proceedings," wrote Michael Drescher, Vermont's acting U.S. attorney.

According to his lawyers, Mahdawi had answered questions and signed a document that he was willing to defend the U.S. Constitution and laws of the nation. They said masked ICE agents then entered the interview room, shackled Mahdawi, and put him in a car.

"What we're seeing here is unprecedented where they are so hellbent on detaining students from good universities in our country," attorney Cyrus Mehta said. "These are not hardened criminals. These are people who have not been charged with any crime, they have also not been charged under any of the other deportation provisions of the Immigration Act."

Mahdawi is still scheduled for a hearing date in immigration court in Louisiana on May 1, his attorneys said. His notice to appear says he is removable under the Immigration and Nationality Act because the Secretary of State has determined his presence and activities "would have serious adverse foreign policy consequences and would compromise a compelling U.S. foreign policy interest."

Last month, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the State Department was revoking visas held by visi-

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tors who were acting counter to national interests, including some who protested Israel's war in Gaza and those who face criminal charges.

According to the court filing, Mahdawi was born in a refugee camp in the West Bank and moved to the United States in 2014. He recently completed coursework at Columbia and was expected to graduate in May before beginning a master's degree program there in the fall.

As a student, Mahdawi was an outspoken critic of Israel's military campaign in Gaza and organized campus protests until March 2024.

U.S. Sen. Peter Welch of Vermont, a Democrat, met with Mahdawi on Monday at the prison and posted a video account of their conversation on X. Mahdawi said he was "in good hands." He said his work is centered on peacemaking and that his empathy extends beyond the Palestinian people to Jews and to the Israelis.

"I'm staying positive by reassuring myself in the ability of justice and the deep belief of democracy," Mahdawi said in Welch's video. "This is the reason I wanted to become a citizen of this country, because I believe in the principles of this country."

Mahdawi's attorney read a statement from him outside the courthouse Wednesday in which he urged supporters to "stay positive and believe in the inevitability of justice."

"This hearing is part of the system of democracy, it prevents a tyrant from having unchecked power," he wrote. "I am in prison, but I am not imprisoned."

Meanwhile, the government is appealing a decision by a different Vermont judge who said another detained student, Rumeysa Ozturk of Tufts University, should be returned to Vermont.

On Tuesday, members of Congress from Massachusetts traveled to Louisiana to meet with Ozturk and Columbia University student Mahmoud Khalil. U.S. Sen. Ed Markey and U.S. Reps. Ayanna Pressley and Jim McGovern expressed concern at a news conference Wednesday that the students, as well as other detainees, were being deprived of nutritious meals, sleep and blankets in the cold facilities.

Khalil and Ozturk have not committed any crimes, the delegation said -- they are being unlawfully detained for exercising their right to free speech.

"They are being targeted and imprisoned because of their political views," McGovern said.

## International students stripped of legal status in the US are piling up wins in court

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Anjan Roy was studying with friends at Missouri State University when he got an email that turned his world upside down. His legal status as an international student had been terminated, and he was suddenly at risk for deportation.

"I was in literal shock, like, what the hell is this?" said Roy, a graduate student in computer science from Bangladesh.

At first, he avoided going out in public, skipping classes and mostly keeping his phone turned off. A court ruling in his favor led to his status being restored this week, and he has returned to his apartment, but he is still asking his roommates to screen visitors.

More than a thousand international students have faced similar disruptions in recent weeks, with their academic careers — and their lives in the U.S. — thrown into doubt in a widespread crackdown by the Trump administration. Some have found a measure of success in court, with federal judges around the country issuing orders to restore students' legal status at least temporarily.

In addition to the case filed in Atlanta, where Roy is among 133 plaintiffs, judges have issued temporary restraining orders in states including New Hampshire, Minnesota, Montana, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin. Judges have denied similar requests in some other cases, saying it was not clear the loss of status would cause irreparable harm.

International students challenge grounds for their status revocation

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said last month the State Department was revoking visas held by visi-



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tors who were acting counter to national interests, including some who protested Israel's war in Gaza and those who face criminal charges. But many affected students said they have been involved only in minor infractions, or it's unclear altogether why they were targeted.

The attorney for Roy and his fellow plaintiffs, Charles Kuck, argued the government did not have legal grounds to terminate the students' status.

He speculated in court last week the government is trying to encourage these students to self-deport, saying "the pressure on these students is overwhelming." He said some asked him if it was safe to leave their homes to get food, and others worried they wouldn't receive a degree after years of work or feared their chances of a career in the U.S. were shot.

"I think the hope is they'll just leave," Kuck said. "The reality is these kids are invested."

An attorney for the government, R. David Powell, argued the students did not suffer significant harm because they could transfer their academic credits or find jobs in another country.

At least 1,190 students at 183 colleges, universities and university systems have had their visas revoked or their legal status terminated since late March, according to an Associated Press review of university statements, correspondence with school officials and court records. The AP is working to confirm reports of hundreds more students who are caught up in the crackdown.

In a lawsuit filed Monday by four people on student visas at the University of Iowa, attorneys detail the "mental and financial suffering" they've experienced. One graduate student, from India, "cannot sleep and is having difficulty breathing and eating," the lawsuit reads. He has stopped going to school, doing research or working as a teaching assistant. Another student, a Chinese undergraduate who expected to graduate this December, said his revoked status has caused his depression to worsen to the point that his doctor increased his medication dosage. The student, the lawsuit says, has not left his apartment out of fear of detention.

Tiny infractions made students targets for the crackdown

Roy, 23, began his academic career at Missouri State in August 2024 as an undergraduate computer science student. He was active in the chess club and a fraternity and has a broad circle of friends. After graduating in December, he began work on a master's degree in January and expects to finish in May 2026.

When Roy received the university's April 10 email on his status termination, one of his friends offered to skip class to go with him to the school's international services office, even though they had a quiz in 45 minutes. The staff there said a database check showed his student status had been terminated, but they didn't know why.

Roy said his only brush with the law came in 2021, when he was questioned by campus security after someone called in a dispute at a university housing building. But he said an officer determined there was no evidence of any crime and no charges were filed.

Roy also got an email from the U.S. embassy in Bangladesh telling him his visa had been revoked and that he could be detained at any time. It warned that if he was deported, he could be sent to a country other than his own. Roy thought about leaving the U.S. but decided to stay after talking to a lawyer.

Anxious about being in his own apartment, Roy went to stay with his second cousin and her husband nearby.

"They were scared someone was going to pick me up from the street and take me somewhere that they wouldn't even know," Roy said.

He mostly stayed inside, turned off his phone unless he needed to use it, and avoided internet browsers that track user data through cookies. His professors were understanding when he told them he wouldn't be able to come to classes for a while, he said.

New doubts about students' future in the US

After the judge's order Friday, he moved back to his apartment. He learned Tuesday his status had been restored, and he plans to return to class. But he's still nervous. He asked his two roommates, both international students, to let him know before they open the door if someone they don't know knocks.

The judge's restoration of his legal status is temporary. Another hearing scheduled for Thursday will determine whether he keeps that status while the litigation continues.

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Roy chose the U.S. over other options in Canada and Australia because of the research opportunities and potential for professional connections, and he ultimately wanted to teach at an American university. But now those plans are up in the air.

His parents, back in Dhaka, have been watching the news and are “freaked out,” he said. His father mentioned to him that they have family in Melbourne, Australia, including a cousin who’s an assistant professor at a university there. \_\_\_\_

AP reporters Christopher L. Keller in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Hannah Fingerhut in Des Moines, Iowa, contributed to this story.

## **Congo’s government and rebels say they are working toward a truce in the east**

By WILSON MCKIN and SALEH MWANAMILONGO Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Congo’s government and a coalition of insurgents in the country’s east including the M23 rebels have agreed to work toward a truce following peace talks in Qatar, a joint statement said Wednesday.

The statement was posted online by spokesman Lawrence Kanyuka of the M23 rebels, and confirmed by government spokesman Patrick Muyaya in comments to local media outlets.

The statement said the parties had agreed to “work towards concluding a truce” and that they were reaffirming their commitment to “an immediate end to hostilities.” Previous commitments to a ceasefire, announced unilaterally, have not held, and Wednesday’s statement was the first such commitment to be announced jointly.

Delegations from Congo’s government and the M23 rebel group met earlier this month in Doha, Qatar’s capital, according to officials from both sides.

The Associated Press was not immediately able to verify if the latest announcement had changed conditions on the ground in Congo’s mineral-rich eastern region.

The decades-long conflict in eastern Congo escalated in January, when the M23 rebels advanced and seized the strategic city of Goma, followed by the town of Bukavu in February.

M23 is one of about 100 armed groups that have been vying for a foothold in mineral-rich eastern Congo near the border with Rwanda, in a conflict that has created one of the world’s most significant humanitarian crises. More than 7 million people have been displaced.

The rebels are supported by about 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, according to U.N. experts, and at times have vowed to march as far as Congo’s capital, Kinshasa, about 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) to the east.

The U.N. Human Rights Council last month launched a commission to investigate atrocities, including allegations of rape and killing akin to “summary executions” by both sides.

## **Remains of mom, child found near Gilgo Beach ID’d, though deaths may be unrelated to serial killings**

By PHILIP MARCELO and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

MINEOLA, N.Y. (AP) — A woman and toddler whose remains were discovered scattered along an oceanfront highway not far from the victims of Long Island’s infamous Gilgo Beach killings were identified Wednesday as a U.S. Army veteran from Alabama and her daughter.

Tanya Denise Jackson, 26, of Mobile, had been living in Brooklyn with her 2-year-old daughter, Tatiana Marie Dykes, at the time of their deaths, Nassau County police announced.

Jackson, who police say may have worked as a medical assistant, had been previously nicknamed “Peaches” by investigators after a tattoo on her body.

Her identity had been a mystery for nearly 28 years. For roughly half that time, investigators have sought

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to determine whether she and her daughter were victims of the same killer, or killers, who left the bodies of several other people strewn in the sand along the parkway that runs the length of Jones Beach Island.

Police said Wednesday that they had no evidence at this point linking the mother and daughter's deaths to Rex Heuermann, who has been charged in the deaths of seven women whose remains were discovered elsewhere on the beach road and other parts of Long Island.

"Although Tanya and Tatiana have commonly been linked to the Gilgo Beach serial killings because the timing and locations of their recovered remains, we are not discounting the possibility that their cases are unrelated from that investigation," Nassau Police Det. Capt. Stephen Fitzpatrick said.

"I'm not saying it is Rex Heuermann and I'm not saying it's not," he added. "We are proceeding as if it's not, keeping our eyes wide open."

Some of Jackson's remains were discovered on June 28, 1997, stuffed inside a plastic tub in a state park in West Hempstead. More remains, and the skeletal remains of the female child, were found in April 2011 off Ocean Parkway, which runs for 15 miles (24 kilometers) along Long Island's barrier island beaches.

At the briefing Wednesday, law enforcement officials said they had identified Jackson and her daughter through advanced DNA and genealogy research.

"The reality is, our work has just begun," Nassau County District Attorney Anne Donnelly said. "Knowing the identities of the mom and the little baby is just a first step to help us get to solving these murders."

Fitzpatrick said police spoke with the child's father, who was cooperating with the investigation and is not considered a suspect at this time.

He said local authorities initially turned over DNA evidence to the FBI, which provided a likely identification for the two in 2022. Additional DNA samples obtained the following year allowed police to notify surviving family members last year. The two were recently laid to rest, with Jackson receiving "full military honors," Fitzpatrick said.

Jackson, who drove a black 1991 Geo Storm, was estranged from her family so it was some time before she was reported missing, he added. She served in the U.S. Army from 1993 to 1995, living on three bases in Texas, Georgia and Missouri, according to Fitzpatrick.

"We never gave up on striving for justice for either Tanya or Tatiana," he said. "We're determined to find the reasons and circumstances that led to their untimely deaths."

Nassau Police said they're offering a \$25,000 reward to anyone with information leading to an arrest.

Public interest in the mystery of "Peaches" identity surged in 2011, when police searching for victims of a possible serial killer discovered that her bones were among 10 sets of human remains discovered off of Ocean Parkway not far from Gilgo Beach.

Most of the victims were female sex workers.

Heuermann, an architect who lived on Long Island, was charged with killing three of the women in 2023. Authorities have since charged him with four more killings. Heuermann has maintained his innocence and pleaded not guilty. His lawyer did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment Wednesday.

Suffolk County District Attorney Ray Tierney's office, which is prosecuting Heuermann, said in a statement he is not commenting on "any topics even tangentially involved to the investigation" while a pre-trial hearing plays out.

Authorities are still trying to identify one more set of remains. In September, Long Island officials released more detailed renderings of a victim believed to be of Chinese descent whose remains were found off Ocean Parkway in 2011. The victim died in 2006 or earlier, was likely between ages 17 and 23 and about 5 feet 6 inches (170 centimeters) tall.

Officials for years had identified the victim as male, but said they now believe the person may have presented outwardly as female as they were dressed in women's clothing.

## Israeli strike in Gaza kills 23 as Arab mediators seek long-term truce

By WAFSA SHURAF and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — An overnight Israeli strike on a school-turned-shelter in Gaza City killed 23 people, as Arab mediators worked on a proposal to end the war with Hamas that would include a five-to-seven-year truce and the release of all remaining hostages, officials said Wednesday.

There was no immediate Israeli comment on the strike, which set several tents ablaze, burning people alive. The military says it only targets militants and blames civilian deaths on Hamas because its fighters are embedded in densely populated areas. Another six people were killed in separate strikes, including 5-year-old twin girls.

France, Germany and Britain meanwhile said Israel's seven-week blockade on all imports to Gaza, including food, was "intolerable," in unusually strong criticism from three of the country's closest allies.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas called on Hamas to release the hostages in order to "block Israel's pretexts" for continuing the war. He reiterated his demands that Hamas give up their arms, referring to them as "sons of dogs" in unusually strong language during a speech in the West Bank.

Abbas, who heads the Western-backed Palestinian Authority, has no influence over Hamas but seeks a role in postwar Gaza. Basem Naim, a senior Hamas official, said anyone making such insults has "lost their physical, psychological and mental eligibility for these leadership positions."

A yearslong truce and a gradual withdrawal

Egypt and Qatar are still developing the proposal, which would include the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and the release of Palestinian prisoners, according to an Egyptian official and a Hamas official who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief media.

Israel ended a ceasefire with Hamas last month and has vowed to continue the war until all the hostages are returned and Hamas is destroyed or disarmed and sent into exile. It says it will hold parts of Gaza indefinitely and implement President Donald Trump's proposal for the resettlement of the population in other countries, which has been widely rejected internationally.

Hamas has said it will only release the dozens of hostages it holds in return for Palestinian prisoners, a complete Israeli withdrawal and a lasting ceasefire, as called for in the now-defunct agreement reached in January. A Hamas delegation arrived in Cairo late Tuesday to discuss the evolving proposal.

The Egyptian official said the proposed truce, with international guarantees, would last between five and seven years, and that a committee of politically independent technocrats would govern Gaza — a measure Hamas has accepted.

The Hamas official said the militant group is open to a long-term truce that includes the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces and international guarantees, naming Russia, China, Turkey or the United Nations Security Council as possible guarantors.

Israel and the U.S. say Hamas must be destroyed or removed

There was no immediate comment from Israeli officials. Israel has ruled out any arrangement that would allow Hamas to preserve its influence in Gaza and rearm. The Trump administration, which has also been involved in the ceasefire talks, has said it fully supports Israel's position.

Israel and the U.S. have pressed Hamas to accept a temporary truce in which it would immediately release several hostages in return for vague promises of talks on a more permanent ceasefire. Hamas has rejected those proposals and says it won't disarm as long as Israel occupies Palestinian territory.

The Hamas official said the group does not trust Netanyahu or the U.S. after they shattered the existing ceasefire agreement, which had facilitated the release of over 30 hostages and nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners.

The Egyptian official said mediators had the impression that Trump wants a deal before he visits the region next month. Trump will travel to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates from May 13 to May 16.

France, Germany and Britain condemn Israeli food blockade



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Israel ended the ceasefire by launching a surprise bombardment across the territory that killed hundreds of Palestinians. Ground forces have expanded a buffer zone along the border and encircled the southern city of Rafah and now control around 50% of the territory.

Israel says the military operations and the tightened blockade are tactics to pressure Hamas to release hostages. Aid groups say thousands of children are malnourished and most people are surviving on one meal a day or less.

"The Israeli decision to block aid from entering Gaza is intolerable," France, Germany and Britain said in their statement. They also condemned recent remarks by Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz, who said the blockade was a pressure tactic and that troops would hold parts of Gaza indefinitely.

"Humanitarian aid must never be used as a political tool and Palestinian territory must not be reduced nor subjected to any demographic change. Israel is bound under international law to allow the unhindered passage of humanitarian aid," the European statement said.

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Oren Marmorstein rejected the criticism, disputing in a post on social media that there is a shortage of aid in Gaza. He said Israel was entitled to block the aid because it says Hamas seizes it for its own use.

In addition to the strike on the school, the Civil Defense, first responders who operate under the Hamas-run government, said it recovered four bodies from strikes on two homes in the same area. Another strike hit a home east of Gaza City, killing the twin girls, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

Israel's offensive has killed over 51,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to the Health Ministry, which does not say how many of the dead were fighters or civilians. Israel says it has killed around 20,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting 251. The militants still have 59 hostages, 24 of whom are believed to be alive, after most of the rest were released in ceasefire agreements or other deals.

## India blames Pakistan for a deadly attack in Kashmir and suspends a key water treaty

By AIJAZ HUSSAIN, SHEIKH SAALIQ and RAJESH ROY Associated Press

SRINAGAR, India (AP) — India blamed Pakistan on Wednesday for a militant attack that killed 26 people in Indian-held Kashmir, downgrading diplomatic ties and suspending a crucial water-sharing treaty that has withstood two wars between the nuclear-armed rivals.

The spray of gunfire at tourists Tuesday in a scenic, mountain-ringed valley was the worst assault in years targeting civilians in the restive region that is claimed by both countries. The unidentified gunmen also wounded 17 other people.

India's foreign secretary, Vikram Misri, announced the diplomatic moves against Pakistan at a news conference in New Delhi late Wednesday, saying a special cabinet meeting called by Prime Minister Narendra Modi decided that the attack had "cross-border" links to Pakistan. However, the government provided no evidence of this publicly.

Pakistan said it would respond more fully to India's actions on Thursday, but in the meantime Pakistani Defense Minister Khawaja Mohammad said that India was using "an unfortunate incident of terrorism" as a pretext to jettison a treaty it has long been trying to evade.

India describes militancy in Kashmir as Pakistan-backed terrorism. Pakistan denies this, and many Muslim Kashmiris consider the militants to be part of a home-grown freedom struggle.

Misri said that the Indus Water Treaty would be suspended "until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism." He said a number of Pakistani diplomats in New Delhi were asked to leave, and Indian diplomats were recalled from Pakistan, reducing diplomatic officials for both countries from 55 to 30.

Misri also said the main land border crossing between the countries would be closed.

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Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said his country would respond to the Indian government's decisions after a high-level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday.

The Indus Water Treaty, brokered by the World Bank in 1960, allows for sharing the waters of a river system that is a lifeline for both countries, particularly for Pakistan's agriculture. The treaty has survived two wars between the countries, in 1965 and 1971, and a major border skirmish in 1999.

Manhunt launched for the assailants

Indian forces on Wednesday launched a manhunt for the assailants. Tens of thousands of police and soldiers fanned out across the region and erected additional checkpoints. They searched cars, used helicopters to search forested mountains and in some areas summoned former militants to police stations for questioning, reports said. Many shops and businesses in Kashmir closed to protest the killings.

Police called the assault a "terror attack" and blamed militants fighting against Indian rule. Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh vowed to "not only trace those who perpetrated the attack but also trace those who conspired to commit this nefarious act on our soil."

Kashmir Resistance, a previously unknown militant group, claimed responsibility for the attack on social media. The group said Indian authorities had settled over 85,000 "outsiders" in the region and claimed that those targeted on Tuesday were not "ordinary tourists" but "were linked to and affiliated with Indian security agencies."

The group's messages could not be independently verified.

Earlier this month, the local government told its legislature that 83,742 Indians were granted rights to buy land and property in Kashmir in the last two years.

The dead were mostly tourists

Officials said 24 of the people killed were Indian tourists. One was from Nepal, and another was a local tourist guide. At least 17 others were wounded.

Pakistan extended condolences to the victims' families.

"We are concerned at the loss of tourists' lives," Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement while wishing the wounded a speedy recovery.

Kashmir has seen a spate of deadly attacks on Hindus, including immigrant workers from Indian states, since New Delhi ended the region's semi-autonomy in 2019 and drastically curbed dissent, civil liberties and media freedoms.

Kashmir has seen tourism boom despite spate of attacks

New Delhi has vigorously pushed tourism, and the region has drawn millions of visitors to its Himalayan foothills. Indian officials have claimed that as a sign of normalcy returning, despite the presence of ubiquitous security checkpoints, armored vehicles and patrolling soldiers. Until Tuesday, tourists were not targeted.

Following the attack, panicked tourists started to leave Kashmir.

Monojit Debnath, from the Indian city of Kolkata, said Kashmir was beautiful, but his family did not feel secure anymore.

"We are tourists, and we should think about what safety we have here for us," Debnath told the Press Trust of India news agency as he was leaving Srinagar, the region's main city, with his family.

"It's heartbreaking to see the exodus of our guests from the valley after yesterday's tragic terror attack," Omar Abdullah, the region's top elected official, wrote on social media. "But at the same time, we totally understand why people would want to leave."

Indian home minister visits

On Wednesday, India's powerful home minister, Amit Shah, attended a ceremony at a police command center in Srinagar, where the slain tourists were paid floral tributes. He also met families of several victims.

Shah vowed to "come down heavily on the perpetrators with the harshest consequences."

Later, Shah visited the site of the killing at Baisaran meadow, some 5 kilometers (3 miles) from the resort town of Pahalgam.

The meadow in Pahalgam is a popular destination, surrounded by snow-capped mountains and dotted with pine forests. It is visited by hundreds of tourists every day.

Kashmir has been divided for decades

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Nuclear-armed rivals India and Pakistan each administer a part of Kashmir, but both claim the territory in its entirety.

Militants in the Indian-controlled portion of Kashmir have been fighting New Delhi's rule since 1989. Many Muslim Kashmiris support the rebels' goal of uniting the territory, either under Pakistani rule or as an independent country.

India has used heavy-handed tactics to maintain its control over the region, including giving the armed forces widespread powers to arrest, torture and summarily execute suspects, human rights groups say.

In March 2000, at least 35 civilians were shot and killed in a southern village in Kashmir shortly before a visit to India by then-U.S. President Bill Clinton.

In 2019, months before New Delhi revoked the region's autonomy, a car bomb attack by militants in southern Pulwama district killed at least 40 paramilitary soldiers and wounded dozens more, bringing India and Pakistan close to war.

Violence has ebbed in the Kashmir Valley, the heart of anti-India rebellion. Fighting between government forces and rebels has largely shifted to remote areas of the Jammu region, including Rajouri, Poonch and Kathua, where Indian troops have faced deadly attacks.

## **A magnitude 6.2 quake shakes Istanbul and injures more than 230 people**

By MEHMET GUZEL and SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — An earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6.2 shook Istanbul and other areas of Turkey on Wednesday, prompting widespread panic and scores of injuries in the city of 16 million people, though there were no immediate reports of serious damage.

At least 236 people were treated for injuries they suffered while trying to jump from buildings or for panic attacks — most of them in Istanbul, where residents are on tenterhooks because the city is considered at high risk for a major quake.

The earthquake had a shallow depth of 10 kilometers (about 6 miles), according to the United States Geological Survey, with its epicenter about 40 kilometers (25 miles) southwest of Istanbul, in the Sea of Marmara.

It was felt in the neighboring provinces of Tekirdag, Yalova, Bursa and Balikesir and in the coastal city of Izmir, some 550 kilometers (340 miles) south of Istanbul. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said the earthquake lasted 13 seconds and was followed by more than 100 aftershocks — the strongest measuring 5.9 in magnitude.

The quake started at 12:49 p.m. Wednesday, a public holiday, when many children were out of school and celebrating in the streets of Istanbul. Panicked residents rushed from their homes and buildings into the streets. Authorities urged residents to avoid entering buildings that might have been damaged and said sports halls and mosques would be open to house residents not wanting to spend the night in their homes.

More than 230 injured

"A total of 236 citizens were affected by panic attacks and from falls or from jumping," Health Minister Kemal Memisoglu said. He said 173 of the injuries were in Istanbul while the rest were in surrounding provinces.

Authorities had received 378 reports of "structural damage" in various buildings, said Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change Minister Murat Kurum, adding that 12 buildings were evacuated as a precaution.

Only one building — a derelict, long-abandoned structure in the city's historic Fatih district — had collapsed, officials said.

Many residents flocked to parks, schoolyards and other open areas to avoid being near buildings in case of collapse or subsequent earthquakes. Some people pitched tents in parks.

"Thank God, there does not seem to be any problems for now," President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said at an event marking the National Sovereignty and Children's Day holiday. "May God protect our country

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and our people from all kinds of calamities, disasters, accidents and troubles.”

Leyla Ucar, a personal trainer, said she was exercising with her student on the 20th floor of a building when they felt intense shaking.

“We shook incredibly. It threw us around, we couldn’t understand what was happening, we didn’t think of an earthquake at first because of the shock,” she said. “It was very scary.”

Senol Sari, 51, told The Associated Press he was with his children in the living room of their third floor apartment when he heard a loud noise and the building started shaking. They fled to a nearby park where they “waited for it to pass,” Sari said.

They later were able to return home calmly, Sari said, but remain worried that a bigger quake will someday strike the city. “Our concerns continue,” he said.

‘My children were a little scared’

Cihan Boztepe, 40, hurriedly fled to the streets with his family to avoid a potential collapse of their building. Standing next to his sobbing child, Boztepe told the AP that in 2023, he was living in Batman province, an area close to the southern part of Turkey where major quakes struck at the time. Wednesday’s tremor felt weaker, and he wasn’t as scared.

“At first we were shaken, then it stopped, then we were shaken again,” he said. “My children were a little scared, but I wasn’t. We quickly gathered our things and went down to a safe place.”

Education Minister Yusuf Tekin announced that schools would be closed on Thursday and Friday in Istanbul but that “in line with the need for a safe space, our school gardens are open to the use of all our citizens.”

Urban reconstruction projects

Turkey is crossed by two major fault lines, and earthquakes are frequent.

A magnitude 7.8 earthquake on Feb. 6, 2023, and a second powerful tremor hours later, killed more than 53,000 people in Turkey and destroyed or damaged hundreds of thousands of buildings in 11 southern and southeastern provinces. Another 6,000 people were killed in the northern parts of neighboring Syria.

Istanbul was not impacted by that earthquake, but the devastation heightened fears of a similar quake, with experts citing the city’s proximity to fault lines.

In a bid to prevent damage from any future quake, the national government and local administrations started urban reconstruction projects to fortify buildings at risk and launched campaigns to demolish those at risk of collapse.

Jailed mayor expresses sadness

Ekrem Imamoglu, the mayor of Istanbul who was jailed last month on corruption charges, released a statement through his lawyers, expressing his sadness at not being able to be with the city’s residents.

“As managers and urban planners who have dedicated their lives to disaster-focused planning in Istanbul and who have struggled for this purpose, my greatest sadness is that we can’t be with you,” the mayor said.

Many view the arrest of the politician, considered a key rival to Erdogan, as being politically motivated. The government insists the courts operate independently.

On Wednesday, long queues formed at gas stations as residents, planning to leave Istanbul, rushed to fill up their vehicles. Among them was Emre Senkay who said he might leave if a more severe earthquake strikes later in the day.

“My plan is to leave Istanbul if there is a more serious earthquake,” he said.

## **A little-known federal agency is at the center of Trump’s executive order to overhaul US elections**

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Florida’s “hanging chads” ballot controversy riveted the nation during the 2000 presidential contest and later prompted Congress to create an independent commission to help states update their voting equipment.

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission has operated in relative anonymity since, but is now central to President Donald Trump’s executive order seeking to overhaul elections. One of the commission’s boards



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will meet Thursday in North Carolina, the first commission-related meeting since the directives were announced.

Among other things, Trump directed the agency to update the national voter registration form to add a proof of citizenship requirement. But whether the president can order an independent agency to act and whether the commission has the authority to do what Trump wants will likely be settled in court.

Why was the commission created?

Congress approved the Help America Vote Act in 2002 to help states replace outdated voting systems and improve the voting experience.

It passed overwhelmingly with bipartisan support and was signed into law by then-President George W. Bush, a Republican who won the 2000 presidential contest over Democrat Al Gore in a disputed election that went to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The culprit was a method of voting at the time in Florida that relied on so-called punch-card ballots, which required voters to mark their choices using a hand-held stylus. But thousands of voters didn't punch their ballot choices completely, leaving it to local election workers — some using magnifying glasses — to divine their intent. The resulting chaos in the pivotal swing state and intense national attention turned "hanging" and "pregnant" chads into household terms.

The Supreme Court ultimately stopped the counting, leaving Bush with a 537-vote victory margin that gave him the Electoral Votes he needed to claim the presidency.

The 2002 law was designed to modernize the voting process. Under it, the Election Assistance Commission was given a number of mandates: distribute \$2.8 billion in federal money for new voting equipment; create voluntary guidelines for voting systems and establish a federal testing and certification program for them; oversee the national voter registration form; and gather data about federal elections.

The four commissioners who lead the agency are nominated by the president based on recommendations from the majority and minority leaders in the U.S. House and Senate, then confirmed by the Senate. No political party can be represented by more than two commissioners.

At various points, the agency has faced budget cuts, staffing shortages and gridlock caused by vacancies in the commissioner positions. But a consistent budget and a quorum among the commissioners since 2019 has led to increased stability, with election officials praising its efforts in recent years.

Trump wants to put his own stamp on elections

Trump has long been skeptical of how elections are run, making false claims that the 2020 election was "rigged" against him. Multiple reviews of that election confirmed his loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

He has continued to criticize voting processes since his win last November, including in his March 25 executive order, which calls for major changes that include a proof-of-citizenship requirement when people register to vote for federal elections.

While Trump directed several federal agencies to act, two of the order's major provisions were directed at the Election Assistance Commission.

It was instructed to "take appropriate action" within 30 days to require documentary proof of citizenship on the national voter registration form. The order outlines acceptable documents as a U.S. passport, a REAL-ID compliant driver's license or official military ID that "indicates the applicant is a citizen," or a government-issued photo ID accompanied by proof of citizenship.

It also directed the commission to "take all appropriate action to cease" federal money for any state that fails to use the form that includes the proof-of-citizenship requirement, though a handful of states are exempt under federal law. Trump also wants the commission to revise standards for voting systems.

Election experts have said the changes are unrealistic given the process outlined in federal law, which includes reviews by advisory groups and a period for public comment. The last major update to the voluntary guidelines for voting systems took years and was approved by the commission in 2021.

"It's practically impossible to demand that commissioners of the EAC create wholly new voting system guidelines based on highly questionable criteria within 180 days," said David Becker, a former Justice Department lawyer who leads the Center for Election Innovation & Research. "It raises the question as to whether this was designed to create chaos since it cannot be practically and competently completed."

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Lawsuits say the commission is independent and not subject to Trump's orders

Trump's executive order has prompted lawsuits by voting rights groups, the Democratic Party and Democratic elected officials in 21 states. They say the president is exceeding his authority under the Constitution.

A lawsuit by 19 Democratic attorneys general argues that the commission was created by Congress to operate independently to protect elections and is required to make decisions "under standards of bipartisanship" and in collaboration with the states.

"The Elections EO seeks to eradicate all those safeguards — aiming to force the Commission to rubber-stamp the President's policy preferences on, among other things, voter registration and voting systems," lawyers for the states wrote.

Justin Levitt, an expert in constitutional law who served previously as deputy assistant attorney general for the Justice Department's civil rights division, said Congress established the Election Assistance Commission as independent of the president and did not give it any enforcement authority.

"It's not like most of the other agencies in the federal government, and that makes a big difference in the amount that it can do or will do to further Trump's agenda," Levitt said. "Legally, that (order) has as much impact as if I told the EAC what to do or you told the EAC what to do."

What happens next?

On Thursday, the commission's Standards Board begins its annual meeting in North Carolina, where it will hear from election officials from across the country, many of whom are likely to have questions about the commission's role under Trump's order.

Earlier this month, the commission's executive director sent a letter to state election officials summarizing the proof-of-citizenship requirement outlined in Trump's order and asking how states would propose to implement it, if required, and what effect that would have on voter registration.

Chairman Donald Palmer said the agency was following the law, which governs the way any proposed change to the federal form can be made.

"That's the process that we've done in the past, and that's the process we did this time," Palmer said. "In my mind, this is really to get information from the states."

He praised the commission's ability in recent years to find consensus and noted that the litigation would likely settle questions surrounding the executive order.

"We are in the executive branch, but we are an independent agency. And so those answers will — I'm sure those will be resolved," he said.

## **Disputed Kashmir witnesses deadliest attack on civilians in years, sparking fears of rising tensions**

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — At least 26 people were killed and 17 others wounded after gunmen opened fire on a group of tourists in Indian-controlled Kashmir, the worst assault in years targeting civilians in the restive region that has seen an anti-India rebellion for more than three decades.

Tuesday's attack took place in the picturesque town of Pahalgam in the Himalayan mountains, popular with Indian visitors.

Police accused rebels of masterminding the attack, which sparked outrage and drew international condemnation, including from U.S. President Donald Trump.

Fear of escalating tensions

Pahalgam is in the Baisaran meadow, locally known as "mini Switzerland" and is accessible only on foot or horseback. The town is a major tourist destination because of its alpine meadows, pine forests, snow-clad slopes and trekking routes.

It also lies on a major annual Hindu pilgrimage route, the Amarnath Yatra, and serves as one of its largest base camps, drawing hundreds of thousands of pilgrims. This year's pilgrimage starts on July 3 and ends on August 9.

The attack on Tuesday hasn't been claimed by any group so far, and on Wednesday, Indian soldiers

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were still searching for the attackers.

Many fear the tourism industry, which employs thousands of people, will be negatively affected.

This also comes as Prime Minister Narendra Modi is soon expected to inaugurate a multibillion-dollar railway line to Kashmir Valley, which his government says will help tourism and economic development in the region.

Modi has decried the "heinous act" and pledged the militants "will be brought to justice."

India's powerful home minister, Amit Shah, visited the attack site on Wednesday.

The India-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir

India and Pakistan have each laid claim to Kashmir since war broke out following the British partition of the subcontinent in 1947. Border skirmishes have long created instability in the region.

The two arch rivals have also fought three wars over Kashmir, where armed insurgents have resisted Indian rule for decades, with many Muslim Kashmiris supporting the rebels' goal of uniting the territory, either under Pakistani rule or as an independent country.

India has accused Pakistan of fomenting violence in the Muslim-majority region. Islamabad denies the charge and many Kashmiris consider it a legitimate freedom struggle. Tens of thousands of civilians, rebels and government forces have been killed in the conflict.

In 2019, Modi's government revoked Kashmir's semiautonomous status and imposed sweeping security measures. Since then, his government has kept order in the region with a huge security presence and drastically curbed dissent, civil liberties and media freedoms.

Attacks on tourists in Kashmir are rare

Militants had attacked civilians before, but the last major attack was in 2000. And though the region has seen a spate of targeted killings in remote mountains in recent years, violence has largely declined in the Kashmir Valley, the heart of anti-India rebellion.

Indian tourism has flourished in Kashmir after the Modi government promoted visits to the region with the hope of showing rising tourism numbers as a sign of renewed stability there, albeit under heavy security presence, checkpoints, armored vehicles and patrolling soldiers.

Millions of visitors now arrive in Kashmir every year to see its Himalayan foothills and exquisitely decorated houseboats, as the fighting between government forces and rebels has largely shifted to the region of Jammu's remote areas, where Indian troops have faced deadly attacks.

The attack coincides with Vance's India visit

Tuesday's attack came as U.S. vice-president JD Vance was on a sightseeing trip to the Indian city of Jaipur on Tuesday, a day after meeting with Modi in New Delhi.

Vance condemned the killings, saying: "Over the past few days, we have been overcome with the beauty of this country and its people. Our thoughts and prayers are with them as they mourn this horrific attack."

He will be in the Indian city of Agra on Wednesday to visit the iconic Taj Mahal monument, which is some 1,000 kilometres (621 miles) away from the attack site.

Trump also denounced the attack and expressed solidarity "with India against terrorism" and called Modi to convey his sympathies, according to Indian authorities.

Other leaders from Russia, Ukraine, Israel, Iran, France, Italy and the United Arab Emirates also expressed condemnation.

Militants had previously planned attacks to coincide with high-profile visits.

One of the most notorious attacks was the killing of at least 35 civilians in a village in Kashmir shortly before a visit to India by then-President Bill Clinton.

## Today in History: April 24, the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, April 24, the 114th day of 2025. There are 251 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On April 24, 1916, Irish republicans launched the Easter Rising, a rebellion against British rule in Ireland. Though the rebels surrendered to British forces six days later, the uprising set the stage for republican

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victories in the Irish general election of 1918 and the establishment of the Irish Free State via the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1922.

Also on this date:

In 1915, in what is considered the start of the Armenian genocide, the Ottoman Empire began rounding up Armenian political and cultural leaders in Constantinople.

In 1960, rioting erupted in Biloxi, Mississippi, after Black protesters staging a "wade-in" at a whites-only beach were attacked by a crowd of hostile white people.

In 1967, Soviet cosmonaut Vladimir Komarov was killed when his Soyuz 1 spacecraft smashed into the Earth after his parachutes failed to deploy properly during reentry. He was the first human spaceflight fatality.

In 1980, the United States launched Operation Eagle Claw, an unsuccessful attempt to free 53 American hostages in Iran that resulted in the deaths of eight U.S. service members.

In 1990, Space Shuttle Discovery blasted off from Cape Canaveral, Florida, carrying the \$1.5 billion Hubble Space Telescope.

In 1995, the final bomb linked to the Unabomber exploded inside the Sacramento, California, offices of the California Forestry Association, killing chief lobbyist Gilbert B. Murray. (Theodore Kaczynski was later sentenced to four lifetimes in prison for a series of bombings that killed three people and injured 23 others.)

In 2013, in Bangladesh, a shoddily constructed eight-story commercial building housing garment factories collapsed, killing more than 1,100 people.

In 2018, former police officer Joseph DeAngelo was arrested at his home near Sacramento after DNA linked him to crimes attributed to the Golden State Killer; authorities believed he committed 13 murders and more than 50 rapes in the 1970s and 1980s. (DeAngelo would plead guilty in 2020 to 13 counts of murder and be sentenced to life in prison without parole.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor Shirley MacLaine is 91. Actor-singer-filmmaker Barbra Streisand is 83. Fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier is 73. Actor Eric Bogosian is 72. Actor Michael O'Keefe is 70. Actor-comedian Cedric the Entertainer is 61. Actor Djimon Hounsou (JEYE'-mihn OHN'-soo) is 61. Actor Aidan Gillen is 57. Actor Rory McCann is 56. Latin pop singer Alejandro Fernandez is 54. Baseball Hall of Famer Chipper Jones is 53. Actor Derek Luke is 51. Singer-TV personality Kelly Clarkson is 43. Country singer Carly Pearce is 35. Actor-musician Joe Keery is 33. Actor Jack Quaid is 33. Actor Jordan Fisher is 31. Golfer Lydia Ko is 28.