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Tuesday, May 20

Senior Menu: Tatertot hot dish, green beans, pineapple, whole wheat bread.

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.

Wednesday, May 21

Senior Menu: Cheeseburger on bun, lettuce/tomato/onion, potato salad, corn, fruit.

Region High School Baseball at two highest seeds

Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.

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

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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

Good morning, everyone! A brand new day means brand new chances—go get them!"



Thursday, May 22

Senior Menu: Beef tips with mashed potato, baby carrots, cherry fluff, whole wheat bread.

Girls Golf at Sisseton, 10 a.m.

Track at Webster, Noon

Friday, May 23

Senior Menu: Chicken pasta salad, three bean salad, cinnamon apple sauce, breadstick.

Track at Warner, 11 a.m.

Saturday, May 24

Sunday, May 25

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

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

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

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

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

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1440

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

Venezuelans' Status Revoked

The Supreme Court approved the Trump administration's emergency request to revoke Venezuelans' temporary protected status yesterday. The decision clears the way for the Department of Homeland Security to begin deporting nearly 350,000 people, pending individual appeals.

Since 1990, the TPS program has allowed the federal government to extend legal status and work permits to people from countries experiencing war, natural disaster, or other crises. The protections are intended to end when conditions improve. The Biden administration first granted Venezuelans TPS in 2021, when over 5 million people fled President Nicolás Maduro's regime and inflation approached 3,000%. Roughly 3 million people have since continued to flee; inflation cooled to double digits last year. A US travel advisory to Venezuela remains in effect.

Yesterday's decision applies to those who received TPS in 2023 when the Biden administration extended the program. The 2021 cohort is expected to see protections expire later this year.

23andMe Sale

American biotech firm Regeneron will buy genetic testing company 23andMe out of bankruptcy, the company announced yesterday, at a reported price of \$256M. The figure represents a more than 95% drop from 23andMe's peak value of \$6B just four years ago.

A first mover in the emerging industry of personal genomics, 23andMe was founded in 2006 and gained popularity offering at-home saliva tests, named Time's "Invention of the Year" in 2008, for customers to determine their ancestry and genetic profiles. The company sold over 12 million DNA tests but failed to find a sustainable business model—most notably, many customers only needed their product a single time.

Because the company had amassed millions of DNA data tied to identifiable profiles, observers had raised numerous privacy concerns over the sale (the data is not covered by typical health disclosure rules known as HIPAA). Regeneron said it would continue 23andMe's testing business in-house and comply with a mediator-approved review of its privacy policy.

European Trade Deal

The UK and European Union announced a trade and security deal yesterday, marking a reset in relations nearly a decade after the UK voted to leave the 27-member bloc. Unveiled by Prime Minister Keir Starmer and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, the deal aims to ease trade barriers and address security concerns amid Russia's war in Ukraine and a shifting US role in Europe. It marks the UK's third trade deal this month, after agreements with the US and India.

The EU remains the UK's largest trading partner, but UK exports to the bloc have fallen 21% since Brexit. The agreement, projected to add nearly \$12B to the UK economy by 2040, includes reduced border checks on food and agricultural products, expanded e-gate access for British travelers at EU airports, a 12-year extension of EU fishing rights in UK waters, and UK participation in a \$170B EU defense procurement initiative.

Separately, President Donald Trump announced that Russia and Ukraine will start ceasefire negotiations following a call with Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NBA playoffs conference finals kick off tonight with the Minnesota Timberwolves taking on the Oklahoma City Thunder (8:30 pm ET, ESPN).

Werenoi, France's bestselling musical artist for the past two years, dies at age 31 in Paris.

Yuri Grigorovich, Russian ballet legend, dies at age 98.

"Sesame Street" signs streaming deal with Netflix just months after Discovery decided not to renew the show for Max; new episodes will release on PBS and Netflix on the same day.

Science & Technology

AI-powered model helps assess the risk of postpartum depression using clinical and demographic data; condition affects about 15% of new mothers but can be difficult to assess and treat.

Engineers design battery with the consistency of toothpaste, ability to stretch to twice its length without losing power; technology may have applications in wearable electronics.

Researchers capture footage of capuchin monkeys kidnapping infant howler monkeys on the Panamanian island of Jicarón; findings suggest primates may engage in social fads, similar to humans.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.1%, Dow +0.3%, Nasdaq +0.0%) as Wall Street digests last week's Moody's downgrade; 30-year Treasury yield briefly hits 5%, dollar slides in early morning trading.

CBS News CEO steps down amid disagreements over how to handle \$20B lawsuit from President Donald Trump, \$8B Paramount-Skydance merger.

Bath & Body Works CEO resigns, to be replaced by former Nike executive.

Spain blocks more than 65,000 Airbnb rental listings as the country seeks to alleviate its housing crisis, among the worst in Europe.

Politics & World Affairs

President Donald Trump signs bill criminalizing revenge porn and explicit deepfake images, including AI-generated content; bill requires social media companies to remove content within 48 hours of notice from victim.

Trump administration agrees in principle to pay nearly \$5M to settle wrongful death lawsuit from the family of Ashli Babbitt, killed by police in the Jan. 6 Capitol attack.

Federal judge rules to end Department of Government Efficiency's takeover of the US Institute of Peace, deeming the nonprofit's March takeover unlawful; decision reinstates previous board members, nullifies DOGE reorganization.

Five aid trucks enter Gaza from Israel, ending three months of blockade on food, medicine, other supplies amid international pressure; the UK, Canada, and France threaten sanctions if additional aid is not allowed.

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Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

May 20, 2025 – 7:00pm
City Hall – 120 North Main Street

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

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
3. Approval of CWE Addition Plat
4. Second Reading of Ordinance No. 788 – Amending Solid Waste Rates for Municipal Utility Customers
5. Second Reading of Ordinance No. 789 – Amending Language of Chapter 8-1 of Groton City Ordinances
6. Park Bathroom Discussion
7. Continued Discussion Regarding Railroad Avenue
8. Authorization to Sign Administrative Contract with NECOG for Wastewater Project
9. Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
10. April Finance Report
11. Minutes
12. Bills
13. City Offices Closed on May 26, 2025, for Memorial Day
14. Baseball Discussion
15. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
16. Hire Summer Recreational Employees
17. Adjournment

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

May 20, 2025, 8:45 A.M.

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

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of the Agenda
3. Opportunity for Public Comment
4. Kelsi Vinger, State's Attorney Grant Program
 - a. Court Resource Home Grant
 - b. Racial & Ethnic Disparities Grant
5. Dirk Rogers, Highway Superintendent:
 - a. R-O-W for Northern Electric
 - b. Bid Opening for Sand Lake Bridge Project
 - c. Intergovernmental Agreement for Boundary Line Highways on County System between Brown County and City of Aberdeen – Approve & Authorize Chairman to Sign Agreement
 - d. Department Update
6. Lynn Heupel, Auditor
 - a. Discuss Software Purchase
7. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes for May 13, 2025
 - b. Claims/Payroll
 - c. HR Report
 - d. Lease Agreements
 - e. Travel Requests
 - f. Lottery Permit
8. Other Business
9. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
10. Adjourn

Brown County Commission Meeting

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

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

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

Access Code: 601-168-909 #

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

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

Presentations may not exceed 3 minutes.

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

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

DEPARTMENT HEAD MEETING – 11:00 A.M.

AGENDA

BROWN COUNTY PLANNING/ZONING COMMISSION REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETINGS

*TUESDAY, May 20, 2025 – 7:00 PM
BROWN COUNTY COURTHOUSE ANNEX in the BASEMENT
(STAIRWAY AND ELEVATOR ACCESS TO BASEMENT)*

- I. **Call to Order:** for Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission
- II. **Roll Call:** Stan Beckler - Chairman, David North - Vice Chair, Patrick Keatts, Dale Kurth, James Meyers, Alternate Paul Johnson, & County Commissioner Mike Gage. Carrie Weisenburger was absent.
- III. **Appointment SDCL 11-2-2,** The County Planning Commission is appointed and approved by the Board of Brown County Commissioners. The county planning commission is known as the County Planning/Zoning Commission. The County Zoning Commission also serves as the County Zoning Board of Adjustment.
- IV. **Contracts with municipalities SDCL 11-2-7.** Contracts to provide planning and zoning services to municipalities--Municipal powers exercised by county board. The governing body of any municipality may contract with the board for planning and zoning services to be provided by the county, and the contract may provide that the municipality shall pay such fees as are agreed for the services performed. Under the provisions of the contract the municipal governing body may authorize the county planning and zoning commission, on behalf of the municipality, to exercise any of the powers otherwise granted to municipal planning and zoning commissions under chapters [11-4](#) and [11-6](#).
Source: SL 1967, ch 20, § 9; SL 1975, ch 113, § 2; SL 1992, ch 60, § 2; SL 1998, ch 76, § 2
 1. Columbia: May 5, 1981, by Resolution.
 2. Verdon Village: April 17, 1981, by Resolution.
 3. Town of Claremont: April 6, 1981, by Resolution.
 4. Town of Stratford: April 6, 1981, by Resolution.
- V. **Opportunity for Public Comment if any.**
- VI. **Approval of May 20, 2025, Agenda:** Motion: 1st _____ 2nd _____
- VII. **Approval of April 15, 2025, Minutes:** Motion: 1st _____ 2nd _____

ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT

- VIII. **Old Business:**
 1. **Sign-up sheet:** On the table by the door entrance, there is a Sign-up Sheet. Please legibly sign in and mark YES or NO if you want to speak to the Board on any Agenda Item.
 2. **Permits:** Anyone that has submitted a Variance Petition (VP) or a Conditional Use Petition (CUP) to the Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA) is still required to get their required PERMITS from the

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Zoning Office before starting their project if their Petition gets approved. Penalties may be assessed per Ordinance when starting projects without proper permits in place.

3. **Brown County Ordinance Amendment & Addition to Title 4** Wind Energy Systems (WES).

4. **Brown County Ordinance Amendment & Addition to Title 4** Data Centers.

IX. **New Business:** *Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission as [Zoning Board of Adjustment \(BOA\)](#).*

1. **Variance to Approach Separation** in a Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG) described as Proposed Lot 1, "Leikvold Second Addition" in the SW1/4 of Section 26-T124N-R64W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (38632 129th Street, Lincoln Twp.).

2. **Conditional Use Petition** in a Heavy Industrial District (H-I) described as Lot 2, "Wheat Grower's West Subdivision" in the N1/2 of Section 21-T123N-R64W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (38435 133rd Street, Aberdeen Twp.).

3. **Conditional Use Petition** in an Agriculture-Preservation District (AG-P) described as Lot 1A, "Sombke Second Subdivision" in the S1/2 of Section 8-T121N-R60W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (40752 144th Street, Bates Twp.).

4. **Variance to Setbacks** in a Highway Commercial District (HC) described as "Goldade Outlot 2" in the NW1/4 of Section 22-T123N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (5260 E Highway 12, Aberdeen Twp.).

5. **Conditional Use Petition** in a Proposed Commercial District (C) described as Lot 3, "Todd Rosebrock First Subdivision" in the NW1/4 of Section 9-T123N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (4275 Paper Lane, Aberdeen Twp.).

6. **Conditional Use Petition** in a Proposed Commercial District (C) described as Lot 9, "Todd Rosebrock First Subdivision" in the NW1/4 of Section 9-T123N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (4180 Paper Lane, Aberdeen Twp.).

7. **Variance to Lot Size** in an Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) described as Proposed Lot 1, "Scarborough Second Addition" in the NW1/4 of Section 22-T121N-R65W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (14520 377th Avenue, New Hope Twp.).

8. **Variance to Setbacks** in an Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) described as The SW1/4 of Section 21-T121N-R63W, except "Criddle's Outlot 1", of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (14580 390th Avenue, West Rondell Twp.).

9. **Conditional Use Petition** in a Heavy Industrial District (H-I) described as "Inman Irrigation Addition" in the SW1/4 of Section 14-T123N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (421 392nd Avenue S, Bath Twp.).

10. **Variance to Setbacks** in a Rural Urban District (RU) described as Lot 7, Block 2, "Original Plat of Stratford" in the SW1/4 of Section 4-T121N-R62W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (315 Campbell Avenue, Stratford City).

11. **Conditional Use Petition** in an Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) described as the S1/2 of the SE1/4 of Section 5-T128N-R62W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (Approximately 29552 101st Street; Liberty Twp.).

X. Other Business:

Completed as Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA) & going to Planning Commission

AGENDA

BROWN COUNTY PLANNING/ZONING COMMISSION REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETINGS

TUESDAY, May 20, 2025 – 7:00 PM

*BROWN COUNTY COURTHOUSE ANNEX in the BASEMENT
(STAIRWAY AND ELEVATOR ACCESS TO BASEMENT)*

PLANNING COMMISSION

- I. **Old Business: Discussion on Amendments to Brown County Ordinance Title 4 for Chapters 4.22 through Chapter 4.29 on Administrative Rules and Enforcement are still postponed until further notice, by Ross Aldentaler, Deputy States Attorney. We are not continuing to put this on the Agenda or Minutes until something is presented to the Planning/Zoning Commission for proposed changes.**
- II. **New Business: Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission as Planning Commission.**
 15. **Rezone Petition** for a property described as Lots 1 thru 10, "Todd Rosebrock First Subdivision" in the NW1/4 of Section 9-T123N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (4095, 4185, 4275, 4365, 4395, 4390, 4360, 4270, 4180, 4090 Paper Lane; Aberdeen Twp.) to be rezoned from Highway Commercial District (HC) to Commercial District (C).
 16. **Rezone Petition** for a property described as Lot 1, "Browning First Subdivision" in the SW1/4 of Section 35-T122N-R65W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (14172 378th Avenue; Highland Twp.) to be rezoned from Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) to Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG).
 17. **Rezone Petition** for a property described as Proposed Lot 1, "E. Price Addition" in the NW1/4 of the NW1/4 of Section 23-T121N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (14510 392nd Avenue; West Rondell Twp.) to be rezoned from Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) to Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG).
 18. **Preliminary Plat** for conveyance purposes on a property described as "Mina Lake Northeast Addition" in the S1/2 of Section 7-T123N-R65W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (37360 132nd Street; Mercier Twp.).
 19. **Preliminary & Final Plat** for financial purposes on a property described as "DM Smith Addition" in the SE1/4 of Section 12-T122N-R65W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (13761 382nd Avenue; Highland Twp.).
 20. **Preliminary & Final Plat** for conveyance purposes on a property described as "Hubert Outlot" in the SW1/4 of Section 19-T128N-R61W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (10374 400th Avenue; Liberty Twp.).

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21. **Preliminary & Final Plat** for conveyance purposes on a property described as "Leikvold Second Addition" in the SW1/4 of Section 26-T124N-R64W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (38632 129th Street; Lincoln Twp.).
22. **Preliminary & Final Plat** for conveyance purposes on a property described as "E. Price Addition" in the NW1/4 of the NW1/4 of Section 23-T121N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (14510 392nd Avenue; West Rondell Twp.).
23. **Preliminary & Final Plat** for development purposes on a property described as "Scarborough Second Addition" in the NW1/4 of Section 22-T121N-R65W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (14536 377th Avenue; New Hope Twp.).
24. **Preliminary & Final Plat** for development purposes on a property described as "Pigors Third Addition" in the SE1/4 of Section 27-T122N-R60W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (14053 410th Avenue; East Hanson Twp.).

III. Other Business:

1. Executive Session if requested.

IV. Motion to Adjourn: 1st _____ 2nd _____

Andre Keller of Groton Among University of Scranton Graduate Class of 2025

SCRANTON, PA (05/19/2025)-- Andre A. Keller of Groton was among the more than 550 graduates who were awarded master's and doctoral degrees at The University of Scranton's graduate commencement ceremony held May 18 at Mohegan Arena at Casey Plaza, Wilkes-Barre Township. Graduates received master's degrees in numerous disciplines, as well as doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.) degrees in accounting, doctor of physical therapy degrees and doctor of nursing practice degrees. Graduates must have completed their academic requirements in August and December of 2024 or January and May of 2025.

Keller earned a Master of Business Administration/Master of Health Administration dual degree in healthcare management, health administration and operations and information management from The University of Scranton.

Graduates hailed from 34 states, including the Northeast United States and Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Michigan, North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee and Texas, among others. International graduates spanned Ghana, India, Pakistan, Taiwan, Uganda and the Cayman Islands.

Andrea Alexandra Navarro Montoya, of Albrightsville, who earned a Master of Business Administration degree in accounting, addressed the crowd on behalf of the Class of 2025. Navarro Montoya spoke about leaving Peru seven years ago in hopes of finding and building a better future.

"At the beginning of my time here, there were moments when I questioned if I belonged - if I truly 'fit in,'" Navarro Montoya said. "But that changed when I met some amazing people who I now proudly call my best friends, incredible professors who became mentors and staff who became like family.

"Scranton has been more than just a university - it has been a home, a place where I have grown, learned and found a community that has supported me every step of the way."

The University of Scranton is a Jesuit university located in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

OPENING MAY 2ND
CLOSING JUNE 2ND

WEBER LANDSCAPING GREENHOUSE

620 WEST THIRD AVENUE

GROTON

HOURS OF OPERATION

M-F 10-6

SAT 10-4

SUN 12-4





Building Coming Down

This small building at 18 N Main St. in downtown Groton is coming down. Demolition began on Monday. This used to be the former Jacobson Agency building.



**SOUTH DAKOTA
NEWS WATCH**

Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

Renewable energy industry becoming a powerful source of employment in South Dakota

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

MITCHELL, S.D. — Matthew Pearson found a successful career in the wind energy industry purely by chance.

After graduating from high school in Vermillion, Pearson knew he didn't want to pursue a four-year degree and instead scrolled through the list of majors offered at Mitchell Tech, one of the state's four technical colleges.

"When I came to the wind energy program, I thought, 'Well, that sounds kind of cool,'" Pearson, 28, recalled during a recent interview at Mitchell Tech, the only South Dakota college with a designated wind energy major.

He didn't know it at the time, but Pearson had stumbled into one of the fastest-growing, highest-paying trade fields in the state and nation.

While workforce shortages plague many industries and employers in the Rushmore State, great opportunities abound for skilled workers to build, operate and maintain renewable energy facilities, including at wind farms. Meanwhile, strong partnerships between technical colleges, employers and the Build Dakota Scholarship program have forged a ready pathway to quickly and effectively fill the need for energy workers.

Pearson obtained a Build Dakota Scholarship that paid all tuition for a two-year wind technology degree, then spent about \$15,000 to complete another two-year major in electrical construction.

After graduation, he quickly landed a job wiring wind towers at locations around the country. He was initially paid about \$80,000 a year, and after six years was making \$127,000 plus a daily living fee of \$140.

But now, with a fiancée and two children, Pearson is completing a circle by leaving field work and returning to Mitchell Tech to become its only wind energy program instructor.

Pearson said that in addition to teaching the skills needed to thrive in the renewable energy field, he'll also share the good news about their job prospects.

"There's been a steady uptick in the need for workforce," he said. "When I would get to a jobsite, there would be three or four companies there, and they'd always come over and ask, 'Hey, you want to come work for us instead?'"

77% of power from renewable energy

South Dakota is among the top three states nationally in percentage of energy generated from renewable sources, leaving it well positioned to provide both jobs in the field and trainers like Pearson who will help meet demand for workers.

About 77% of the power used in the state comes from non-fossil fuel sources, largely from water and wind, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. The state has three solar farms but no plans filed for more.

Since the mid-1950s, South Dakota has generated significant energy from its four hydroelectric power plants on the Missouri River.

And over roughly the past 15 years, the state has seen a tenfold increase in wind energy production, according to the state Public Utilities Commission. That growth has created a healthy number of construction and maintenance jobs.

In 2009, the state had 190 turbines capable of producing about 350 megawatts (MW) of electricity. At the end of 2024, South Dakota was home to 1,417 turbines able to generate about 3,600 MW of energy.

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The PUC also approved a 68-turbine project with a capacity of 260 MW and a \$621 million price tag near Clear Lake in March.

"We've had just a tremendous expansion of wind energy in South Dakota," said Chris Nelson, a PUC commissioner. "Today, though, we're in a little bit of a lull."

The expected slowdown is due to a lack of transmission lines capable of carrying more power, most of which heads east out of the state, Nelson said.

Despite the infrastructure challenges, renewable energy still has a bright future, he said. Two nonprofit energy consortiums that manage the power grid in the upper Midwest plan to spend a combined \$37 billion to expand transmission capacity, including in South Dakota, over roughly the next decade.

Two majors, 100% job placement

At Lake Area Technical College in Watertown, students are offered two energy-related degree tracks, said president Tiffany Sanderson.

The energy technology major provides training in development and maintenance of energy systems, and the energy operations degree is aimed at managing an energy facility.

"In our energy programs, those are students interested in working with their hands and solving engineering or process-oriented problems," she said. "They're very mechanically minded and can figure out how to make sure power is produced reliably so people don't have delays in service."

During a recent tour of the technology labs, students used 3D printers, developed and analyzed system efficiency, and worked on unique projects like a solar-powered ice fishing shanty.

The two programs have about two dozen students combined, Sanderson said. In the 2023 graduating class, 100% of all graduates were employed within six months, with average salaries of \$65,000 a year in the technology major and \$69,000 a year in operations.

"That is for their first jobs in the industry, so those are tremendous opportunities for a brand new graduate with two years of college education," she said.

'Crazy' number of jobs available

In May, Nathaniel Bekaert will become one of those new graduates from Lake Area tech.

Bekaert, 28, grew up on a farm and came to the college after six years in the U.S. Army, which paid for almost all of his tuition, fees and equipment costs.

After touring the Gavins Point Dam hydroelectric plant in Yankton on the Nebraska border and interning at the Big Stone Power Plant near the Minnesota border, Bekaert was sold on the idea of working as a mechanic in the energy field.

"The more you learn, the more you want to dive into it," he said.

With his anticipated degree and work experience, Bekaert said he was recruited extensively by energy companies.

"The amount of energy companies coming in looking for workers is crazy, and you can't really grasp how many companies are looking for energy students," he said. "There are a dozen or more companies within 45 minutes from here that are actively looking for technicians and operators or people with some type of energy degree."

As a native of the Watertown area, Bekaert has accepted a job close to home as a wind technician at the Crowned Ridge wind farm northeast of the city, where he will make \$29 an hour plus a \$5,000 signing bonus and a \$200 annual stipend for work boots.

Crowned Ridge is operated by NextEra Energy, a Florida-based company that runs wind farms across the country. A recent check of NextEra's website revealed 396 job openings, with 185 related specifically to wind energy.

"No matter what happens with fossil fuels, we can keep going (with renewable energy) and live off that, and it will benefit everybody in the world. And we won't have to rely on another country," Bekaert said of his career choice.

A systematic approach to workforce development

The South Dakota technical school system, which also includes campuses in Sioux Falls and Rapid City,

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has developed a close working relationship with the energy industry to ensure students learn the right skills and employers can tap into a pipeline of well-trained workers.

Lake Area Tech officials go into local public schools to promote energy and other trade jobs starting in elementary grades, Sanderson said.

At Mitchell Tech, vice president for enrollment services Clayton Deuter said the college now offers a one-year wind energy degree instead of a two-year program, a change made after energy companies said some skills taught in the longer program could be obtained on the job instead.

Deuter said the energy programs at Mitchell Tech are an easy sell to students and their parents due to the low cost compared to a four-year college and the availability of Build Dakota scholarships in which students get tuition paid if they work in South Dakota for three years after graduation.

Mitchell Tech also offers a dual-enrollment program to high school students so they can have a wind energy degree from the college in hand by the time they graduate.

"You think about return on investment, and here you can take one year in the wind turbine program and you can graduate and make \$80,000 to \$100,000 a year," Deuter said. "With student loan debt being so crazy, you don't have to bankrupt yourself financially and be tethered to a student loan payment when you're trying to buy a house and start a family."

One of the state's biggest renewable energy employers is Marmen Energy in Brandon. The Canadian-owned company has 285 employees who build wind towers up to 300-feet tall that are shipped to wind farms nationwide.

Aimee Miritello, human resources manager, said the company's relationships with high schools and technical colleges form a pillar of the company's worker recruitment strategy to overcome a nagging lack of workers in the trade fields.

"Historically for us that has been one of our best ways of getting qualified employees," she said.

Marmen has expanded its South Dakota plant to accommodate what Miritello said has been a steady increase in demand for wind towers across the country.

Marmen workers, who include welders, painters and other construction tradespeople, make a good wage, are offered one of the best benefit packages in the region and have strong opportunities for internal advancement, she said.

"Plus, they're a part of making huge wind towers, so their pride in that is pretty big," she said.

The Life of John Martin

A Celebration of Life for John Martin, 82, of Groton will be 10:00 a.m., Saturday, May 24th at Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton. Father Gregory Tschakert will officiate. Inurnment will follow in Union Cemetery, Groton.

Visitation will be held for one hour prior to services at the chapel.

John passed away May 16, 2025 at Avantara Groton.

John Jay Martin was born on a farm south of Groton on June 22, 1942 to Nels and Dorothy (Hoops) Martin. He went to Synaground Country School in West Hanson Township through the 8th grade and then attended Groton High School. His sister, Marilyn and John lived with their grandmother, Louise Hoops while attending high school. After school, they worked at Omer's Café for 25 cents an hour. John obtained his GED in 1992.

John worked for Harvey Fliehs, Sr. for over 50 years. He met Harvey when he was 10 years old. John's dad had just died (1953) and Harvey along with others came to help put in the crop and took John on his tractor (without a cab) and rode with him all day. Harvey and John would go to Montana and Wyoming to buy calves and yearlings. They also went to North Dakota and Minnesota to buy feeder pigs. They did a lot of fun things together.

John married Dolores "Dodie" Eberle on September 1, 1962 at St. John's Catholic Church in Groton. They were blessed with three children: John Jr., Rosalie and Joan Mary, who only lived five days.

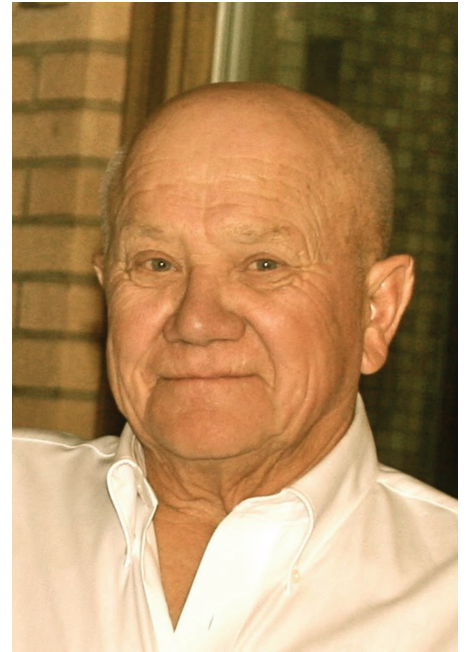
John enjoyed fishing, camping, deer and pheasant hunting. In summer on weekends, the family would go camping and fishing. In the fall, John and John Jr. would go deer hunting at Buffalo with Warren Dunn and Jr. Bail. When the grandsons got older, Marcus, Anthony and Lucas would go with him. He also deer hunted in the Black Hills with Jay Olson and East River with John Jr. and the grandsons.

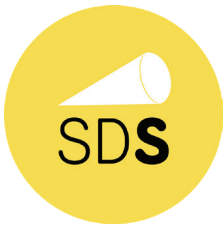
John is survived by his wife, Dolores, two children, John Jr. (Sharon) Martin of Spearfish, Rosalie (Jason) Wylie of Olathe, KS, six grandchildren: Marcus (Larissa) Wylie, Anthony Wylie, Mary (Anthony) Tovar, Rachel (Austin) Lake, Lucas (Tess) Martin, Rebecca Martin (Jake Kneeland) and nine great-grandchildren: Marcus Jr., Everly, Liam and Wrenly Wylie, Hadley and Noah Tovar, Sutton Lake, Ellis and Emmie Martin. John is also survived by his brother-in-law, Don Eberle, sister-in-laws, Charlotte Graves and Charlotte Martin and special friends, Jerrie Vedvei, Wynella and Neal Abeln.

Preceding him in death were his parents, his infant daughter, siblings, Bert, Marilyn, Betty and sister-in-law, Kathleen Eberle, sister and brother-in-law, Mary Ann and Don Mock, brother-in-laws, Dave Eberle, Glenn Graves and Erv Mortenson.

Honorary Urn Bearers are his great-grandchildren: Ellis, Emmie, Sutton, Hadley, Noah, Marcus Jr., Everly, Liam and Wrenly.

Urn Bearers are his grandchildren: Rebecca, Lucas, Rachel, Mary, Anthony and Marcus.





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

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Anti-pipeline activists cheer expected removal of federal permit preemption from reconciliation bill

Groups also urge Rep. Johnson to 'die on this hill' of repealing carbon sequestration tax credits

BY: JOHN HULT - MAY 19, 2025 5:57 PM

A provision to let pipeline companies bypass state permitters is expected to be stripped from the "big, beautiful" federal budget reconciliation bill, but anti-pipeline activists want Congress to kill a carbon tax credit program before they pass the bill along to President Donald Trump.

That was the message from a group of South Dakota carbon dioxide pipeline opponents during a virtual press conference Monday. Representatives from Dakota Rural Action, the South Dakota Property Rights and Local Control Alliance, and the South Dakota Stockgrowers Association joined the call.

Last week, groups in the anti-carbon pipeline camp raised alarms about the reconciliation bill over a provision tucked within its 1,100 pages. It would have given the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission exclusive authority to issue licenses for pipelines carrying natural gas, carbon dioxide, hydrogen, oil or other energy products and byproducts.

The state permitting process has been a political minefield for a proposed carbon pipeline from Summit Carbon Solutions that would traverse parts of Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota and South Dakota, collecting carbon from ethanol plants on its way to a North Dakota sequestration site. The South Dakota Public Utilities Commission has rejected the project twice.

South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden signed a bill into law in March banning the use of eminent domain by carbon pipeline companies, stripping Summit of the potential use of state court condemnation actions to build beneath land owned by project opponents.

Anticipated removal of federal provision to preempt state regulators

Critics said the federal permitting provision in the reconciliation bill would've allowed Summit to preempt state-level regulations.

The bill passed through a House committee Sunday night. President Trump has called it a "big, beautiful bill" chock full of tax breaks and cuts to wasteful spending; opponents have decried it as a plan to carve large swaths of the citizenry out of entitlement programs such as Medicaid. The complex budget reconciliation process allows the majority party to pass legislation with simple majorities in both chambers, avoiding the U.S. Senate's usual 60-vote requirement.

The federal pipeline preemption provision will be removed in the House Rules Committee on Wednesday morning, according to Kristen Blakely, who works for U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota.

Opponents of the Summit project celebrated that news on the Monday press call.

"It was good to see that they removed the federal siting authority," said Republican state Sen. Joy Hohn of Hartford.

Pipeline opponents remain concerned about one other provision that remains in the bill. It would let pipeline companies pay the federal government \$10 million for an "expedited environmental review" lasting one year, with a possible extension of up to six months. The current federal review process can take years. Under the provision, an expedited review's results would not be appealable.

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Summit doesn't need that level of environmental review, though other pipelines – like the controversial Dakota Access crude oil pipeline that Hohn fought to prevent nearly a decade ago – do need them.

Blakely told Searchlight that the expedited environmental review no longer applies to any carbon pipelines, as it was tied to the now-scuttled preemption provision for permits.

Anti-pipeline groups: Johnson should think of governor's race

Hohn was elected on a landowner rights platform and helped shepherd the eminent domain ban through the statehouse.

Summit's business model hinges on the company's intended collection of billions in 45Q tax credits for companies that sequester carbon, keeping it from contributing to climate change.

Hohn and the others on hand for Monday's press conference want to see Rep. Johnson push for the elimination of that program, which has existed for decades and was beefed up through former President Joe Biden's Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

"We are calling for Rep. Johnson to die on this hill," said Chase Jensen of Dakota Rural Action, who called the notion of 45Q credits surviving in a U.S. Capitol transfixed by talk of wasteful spending "insane."

Ed Fischbach, a board member of Dakota Rural Action, called the 45Q program "nothing but corporate welfare."

Dennis Fieckert of the South Dakota Property Rights and Local Control Alliance suggested that Johnson's potential entry into the 2026 South Dakota gubernatorial contest would start off on the wrong foot without a push to end 45Q.

Hohn was one of several state lawmakers who earned their office last year through opposition to eminent domain for carbon pipelines. In that same election, South Dakota voters shot down a law passed by state lawmakers in 2024 that would have granted landowners additional rights but also cleared a path for permitting by Summit.

Rep. Johnson "knows what's going on here in South Dakota," Feickert said, adding, "He needs to step up."

Blakely, Johnson's spokeswoman, pointed out that the reconciliation bill would alter the tax credit program by limiting access to companies that begin construction within two years of the bill's enactment. The bill also restricts access to credits by taxpaying companies that are "specified foreign entities" like Chinese defense companies, or taxpaying companies influenced by those entities.

As far as the notion of eliminating 45Q, a statement from Johnson said he's still working with his colleagues to make the "big, beautiful bill" a "more conservative" piece of legislation.

"I've been on the frontlines to help eliminate ridiculous portions of the Inflation Reduction Act, like EV chargers and other Green New Deal policies," Johnson said.

Jensen, of Dakota Rural Action, said the credits in 45Q didn't originate with the Green New Deal, the name attached to a set of policies promoted by some of Congress' more liberal members. The tax credits originated under a bill signed by President George W. Bush in 2008, and were expanded by President Trump during his first term in office before President Biden's infrastructure bill expanded them further.

"Our congressman continues to make it sound like this is about getting rid of the Green New Deal, and that this is Biden's fault, but in reality, this is a bipartisan agenda that we are trying to get rid of," Jensen said.

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.

Protest planned over prison deaths, security issues, treatment of inmates

Division of Criminal Investigation leading inquiry on two deaths, days apart, at Sioux Falls prison complex

BY: JOHN HULT - MAY 19, 2025 5:29 PM

The South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation is heading up an inquiry into two inmate deaths that occurred last week on the campus of the South Dakota State Penitentiary.

The deaths, as well as a host of security breakdowns in recent months, are among the motivating factors for a planned Friday protest outside the facility in Sioux Falls.

DCI spokesman Tony Mangan confirmed Monday that the agency is working with the Department of Corrections' Office of Internal Affairs to look into the circumstances surrounding the deaths of two men housed in Sioux Falls.

The first, 39-year-old Jason Garreau, was found unresponsive in his cell on May 15, according to a news release sent by the DOC the following day.

A similar news release came two days later, on Sunday, and also used the verbiage "found unresponsive in his cell," in reference to the death of 24-year-old Joshua Arrow.

Garreau lived in the penitentiary, an 1881 structure whose age, safety and crowded conditions have caused three years of discussion among state lawmakers on a replacement.

Arrow lived in the Jameson Annex, a building erected in the 1990s to house maximum-security inmates, those in disciplinary segregation and those with mental health needs.

Both facilities have seen outbursts of violence since March. There were two incidents just days before a work group studying prison construction walked through for a visit in early April. The first involved a female correctional officer assaulted at the penitentiary, the second an outbreak of violence between multiple inmates at Jameson that led to injuries and a facility lockdown.

The penitentiary once again saw a flare-up of fighting in early May. On that violence, the DOC only offered that there were no "life-threatening" injuries or injuries to officers.

On May 7, a correctional officer was assaulted at Mike Durfee State Prison in Springfield, a medium security prison that played host to two days of wide-scale fighting last summer.

After a tour of Southeast Technical College in Sioux Falls on May 7, South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden said he has "full confidence" in Corrections Secretary Kellie Wasko to manage the security issues within the DOC.

Wasko, he said, has "done a pretty good job of managing that situation, given the circumstances that she's inherited and the conditions and the overcrowding."

On Friday, a group led by a former inmate named Tracii Barse plans to protest conditions at the penitentiary from 4 to 6 p.m. in Sioux Falls. The poster for the event says the group intends to "peacefully and respectfully" protest "the treatment the inmates are enduring from admins and guards."

"We will be speaking in honor and memory of the deaths that have recently happened inside the prison system," the poster reads.

Barse said one of the primary goals is to push the DOC to respond to the concerns of family members with more honesty and transparency. While lawmakers discuss the possibility of expensive new prison construction projects, Barse said, inmates are injured, sick and dying, and family members – and the public – are left to wonder about the circumstances for days, weeks or longer.

"The people have the right to know what's going on," Barse said.

Nicole Gednalske, a spokeswoman for the DOC, told South Dakota Searchlight in an emailed statement that the agency is "awaiting autopsy results at this time" on the two recent deaths.

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.

Trump says he loves farmers. He's dismantling the agency helping their communities survive

About 10% of the 15,000 federal employees who have left the U.S. Department of Agriculture worked for Rural Development, the agency most responsible for federal investment in farming communities.

BY: SKY CHADDE, INVESTIGATE MIDWEST - MAY 19, 2025 9:01 AM

In 2016, Tillman County, a politically deep red area in southwest Oklahoma with a population of less than 7,000 and dropping, lost its hospital. Emergency services calls skyrocketed, and health outcomes deteriorated.

Trey Caldwell, the area's Republican state representative, said his office found at least three people died after long ambulance rides. "They would have survived," he said, "if they could have gotten immediate emergency care right then and there."

But hope for the community dotted with dairy farms arrived in 2023, when construction started on a new hospital. Breaking ground required state and federal law changes, funding from former President Joe Biden's administration and, perhaps most importantly, seed money from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development agency.

"The last thing you want to do is saddle that hospital with a lot of debt," Caldwell said. "That USDA funding mechanism was massive. It really helped move the needle."

But former agency officials worry fewer projects like the hospital could be built in rural America as the Trump administration and Elon Musk's DOGE have targeted Rural Development for large staffing cuts. With fewer employees in rural communities assisting local leaders with their funding needs, there is concern Trump's chainsawing of the federal workforce could leave rural America without a robust safety net.

"We invest in so many businesses in rural America, and when you have fewer businesses, you have fewer jobs and fewer economic opportunities," said Basil Gooden, who led Rural Development during Biden's last year in office. "It's not going to happen overnight. It's going to take a little while before people realize things have really broken."

In a statement, the USDA said Biden officials left the USDA "in complete disarray, including hiring thousands of employees with no sustainable way to pay them. ... Fortunately, President Trump is taking strong action to support farmers."

Rural Development is how the federal government ensures rural areas aren't left behind as those residents move to cities for higher living standards. It funds broadband infrastructure and helps lifelong renters buy homes in population-losing communities.

Former agency officials said keeping rural areas attractive is essential to national security. Consumers have grown accustomed to the convenience of fully stocked grocery store shelves and freezers, and the country's fuel supply increasingly uses ethanol grown in Midwestern corn fields. To keep the supply chain running, some people have to live in areas often bereft of modern-day necessities, such as hospitals or high-speed internet.

Investing in rural communities is critical to ensure a long-term agricultural workforce, especially as the average age of U.S. farmers increases rapidly. That means the people growing America's food and fuel need access to quality grocery stores, childcare and health care.

"Farming ranks among the most hazardous occupations, making access to emergency medical services and hospitals a critical infrastructure need," said Bette Brand, who led the agency during Trump's first term. "Ensuring that rural families can live and work safely is fundamental to maintaining a stable food supply and sustaining agricultural productivity."

The number of projects Rural Development has funded each year has trended downward for years, but it began to nosedive in 2021, agency data shows. Biden officials pointed to the loss of about 2,000 agency employees, out of a total of about 6,000, during the first Trump administration.

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"Our investments have gone down because we just don't have the staffing that we used to have," Gooden said. "We don't have the people on the ground. That's very detrimental."

Gooden hired about 800 more staffers during his tenure, he said, but they were probationary employees, the classification the administration has targeted for dismissal. More than 500 of the employees were let go in the administration's mass terminations at the USDA in February.

To date, more than 1,500 Rural Development staffers have left, the USDA said — likely leaving the agency with fewer staffers than at the end of the first Trump administration. That's roughly 10% of the 15,000 total USDA employees who have left the department.

Brand said the agency made meaningful gains in efficiency in Donald Trump's first term. Continuing to improve efficiency, DOGE's stated goal, is important, she said, but the recent job cuts risk destabilizing rural communities, which have largely supported Trump's candidacies.

"There's a persistent undercurrent of stress among federal employees that's slowing the pace of loans and program implementation," she said. "That doesn't mean change isn't needed, but the way it's executed matters."

She likened the agency to an ocean liner that's left port. "It's as if the agency is mid-voyage — charting a course and making progress — and someone dropped anchor without warning," she said. "You don't stop a ship of that size without consequences. The abruptness disrupts momentum, strands key personnel and risks throwing off balance the very systems rural communities rely on. Reform is necessary, but if the process causes collateral damage to people who are simply doing their jobs, it could create long-term harm."

Brand added reforms must produce lasting results to justify the disruption.

"If you're going to put the agency — and the communities it serves — through this kind of turbulence, the outcomes better be meaningful and durable," she said. "Otherwise, the cost to individuals and local economies may never be recouped."

In an early March speech, Brooke Rollins, Trump's agriculture secretary, announced she would release a plan to restore rural prosperity in the "coming weeks." No plan has been released yet, but she said it would improve the agency's efficiency.

On Trump's 100th day, Rollins released her own list of accomplishments, which included taking "leadership to make rural America prosper again." It linked to her previous statement about her unreleased plan. In a statement to Investigate Midwest, the USDA said "more information ... will be released soon."

Rollins also said the USDA would "invite the private sector" to participate in the endeavor, and she specifically mentioned satellite internet. Musk owns Starlink, which provides satellite internet. The White House has said Musk has pledged to avoid potential conflicts of interest, according to NBC News.

Across the country, only 55% of farms have broadband access, and Starlink has been pushed as an alternative in rural areas because it relies on satellites instead of traditional cable infrastructure. But the federal official who led the government's broadband program pilloried Starlink in a resignation letter in March, according to Politico.

"Stranding all or part of rural America with worse internet so that we can make the world's richest man even richer is yet another in a long line of betrayals by Washington," the official, Evan Feinman, wrote.

Asked if the USDA saw a conflict of interest in Rollins pushing satellite internet, the department did not answer directly. It said its programs are "technology neutral" and it will allow communities to decide what technology "is best for their project."

In her March speech, Rollins added her plan will "restore more power to ... local leaders who know (their) communities better than anyone in Washington."

It's unclear how Rollins' plan differs from Rural Development's existing role. The agency was designed to spur private investment in underserved areas, with the USDA acting as a lender of last resort that cannot compete with banks. Former officials said local communities largely drive what projects are funded.

The federal employees working in state Rural Development offices are also members of the communities in which they operate.

For instance, in South Dakota, local developers have received grants to update rural water systems. "It's South Dakotans doing the work, and it's South Dakotans who care about making sure that they've got clean

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water for their community," said Nikki Gronli, a Biden political appointee who led the agency's state office.

"We are a place that is often forgotten," she added. "I think the best people to do the work here are South Dakotans because they care. It's personal for them. I don't see some large developer coming from Chicago or L.A. that's going to want to invest in South Dakota with our small population."

Out of 39 people in the South Dakota office, nine were fired in February and a few others have accepted retirement offers, Gronli said. In a matter of months, the office has been reduced to 26 staffers.

Recently, Rollins said federal workers who assist farmers with direct loans would not be terminated, according to the North Dakota Monitor. Employees with the Farm Service Agency, a separate USDA division from Rural Development, or those on the "frontline or with the farmers" would be spared, she said.

When asked if Rural Development was included in the definition of "front line," given its importance to farmers' lives, the USDA pointed to an April 22 declaration in which Rollins exempted "national security and public safety" positions from the hiring freeze.

"As the memo states, 'Food Security is National Security,' and Secretary Rollins will not compromise this critical work," the USDA said in a statement.

The memo lists dozens of positions that are exempted, including firefighters and food inspectors. None are related to Rural Development.

First Trump administration instituted agency cuts

Trump has often declared his love for farmers and rural communities, but, like now, his first administration targeted Rural Development for job cuts.

Months into the first Trump administration, then-Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue proposed restructuring the USDA, including abolishing the undersecretary for Rural Development position.

In the USDA hierarchy, an undersecretary is just below the department's top leader. Several undersecretary positions exist, and they can be seen as commitments to important aspects of the USDA's mission. Undersecretaries oversee farm production, food safety and natural resources, for example.

Perdue established an undersecretary of international trade, a priority of the first Trump administration. At the time, advocates worried the move signaled less investment in rural America.

The administration's hiring freeze, implemented in January 2017, also affected Rural Development, and the agency reduced headcount by consolidating administrative duties, such as human resources.

Leadership at the agency turned over a few times before Brand was tapped to head it in early 2020, right before the COVID-19 pandemic started. "That leadership transition made it difficult for us to stay on target on some of these bigger priorities," she said.

In her new role, Brand fielded complaints from state offices. "You would hear it quite often from states that said, 'Well, I need more people. I need more help,'" she said. "But the real question was whether the issue was staffing levels or whether better technology and systems could help existing staff be more effective."

She said modernizing operations was key to meeting demands. In her opinion, if IT systems were stronger, field staff could spend more time in the field.

When the pandemic forced the department to work remotely, Brand, who worked for decades in the farm credit industry, worried about customer service, but, she said, "our customers didn't notice a difference."

Although Trump and Musk have alleged that many federal employees are lazy, Brand had the opposite experience during Trump's first term. During the pandemic, one employee in a rural area did not have high-speed internet at his house. However, he could connect to broadband at the end of his long driveway. He built a shack there so he could work remotely, Brand said.

Trump actions reverse Biden staffing additions

When Biden officials took over the agency, they heard a similar complaint as Brand: "One of the things I heard right away from one of our veteran employees was we need more people," said Gronli, South Dakota's former state director.

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As the pandemic still raged, Robert Lyons, a political appointee in Washington, joined the USDA's office in late 2021. Following the previous administration's reduction in staff, "there were less people doing more work," he said. "Everyone was rolling up their sleeves and doing what felt like two to three jobs."

Many employees did not document their overtime, Lyons said. "We had to tell them, 'Hey, we need Congress to understand that when they allocate funding, this is the amount of work that's actually going into processing these grants and meeting with the community,'" he said.

Fewer staffers, especially at the state level, could translate into frustrating experiences on the ground.

Bert Cunningham, the city manager of Bowie, a town of about 6,000 in north Texas, said he recently applied for a grant to extend a waterline. He had little personal interaction with agency employees, which delayed the process as he tried to navigate the agency's website. "It's all email with Rural Development," he said.

The attractive part is that the USDA offers better terms than banks or other lenders, Cunningham said. It could forgive up to 40% of a loan, he said.

Eventually, Cunningham found an engineering firm that frequently works with the USDA. He said that approach has been more successful.

In the last year of Biden's presidency, the agency pushed to hire more workers in state offices. Many of them were younger workers who, the thought was, would become the next generation of Rural Development leaders as USDA's older workers naturally retired.

After Trump was elected, members of his transition team asked Rural Development leaders questions focused on its workforce: How many worked remotely? Where were they located? In the opinion of Gooden, Biden's last head of Rural Development, the questions were not focused on the agency's mission.

"That was surprising to me," he said. "Whenever I go into an organization, I want to know what keeps folks up at night."

Soon after inauguration day, Trump officials illegally placed a freeze on funding that Congress, the branch of government that controls America's purse strings, had appropriated. The flow of Rural Development funding stopped.

As payments to farms stopped, state offices had little information to share. In response to the rejection of a reimbursement payment for a Maryland farm in early February, a Rural Development staffer said, "We will need to wait and see if the hold will be lifted, for now we cannot process the reimbursement," according to records submitted in a lawsuit against Trump's funding freeze.

On April 15, a judge ruled the USDA's freeze was illegal and ordered funding to resume. At a May 7 Congressional hearing, Rep. Rosa DeLauro, a Connecticut Democrat, said funding for several programs, including for broadband, were still frozen. Rollins did not dispute it.

She said the USDA was complying with court orders and funding for many programs would be made available by the end of May.

Proposed cuts to Medicaid could imperil new hospital

Oklahoma has long struggled with health care access. By 2020, Oklahoma had the second-highest uninsured rate in the country, according to Oklahoma Watch, and Tillman County had one of the highest uninsured rates in the state. About 18% of its several thousand residents had no insurance.

The first step, then, in bringing a new hospital to the area was Oklahoma's expansion of Medicaid access. In June 2020, voters approved a ballot initiative that increased how much a family could make and still be eligible for the program. Since 2021, an additional 330,000 people have received benefits, according to the state.

Expanding Medicaid was a "godsend" for rural hospitals, said Rich Rasmussen, the Oklahoma Hospital Association's president. It opened up a new revenue stream, as the state now reimburses hospitals for care at a level closer to private insurance. "Medicaid has the ability to close the gap for these rural hospitals," he said.

But another obstacle presented itself at the federal level, said Caldwell, the Oklahoma state representative.

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Because facilities in rural areas primarily serve small populations with many low-income and senior patients, they often require federal grants to remain operable. To qualify for the funding, the facilities must be designated as "critical access hospitals." They need to provide 24/7 emergency care. They also need to be at least 35 miles from another critical access hospital.

The hospital's location was too close — by several hundred feet, Caldwell said.

"We started looking at all the loopholes about the road requirements," he said. "We started putting together a plan."

He lobbied James Lankford, Oklahoma's Republican U.S. Senator, who began pushing for a rule change, Caldwell said. Chuck Schumer, the current Senate minority leader for the Democrats, also advocated for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to loosen its rules, as rural New York hospitals had faced similar problems, according to his office.

In 2022, CMS clarified the distance requirement for critical access hospitals. Originally, hospitals needed to be at least 35 miles apart via a "primary road." The definition was narrowed down to be more specific, which allowed the future hospital in Tillman County to be eligible for federal funding.

At the same time, revenue streams to build the hospital were secured.

Caldwell and a few other state representatives shepherded legislation that increased funding for rural hospitals. Money from the American Rescue Plan Act, a Biden economic stimulus to address the COVID-19 pandemic, was also tapped.

U.S. Rep. Tom Cole, a Republican that represents Tillman County and chairs the powerful appropriations committee, wrangled \$6 million for the \$15 million project from Rural Development. The agency's state lead, Ken Corn, a Biden appointee and a former state senator, was also a "huge help," Caldwell said. Corn declined to comment.

Cole said the state Rural Development office was instrumental in jumpstarting the hospital.

"I'm hardly an advocate for the Biden administration," he said, "but the local people that we had working in the ag department were critical to this. Oklahoma is not an area that Joe Biden was going to do particularly well in, and yet the USDA stepped up."

Oklahoma has voted for Trump by a two-to-one margin three times. His support in Tillman County has been even greater.

Caldwell said it's his understanding the hospital's construction has not been affected by the Trump administration's funding freeze. Comanche County Memorial Hospital, which will run the new Tillman County facility, said the project "remains fully supported."

But another Trump initiative could affect the hospital's long-term viability.

Trump has advocated for slicing Medicaid funding to pay for tax cuts for the wealthy. On Monday, House Speaker Mike Johnson released the GOP's tax plan, which includes Medicaid cuts. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated 8.6 million people would lose health care under the proposal, according to the Associated Press.

If Medicaid is slashed, that would erase a significant income source for all hospitals, impact their financial sustainability and scuttle any new projects under development, Rasmussen said. Not only would health care access suffer, but local communities would lose many jobs, further hurting their economies.

"These small hospitals would not be able to survive without that program," he said.

Asked about cutting Medicaid, Caldwell, who chairs the state's appropriations committee, said it was a significant concern because the state would face a budget shortfall.

Medicaid access is "in our state constitution," he said. "If the feds pull back, we will be legally obligated to make it whole. We'll have to find cuts in other spots of the budget."

Speaking before the GOP's budget was released Monday, Cole said reining in government spending was necessary to deal with the government's budget deficit. The potential effect on the Tillman County hospital "depends on how the cuts are done," he said.

"Everybody worries about" cuts to Medicaid, Cole said, "but this gets down to focusing on things that are essential, and I'm comfortable that that's what we'll do."

Comanche, the hospital, said Medicaid cuts would have a “minimal” effect. “A significant portion of Tillman County’s population is eligible for Medicare, which is reimbursed under a different structure,” a spokeswoman said. “As a result, the hospital’s financial outlook remains stable.”

While Congress debates Medicaid cuts — and the potential fate of the Tillman County hospital — Caldwell takes pride in the work he and others did to revive a hospital. He drove by it recently, and the construction “warmed my heart,” he said.

“It’s going to save people’s lives,” he said. “There are going to be people over the next 50 years who get to spend extra time with their loved ones because that hospital is there.”

Sky Chadde has covered the agriculture industry for Investigate Midwest since 2019 and spent much of 2020 focused on the crisis of COVID-19 in meatpacking plants, which included collecting and analyzing data on case counts. He also served as the newsroom’s first managing editor, and is now a full-time reporter.

U.S. Supreme Court lets Trump end protected status for 350,000 Venezuelan migrants

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - MAY 19, 2025 3:32 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court said Monday it will allow, for now, the Trump administration to terminate temporary protections for a group of 350,000 Venezuelans, striking down a lower court’s order that blocked the process.

The order still means the group of Venezuelans on Temporary Protected Status — a designation given to nationals from countries deemed too dangerous to return to remain in the U.S. — will be able to continue to challenge in court the end of their work permits and the possibility of removal. But they no longer have protections from deportation.

No justices signed onto the ruling, which is typical in cases brought before the high court on an emergency basis, but liberal Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson noted she would have denied the request.

TPS status for that group of Venezuelans — a portion of Venezuelans living in the United States, not all of them — was set to end on April 7 under a move by the Trump administration.

But U.S. District Judge Edward Chen of the Northern District of California in March blocked Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem’s decision to vacate an extension of TPS protections that had been put in place by the Biden administration until October 2026.

The case is now before the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

Chen, who was appointed by former President Barack Obama, blocked the Trump administration from removing protections for that group of Venezuelans on the basis that Noem’s actions were “arbitrary and capricious,” and potentially motivated by racism.

“Acting on the basis of a negative group stereotype and generalizing such stereotype to the entire group is the classic example of racism,” Chen wrote in his order.

Noem cited gang activity as her reason for not extending TPS for the group of 350,000 Venezuelans, who came to the United States in 2023.

A second group of 250,000 Venezuelans who were granted TPS in 2021 will have their work and deportation protections expire in September. Chen’s order did not apply to the second group of Venezuelans.

Those with TPS have deportation protections and are allowed to work and live in the United States for 18 months, unless extended by the DHS secretary.

Democrats criticized Monday’s decision, including Colorado Sen. Michael Bennet.

“Ending protections for Venezuelans fleeing Maduro’s regime is cruel, short-sighted, and destabilizing,” he wrote on social media.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, Democrat of Washington state, wrote on social media that Venezuelans “face extreme oppression, arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killings, and torture — the exact type of situation that requires our government to provide TPS.”

Monday's order is one of several immigration-related emergency requests from the Trump administration before the Supreme Court.

Last week, the high court heard oral arguments that stemmed from an executive order signed by President Donald Trump to end the constitutional right to birthright citizenship.

And justices in a separate case, again, denied the Trump administration from resuming the deportations of Venezuelans under an 18th-century wartime law known as the Alien Enemies Act.

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

Conservatives on U.S. House Budget Committee switch votes, advance GOP package

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MAY 18, 2025 11:27 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republicans on the Budget Committee moved the “one big, beautiful” reconciliation bill a step closer to the chamber floor in a rare Sunday night vote after a handful of conservatives blocked the bill Friday.

The massive deal squeaked through on a 17-16 vote, with four far-right panel members voting “present.” They were Reps. Josh Brecheen of Oklahoma, Andrew Clyde of Georgia, Ralph Norman of South Carolina and Chip Roy of Texas. All four voted no on the bill Friday.

Rep. Lloyd Smucker of Pennsylvania flipped his Friday vote of “no” to support the massive budget reconciliation deal that cuts safety net programs to pay for extending, and expanding, President Donald Trump’s 2017 tax law — at a cost of \$3.8 trillion over the next decade.

Smucker, the panel’s vice chair, switched his vote Friday because of committee procedural rules that allowed him to propose reconsideration of the measure.

Brecheen, Clyde, Norman and Roy voted “no” on Friday after demanding work requirements for some Medicaid recipients begin prior to the bill’s stated date of 2029, and that clean energy tax credits phase out at a faster pace.

Roy wrote on social media Sunday night that he changed his vote “out of respect for the Republican Conference and the President to move the bill forward” but that the bill “does not yet meet the moment.”

Other details on why the members changed their votes to “present” were unclear.

When asked by Democrats on the panel whether anything had changed in the bill, Budget Committee Chair Jody Arrington said negotiations were “fluid.”

“Deliberations continue at this very moment. They will continue on into the week, and I suspect right up until the time we put this big, beautiful bill on the floor of the House,” said Arrington of Texas.

Ranking Member Brendan Boyle of Pennsylvania said his side of the aisle wanted “transparency.”

“If the bill has changed and there’s been some side agreement reached, I think it’s important that all the members have the full details on that in advance of any vote,” Boyle said.

Massive bill

The committee’s tense Sunday night meeting began nearly 30 minutes late.

House Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana told reporters on Capitol Hill shortly beforehand that talks were going “great” and that “minor modifications” had been made over the weekend.

The 1,116-page bill package that includes bills from 11 separate committees will now need to clear the House Committee on Rules to advance to a full House vote. House members are set to leave for Memorial Day recess on Thursday.

As written, the bill cuts more than \$600 billion over the next decade from Medicaid, the government health program for low-income individuals as well as those with disabilities.

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Credit downgrade

Sunday night's vote came just two days after Moody's Ratings downgraded the U.S. government's credit rating, citing a gloomy outlook for U.S. debt and interest burdens.

"Successive US administrations and Congress have failed to agree on measures to reverse the trend of large annual fiscal deficits and growing interest costs," a Friday statement from the investment rating service read. "We do not believe that material multi-year reductions in mandatory spending and deficits will result from current fiscal proposals under consideration."

The reconciliation package could add up to \$3.3 trillion to the national debt through 2034, reaching \$5.2 trillion if temporary provisions are made permanent, according to analysis by the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. The Congressional Budget Office has not yet released scores for all parts of the megabill.

The far-right House Freedom Caucus board released a statement shortly after Sunday night's vote, saying the bill continues to increase deficits "with possible savings years down the road that may never materialize."

"Thanks to discussions over the weekend, the bill will be closer to the budget resolution framework we agreed upon in the House in April, but it fails to actually honor our promise to significantly correct the spending trajectory of the federal government and lead our nation towards a balanced budget," according to the statement posted on social media.

Members of the caucus who do not serve on the Budget Committee made similar public statements.

"America faces the reality of financial insolvency and looming bankruptcy. For 9 years, I have remained faithful to principles that include an end to the continuous growth of FedGov deficit spending. I will not support a federal budget that increases federal deficit spending," GOP Rep. Clay Higgins of Louisiana wrote on his X profile Sunday.

Republican Rep. Mark Green of Tennessee wrote on the social media site, "The Moody's downgrade is yet another wake up call. We need to decrease spending immediately!"

Thin margins

As expected, and following Friday's same result, Democrats on the panel voted unanimously against the package.

Republicans hold a slim 220-213 margin in the House, meaning that if more than three Republicans vote with Democrats — who are all expected to vote against the package — the bill would fail on the floor.

Republicans swiftly voted down several last-ditch efforts by Democrats on the panel to protect low-income health care and food assistance programs, as well as clean energy and manufacturing tax credits.

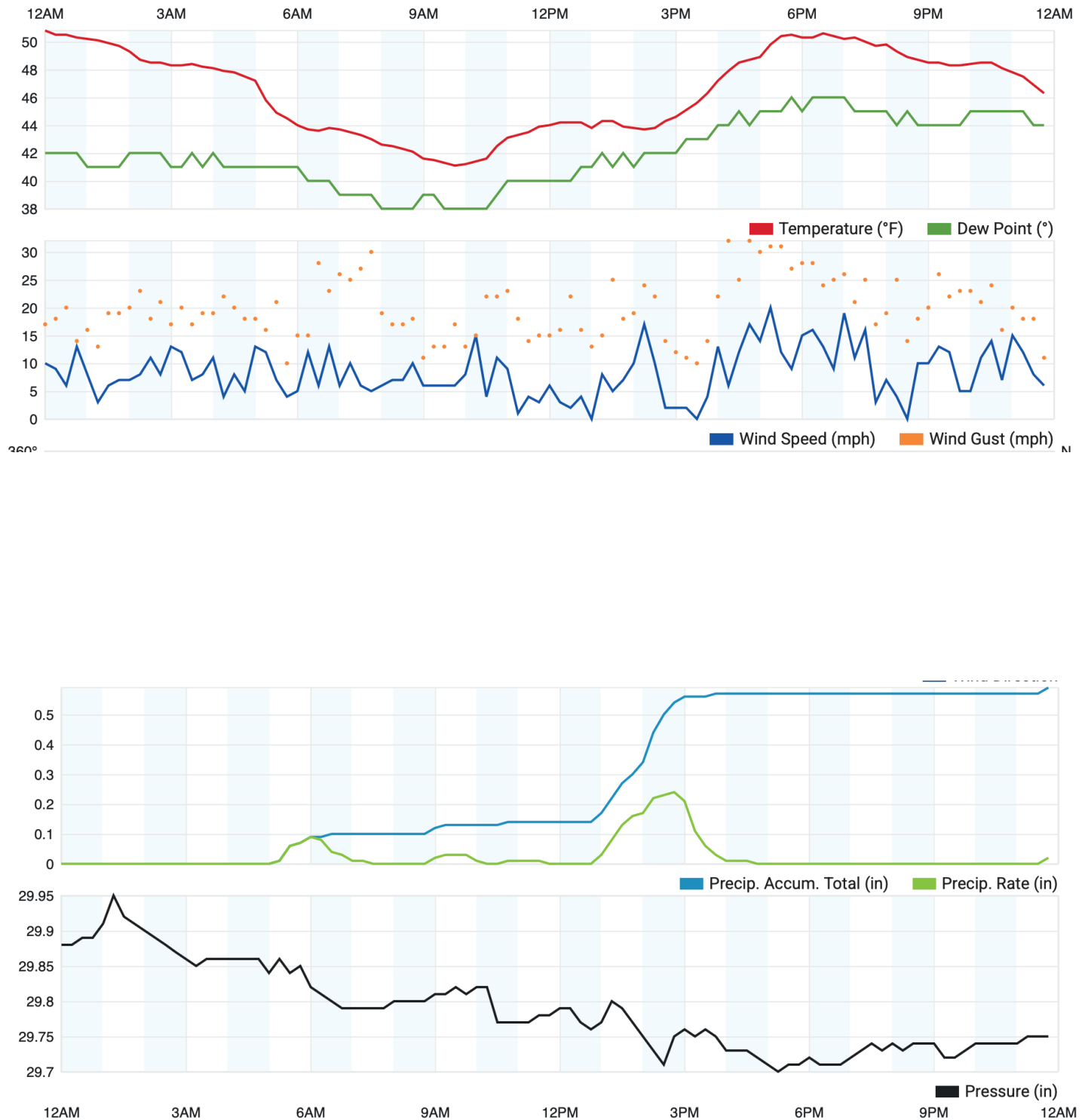
Johnson must also contend with a parallel — and expensive — fight among his conference on the state and local taxes, or SALT, deduction. Republicans who represent high-income, high-tax blue states like California and New York, are demanding a more generous cap on the amount they can deduct.

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

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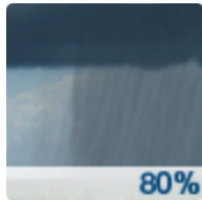
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Tuesday



High: 43 °F

Showers

Tuesday Night



Low: 33 °F

Showers then
Rain/Snow

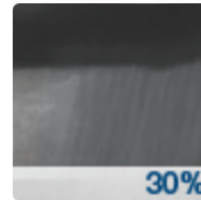
Wednesday



High: 48 °F

Rain/Snow
Likely then
Showers
Likely

Wednesday
Night



Low: 35 °F

Chance
Showers

Thursday

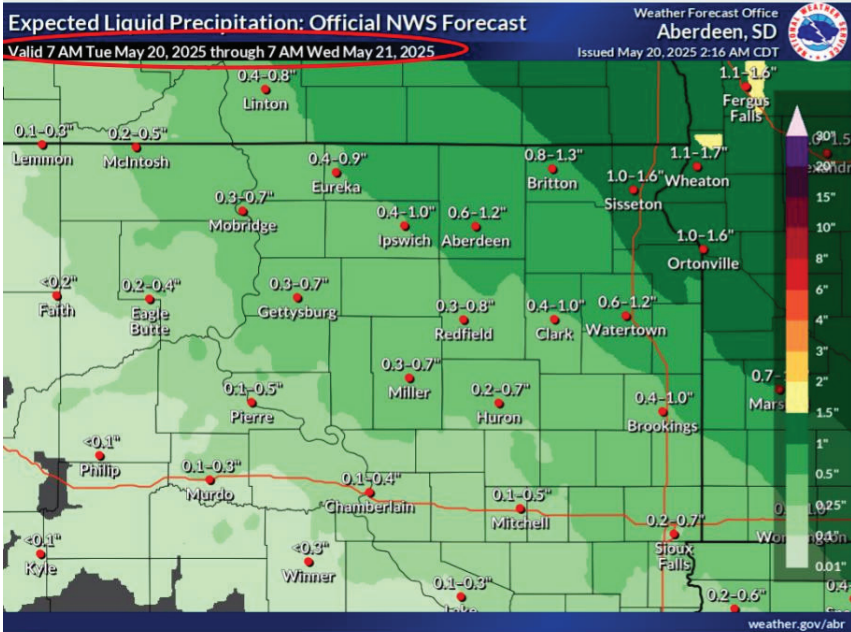


High: 63 °F

Partly Sunny

Potential Precipitation Amounts Over The Next 24 Hours May 20, 2025 4:12 AM

50% chance that precipitation amounts will fall within this range over the next 24 hours



Key Messages:

- Additional Rainfall through Wednesday morning
- A majority of precipitation will fall by late tonight
- Percent chance of additional rainfall for Tue -> Wed:
 - 0.50" or more: 70-95%
 - Over northeast SD/west central MN, 30-70% over central/north central SD
 - 1.00" or more: 50-75%
 - Over northeast SD/west central MN, <50% over central/north central SD



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

There is more rain coming today and tonight from the east and southeast. Much of the forecast area is likely to receive another half inch or more of rainfall by 7 AM CDT Wednesday.

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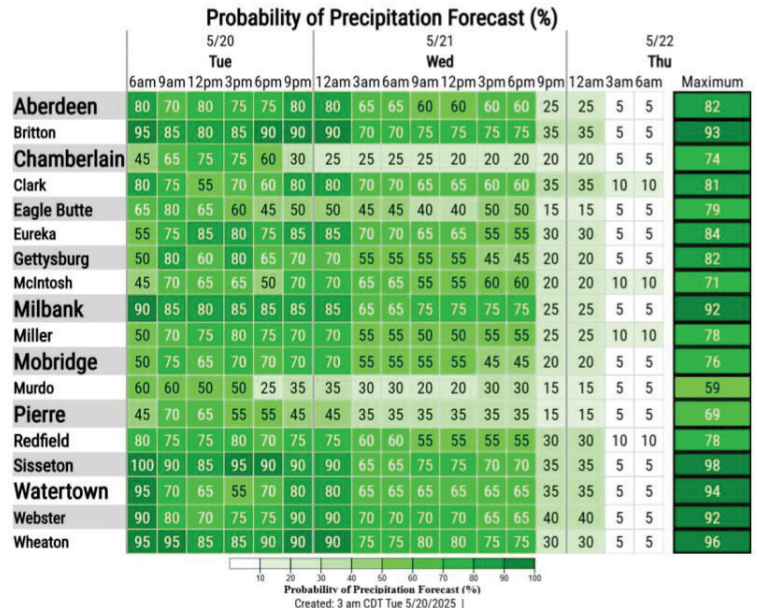
Timing Rain Chances Through Wednesday

May 20, 2025

4:21 AM

Rain may mix with or change to snow at times later tonight into Wednesday morning.

- **Today:** Highs: 42-51°
 - Cloudy. Showers continuing through the day.
 - There is a **Marginal Risk** for excessive rainfall across northeast SD and west central MN today.
- **Tonight:** Lows: 33-38°
 - Cloudy. Showers continuing through the night.
 - **Rain may mix with or change to snow at times** over portions of north central and northeast SD. Little to no snow accumulation is expected at this time.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Precipitation probabilities remain quite high for quite a while today through tonight before beginning to taper off Wednesday. The bulk of the remaining precipitation amounts will add up today and tonight. It could get cold enough later tonight for some snow to mix in with the rain across portions of north central and northeast South Dakota. Accumulating snow is not anticipated at this time.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 51 °F at 12:00 AM

Low Temp: 41 °F at 9:41 AM

Wind: 35 mph at 5:30 PM

Precip: : 0.57

Day length: 15 hours, 09 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 96 in 1934

Record Low: 23 in 1907

Average High: 72

Average Low: 46

Average Precip in May.: 2.21

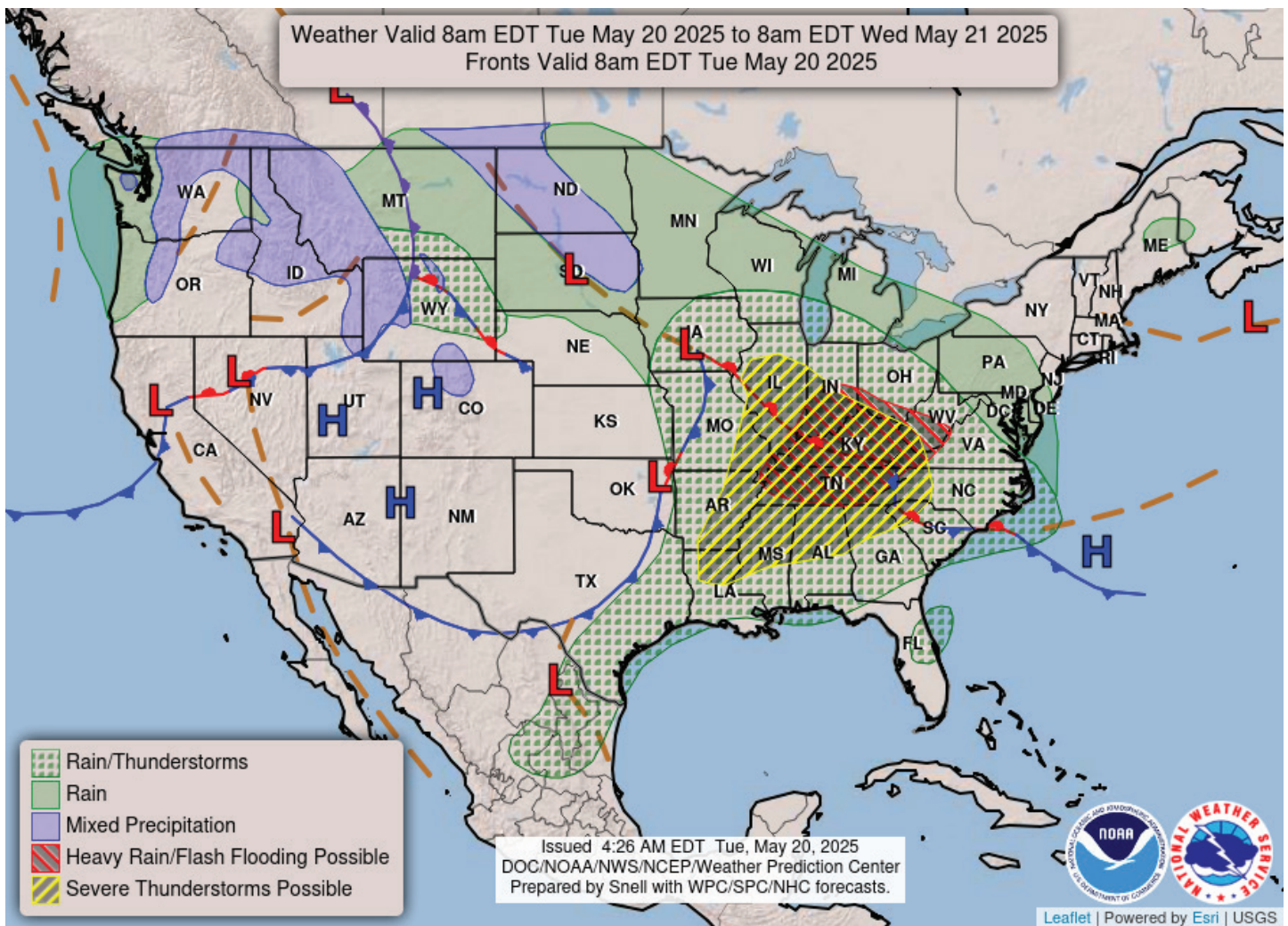
Precip to date in May.: 2.30

Average Precip to date: 6.18

Precip Year to Date: 4.93

Sunset Tonight: 9:03:43 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:53:16 am



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Today in Weather History

May 20th, 1965: A tornado hit north of Frederick. On one farm, a barn and all outbuildings were destroyed, and windows exploded outward at the house. The tornado was estimated to have been on the ground for about 5 miles.

May 20th, 1974: Softball-sized hail fell in Kennebec, Lyman County, breaking many windows in schools and other buildings.

1894 - A record late snow of two to eight inches whitened parts of central and eastern Kentucky. Lexington KY received six inches of snow. (The Weather Channel)

1916 - A tornado struck the town of Codell, KS. A tornado struck the town on the same day the following year (1917), and a third tornado hit Cordell on May 20th in 1918. (The Weather Channel)

1957 - A tornado touched down to the southwest of Kansas City and traveled a distance of seventy-one miles cutting a swath of near total destruction through the southeastern suburbs of Ruskin Heights and Hickman Mills. The tornado claimed the lives of forty-five persons, and left hundreds homeless. It was the worst weather disaster of record for Kansas City. About all that remained of one house was a small table and a fish bowl atop, with the fish still swimming about inside the bowl, rather unconcerned. (The Kansas City Weather Almanac)

1987 - Thunderstorms in southern Texas produced grapefruit size hail, near the town of Dilley ("by dilly"), and produced wind gusts to 73 mph at Lake Amistad. The large hail broke windows, killed small animals, and damaged watermelon. Thunderstorms developing along a warm front produced severe weather from Indiana to the Dakotas. Thunderstorms produced baseball size hail at Denver IA, and wind gusts to 80 mph in southern Henry County IL. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms in the south central U.S. produced wind gusts to 70 mph at Omaha, NE, and wind gusts to 80 mph at Midland and Dallas, TX. Temperatures in California soared into the 90s and above 100 degrees. San Jose CA reported a record high of 97 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Pre-dawn thunderstorms produced large hail in eastern Oklahoma and northwestern Arkansas. Later in the morning thunderstorms in North Carolina produced dime size hail at Hanging Dog. Thunderstorms also produced severe weather from the Lower Mississippi Valley to the Central Plains Region later that day and night, with baseball size hail reported around Lawn, Novice and Eola TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather across the southeastern quarter of the nation through the day and night. Severe thunderstorms spawned six tornadoes, including one which injured two persons at Algoma, MS, and another which injured nine persons at Rogersville, MO. There were 119 reports of large hail or damaging winds. Thunderstorms produced baseball size hail at Houston MO and damaging winds which killed one person at Toccoa GA. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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Morris Massey was a professor of communication at the University of Colorado. While there, he became famous for a film entitled, "What You Are is Where You Were When...." Though the title may be confusing, the message is not. All of us are "value programmed" in our homes by the time we are six.

"Value programmed" means that our behaviors or lifestyles come from our parents or primary teachers. And, these behaviors or "values" are so deeply ingrained within us that we "live" or "behave them" without even thinking about them. Unless there is an event in our lives that forces us to change, we take them to our grave.

"My son," said Solomon, once again wanting his son's undivided attention, challenged him to "keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teachings."

Now, Solomon or the mother of that particular son certainly did not know about Morris Massey or his research. But, they did know the importance, influence, and impact that how they lived and what they taught their children was critical for their children's wellbeing. So, they chose to make an issue about how they should live. And, furthermore, made no apology for doing so.

Throughout Scripture, fathers and mothers are authorized, with divine authority, to set the boundaries, behaviors, and attitudes of their children. Solomon and his wife were determined to do this. They realized their obligation to God and were willing to obey Him.

Today's Prayer: Father, children are entrusted to parents as Your gifts to them, to lead and train them in Your paths. Give parents courage and insight to follow Your directions! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Scripture: "My son, obey your father's commands, and don't neglect your mother's instruction."
-Proverbs 6:20

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.16.25

2 22 42 62 66 14

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$139,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 16 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.19.25

4 24 25 45 47 2

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$35,220,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 31 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.19.25

22 23 32 35 39 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 46 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.17.25

2 22 24 30 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 46 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.19.25

11 12 27 30 35 7

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 15 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.19.25

13 14 37 50 60 11

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$146,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 15 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

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

News from the **AP** Associated Press

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

By JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

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

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

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

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

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

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

How do I get emergency updates?

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

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

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

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

Where should I take shelter?

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

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

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

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

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

How can I keep my home safe?

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

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

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

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

What should I do if I'm driving?

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

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

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

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

Slow progress and no major breakthroughs dampen hopes for Russia-Ukraine peace deal

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump's phone calls with the leaders of Russia and Ukraine deepened expectations that progress might soon be made on ending those countries' more than three-year war, though frustration at the slow pace of negotiations and the absence of any significant breakthrough kept hopes low.

"It is obvious that Russia is trying to buy time to continue the war and occupation," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Tuesday on Telegram. "We are working with partners to put pressure on the Russians to behave differently," he added in an apparent reference to further international sanctions on Russia.

Ukraine has offered a comprehensive 30-day ceasefire, which Moscow has effectively rejected by imposing far-reaching conditions, and Zelenskyy proposed a face-to-face meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin but the Russian leader spurned that offer.

Trump said his personal intervention was needed to push peace efforts forward, and on Monday he held separate talks over the phone with Zelenskyy and Putin.

Russia and Ukraine will "immediately" begin ceasefire negotiations, Trump announced, though there was no detail on when or where such talks might take place.

"The status quo has not changed," Mykhailo Podoliak, a senior adviser to Zelenskyy, wrote on the social platform X on Tuesday.

U.S. officials have for the past few months urged Russia and Ukraine to reach a settlement, as Trump sought a swift end to Europe's biggest conflict since World War II.

Trump said his talks with Putin on Monday were "excellent," but European officials were skeptical about Russia's intentions.

"Putin has never changed his position," Estonian Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur said in Brussels on Tuesday. "Russia actually doesn't want to end this war."

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, said Russia's failure to negotiate in good faith should trigger threatened U.S. sanctions.

"We really haven't seen, you know, the pressure on Russia from these talks," she told reporters.

Also, some were unconvinced by Putin's promise to Trump that Russia is "ready to work with" Ukraine on a "memorandum" outlining the framework for "a possible future peace treaty."

"It appears that Putin has devised a way to offer Trump an interim, tangible outcome from Washington's peace efforts without making any real concessions," Tatiana Stanovaya, a senior fellow at the Carnegie

Russia Eurasia Center, said on X.

The warring countries are insisting on apparently irreconcilable conditions for peace, and even a temporary truce has been out of reach.

The first direct Russia-Ukraine peace talks since the early weeks of Moscow's 2022 invasion ended after less than two hours last Friday, and while both sides agreed on a large prisoner swap, they clearly remained far apart on key conditions for ending the fighting.

Strikes on Gaza kill at least 60 people, local officials say, as criticism against Israel mounts

By WAFAA SHURAF, SAMY MAGDY and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli strikes pounded Gaza overnight and into Tuesday, hitting a family home and a school-turned-shelter, and killing at least 60 people, Palestinian health officials said, as Israel pressed its war against Hamas despite mounting international condemnation.

Israel launched another major offensive in the territory in recent days, saying it aims to return dozens of hostages held by Hamas and destroy the militant group. More than 300 people have been killed in Gaza since the start of the latest onslaught, according to local health officials.

Israel says it seeks to seize Gaza and hold on to territory there, displace hundreds of thousands of people and secure aid distribution.

As the new offensive ramps up, Israel agreed to allow a limited amount of aid into the war-ravaged territory of roughly 2 million people after a 2 1/2 month blockade that prevented the entry of food, medicine and fuel, among other goods. The blockade prompted warnings from food experts of a risk of famine.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he made the decision to let in minimal aid after pressure from allies, who he said couldn't support Israel so long as "images of hunger" were coming out of Gaza.

Criticism of Israel's conduct intensified Monday when allies Canada, France and the United Kingdom threatened "concrete actions" against the country, including sanctions, and called on Israel to stop its "egregious" new military actions in Gaza. Netanyahu rejected the criticism, saying it was "a huge prize" for Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack that would invite more such violence.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot denounced the Israeli government's "blind violence" in Gaza that he said has turned the Palestinian territory into a "place of death."

"This must stop," Barrot told French radio France Inter on Tuesday.

Jens Laerke, spokesman for the U.N. humanitarian agency OCHA, said the world body had received approvals for about 100 trucks to enter Gaza.

But he said only five trucks have crossed into Gaza since Monday and those do not appear to have been taken yet by aid groups for distribution. It was not immediately clear what was causing the holdup.

The U.N. says that amount of trucks is just "drop in the ocean" of what is needed. Some 600 trucks a day had entered during a ceasefire earlier this year.

Israeli politician criticizes killing 'babies as a hobby'

Criticism against Israel's conduct in Gaza came also from inside the country, with a leader of Israel's center-left politics saying on Tuesday that Israel was becoming an "outcast among nations" because of the government's approach to the war.

"A sane country doesn't engage in fighting against civilians, doesn't kill babies as a hobby and doesn't set for itself the goals of expelling a population," Yair Golan, a retired general and leader of the opposition Democrats party, told Reshet Bet radio.

His comments were rare criticism from within Israel of its wartime conduct in Gaza. Many Israelis have criticized Netanyahu throughout the war, but that has been mostly limited to what opponents argue are his political motives to continue the war. Criticism like Golan's, over the war's toll on Palestinian civilians, has been almost unheard.

Netanyahu swiftly slammed Golan's remarks, calling them "wild incitement" against Israeli soldiers and accusing Golan of echoing "disgraceful antisemitic blood libels" against the country.

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Golan, who donned his uniform during Hamas' 2023 attack to join the fight against the raiding militants, previously sparked an uproar when as deputy military chief of staff in 2016, he likened the atmosphere in Israel to that of Nazi-era Germany.

Strikes pound Gaza

Over recent days, strikes have pounded areas across Gaza and Israel has issued evacuation orders for Gaza's second-largest city, Khan Younis, which endured a previous offensive that left vast destruction.

In the latest strikes, two in northern Gaza hit a family home and a school-turned-shelter, killing at least 22 people, more than half of them women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

A strike in the central city of Deir al-Balah killed 13 people, and another in the nearby built-up Nuseirat refugee camp killed 15, according to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital.

Two strikes in the southern city of Khan Younis killed 10 people, according to Nasser Hospital.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military, which says it only targets militants and blames Hamas for civilian deaths because the group operates in densely populated areas.

The war in Gaza began when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting 251 others. The militants are still holding 58 captives, around a third believed to be alive, after most of the rest were returned in ceasefire agreements or other deals.

Israel's retaliatory offensive, which has destroyed large swaths of Gaza, has killed more than 53,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count.

The NFL tush push ban proposal is back on the table at the spring owners meetings

By DAVE CAMPBELL AP Pro Football Writer

EAGAN, Minn. (AP) — Can the tush push cross the goal line for good? Or will the NFL's touchy and trendy short-yardage strategy ultimately get stuffed?

League owners will answer that question in Minnesota, where they're holding their spring meetings next to Vikings headquarters on Tuesday and Wednesday. After tabling the issue seven weeks ago for further discussion, a vote is expected on the proposal by the Green Bay Packers to prohibit the play popularized by the reigning Super Bowl champion Philadelphia Eagles. To pass the ban, 24 of the 32 teams must approve.

Commissioner Roger Goodell said last month he believes the owners will reach a consensus on the issue that involves both competitive integrity and player safety. The league released a revised proposal by the Packers on Monday that broadens the language to prohibit pushing, pulling, lifting or encircling a runner by any offensive player, not specific to quarterback assists. The penalty is 10 yards. This is what the rulebook stated 20 years ago, until the ban was lifted because of the difficulty of enforcement.

Eagles owner Jeffrey Lurie has been leading the defense of the play his team developed with the coinciding arrival of strong-legged quarterback Jalen Hurts in 2020.

The NFL has no conclusive data supporting a connection between the tush push and an injury risk increase, as Lurie noted at the last league meetings in Florida. The Buffalo Bills are also a frequent user and favor a ban for safety, though, as head coach Sean McDermott said after the vote was tabled. The tush push, which has also been dubbed the "Brotherly Shove" in a catchy and clever twist on the Greek-to-English translation of Philadelphia, not only assigns a player to push the backside of the quarterback for extra power behind a tight nine-man line but sometimes involves a blocker on the end pivoting to try to pull the ball carrier past the marker.

Health is only half of this debate, however. Entertainment is the other.

While the Eagles have nearly perfected the play for fourth-and-1 or 1-yard line situations with well-chosen personnel and well-rehearsed precision, it looks more like rugby than football.

The Packers, who lost to the Eagles in the first round of the playoffs last season, have been among several teams voicing their distaste for the evolution of the traditional quarterback sneak into an all-out scrum. On the memo distributed by the NFL on Monday, the reasons cited for the proposal are player

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safety and pace of play.

"It was controversial when the forward pass came out," Lurie said at the last league meetings. "I think aestheticism is very subjective. I've never judged whether a play looks OK."

Regardless of the fate of the play, the fairness and fun of it are sure to be talking points throughout the season, particularly leading up to the Monday night game on Nov. 10 when the Packers host the Eagles.

Both of those teams have a good chance to be in contention in the loaded NFC for the playoffs, which could unfold a little differently if a proposal by the Detroit Lions passes this week. Like the tush push, a vote was tabled at the last gathering for further discussion on altering the seeding rules to base the order strictly on overall winning percentage rather than guaranteeing division winners the first four spots in each conference.

In this case, division winners would no longer get the automatic home game like the Los Angeles Rams did in January after finishing 10-7. Though wildfires forced the game to be moved to Arizona, the Vikings had to hit the road despite going 14-3, one game behind the Lions.

NFL owners will also consider from the competition committee several adjustments on the onside kick with the goal of increasing the recovery rate and decide whether to approve player participation in flag football in the 2028 Summer Olympics.

World shares advance after China cuts interest rates to boost economy

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

World shares rallied Tuesday after China cut key interest rates to help fend off an economic malaise worsened by trade friction with Washington.

Shares in China's CATL, the world's largest maker of electric batteries, jumped 16.4% in its Hong Kong trading debut after it raised about \$4.6 billion in the world's largest IPO this year. Its shares traded in Shenzhen, mainland China's smaller share market after Shanghai, gained 1.2% after dipping earlier in the day.

The Reserve Bank of Australia reduced its benchmark interest rate by a quarter percentage for a second time this year, to 3.85%, judging inflation to be within its target range. The earlier reduction, in February, was Australia's first rate cut since October 2020.

The future for the S&P 500 lost 0.3% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was 0.1% lower. In European trading, Germany's DAX edged 0.2% higher to 23,988.93, while the CAC 40 in Paris climbed 0.1% to 7,892.94. Britain's FTSE 100 rose 0.5% to 8,745.62.

China's central bank made its first cut to its loan prime rates in seven months in a move welcomed by investors eager for more stimulus as the world's second largest economy feels the pinch of Trump's higher tariffs.

The People's Bank of China cut the one-year loan prime rate, the reference rate for pricing all new loans and outstanding floating rate loans, to 3.00% from 3.1%. It cut the 5-year loan prime rate to 3.5% from 3.6%.

With China's chief concern being deflation due to slack demand rather than inflation, economists have been expecting such a move. Data reported Monday showed the economy under pressure from Trump's trade war, with retail sales and factory output slowing and property investment continuing to fall.

Tuesday's cuts probably won't be the last this year, Zichun Huang of Capital Economics said in a report. "But modest rate cuts alone are unlikely to meaningfully boost loan demand or wider economic activity," Huang said.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng gained 1.5% to 23,681.48, while the Shanghai Composite index advanced 0.4% to 3,380.48.

In Tokyo, the Nikkei 225 inched up 0.1% to 37,529.49, while Australia's S&P/ASX 200 rose 0.6% to 8,343.30. South Korea's Kospi lost 0.1% to 2,601.80, while the Taiex in Taiwan was nearly unchanged.

India's Sensex lost 0.8%.

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On Monday, U.S. stocks, bonds and the value of the U.S. dollar drifted through a quiet day after Moody's Ratings became the last of the three major credit-rating agencies to say the U.S. federal government no longer deserves a top-tier "Aaa" rating.

The S&P 500 picked up 0.1% and the Dow industrials added 0.3%. The Nasdaq composite was nearly unchanged.

The downgrade by Moody's coincided with a debate in Washington over potential cuts in tax rates that could siphon away more revenue.

If the government has to pay more in interest to borrow cash, that could cause interest rates to rise for U.S. households and businesses, too, in turn slowing the economy.

The downgrade adds to a long list of concerns on investors' minds, chief among them President Donald Trump's trade war. It has forced investors globally to question whether the U.S. bond market and the U.S. dollar still deserve their reputations as some of the safest places to park cash during a crisis.

The U.S. economy has held up so far and hopes are high that Trump will eventually relent on his tariffs after striking trade deals with other countries.

But big companies have been warning about uncertainty over the future. Walmart, for example, said recently that it will likely have to raise prices because of tariffs. That caused Trump over the weekend to criticize Walmart and demand it and China "eat the tariffs."

Walmart's stock slipped 0.1% Monday.

In other trading early Tuesday, U.S. benchmark crude oil lost 4 cents to \$62.10 per barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, shed 11 cents to \$65.43 per barrel.

The U.S. dollar fell to 144.44 Japanese yen from 144.86 yen. The euro climbed to \$1.1261 from \$1.1244.

How uproar over a Māori haka, beloved in New Zealand life, sowed chaos and gridlock in Parliament

By CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-McLAY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — The haka, a chanting dance of challenge, is sacred to New Zealand's Māori people but it's become a beloved cultural institution among New Zealanders of all races. Spine-tingling performances at sports events, funerals and graduations often go viral online, a non-partisan point of pride for the country abroad.

But one haka performed in protest in New Zealand's Parliament by three legislators last November has provoked fierce division among lawmakers about whether it was an act of peaceful dissent, or disruptive and even intimidating to their opponents.

A vote to approve unprecedented, lengthy bans from Parliament for the Māori party lawmakers who enacted the protest was unexpectedly suspended on Tuesday. Debate will resume in June, when it threatens to gridlock the legislative agenda until politicians from all parties reach consensus on what the punishment should be.

Hundreds of protesters against the sanctions waited outside Parliament's front doors in New Zealand's capital, Wellington, on Tuesday to greet the Māori party lawmakers with a haka when they emerged.

What is the haka?

The haka was once viewed as a war dance, but that understanding has changed in New Zealand as it has been embraced in a range of celebratory, somber and ceremonial settings. It's an expression of Māori identity and while sacred, it can be performed by people of any race who are educated by Māori in the words, movements and cultural protocols.

Emotional haka have generated news headlines in the past year when performed by soldiers farewelling a New Zealander who died fighting in Ukraine, and in Paris by athletes from New Zealand's Olympic team. While the best-known haka is "ka mate," the chant often performed by the All Blacks rugby team before games, there are many variants.

Why was this one controversial?

Last November's protest wasn't the first time a haka has rung out in Parliament. Performances regularly

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follow the passage of laws important to Māori.

But some lawmakers decried this one for two reasons: because the legislators from Te Pāti Māori, the Māori Party, left their seats and strode across the floor toward government politicians while performing it, and because it disrupted the vote on a proposed law.

When asked how the Māori party would vote on a bill they said would dismantle Indigenous rights, Hana-Rāwhiti Maipi-Clarke – New Zealand's youngest parliamentarian, at 22 – tore up a copy of the law and began the haka, joined by two of her colleagues.

The law, an attempt to rewrite New Zealand's founding treaty between Māori tribal leaders and the British crown, was widely unpopular and has since been defeated. But for six months, a committee of the lawmakers' peers have fought furiously about how — or whether — their protest of it should be punished.

Why is debate about it still going?

Usually there's agreement among parliamentarians about penalties for errant behavior. But this episode polarized the committee considering the lawmakers' actions.

Its report recommended Maipi-Clarke, who the committee said showed contrition in a letter, be suspended for seven days and her colleagues for 21 days. That's the harshest penalty ever assigned to New Zealand lawmakers; the previous record was three days.

Parliament Speaker Gerry Brownlee this month scheduled a rare, unlimited debate in Parliament until all parties could find consensus on the penalty, citing the severity of the proposed bans. But minutes after the debate began Tuesday, it was adjourned at the government's behest after they allowed the Māori party lawmakers to stay until after Thursday's budget was delivered.

It permitted the government their budget week agenda and meant the Māori lawmakers — opponents of the government — wouldn't miss one of Parliament's most significant dates. But the debate about the bans will then resume.

Opposition leader Chris Hipkins, the only opponent of the sanctions to speak before debate was suspended, cited episodes where lawmakers have brawled in Parliament and driven a tractor up the building's steps, but were not suspended, as evidence that the bans weren't fair.

But Judith Collins, the chair of the committee that produced the sanctions, said the penalties were "not about the haka." Collins said the lawmakers' behavior was the most egregious she'd ever witnessed.

What happens next?

The debate will resume on June 5, when it threatens to stall usual government business once more. The government said Tuesday that it would not back down from the punishments suggested and opposition parties said they couldn't be swayed from disputing them.

Outside Parliament, activist Eru Kapa-Kingi told the assembled crowd that the haka was "a source of fear" in Parliament.

"Even though when the All Blacks do it it's a good thing," he added.

Man executed for the 2000 killing of a police officer in Indiana's second execution in 15 years

By SOPHIA TAREEN and ED WHITE Associated Press

MICHIGAN CITY, Ind. (AP) — An Indiana man convicted in the fatal shooting of a police officer in 2000 was executed Tuesday by lethal injection in the state's second execution in 15 years.

Benjamin Ritchie, 45, had been on Indiana's death row since 2002, when he was convicted of killing Beech Grove Police Officer Bill Toney during a chase on foot.

Ritchie was executed at the Indiana State Prison in Michigan City, according to Indiana Department of Correction officials. IDOC said in a statement that the process started shortly after midnight and Ritchie was pronounced dead at 12:46 a.m.

Ritchie's last meal was from the Olive Garden and he expressed love, support and peace for his friends and family, according to the statement.

Under state law, he was allowed five witnesses at his execution, which included his attorney Steve

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Schutte, who told reporters he had a limited view of the process.

"I couldn't see his face. He was lying flat by that time," Schutte said. "He sat up, twitched, laid back down."

The process was carried out hours after the U.S. Supreme Court declined to take the case, exhausting all of Ritchie's legal options to fight the death sentence.

Dozens of people, both anti-death penalty advocates and supporters of Toney, stood outside the prison until early Tuesday.

Indiana resumed executions in December after a yearslong hiatus due to a scarcity of lethal injection drugs nationwide. Prison officials provided photos of the execution chamber before Joseph Corcoran's execution, showing a space that looks like an operating room with a gurney, fluorescent lighting and an adjacent viewing room. They've since offered few other details.

Among 27 states with death penalty laws, Indiana is one of two that bars media witnesses. The other, Wyoming, has conducted one execution in the last half-century.

The Associated Press and other media organizations filed a federal lawsuit in Indiana seeking media access, but a federal judge denied a preliminary injunction last week that would have allowed journalists to witness Ritchie's execution and future ones. The judge found that barring the news media doesn't violate the First Amendment nor does it single out the news media for unequal treatment.

The execution in Indiana is among 12 scheduled in eight states this year. Ritchie's execution and two others in Texas and Tennessee will be carried out this week.

The 2000 fatal shooting of a police officer

Ritchie was 20 when he and others stole a van in Beech Grove, near Indianapolis. He then fired at Toney during a foot chase, killing him.

At the time Ritchie was on probation from a 1998 burglary conviction.

Toney, 31, had worked at the Beech Grove Police Department for two years. The married father of two was the first officer of the small department to be killed by gunfire in the line of duty.

Relatives spoke at a clemency hearing last week in support of the execution.

"It's time. We're all tired," said Dee Dee Horen, who was Toney's wife. "It is time for this chapter of my story, our story, to be closed. It's time for us to remember Bill, to remember Bill's life, and not his death."

Appealing a death sentence

Ritchie's attorneys have fought the death sentence, arguing his legal counsel at trial was ineffective because his lawyers failed to fully investigate and present evidence on his fetal alcohol spectrum disorders and childhood lead exposure.

Current defense attorneys say Ritchie suffered "severe brain damage" because his mother abused alcohol and drugs during pregnancy and he's struggled with decision-making. He was also diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 2005.

Disability rights advocates argued that Ritchie's brain damage should have excluded him from the death penalty.

"This is a foolish, senseless, agonizing waste of time and money," said Schutte, who added that Ritchie was no longer "the same person who committed that crime."

Attorney General Todd Rokita said the execution honored Toney's "sacrifice to the community."

Republican Gov. Mike Braun rejected Ritchie's clemency bid last week without explanation.

The Indiana Supreme Court denied a request to stop the execution. Ritchie's attorneys challenged that decision in federal court, which a judge rejected. The 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals sided with the lower court on Sunday.

As the sun set Monday, the Rev. Richard Holy, a Catholic priest, recited the rosary with about 20 people in the prison parking lot.

"We don't have to keep taking one life to exact justice for taking another," he said.

Dozens also showed up to honor Toney's memory.

"I support the death penalty in certain cases and this is one of them," said Mark Hamner, an Indianapolis-area officer.

Expressing regret and awaiting execution

Attorneys said Ritchie changed during his more than two decades behind bars and had shown remorse. In court as a young man, Ritchie smiled at Horen and laughed as the verdict was read.

He told a parole board he deeply regretted his actions, especially how he acted with Toney's widow.

"I wish I could go back to the day in court, because that man's wife deserved to say everything she needed to say to me, and that punk kid should have just kept his mouth shut and let her say whatever she needed to say," Ritchie said.

Ritchie, who was also a father, spent his last days getting visits from friends and family.

"I've ruined my life and other people's lives, and I'm so sorry for that night," he told the parole board earlier this month. "You can't take back what you did."

Released Israeli-American hostage's parents say the small things bring bliss as he recovers

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — For two days after Israeli-American soldier Edan Alexander was released from 19 months of captivity in Gaza, he couldn't eat anything. Despite periods of near starvation while being held by Hamas militants, Alexander just didn't have an appetite.

Then, his mother, Yael Alexander, put a burger and fries in front of him, and her son dove in.

It was one of many joyful moments his family has experienced since learning he would be freed.

Hamas portrayed the release of Alexander, the last living American hostage in Gaza, as a gesture to President Donald Trump ahead of his Mideast tour last week, which the militants hoped would revive ceasefire talks. Instead, Israel launched a renewed offensive days later that families of the remaining hostages fear could put their loved ones in grave danger.

Alexander's father was somewhat heartened by Israel's announcement Monday that some aid was going into Gaza for the first time in 2 1/2 months.

"That's the first step forward, so hopefully we'll see another ceasefire, more releases and the end to this conflict," Adi Alexander said. "It's been too long, too much, and you can't treat agony with more agony. It's enough."

He urged Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to "rise above politics to prioritize human life."

Eight missed calls on Mother's Day

The family had just finished celebrating Mother's Day at their home in New Jersey when Adi Alexander saw eight missed calls from Steve Witkoff, Trump's Mideast envoy. Witkoff told them to turn on the TV because Hamas was about to announce their son would be released.

"We were freaking out," he said. The family raced to book flights to Israel. Alexander's mother traveled with Trump's hostage negotiator, Adam Boehler. His father and the couple's other two children arrived just minutes before Edan Alexander crossed into Israel from Gaza.

Alexander was one of 251 people kidnapped during Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel, in which Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians. Hamas is still holding 58 hostages, around a third of them believed to be alive, after most of the rest were released in ceasefires or other deals. Israeli forces have rescued eight hostages alive and recovered more than 40 bodies.

Israel's retaliatory offensive in Gaza has killed more than 53,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count. The campaign has destroyed large areas of Gaza and displaced around 90% of its population.

Moved between tunnels

The lowest point of his 584 days of captivity, Alexander told his parents, was being dragged into Gaza and pushed into a tunnel. For hours, he was held alone underground until 10 other hostages were thrust in with him.

That came as a relief. His father said his son's biggest fear was being kidnapped alone, like an Israeli soldier captured in Gaza in 2006, who was held for years until he was released in a 2011 exchange for

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more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners.

Edan Alexander told his parents he was kept mostly underground and moved frequently between tunnels with other hostages. There was very little food, and he rarely saw sunlight or was able to breathe fresh air. In the beginning, like many other male hostages, he was kept handcuffed, sometimes with a sack over his head, and interrogated.

The 6-foot-tall (180 cm) Alexander dropped to around 130 pounds (60 kilograms) from around 175 pounds (80 kilograms) before he was kidnapped.

The conditions of his son's captivity improved slightly following Trump's election in November, Adi Alexander said. During a weekslong ceasefire earlier this year, he was given meat and vegetables for the first time, but that ended once Israel reimposed the blockade on Gaza in March.

A family reunited with their son vows to keep fighting for others

Adi Alexander said the family is beyond grateful to Trump and the American officials who worked tirelessly to free their son. He lived in Maryland as a young child and graduated from high school in Tenafly, New Jersey. He moved to Israel in 2022 and volunteered for the Israeli army.

The day after Alexander's release, American officials Boehler and Witkoff visited what's come to be known as Hostage Square in Tel Aviv, meeting with families of those held in Gaza.

Hostage families said they left the meeting optimistic there would be more releases. But Trump ended a whirlwind trip through three Gulf countries without additional announcements, and Israel renewed its military campaign on Saturday, dashing hopes for immediate releases.

Alexander's parents said as soon as they catch their breath the family will resume the fight to win the hostages' release. They have been a constant presence at rallies, speaking with the media and politicians, shuttling between New Jersey, Washington and Israel. Alexander's terminally-ill great-aunt managed to hold on until he was safe. She died just after hearing he was with the Red Cross, Yael Alexander said.

Moments of quiet as recovery begins

Edan Alexander returned weak and pale, but his parents say they see him gaining strength each day. The hamburger two days after his release was a turning point.

"I was sitting there and looking at him with this big smile on my face, and I'm like, oh my God, because he was like, craving the hamburger," Yael Alexander said.

For now, Edan Alexander is back in the room in his grandmother's apartment in Tel Aviv where he stayed during breaks from the army before his abduction.

He's reconnected with some hostages, including Sagui Dekel Chen, an American-Israeli who was released during the previous ceasefire. He's visiting with old friends from the army and New Jersey, squeezing in doctor's appointments between hanging out with his siblings.

There are quiet moments that have stuck out to his mother over the past week, when he does normal things, like scrolling through Spotify. Seeing her three children together. Simply being able to touch him, hug him.

It's a long path to recovery, but there are moments of bliss, like seeing him share a beer with his sister on the hospital rooftop. It was his first "legal" beer, since he turned 21 in captivity, a rite of passage since that's the legal drinking age in the U.S.

"It was like, I'm here, I'm back, I have my sunglasses, I have a beer in my hand, and we are all good," she said.

More severe weather pummels the central US as thousands recover from deadly tornadoes

By BRUCE SCHREINER Associated Press

LONDON, Ky. (AP) — More tornadoes plowed through the central U.S. on Monday, ripping apart buildings and knocking out power as people from Texas to Kentucky continued to clean up from days of severe weather that killed more than two dozen people and destroyed thousands of homes and buildings.

At least four tornadoes were confirmed in Oklahoma and Nebraska on Monday evening, according to a

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preliminary report from the National Weather Service.

Across Oklahoma, at least 10 homes were destroyed and multiple buildings were damaged, including a fire station that was wiped out, according to the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management. A spokesperson for the agency said they have not received any reports of injuries or deaths.

Around 115,000 customers were without power in Oklahoma, Arkansas and Missouri, according to PowerOutage.us.

Parts of several highways were also closed due to flooding or storm damage.

In northwest Arkansas, severe weather caused a Halsey concert to be canceled and a municipal airport had to close temporarily Monday night so crews could remove debris from the field. And in Oklahoma, Tulsa Public Schools canceled all afterschool activities.

Northern Texas saw softball-sized hail measuring 4 1/2 inches (11.4 centimeters) in diameter, according to Scott Kleebauer, a meteorologist with the service's Weather Prediction Center.

Missouri and Kentucky clean up

Earlier Monday in St. Louis, where officials estimated a Friday tornado damaged 5,000 buildings and may cost well over \$1 billion, the mayor warned that federal assistance could take weeks.

Kentucky has been hardest hit by the storms. A devastating tornado late Friday into early Saturday damaged hundreds of homes, tossed vehicles and killed at least 19 people, most of them in southeastern Laurel County.

In London, Kentucky, where the devastation was centered, the small airport became a beehive of cleanup work after it took a direct hit from a tornado. Small aircraft stored there had large dents in them and even wings ripped open. Officials were using it as a base to get water, food, diapers and other supplies out to the community.

"We have 1,001 things going on. But we're managing it. And we're going to get it all cleaned up," said London Mayor Randall Weddle.

Officials in Kansas and Texas also were evaluating damage from late Sunday storms.

The risk of severe storms moves into Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee on Tuesday, the weather service said.

Kentucky hit hard

The Kentucky storms that killed 19 people were part of a weather system that caused seven deaths in Missouri and two in northern Virginia, authorities said.

Lonnie Nantz hid in a hallway with his wife, two daughters and a grandson as the one-story brick home they bought near London in 1977 was destroyed around them. They were trapped in rubble for about 20 minutes in the midnight darkness before they were rescued unharmed.

"I don't know why this happened. I've tried to live a good life all my life. I've still got the faith," said the 77-year-old Nantz, who went to church as always on Sunday.

London city worker Ashley Taylor was back on the job Monday loading doughnuts to take to a hospital and dispatch center even though there was a tarp on her roof. She was lucky — the houses across her street were destroyed late Friday night.

She survived the storm with nine other people and three dogs in the crawl space of a neighbor's home.

"We prayed like never before — and just thankful for everything God did for us," Taylor said.

In surrounding Laurel County, first responders mourned one of their own.

Fellow firefighters found the body of Laurel County Fire Major Leslie Leatherman on top of a woman he was shielding from the storm's fury as he answered calls during the worst of the storm. The woman was yelling for help and they were in a field across from a destroyed subdivision.

The injured woman turned out to be Leatherman's wife and officials aren't sure if he knew who he was protecting in the darkness and chaos, the fire department said on social media.

St. Louis waits for FEMA

St. Louis Mayor Cara Spencer said five people died, 38 were injured and more than 5,000 homes were affected by an EF3 tornado with winds up to 150 mph (240 kph) that slammed areas north and west of

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downtown Friday. Spencer has estimated that damages will exceed \$1.6 billion.

"Eight miles of pure destruction, at times a mile wide," Spencer said at a Monday news conference. "We're talking about thousands of buildings, thousands of families are being displaced."

The city is awaiting a disaster declaration from the governor's office as a first step to getting federal assistance.

U.S. Sen. Josh Hawley, a Missouri Republican, expressed frustration over the federal response to a deadly March storm.

"I'm not happy about the fact we're still waiting from all of that damage two months ago," Hawley said.

Acting Federal Emergency Management Agency Chief David Richardson said last week he plans to shift responsibility for disaster recovery to states this year as part of an agencywide transformation and that FEMA would coordinate federal assistance "when deemed necessary."

Spencer said during a news conference Monday evening that emergency protocols put in place in 2021 were not followed, possibly preventing sirens being activated to warn residents about the tornado.

She said it was not clear whose responsibility it was to let the community know about the emergency but that the fire department will do so moving forward.

In Texas, several tornadoes touched down west of Fort Worth on Sunday, including an EF1 with peak winds of 105 mph (169 kph) that caused damage in and around Gordon, the weather service said Monday.

Trump alleges 'genocide' in South Africa. At an agricultural fair, even Afrikaner farmers scoff

By MOGOMOTSI MAGOME Associated Press

BOTHAVILLE, South Africa (AP) — Days before South Africa's president meets with U.S. President Donald Trump at the White House this week, Afrikaner farmers at the center of an extraordinary new U.S. refugee policy roamed a memorial to farm attacks in their country's agricultural heartland, some touching the names of the dead — both Black and white.

Here in Bothaville, where thousands of farmers gathered for a lively agricultural fair with everything from grains to guns on display, even some conservative white Afrikaner groups debunked the Trump administration's "genocide" and land seizure claims that led it to cut all financial aid to South Africa.

The bustling scene was business as usual, with milkshakes and burgers and tow-headed children pulled in wagons.

The late President Nelson Mandela — South Africa's first Black leader — stood in Bothaville over a quarter-century ago and acknowledged the increasing violent attacks on farmers in the first years following the decades-long racial system of apartheid. "But the complex problem of crime on our farms, as elsewhere, demand long-term solutions," he said.

Some at the agricultural fair said fleeing the country isn't one of them.

"I really hope that during the upcoming visit to Washington, (President Cyril Ramaphosa) is going to be able to put the facts before his counterpart and to demonstrate that there is no mass expropriation of land taking place in South Africa, and there is no genocide taking place," John Steenhuisen, minister of agriculture, told The Associated Press. He will be part of the delegation for Wednesday's meeting.

The minority white Afrikaner community is in the spotlight after the U.S. granted refugee status to at least 49 of them claiming to flee racial and violent persecution and widespread seizures of white-owned land — despite evidence that such claims are untrue.

While many at the agricultural fair raised serious concerns about the safety of farmers and farm workers, others were quick to point out that crime targeted both Black and white farmers and farm workers, as shown by South Africa's crime statistics.

Thobani Ntonga, a Black farmer from Eastern Cape province, told the AP he had been attacked on his farm by criminals and almost kidnapped but a Black neighbor intervened.

"Crime affects both Black and white. ... It's an issue of vulnerability," he said. "Farmers are separated from your general public. We're not near towns, we are in the rural areas. And I think it's exactly that. So,

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perpetrators, they thrive on that, on the fact that farms are isolated.”

Other farmers echoed his thoughts and called for more resources and policing.

“Crime especially hits small-scale farmers worse because they don’t have resources for private security,” said Afrikaner farmer Willem de Chavonnes Vrugt. He and other farmers wondered why they would leave the land where they have been rooted for decades.

Ramaphosa, himself a cattle farmer, also visited the agricultural fair for the first time in about 20 years — to buy equipment but also do outreach as many in South Africa puzzle over the Trump administration’s focus on their country.

“We must not run away from our problems,” the president said during his visit. “When you run away, you’re a coward.”

Applying to be a refugee

The fast-tracking of the Afrikaners’ refugee applications has raised questions about a system where many seeking asylum in the U.S. can languish for years, waiting.

The State Department has not made details of the process public, but one person who has applied to be resettled told the AP the online application process was “rigorous.”

Katia Beeden, a member of an advocacy group established to assist white South Africans seeking resettlement, said applicants have to go through at least three online interviews and answer questions about their health and criminal background.

They are also required to submit information or proof of being persecuted in South Africa, she said. She said she has been robbed in her house, with robbers locking her in her bedroom.

“They’ve already warned that you can’t lie or hide anything from them. So it’s quite a thorough process and not everyone is guaranteed,” she said.

By the numbers

Violent crime is rife in South Africa, but experts say the vast majority of victims are Black and poor. Police statistics show that up to 75 people are killed daily across the country.

Afrikaner agriculture union TLU SA says it believes farmers are more susceptible to such attacks because of their isolation.

Twelve murders occurred on farms in 2024, police statistics show. One of those killed was a farmer. The rest were farm workers, people staying on farms and a security guard. The data don’t reflect the victims’ race.

Overall across South Africa last year, 6,953 people were killed.

Government data also show that white farmers own the vast majority of South Africa’s farmland — 80% of it, according to the 2017 census of commercial agriculture, which recorded over 40,000 white farmers.

That data, however, only reflects farmers who have revenue of \$55,396 a year, which excludes many small-scale farmers, the majority of them Black.

Overall, the white minority — just 7% of the population is white — still owns the vast majority of the land in South Africa, which the World Bank has called “the most unequal country in the world.”

According to the 2017 government land audit, white South Africans hold about 72% of individually owned land — while Black South Africans own 15%.

Greece’s top diplomat calls war in Gaza a ‘nightmare’

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The world is facing the most turbulent times since World War II, Greece’s top diplomat says, pointing to a crossroads in democracy and saying Europe is facing a “political identity crisis.”

In a wide-ranging interview with The Associated Press, Foreign Minister Giorgos Gerapetritis weighed in on two of the globe’s major conflicts, saying the “nightmare” and escalating death toll in Gaza must end and Greece stands by Ukraine.

He also noted that U.S. President Donald Trump’s tariffs are not “good news.”

Here are some takeaways from Monday’s interview:

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A crisis in democracy tied to inequality

Gerapetritis, whose country holds the rotating presidency of the U.N. Security Council this month, said inequalities between nations and people are challenging "the essence of democracy and the rule of law." As a result, "we have turned into an era where populism and demagogues are essentially ruling the state," he said.

He said global turmoil is also the result of technology and the world's mobility, which mean every challenge — from pandemics to climate and migration — touches everyone. The upheaval also follows a crisis in overall global cooperation and belief in international organizations, which have failed to address challenges in recent years.

Nonetheless, Gerapetritis said, Greece believes "democracy has a self-corrective mechanism" and what's needed at this challenging time is strong leadership in major nations and international organizations "to make people believe in the noble cause of being together in peace and prosperity."

Europe is seeking resilience amid the war in Ukraine

The Greek foreign minister said the European Union's requirement that decisions be adopted unanimously by its 27 members — giving a single nation veto power — has become an obstacle.

On the other hand, he said, the veto reflects national interests that should be at the core of European politics.

At the moment, Gerapetritis said Europe is in a "political identity crisis."

"It seems that on occasions, we forget what are the essential elements that brought us together as Europeans, and we do suffer from some divergences and conflict," he said. "And now we're suffering the post-shock syndrome after the war in Ukraine. So I think Europe needs again to find its resilience and identity."

Greece stands by Ukraine because it supports the rule of law and its sovereignty and territorial integrity, he said.

As for EU and U.S. sanctions against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Gerapetritis said they have been only partially successful because Moscow has found ways to circumvent their impact. The economic penalties have not become "a turning point for peace," he said.

Greece has good relations with both Israel and the Palestinians

Gerapetritis said his country supports a two-state solution, has discussed it and Gaza's reconstruction extensively with Israel and the Palestinians, and sees itself as an "honest broker."

"We would like to be actively involved, but to be totally honest, it's not a matter of who mediates, it's a matter of stopping the nightmare," he said.

Hamas' killing of 1,200 people and taking of hostages from Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, was absolutely inhumane, he said. Also, "I cannot really tolerate what is happening now in the Middle East," he said, pointing to the more than 53,000 Palestinians killed in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to its health ministry, which doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count.

Gerapetritis, who will preside at a Security Council meeting Thursday on protecting civilians in conflict, called for massive humanitarian aid for Gaza and a speedy ceasefire.

The first few aid trucks entered Gaza this week following nearly three months of an Israeli blockade of food, medicine and other supplies. Israel says a new distribution system will launch to prevent Hamas from accessing aid, which Israel says the militant group uses to bolster its rule in Gaza.

Looking for compromise on U.S. tariffs

Gerapetritis said U.S.-Greek ties are growing, citing investments by Amazon, Google, Pfizer and other companies, including in the energy field.

Tariffs imposed by the Trump administration haven't had a major influence in the country, he said, "because we are not overexposed to that type of bilateral trade."

But Greece is in favor of free trade, he said, and while "we do not consider that tariffs are good news ... we do believe that there must be a modus vivendi," a Latin phrase that in international relations often means a compromise between parties.

Trump imposed a 20% levy on goods from the EU amid a series of such moves against trading partners but later paused them to give a chance to negotiate solutions to U.S. trade concerns. Countries subject to the pause will face Trump's 10% baseline tariff.

Trump is heading to Capitol Hill to persuade divided GOP to unify around his 'big, beautiful' bill

By LISA MASCARO, KEVIN FREKING and LEAH ASKARINAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is heading to Capitol Hill early Tuesday to seal the deal on his "big, beautiful bill," using the power of political persuasion to unify divided House Republicans on the multitrillion-dollar package that is at risk of collapsing ahead of planned votes this week.

Trump has implored GOP holdouts to "STOP TALKING, AND GET IT DONE." But negotiations are slogging along and it's not at all clear the package, with its sweeping tax breaks and cuts to Medicaid, food stamps and green energy programs, has the support needed from the House's slim Republican majority, who are also being asked to add some \$350 billion to Trump's border security, deportation and defense agenda.

Conservatives are insisting on quicker, steeper cuts to federal programs to offset the costs of the trillions of dollars in lost tax revenue. At the same time, a core group of lawmakers from New York and other high-tax states want bigger tax breaks for their voters back home. Worries about piling onto the nation's \$36 trillion debt are stark.

"I think it's pretty obvious that they're going to need more time," said Rep. Andy Harris, R-Md., the chairman of the House Freedom Caucus.

"These are complicated issues with trillions of dollars," he said. "We've got to do this thing right."

Trump's visit to address House Republicans at their weekly conference meeting comes at a pivotal moment, testing the president's deal-making powers. House Speaker Mike Johnson is determined to push the bill forward and needs Trump to provide the momentum, either by encouragement or political warnings or a combination of both.

With House Democrats lined up against the package, GOP leaders have almost no votes to spare. A key committee hearing is set for the middle of the night Tuesday in hopes of a House floor vote by Wednesday afternoon.

Democrats argue the package is little more than a giveaway to the wealthy at the expense of health care and food programs Americans rely on.

"They literally are trying to take health care away from millions of Americans at this very moment in the dead of night," said House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York.

"If this legislation is designed to make life better for the American people, can someone explain to me why they would hold a hearing to advance the bill at 1 a.m. in the morning?"

Trump has been pushing hard for Republicans to unite behind the bill, which has been uniquely shaped in his image as the president's signature domestic policy initiative in Congress.

The sprawling 1,116-page package carries Trump's title, the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act," as well as his campaign promises to extend the tax breaks approved during his first term while adding new ones, including no taxes on tips, automobile loan interest and Social Security.

Yet, the price tag is rising and lawmakers are wary of the votes ahead, particularly as the economy teeters with uncertainty.

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a nonpartisan fiscal watchdog group, estimates that the House bill is shaping up to add roughly \$3.3 trillion to the debt over the next decade.

Republicans criticizing the measure argued that the bill's new spending and tax cuts are front-loaded, while the measures to offset the cost are back-loaded.

In particular, the conservative Republicans are looking to speed up the new work requirements that Republicans want to enact for able-bodied participants in Medicaid. They had been proposed to start Jan. 1, 2029, but GOP Majority Leader Steve Scalise said on CNBC that work requirements for some Medicaid beneficiaries would begin in early 2027.

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At least 7.6 million fewer people are expected to have health insurance under the initial Medicaid changes, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said last week.

Republican holdouts are also looking to more quickly halt green energy tax breaks, which had been approved as part of the Biden-era Inflation Reduction Act, and are now being used for renewable energy projects across the nation.

But for every change Johnson considers to appease the hard-right conservatives, he risks losing support from more traditional and centrist Republicans. Many have signed on to letters protesting deep cuts to Medicaid and food assistance programs and the rolling back of clean energy tax credits.

At its core, the sprawling legislative package permanently extends the existing income tax cuts and bolsters the standard deduction, increasing it to \$32,000 for joint filers, and the child tax credit to \$2,500.

The New Yorkers are fighting for a larger state and local tax deduction beyond the bill's proposal. As it stands, the bill would triple what's currently a \$10,000 cap on the state and local tax deduction, increasing it to \$30,000 for joint filers with incomes up to \$400,000 a year. They have proposed a deduction of \$62,000 for single filers and \$124,000 for joint filers.

If the bill passes the House this week, it would then move to the Senate, where Republicans are also eyeing changes.

Democratic Rep. McIver charged with assault after skirmish at ICE center, New Jersey prosecutor says

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, ERIC TUCKER and MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic Rep. LaMonica McIver is being charged with assault after a skirmish with federal officers outside an immigration detention center, said New Jersey's top federal prosecutor, who also announced Monday that she was dropping a trespassing case against the Newark mayor whose arrest led to the disturbance.

Interim U.S. Attorney Alina Habba wrote on social media that McIver is facing a charge of assaulting, impeding or interfering with law enforcement, but court papers providing details were not immediately released or publicly available online.

The prosecution of McIver is a rare federal criminal case against a sitting member of Congress for allegations other than fraud or corruption. The case instantly taps into a much broader and more consequential power struggle between a Trump administration engaged in a sweeping overhaul of immigration policy and a Democratic party scrambling for ways to respond.

Within minutes of Habba's announcement, McIver's Democratic colleagues cast the prosecution as an infringement on lawmakers' official duties to serve their constituents and an effort to silence their opposition to an immigration policy that helped propel the president back into power but now has emerged as divisive fault line in American political discourse.

At the same time, Habba announced that her office agreed to dismiss a misdemeanor charge against Democratic Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, who was arrested after he attempted to join McIver and two other members of New Jersey's congressional delegation inspecting the facility in their oversight capacity. Habba said the decision was reached "for the sake of moving forward" and said she has invited the mayor to tour the Delaney Hall detention center and will join him herself.

"The citizens of New Jersey deserve unified leadership so we can get to work to keep our state safe," Habba said in a statement.

McIver has denied any wrongdoing and has accused federal agents of escalating the situation by arresting the mayor. She denounced the charge as "purely political" and said prosecutors are distorting her actions in an effort to deter legislative oversight.

"This administration will never stop me from working for the people in our district and standing up for what is right," she said in a statement. "I am thankful for the outpouring of support I have received and I look forward to the truth being laid out clearly in court."

A nearly two-minute clip released by the Homeland Security Department shows McIver on the facility

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side of a chain-link fence just before the arrest of the mayor on the street side of the fence. She and uniformed officials go through the gate and she joins others shouting "surround the mayor." The video shows McIver in a tightly packed group of people and officers. At one point her left elbow and then her right elbow push into an officer wearing a dark face covering and an olive green uniform emblazoned with the word "Police" on it.

It isn't clear from bodycam video whether that contact was intentional, incidental or a result of jostling in the chaotic scene.

In a post on X, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said McIver was being charged after a "thorough review of the video footage" and investigation by Homeland Security Investigations.

"Assaults on federal law enforcement will not be tolerated," Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche said in a post on X. "This Administration will always protect those who work tirelessly to keep America safe."

McIver's attorney called the decision to charge her "spectacularly inappropriate," saying she went to Delaney Hall "to do her job" and she has the responsibility as a member of Congress to oversee U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's treatment of detainees. As of Monday night, neither McIver nor her attorneys had gotten charging documents from prosecutors, according to an emailed statement from a spokesperson for her attorney.

"Rather than facilitating that inspection, ICE agents chose to escalate what should have been a peaceful situation into chaos," Paul Fishman, the former U.S. attorney for New Jersey, said in a statement. "This prosecution is an attempt to shift the blame for ICE's behavior to Congresswoman McIver. In the courtroom, facts — not headlines — will matter."

Baraka, who is seeking the Democratic nomination in this year's governor's race, had repeatedly denied trespassing and said he had been invited inside the gate at one point before the arrest.

He said in an emailed statement Monday that he was glad the case against him was dismissed. He said he will "continue to advocate for the humane treatment of detainees" and "continue to press the facility to ensure that it is compliant with City of Newark codes and regulations."

Baraka called McIver a "daughter of Newark" and said he stood with her.

"I fully expect her to be vindicated," he said.

McIver, 38, first came to Congress in September in a special election after the death of Rep. Donald Payne Jr. left a vacancy in the 10th District. She was then elected to a full term in November. A Newark native, she served as the president of the Newark City Council from 2022 to 2024 and worked in the city's public schools before that.

House Democratic leaders decried the criminal case against their colleague in a lengthy statement in which they called the charge "extreme, morally bankrupt" and lacking "any basis in law or fact."

"The proceeding initiated by the so-called U.S. Attorney in New Jersey is a blatant attempt by the Trump administration to intimidate Congress and interfere with our ability to serve as a check and balance on an out-of-control executive branch," said the statement from Rep. Hakeem Jeffries of New York and other senior members of the party. "House Democrats will not be intimidated by the Trump administration. Not today. Not ever."

First few aid trucks enter Gaza but allies threaten Israel with sanctions and urge more

By TIA GOLDENBERG, SAMY MAGDY and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — The first few aid trucks entered Gaza on Monday following nearly three months of Israel's blockade of food, medicine and other supplies, Israel and the United Nations said, as Israel acknowledged growing pressure from allies including the United States.

Five trucks carrying baby food and other desperately needed aid entered the territory of over 2 million Palestinians via the Kerem Shalom crossing, according to the Israeli defense body in charge of coordinating aid to Gaza, COGAT.

The U.N. humanitarian chief, Tom Fletcher, called it a "welcome development" but described the trucks

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as a “drop in the ocean of what is urgently needed.” Food security experts last week warned of famine in Gaza. During the latest ceasefire that Israel ended in March, some 600 aid trucks entered Gaza each day.

Fletcher said an additional four U.N. trucks were cleared to enter Gaza. Those trucks may enter Tuesday, COGAT said. Fletcher added that given the chaotic situation on the ground, the U.N. expects the aid could be looted or stolen, a growing problem as resources became increasingly scarce.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said his decision to resume “minimal” aid to Gaza came after allies said they couldn’t support Israel’s new military offensive if there are “images of hunger” coming from the Palestinian territory.

Shortly after Israel announced the first trucks entered Gaza, the U.K., France and Canada issued a sharply worded joint statement calling the aid “wholly inadequate.” They threatened “concrete actions” against Israel, including sanctions, for its activities in Gaza and the occupied West Bank and called on Israel to stop its “egregious” new military actions in Gaza.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the joint statement and called it “a huge prize for the genocidal attack on Israel on October 7.”

Israel over the weekend launched a new wave of air and ground operations across Gaza, and the army ordered the evacuation of its second-largest city, Khan Younis, where a massive operation earlier in the 19-month war left much of the area in ruins.

Israel says it is pressuring Hamas to release the remaining hostages abducted in the Oct. 7, 2023, attack that ignited the war. Hamas has said it will only release them in exchange for a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal.

Netanyahu repeated Monday that Israel plans on “taking control of all of Gaza.” He has said Israel will encourage what he describes as the voluntary emigration of much of Gaza’s population to other countries — something that Palestinians have rejected.

Allies pressure Israel

In a video statement, Netanyahu said Israel’s “greatest friends in the world” had told him, “We cannot accept images of hunger, mass hunger. We cannot stand that. We will not be able to support you.”

The Trump administration, which has voiced full support for Israel’s actions and blames Hamas for deaths in Gaza, has expressed growing concern over the hunger crisis. President Donald Trump — who skipped Israel on his trip to the region last week — voiced concern, as did Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Netanyahu’s video statement appeared aimed at pacifying anger in his nationalist base at the decision to resume aid. Two far-right governing partners have pressed Netanyahu not to allow aid into Gaza.

Aid into Gaza would be “minimal,” Netanyahu said, and would act as a bridge toward the launch of a new aid system in Gaza. A U.S.-backed organization will distribute assistance in hubs that will be secured by the Israeli military.

Israel says the plan is meant to prevent Hamas from accessing aid, which Israel says it uses to bolster its rule in Gaza.

U.N. agencies and aid groups have rejected the plan, saying it won’t reach enough people and would weaponize aid in contravention of humanitarian principles. They have refused to take part.

According to aid officials familiar with the plan, it will involve setting up distribution points mostly in southern Gaza, forcing many Palestinians to move south once again. The recent ceasefire saw hundreds of thousands return to homes in the north.

Threat of sanctions

The statement by France, Canada and the U.K. marked one of their most significant criticisms of Israel’s handling of the war in Gaza and Israel’s actions in the occupied West Bank.

“We oppose any attempt to expand settlements in the West Bank,” the three countries said, calling them illegal.

The countries said they have always supported Israel’s right to defend itself against terrorism but called the military escalation in Gaza disproportionate. The countries earlier criticized the new U.S.-backed proposal for aid delivery in Gaza, saying it would not align with humanitarian law.

Canada has already imposed a series of sanctions against Israel over the last two years regarding settler

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violence in the West Bank. It was unclear how much France can act unilaterally given that it is a member of the European Union.

In a separate, letter Monday, the foreign ministers of Germany, Italy, Japan and 18 other countries — not including the United States — called for Israel to fully reopen humanitarian aid delivery to Gaza by the U.N. and non-governmental organizations.

The war in Gaza began when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting 251 others. The militants are still holding 58 captives, around a third believed to be alive, after most of the rest were returned in ceasefire agreements or other deals.

Israel's retaliatory offensive, which has destroyed large swaths of Gaza, has killed more than 53,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count.

The war has displaced around 90% of its population, most of them multiple times.

After a political career shaped by cancer, Biden faces his own grim diagnosis

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In Joe Biden's family, there's a saying that the three worst words anyone can hear are "you have cancer."

One decade ago, his son Beau died from a brain tumor. Several years later, his wife Jill had two cancerous lesions removed in her own brush with the disease.

Now it is the former president's turn. Biden's office disclosed his prostate cancer diagnosis over the weekend, saying it has already spread to his bones.

Although the cancer can possibly be controlled with treatment, it is no longer curable. The announcement is a bitter revelation that a disease that has brought so much tragedy to Biden's life could be what ends it.

"Cancer touches us all," Biden wrote on social media. "Like so many of you, Jill and I have learned that we are strongest in the broken places."

Even before the diagnosis, Biden's post-presidency was shadowed by questions about his health and whether he should have run for reelection. As questions about his fitness for office mounted, he abandoned the campaign and Donald Trump retook the presidency by defeating Kamala Harris. As the 82-year-old Biden works to safeguard his damaged political legacy, he'll also be fighting a disease that shaped the final chapters of his decades-long career.

Biden was serving as Barack Obama's vice president when Beau died in 2015. He decided not to seek the Democratic nomination the following year, which helped clear a path for Hillary Clinton, who lost to Trump in 2016.

Valerie Jarrett, a longtime Obama adviser, said Biden wanted to "channel his grief into action and figure out how we can do better" on treating cancer to "make sure that other people didn't have to go through what he went through."

The effort was formalized as a White House task force, with Biden in charge. After a few years out of office, Biden re-entered politics to campaign against Trump in 2020. The heartache from Beau's death was never far from the surface though. His eldest son had been Delaware's attorney general and often viewed as Biden's political successor.

"Beau should be the one running for president, not me," Biden said, a thought he echoed on many occasions.

He made fighting cancer a focus for his presidency, resurrecting a "moonshot" initiative to increase funding for research and improve treatment. He unveiled the initiative at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in 2022, echoing the Democratic icon's famous speech declaring that "we will go to the moon" six decades earlier.

"Beating cancer is something we can do together," Biden said.

By this point, he had already signed legislation known as the PACT Act to expand healthcare benefits

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for veterans. The law guarantees treatment for chronic illnesses blamed on burn pits, which were used to dispose of chemicals, tires, plastics, medical equipment and human waste on military bases.

Biden left no doubt that he believed Beau's death resulted from his service with the National Guard in Iraq. "When they came home, many of the fittest and best warriors that we sent to war were not the same — headaches, numbness, dizziness, cancer," he said. "My son Beau was one of them."

Denis McDonough, who led the Veterans Affairs Department under Biden, said the president didn't talk about Beau's death during policy discussions. But he said it was clear that Biden "knew the experience that other families were having, and he was going to be damn sure that we weren't going to miss an opportunity to address that."

McDonough recalled that Biden wanted the new law to take effect as quickly as possible.

"He had an option to stretch it out," he said. "He said no way."

The following year, first lady Jill Biden had two cancerous lesions removed, one above her right eye and the other on her chest. They were both basal cell carcinoma.

Learning of the diagnosis "was a little harder than I thought," she told The Associated Press during a trip to Africa.

"I'm lucky," she said. "Believe me, I am so lucky that they caught it, they removed it, and I'm healthy."

Biden's cancer diagnosis is not the first time that he's faced his own mortality.

Months after ending his first presidential campaign in 1988, he collapsed in a New York hotel room. In his memoir "Promises to Keep," he described "lightning flashing inside my head, a powerful electrical surge — and then a rip of pain like I'd never felt before."

He had suffered a brain aneurysm that required surgery. Biden wrote that "I had no real fear of dying. I'd long since accepted the fact that life's guarantees don't include a fair shake."

McDonough imagined that Biden would feel similarly about his current situation.

"He's always on to the next fight," he said.

Radio calls asked tugs for help 45 seconds before Mexican ship hit Brooklyn Bridge, officials say

By SUSAN HAIGH Associated Press

The Mexican navy tall ship that struck the Brooklyn Bridge was underway for less than 5 minutes before its masts crashed into the historic span, and radio calls indicating it was in distress went out only 45 seconds before the deadly collision, according to a timeline laid out by U.S. investigators Monday.

With the help of a tugboat, the Cuauhtemoc training vessel backed away from a Manhattan pier filled with cheering people at 8:20 p.m. on Saturday, officials said.

Videos showed the ship moving slowly at first, its rigging filled with white lights and naval cadets balanced high on the ship's yards — the spars that hold the sails. The tugboat nudged the ship along, keeping it from drifting upstream toward the bridge in the current as it backed up into the East River toward Brooklyn.

But after a few minutes, the ship separated from the tug and picked up speed, still moving in reverse, heading for the bridge.

Four minutes after the ship left the pier, a radio call went out asking for help from any additional tugboats in the area, followed by other requests for assistance, National Transportation Safety Board investigator Brian Young said at a media briefing Monday. Officials did not say whether those radio calls originated from the ship, the tug, or somewhere else.

Forty-five seconds after the first call, the ship, struck the bridge, snapping its three masts. Young said it had reached 6 knots, or nearly 7 mph (11 Kilometers per hour), at the time of the crash. The Cuauhtemoc kept going, passing beneath the bridge and bumping against a pier before ultimately coming to a stop at around 8:27 p.m., Young said.

Footage of the collision shot by horrified onlookers show the ship moving swiftly backwards and then grinding beneath the 142-year-old bridge as its topmasts snapped off. Multiple cadets in the ship's crew

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were aloft, standing on the ship's yards when the collision happened. Several were left dangling by safety harnesses as the masts partially collapsed. Two cadets died.

The tugboat that had helped the ship get out of its berth could be seen on video trying to get ahead of the vessel as it headed toward the bridge but couldn't overtake it in time.

It remains unclear whether a mechanical problem played a role. NTSB officials said they have not yet been granted permission to board the ship and they have not yet interviewed the captain or the tugboat and harbor pilots who were assisting the vessel as it tried to depart New York for a trip to Iceland.

"This is a start of a long process. We will not be drawing any conclusions. We will not speculate," said NTSB Board Member Michael Graham. Officials said the investigation could take months to fully complete.

Many crew members on the tall ship flew home to Mexico Monday, officials said.

Seven officers and 172 cadets who were aboard the Cuauhtemoc arrived early Monday at the port of Veracruz, where Mexico's naval school is, the Mexican navy said in a post on X. Two cadets remained in New York getting medical treatment. They were in stable condition, the navy said.

The crippled Cuauhtemoc remained at a dock in Manhattan on Monday. Officials said preparations were being made to move it to a salvage yard.

The Brooklyn Bridge escaped major damage but at least 19 of the ship's 277 sailors needed medical treatment, according to officials. Among those killed was América Yamilet Sánchez, a 20-year-old sailor who had been studying engineering at the Mexican naval academy. Her family has said she died after falling from one of the Cuauhtemoc's masts.

The Cuauhtemoc arrived in New York on May 13 as part of a global goodwill tour. The vessel, which sailed for the first time in 1982, had been docked and welcoming visitors in recent days at the tourist-heavy South Street Seaport.

The ship's main mast has a height of 160 feet (50 meters), far too high for the span of the Brooklyn Bridge at any tide.

Singer Dawn Richard says Sean 'Diddy' Combs threatened her with death after she saw him beat Cassie

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Singer Dawn Richard told jurors at Sean "Diddy" Combs' sex trafficking trial on Monday that the hip-hop mogul threatened to kill her if she told anyone she saw him physically abusing his longtime girlfriend.

Richard testified that Combs made the threat the day after she witnessed the Bad Boy Records founder punch and kick Casandra "Cassie" Ventura after taking a swing at her with a skillet. Richard said he told her and another woman who saw the attack that "we could go missing" if they didn't stay quiet.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Mitzi Steiner asked Richard what she took "we could go missing" to mean.

"That we could die," Richard responded, saying she was shocked because all of this happened just as she was beginning to record with Diddy — Dirty Money, a musical trio with Combs and another R&B singer.

Richard disclosed the alleged threat as she returned to the witness stand to kick off the second week of testimony in Combs' sex trafficking and racketeering trial in Manhattan federal court.

Combs, 55, is accused of exploiting his entertainment powerbroker status to abuse women, including Cassie, through threats and violence for two decades from 2004 until his arrest last September. He has pleaded not guilty. His lawyers argue that prosecutors compiled proof of domestic violence, but not the federal crimes he's charged with.

Before day's end, Cassie's best friend of 17 years and a former personal assistant to Combs testified that she felt trapped as prosecutors tried to uncover proof that Combs was operating a criminal racketeering organization that relied on employees to help him control Cassie and other women in his life.

Testimony about Combs' beatings of Cassie came with hardly a mention of the drug-fueled "freak-offs" that dominated testimony last week, when Cassie explained over four days how her wish for a loving relationship with Combs led instead to her weekly sexual performances with male sex workers that left her

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too exhausted to pursue her musical career.

Richard recalls violent outbursts

Richard, who began her testimony Friday and concluded Monday, said she witnessed Combs attack Cassie multiple times, including during a visit to Combs' home recording studio in 2009, when Richard said she and another woman saw Combs hit Cassie "on the head and beat her on the ground" after Cassie deflected a swipe at her head by a skillet.

Richard said she witnessed Combs beat his girlfriend frequently when he "would punch her, choke her, drag her, slap her in the mouth. I saw him kick her, punch her in the stomach."

Beatings came when Cassie spoke up for herself, "if she had an opinion about something," said Richard, who also performed in the group Danity Kane.

She said Combs' staff, including his bodyguards, also witnessed violence, but they "wouldn't react. They wouldn't do anything."

Richard supported Cassie's testimony that Combs had stifled Cassie's fledgling singing career, saying she heard Combs tell Cassie that he "owned her" and that any success she had would be on his terms.

Richard said Combs would get mad — sometimes violent — when she and other artists offered to help Cassie write songs.

Defense lawyer Nicole Westmoreland suggested Richard was testifying because she was angry at Combs for ending Danity Kane and Diddy — Dirty Money, and because she has a pending lawsuit against him.

"You felt that Mr. Combs ruined your career not once, but twice?" Westmoreland asked.

"Yes," Richard answered.

She contended, though, that she was sad, not angry, over the end of the groups, and is suing Combs because he mistreated her and withheld her earnings.

Bad Boy signed Cassie to a 10-album deal in 2006, but only released one — the self-titled "Cassie," which came out the same year. Cassie and Combs started dating in 2007 and broke up for good in 2018.

Cassie's former best friend recalls violent outbursts

After Richard came testimony from Kerry Morgan. She said she was Cassie's longtime best friend until they had a falling out after Morgan suffered a concussion when Combs' choked Morgan and slung a wooden hanger at her in 2018 when he came to Cassie's Los Angeles home enraged that Cassie was dating someone else.

Morgan said she was going to sue Combs, but Cassie met her at a pizza parlor and had her sign a non-disclosure agreement in return for \$30,000 from Combs while accusing her of "milking" and "overexaggerating" the attack. Morgan and Cassie both testified that they haven't spoken since.

Morgan, a reluctant witness who acknowledged that she only testified in response to a government subpoena, said she saw Combs beat Cassie at least twice, including once so severely on a trip to Jamaica when Combs became angry that Cassie was taking too long in the bathroom that she thought her friend had been "knocked out."

She said she encouraged Cassie to break up with him after realizing that the very confident woman she had met in 2001 during modeling gigs and who roomed with her for a time had "lost her spark" and had assumed a slumped posture as she catered to Combs' needs. But she said Cassie was reluctant to leave Combs.

"He controlled everything. She would've lost all of her livelihood," Morgan said, noting that Combs paid for Cassie's car and apartment, and had her under contract with Bad Boy.

Cassie testified last week that although she continued to go to the recording studio and work on songs, Combs refused to release them.

"He was in charge of her career," Morgan testified, adding that Cassie sometimes expressed frustration that her music wasn't being released.

Ex-employee says Combs called Cassie 'very moldable'

David James, who served as Combs' personal assistant from 2007 to 2009, started crying as he testified that, when he interviewed for the job, one of the hip-hop heavyweight's lieutenants pointed to a photo of

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Combs on the wall and told him: "This is Mr. Combs' kingdom. We're all here to serve him."

James' employment coincided with the early days of Combs and Cassie's relationship. He recalled her being astonished — and perhaps overwhelmed — by Combs' high-flying, globetrotting ways.

"Man, this lifestyle is crazy," he recalled Cassie saying as they smoked cigarettes on a dock with her then-best friend Morgan.

James, who will return to the stand Tuesday, said he suggested Cassie leave Combs if she was uncomfortable, to which he said she replied: "I can't. I can't get out. You know, Mr. Combs oversees so much of my life."

James recalled talking to Combs on another occasion about the women in his life. Combs, he said, described his longtime girlfriend Kim Porter, the mother of some of his children, as "my queen."

When the subject turned to Cassie, James testified that Combs told him: "She's good. I got her right where I want her. She's young."

James recalled Combs describing Cassie as "very moldable."

Trump says Russia-Ukraine ceasefire talks will begin immediately following call with Putin

By ZEKE MILLER, JOSH BOAK and KATIE MARIE DAVIES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Russia and Ukraine will "immediately" begin ceasefire negotiations, President Donald Trump said Monday after separate calls with the leaders of both countries meant to spur progress toward ending the three-year war. The conversations did not appear to yield a major breakthrough.

It was not clear when or where any talks might take place or who would participate. Trump's announcement came days after the first direct engagement between Russian and Ukrainian delegations since 2022. Those negotiations Friday in Turkey brought about a limited exchange of prisoners but no pause in the fighting.

Ahead of the calls, the White House said Trump had grown "frustrated" with both leaders over the continuing war. Vice President JD Vance said Trump would press Russian President Vladimir Putin to see if he was truly interested in stopping the fighting, and if not, that the U.S. could disengage from trying to stop the conflict. Trump later told reporters that he believed Putin was serious about wanting peace.

"The conditions for that will be negotiated between the two parties, as it can only be, because they know details of a negotiation that nobody else would be aware of," Trump said in a social media post.

Trump said the call with Putin was "excellent," adding, "If it wasn't, I would say so now, rather than later."

Later, speaking to reporters in the Oval Office, he noted the process has "got very big egos involved, I tell you."

"Big egos involved. But I think something's going to happen and, if it doesn't I'd just back away and they have to keep going," Trump said. "This was a European situation. It should have remained a European situation."

Trump also said he told Putin, "We've got to get going."

Trump has struggled to end a war that began with Russia's invasion in February 2022, a setback for his promises to quickly settle the conflict once he was back in the White House, if not before he took office.

'Weary and frustrated'

"He's grown weary and frustrated with both sides of the conflict," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters Monday before the calls.

The Republican president is banking on the idea that his force of personality and personal history with Putin will be enough to break any impasse over a pause in the fighting. He dangled the prospect of reduced sanctions and increased trade with Russia should the war end.

After the call, Putin said Russia was ready to continue discussing an end to the fighting after a "very informative and very frank" conversation with Trump. Putin said the warring countries should "find compromises that would suit all parties."

Moscow, he said, will "propose and is ready to work with" Ukraine on a "memorandum" outlining the

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framework for “a possible future peace treaty.”

But indicating that little had fundamentally changed about his demands, Putin said: “At the same time, I would like to note that, in general, Russia’s position is clear. The main thing for us is to eliminate the root causes of this crisis.”

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Monday that he reaffirmed to Trump that Ukraine is ready for a full and unconditional ceasefire. He urged the international community to maintain pressure on Moscow if it refuses to halt its invasion.

“Ukraine doesn’t need to be persuaded — our representatives are ready to make real decisions. What’s needed is mirrored readiness from Russia for such result-oriented negotiations,” Zelenskyy said.

Trump and Putin addressed each other by first names

Russian presidential adviser Yuri Ushakov, who previously served as Russian ambassador to the U.S., described the conversation as friendly, with Trump and Putin addressing each other by their first names.

“Trump said, ‘Vladimir, you can pick up the phone at any time, and I will be happy to answer and speak with you,’” he said.

Ushakov also said Trump and Putin could meet face-to-face at some point, but no timeline was set.

Putin and Trump also talked about a Russia-U.S. prisoner exchange, which Ushakov said was “in the works” and envisioned Moscow and Washington releasing nine people each. Ushakov did not offer any other details.

Speaking before the call, Vance said Trump could walk away from trying to end the war if he feels Putin isn’t serious about negotiation.

“I’d say we’re more than open to walking away,” Vance told reporters before leaving Rome after meeting with Pope Leo XIV. Vance said Trump has been clear that the U.S. “is not going to spin its wheels here. We want to see outcomes.”

Zelenskyy, who spoke to Trump one-on-one before the Putin call and then jointly with European leaders after, told reporters that he emphasized to Trump that no decisions should be made about Ukraine without involving Kyiv. He also said that he discussed the potential for “serious sanctions” on Russia.

Trump said the Vatican expressed interest in hosting the negotiations, but there was no immediate confirmation that any talks had been scheduled.

Trump tries the carrot — and stick — with Putin

Trump sought to use financial incentives to broker some kind of agreement after Russia’s invasion led to severe sanctions by the United States and its allies that have steadily eroded Moscow’s ability to grow.

“Russia wants to do largescale TRADE with the United States when this catastrophic “bloodbath” is over, and I agree,” he said in a social media post. “There is a tremendous opportunity for Russia to create massive amounts of jobs and wealth. Its potential is UNLIMITED.”

Trump’s treasury secretary, Scott Bessent, said Sunday on NBC’s “Meet the Press” that Trump had made it clear that a failure by Putin to negotiate “in good faith” could lead to additional sanctions against Russia.

Bessent suggested the sanctions that began during the administration of Democratic President Joe Biden were inadequate because they did not stop Russia’s oil revenues, due to concerns that doing so would increase U.S. prices. The United States sought to cap Russia’s oil revenues while preserving the country’s petroleum exports to limit the damage from the inflation that the war produced.

Trump and Zelenskyy spoke with leaders from France, Italy and Finland, as well as European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who have threatened tougher sanctions on Russia in a bid to force Putin into negotiations.

Putin recently rejected an offer by Zelenskyy to meet in-person in Turkey as an alternative to a 30-day ceasefire urged by Ukraine and its Western allies, including Washington. Instead, Russian and Ukrainian officials met in Istanbul for talks, the first such direct negotiations since March 2022.

Those talks ended Friday after less than two hours, without a ceasefire in place. But both countries committed to exchange 1,000 prisoners of war each, with Ukraine’s intelligence chief, Kyrylo Budanov, saying on Ukrainian television Saturday that the exchanges could happen as early as this week.

Supreme Court allows Trump to strip legal protections from 350,000 Venezuelans who risk deportation

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Monday allowed the Trump administration to strip legal protections from 350,000 Venezuelans, potentially exposing them to deportation.

The court's order, with only one noted dissent, puts on hold a ruling from a federal judge in San Francisco that kept in place Temporary Protected Status for the Venezuelans that would have otherwise expired last month. The justices provided no rationale, which is common in emergency appeals.

The status allows people already in the United States to live and work legally because their native countries are deemed unsafe for return due to natural disaster or civil strife.

The high court's order appears to be the "single largest action in modern American history stripping any group of non-citizens of immigration status," said Ahilan Arulanantham, one of the attorneys for Venezuelan migrants.

"This decision will force families to be in an impossible position either choosing to survive or choosing stability," said Cecilia Gonzalez Herrera, who sued to try and stop the Trump administration from revoking legal protections from her and others like her.

"Venezuelans are not criminals," Gonzalez Herrera said.

"We all deserve the chance to thrive without being sent back to danger," she said.

The ramifications for the hundreds of thousands of people affected aren't yet clear, Arulanantham said.

Mariana Moleros, her husband and their daughter left their native Venezuela in September 2005 after receiving death threats for their open political opposition to the socialist government. They came to the United States hoping to find peace and protection and requested asylum, but their application was denied.

They were temporarily granted TPS but now they live in fear again — fear of being detained and deported to a country where they don't feel safe.

"Today we are all exposed to being imprisoned in Venezuela if the U.S. return us," said Moleros, a 44-year-old Venezuelan attorney who lives in Florida. "They should not deport someone who is at risk of being assassinated, torture and incarcerated."

A federal appeals court had earlier rejected the administration's request to put the order on hold while the lawsuit continues. A hearing is set for next week in front of U.S. District Judge Edward Chen, who had paused the administration's plans.

In a statement, Homeland Security called the court's decision a "win for the American people and the safety of our communities" and said the Biden administration "exploited programs to let poorly vetted migrants into this country."

"The Trump administration is reinstituting integrity into our immigration system to keep our homeland and its people safe," said spokeswoman Tricia McLaughlin.

The case is the latest in a string of emergency appeals President Donald Trump's administration has made to the Supreme Court, many of them related to immigration and involving Venezuela. Earlier this month, the government asked the court to allow it to end humanitarian parole for hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela, setting them up for potential deportation as well.

The high court also has been involved in slowing Trump's efforts to swiftly deport Venezuelans accused of being gang members to a prison in El Salvador under an 18th century wartime law called the Alien Enemies Act.

The complex economic and political crisis in Venezuela has driven more than 7.7 million people to leave the South American nation since 2013. Venezuela's most recent economic troubles pushed year-over-year inflation in April to 172%. The latest chapter even prompted President Nicolás Maduro to declare an "economic emergency" last month. Maduro, whose reelection last year to a third term has been condemned internationally as illegitimate, also has cracked down on his political opponents.

In the dispute over TPS, the administration has moved aggressively to withdraw various protections

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that have allowed immigrants to remain in the country, including ending the temporary protected status for a total of 600,000 Venezuelans and 500,000 Haitians. That status is granted in 18-month increments. Venezuela was first designated for TPS in 2021; Haiti, in 2010.

Last week, DHS announced that TPS for Afghanistan, first provided in 2022, would end in mid-July.

The protections for Venezuelans had been set to expire April 7, but Chen found that the expiration threatened to severely disrupt the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and could cost billions in lost economic activity.

Chen, who was appointed to the bench by Democratic President Barack Obama, found the government hadn't shown any harm caused by keeping the program alive.

But Solicitor General D. John Sauer wrote on behalf of the administration that Chen's order impermissibly interferes with the administration's power over immigration and foreign affairs.

In addition, Sauer told the justices, people affected by ending the protected status might have other legal options to try to remain in the country because the "decision to terminate TPS is not equivalent to a final removal order."

Congress created TPS in 1990 to prevent deportations to countries suffering from natural disasters or civil strife.

Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson said she would have rejected the administration's emergency appeal.

What's happened at the Cannes Film Festival so far — and what's still to come

CANNES, France (AP) — This year's Cannes Film Festival is at its halfway mark, but it's been an attention-grabbing affair since its start — from new rules for its red carpets, nerves about potential U.S. tariffs and the return of Tom Cruise.

And that says nothing about the films, seen as a strong slate as Cannes has become increasingly important to the Oscars' best picture hopefuls. As the festival enters its second week, it's become clear that this year's films are reckoning with geopolitical doom, climate change and other calamities that closely resemble current events.

Even in a normal year, Cannes is a lot to keep up with. Here's a handy guide of what's happened so far, what to expect and what it may mean.

What's happened lately at Cannes

Monday brought a pair of surprises thanks to Spike Lee's latest film, "Highest 2 Lowest." The first was an honorary Palme d'Or for Denzel Washington, who arrived for the premiere on a whirlwind trip on his only day off from starring in "Othello" on Broadway.

Another surprise came after the movie's premiere, when Rihanna walked the red carpet with partner A\$AP Rocky, who also stars in the film.

Some early standout moments from Cannes

Cannes opened Tuesday with a starry tribute to Robert De Niro, 49 years after "Taxi Driver" won the festival's top prize, the Palme d'Or. De Niro used his own honorary Palme to assail U.S. President Donald Trump, a frequent target of his criticism.

He also basked in the adoration of some of film's elite, including Leonardo DiCaprio and Quentin Tarantino.

Cannes debuted a complex 4K restoration of "The Gold Rush," one of Charlie Chaplin's most beloved silent masterpieces, timed to the film's 100th anniversary. "Our grandfather would be really proud to see this, a hundred years later, to see all you here and interested in seeing the film," said Kiera Chaplin to a packed screening.

Tom Cruise took the spotlight on Day 2 with the latest "Mission: Impossible" installment, "Final Reckoning." For such a high-flying franchise, Cruise kept his feet on the ground. That aligned with a recent trend — gone are the days of fighter jet flyovers, Jerry Seinfeld in a bee costume and other big stunts.

On Thursday, news broke that the festival had barred French actor Théo Navarro-Mussy from attending the premiere of the competition entry "Case 137" in what's believed to be a first for the festival in the

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#MeToo era. Navarro-Mussry has been accused of rape in a case that remains on appeal.

On Friday, Bono premiered his documentary, "Bono: Stories of Surrender." In a wide-ranging interview, the rock superstar talked about the insights the project has given him (including a deeper appreciation for his late father), his concerns about the dismantling of USAID and his first impression of Pope Leo XIV.

Ari Aster also debuted his COVID-era film "Eddington" to mixed reviews.

Over the weekend, Richard Linklater's latest, "Nouvelle Vague," fared better with critics. So too did Jennifer Lawrence's performance in Lynne Ramsay's "Die, My Love," already garnering Oscar buzz. Kristen Stewart, among a spate of actors unveiling their directorial debuts at Cannes this year, premiered "The Chronology of Water" in the festival's Un Certain Regard section. With her film, Stewart is trying to destroy the myth that directing is for a select few.

"It's such a fallacy that you need to have an unbelievable tool kit or some kind of credential," she said. "It really is if you have something to say, then a movie can fall out of you very elegantly."

"My Father's Shadow" made history Sunday as the first Nigerian film to play as an official Cannes selection with its debut in the Un Certain Regard section.

"It means a lot to people back in Nigeria. It means we can exist on these platforms and our stories can exist in these spaces," said director Akinola Davies Jr. "It's a testament to talent that's around in Nigeria. It's a testament to the stories that are there. It's a testament to the industry that's flourishing."

What more to expect from the 2025 Cannes Film Festival

AP Film Writer Jake Coyle broke down some of the key things about the festival in a thorough primer. Among the things to watch: any effects of Trump's talk about tariffs on foreign-made films at the world's largest film market. The festival serves as the start of Oscar season and there's a packed field vying for this year's Palme d'Or.

Outside of competition, there's some starry first-time directors along with Stewart: Scarlett Johansson with "Eleanor the Great" and Harris Dickinson with "Urchin."

Their films are not in the main competition, but as Brazilian director Kleber Mendonça Filho told Coyle about debuting a film at Cannes: "You release a film into that Colosseum-like situation." Filho, who is in the main competition with "The Secret Agent," noted premiering a movie at the festival is akin to "a potential invitation to a beheading."

New red carpet rules, and how stars are responding

One of the buzziest moves by Cannes this year so far has been its proclamation that nudity is banned by festivalgoers and so too are "voluminous" outfits, in particular those with a large train.

The move to ban nude looks comes amid the "naked dress" trend on red carpets, including Bianca Censori's Grammys look and many of the outfits worn by Vanity Fair party attendees after the Oscars.

Cannes press officers said last week the festival "made explicit in its charter certain rules that have long been in effect."

So how did stars at Cannes respond?

Halle Berry, who is on the festival jury headed by Juliette Binoche, told reporters she would abide by it and had changed her opening night look.

While risque looks have been in short supply, there have certainly been some "voluminous outfits," including dresses worn by Heidi Klum, Chinese actor Wan QianHui and others.

What might Cannes call fowl on next?

People on the carpet in bird costumes, perhaps, as happened when someone dressed as a giant bird appeared at the premiere of "Die, My Love."

At least it didn't spread its wings for the cameras.

Trump looks to unite Republicans with visit to Capitol before key votes on tax cut bill

By KEVIN FREKING, LISA MASCARO and LEAH ASKARINAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump will look to build momentum for his sweeping tax cut

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and immigration bill on Tuesday, taking a trip to Capitol Hill to address House Republicans as they try to work out their differences before a planned floor vote later this week.

Trump will attend the GOP's weekly conference meeting, according to a White House official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss plans not yet made public.

Republicans can afford only a few defections to get the bill through the House, and it's clear differences remain. Some deficit hawks are insisting on quicker cuts to Medicaid and green energy programs before giving their full support. Others are seeking a large increase in the state and local tax deduction.

Trump has been pushing hard for Republicans to unite behind the bill, which would enact many of his campaign promises. The bill carries his preferred title, the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act."

House Republicans narrowly advanced the sprawling 1,116-page package in a rare weekend vote late Sunday, but just barely, as GOP leaders promise more negotiations ahead.

"The bill does not yet meet the moment," said Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, a leader of the House Freedom Caucus, in a social media post immediately after the late-night session. "We can and must do better before we pass the final product."

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Monday it's "absolutely essential" that Republicans unite and pass the bill so that Trump can deliver on the agenda.

Leavitt said Americans gave Republicans a "once-in-a-generation" opportunity to "course correct our country" and "there is no time to waste."

Republicans criticizing the measure argued that the bill's new spending and tax cuts are front-loaded in the bill, while the measures to offset the cost are back-loaded. In particular, they are looking to speed up the new work requirements that Republicans want to enact for able-bodied participants in Medicaid. They also want to more quickly end tax breaks for green energy projects being used nationwide.

Majority Leader Steve Scalise said on CNBC Monday that work requirements for some Medicaid beneficiaries would begin in early 2027, a big change from the 2029 start date that is currently in the bill.

Scalise said GOP leaders are looking to give the administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Dr. Mehmet Oz, the time he needs to implement the work requirements, but would be "moving that date up dramatically."

Late last week, the House Budget Committee failed to advance the package when four conservative Republicans objected. But it was able to do so Sunday on a vote of 17-16, with the four hold-outs voting "present" to allow it to move ahead, as talks continue.

Speaker Mike Johnson, who met late Sunday with lawmakers ahead of voting, indicated he wants to impose the work requirements "as soon as possible" but acknowledged it may take states longer to change their systems.

"There will be more details to iron out and several more to take care of," Johnson, R-La., said outside the hearing room.

"But I'm looking forward to very thoughtful discussions, very productive discussions over the next few days, and I'm absolutely convinced we're going to get this in final form and pass it."

Democrats have decried the cuts Republicans are proposing to Medicaid and food stamps to offset the costs of the tax breaks. Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries noted that the House Rules committee would begin taking up the measure at 1 a.m. Wednesday.

"They literally are trying to take health care away from millions of Americans at this very moment in the dead of night," Jeffries said.

At its core, the sprawling legislative package permanently extends the existing income tax cuts that were approved during Trump's first term in 2017 and adds temporary new ones that the president campaigned on in 2024, including no taxes on tips, overtime pay and auto loan interest payments. The measure also proposes big spending increases for border security and defense.

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a nonpartisan fiscal watchdog group, estimates that the House bill is shaping up to add roughly \$3.3 trillion to the debt over the next decade.

Johnson is not just having to address the concerns of the deficit hawks in his party. He's also facing pressure from centrists who will be warily eyeing the proposed changes to Medicaid, food assistance programs

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and the rolling back of clean energy tax credits. Republican lawmakers from New York and elsewhere are also demanding a much larger state and local tax deduction.

As it stands, the bill proposes tripling what's currently a \$10,000 cap on the state and local tax deduction, increasing it to \$30,000 for joint filers with incomes up to \$400,000 a year.

Rep. Nick LaLota, one of the New York lawmakers leading the effort to lift the cap, said they have proposed a deduction of \$62,000 for single filers and \$124,000 for joint filers.

Rep. Jodey Arrington, the chairman of the House Budget Committee, said the bill remained under negotiation.

"Deliberations continue at this very moment," Arrington said. "They will continue on into the week, and I suspect right up until the time we put this big, beautiful bill on the floor of the House."

If the bill passes the House this week, it would then move to the Senate, where Republicans are also eyeing changes.

Stocks, bonds and the dollar drift after the latest downgrade to the US government's credit rating

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After recovering from an initial jolt, U.S. stocks, bonds and the value of the U.S. dollar drifted through a quiet Monday following the latest reminder that the U.S. government may be hurtling toward an unsustainable mountain of debt.

The S&P 500 edged up by 0.1% after Moody's Ratings became the last of the three major credit-rating agencies to say the U.S. federal government no longer deserves a top-tier "Aaa" rating. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 137 points, or 0.3%, and the Nasdaq composite inched up by less than 0.1%.

Moody's pointed to how the U.S. government continues to borrow more and more money to pay for its expenses, with political bickering making it difficult to either rein in Washington's spending or raise its revenue in order to get its ballooning debt under more control.

They're serious problems, but nothing Moody's said is new, and critics have been railing against Washington's inability to control its debt for many years. Standard & Poor's lowered its credit rating for the U.S. government in 2011.

Because the issues are so well known already, investors have likely already accounted for them, according to Brian Rehling, head of global fixed income strategy and other analysts at Wells Fargo Investment Institute. They're expecting "limited additional market impact" following the initial reactions to the Moody's move.

Stocks and U.S. government bond prices at first fell sharply early in Monday's trading, but they trimmed their losses as the day progressed. The S&P 500 went from a loss of 1.1% to a modest gain of 0.2% before drifting through the afternoon.

The move by Moody's essentially warns investors globally not to lend to the U.S. government at such low interest rates, and the yield on the 10-year Treasury briefly jumped above 4.55% early Monday morning. That number shows how much in interest the U.S. government has to pay in order to borrow money for 10 years, and it was up sharply from 4.43% late Friday. But it later regressed to 4.45% as more calm returned to the market.

The yield on a 30-year Treasury bond briefly leaped above 5% before likewise receding, up from less than 4% in September.

The downgrade by Moody's comes ahead of a tense period for Washington, where it's set to debate potential cuts in tax rates that could suck away more revenue, as well as the nation's limit on how much it can borrow.

If Washington has to pay more in interest to borrow cash to pay its bills, that could filter out and cause interest rates to rise for U.S. households and businesses too, in everything from mortgage rates to auto loan rates to credit cards. That in turn could slow the economy.

The downgrade adds to a long list of concerns that have already weighed on the market. Chief among

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them is President Donald Trump's trade war, which itself has forced investors globally to question whether the U.S. bond market and the U.S. dollar still deserve their reputations as some of the safest places to park cash during a crisis.

The U.S. economy seems to be holding up OK so far despite the pressures of tariffs, and hopes are high that Trump will eventually relent on his tariffs after striking trade deals with other countries. That's a major reason the S&P 500 has rallied back within 3% of its all-time high after falling roughly 20% below that market last month.

But big companies have been warning recently they're uncertain about the future. Walmart, for example, said recently that it will likely have to raise prices because of tariffs. That caused Trump over the weekend to criticize Walmart and demand it and China "eat the tariffs."

Walmart's stock slipped 0.1% Monday.

Other big retailers on the schedule to report their latest quarterly results this upcoming week include Target, Home Depot, Lowe's and TJX Cos.

On the winning end of Wall Street was Novavax, which rose 15% after it said U.S. regulators approved its COVID-19 vaccine under some conditions. The approval triggered a \$175 million milestone payment under the company's collaboration agreement with Sanofi.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 5.22 points to 5,963.60. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 137.33 to 42,792.07, and the Nasdaq composite rose 4.36 to 19,215.46.

In stock markets abroad, indexes were mixed amid mostly modest movements across Europe and Asia.

Indexes were close to flat in both Shanghai and Hong Kong after the Chinese government said retail sales rose less in April than expected. Growth in industrial output slowed to 6.1% year-on-year from 7.7% in March.

In the foreign currency markets, the value of the U.S. dollar fell against everything from the euro to the Australian dollar.

NFL owners set to discuss tush push again, along with playoff and flag football proposals

By SCHUYLER DIXON AP Pro Football Writer

The fate of the tush push will be up for discussion again along with the NFL's history of giving division champions with mediocre records home field in the playoffs.

There will be a new topic as well when NFL owners gather Tuesday and Wednesday at the headquarters of the Minnesota Vikings after the league issued a proposal that would allow its players to participate in flag football when the sport makes its Olympic debut in Los Angeles in 2028.

"There's more work to be done there," NFL executive Jeff Miller said when the flag football proposal was released last week. "It will certainly be an important topic of conversation. ... I would expect it to be an engaging and robust conversation on that topic."

Philadelphia's famous play has been a topic of conversation for years, reaching a new level when owners agreed to consider a proposal from Green Bay to ban a short-yardage scheme that has helped the Eagles win one Super Bowl — this past season — and reach another.

Owners were set to vote last month but instead tabled the topic for more discussion of a play where Jalen Hurts takes the snap on a quarterback sneak while two or three players line up behind him to try to push him past the first down line or into the end zone.

The Eagles began using the play in 2022. Buffalo was among several teams that started using it, but no team has matched Philadelphia's success rate.

"There are definitely some people that have health and safety concerns, but there's just as many people that have football concerns," NFL Competition Committee chairman Rich McKay said last month. "So I wouldn't say it was because of one particular health and safety video or discussion. It was much more about the play, the aesthetics of the play, is it part of what football has been traditionally, or is it more of a rugby play?"

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It has been a virtual guarantee that Philadelphia uses the play on fourth-and-1, and sometimes even when needing 2 yards on fourth down.

"There's no data that shows it isn't a very safe play, or else we wouldn't be pushing the tush push," Eagles owner Jeffrey Lurie said.

Detroit has proposed getting rid of a playoff system where division champions get the top four seeds in each conference regardless of record.

The original proposal by the Lions had the teams in each conference seeded one through seven based on their records, with all four division champs still guaranteed postseason berths. There also has been discussion of leaving the wild-card round alone and reseeding for the divisional playoffs.

The current system has led to quite a few situations where wild-card teams with much better records were forced to play a fourth-seeded division champion on the road.

Last season offered an example, when Minnesota finished a game behind the Lions at 14-3 in the NFC North and had to play at the NFC West champion Los Angeles Rams. LA rolled to a 27-9 victory.

During the 2010 season, New Orleans was the defending Super Bowl champion with an 11-5 record but didn't win the NFC South. The Saints had to visit NFC West champ Seattle, which finished 7-9 but had one of the best home-field advantages in the league. The Seahawks won 41-36.

The NFL has been making a big push into flag football in hopes of increasing youth participation and opportunities for women in the sport. The league played a major role in making sure the Los Angeles Olympics would be the first with flag football, with events for both men and women.

Several star players, including Kansas City quarterback Patrick Mahomes and Miami receiver Tyreek Hill, have expressed interest in the past in participating in the Olympics. Minnesota running back Aaron Jones lit up when asked last month about the possibility.

"I would absolutely love it. Every other sport gets an opportunity to win a gold medal," Jones said. "And if you're not serving your country in the military, I feel like that's the other highest honor."

The proposal would allow only one player per NFL team to be selected by a country for the Olympics in addition to each team's designated international player.

It also provides for injury protection and salary cap credit in case of any injuries and requires minimum standards for medical staffs and field surfaces.

These surreal trees survived for centuries. Scientists worry for their future

By ANNIKA HAMMERSCHLAG Associated Press

SOCOTRA, Yemen (AP) — On a windswept plateau high above the Arabian Sea, Sena Keybani cradles a sapling that barely reaches her ankle. The young plant, protected by a makeshift fence of wood and wire, is a kind of dragon's blood tree — a species found only on the Yemeni island of Socotra that is now struggling to survive intensifying threats from climate change.

"Seeing the trees die, it's like losing one of your babies," said Keybani, whose family runs a nursery dedicated to preserving the species.

Known for their mushroom-shaped canopies and the blood-red sap that courses through their wood, the trees once stood in great numbers. But increasingly severe cyclones, grazing by invasive goats, and persistent turmoil in Yemen — which is one of the world's poorest countries and beset by a decade-long civil war — have pushed the species, and the unique ecosystem it supports, toward collapse.

Often compared to the Galapagos Islands, Socotra floats in splendid isolation some 240 kilometers (150 miles) off the Horn of Africa. Its biological riches — including 825 plant species, of which more than a third exist nowhere else on Earth — have earned it UNESCO World Heritage status. Among them are bottle trees, whose swollen trunks jut from rock like sculptures, and frankincense, their gnarled limbs twisting skywards.

But it's the dragon's blood tree that has long captured imaginations, its otherworldly form seeming to belong more to the pages of Dr. Seuss than to any terrestrial forest. The island receives about 5,000

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tourists annually, many drawn by the surreal sight of the dragon's blood forests.

Visitors are required to hire local guides and stay in campsites run by Socotran families to ensure tourist dollars are distributed locally. If the trees were to disappear, the industry that sustains many islanders could vanish with them.

"With the income we receive from tourism, we live better than those on the mainland," said Mubarak Koji, Socotra's head of tourism.

But the tree is more than a botanical curiosity: It's a pillar of Socotra's ecosystem. The umbrella-like canopies capture fog and rain, which they channel into the soil below, allowing neighboring plants to thrive in the arid climate.

"When you lose the trees, you lose everything — the soil, the water, the entire ecosystem," said Kay Van Damme, a Belgian conservation biologist who has worked on Socotra since 1999.

Without intervention, scientists like Van Damme warn these trees could disappear within a few centuries — and with them many other species.

"We've succeeded, as humans, to destroy huge amounts of nature on most of the world's islands," he said. "Socotra is a place where we can actually really do something. But if we don't, this one is on us."

Increasingly intense cyclones uproot trees

Across the rugged expanse of Socotra's Firmihin plateau, the largest remaining dragon's blood forest unfolds against the backdrop of jagged mountains. Thousands of wide canopies balance atop slender trunks. Socotra starlings dart among the dense crowns while Egyptian vultures bank against the relentless gusts. Below, goats weave through the rocky undergrowth.

The frequency of severe cyclones has increased dramatically across the Arabian Sea in recent decades, according to a 2017 study in the journal *Nature Climate Change*, and Socotra's dragon's blood trees are paying the price.

In 2015, a devastating one-two punch of cyclones — unprecedented in their intensity — tore across the island. Centuries-old specimens, some over 500 years old, which had weathered countless previous storms, were uprooted by the thousands. The destruction continued in 2018 with yet another cyclone.

As greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, so too will the intensity of the storms, warned Hiroyuki Murakami, a climate scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the study's lead author. "Climate models all over the world robustly project more favorable conditions for tropical cyclones."

Invasive goats endanger young trees

But storms aren't the only threat. Unlike pine or oak trees, which grow 60 to 90 centimeters (25 to 35 inches) per year, dragon's blood trees creep along at just 2 to 3 centimeters (about 1 inch) annually. By the time they reach maturity, many have already succumbed to an insidious danger: goats.

An invasive species on Socotra, free-roaming goats devour saplings before they have a chance to grow. Outside of hard-to-reach cliffs, the only place young dragon's blood trees can survive is within protected nurseries.

"The majority of forests that have been surveyed are what we call over-mature — there are no young trees, there are no seedlings," said Alan Forrest, a biodiversity scientist at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh's Centre for Middle Eastern Plants. "So you've got old trees coming down and dying, and there's not a lot of regeneration going on."

Keybani's family's nursery is one of several critical enclosures that keep out goats and allow saplings to grow undisturbed.

"Within those nurseries and enclosures, the reproduction and age structure of the vegetation is much better," Forrest said. "And therefore, it will be more resilient to climate change."

Conflict threatens conservation

But such conservation efforts are complicated by Yemen's stalemated civil war. As the Saudi Arabia-backed, internationally recognized government battles Houthi rebels — a Shiite group backed by Iran — the conflict has spilled beyond the country's borders. Houthi attacks on Israel and commercial shipping in the Red Sea have drawn retaliation from Israeli and Western forces, further destabilizing the region.

"The Yemeni government has 99 problems right now," said Abdulrahman Al-Eryani, an advisor with Gulf State Analytics, a Washington-based risk consulting firm. "Policymakers are focused on stabilizing the country and ensuring essential services like electricity and water remain functional. Addressing climate issues would be a luxury."

With little national support, conservation efforts are left largely up to Socotrans. But local resources are scarce, said Sami Mubarak, an ecotourism guide on the island.

Mubarak gestures toward the Keybani family nursery's slanting fence posts, strung together with flimsy wire. The enclosures only last a few years before the wind and rain break them down. Funding for sturdier nurseries with cement fence posts would go a long way, he said.

"Right now, there are only a few small environmental projects — it's not enough," he said. "We need the local authority and national government of Yemen to make conservation a priority."

Aid workers feel helpless as Israel's blockade pushes Gaza towards famine

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Two cases pushed nutritionist Rana Soboh to wits' end. First, a woman was rushed to a Gaza emergency room after fainting while she breastfed her newborn. She told Soboh she hadn't eaten in days.

The next day at another medical facility, Soboh found a severely malnourished 1-year-old boy weighing 5 kilograms (11 pounds), less than half what's normal. He hadn't grown any teeth. He was too weak to cry. The mother was also malnourished, "a skeleton, covered in skin."

When the mother asked for food, Soboh started crying uncontrollably.

A feeling of powerlessness has overwhelmed her. Soboh said sometimes she gives a little money or a bit of her own food. But now she, too, is struggling.

"This is the worst feeling, wanting to help but knowing you can't. I wished the earth would crack open and swallow me," she said. "What more cruel scenes does the world need to see?"

After months of trying to raise alarm, humanitarian workers are overflowing with anger, frustration and horror over Israel's nearly three-month blockade of Gaza. The Associated Press spoke to over a dozen aid workers, some with years of experience in emergencies around the world and Palestinians who have worked through this and other wars.

They say what is happening in Gaza is a catastrophe, among the worst they have ever seen. It's more painful, they say, because it's man-made, caused by Israel cutting off all food, fuel, medicine and other supplies to the territory nearly 11 weeks ago.

The world's top authority on food crises last week warned of famine unless the blockade ends. Almost the entire population of around 2.3 million is acutely malnourished, and one in five Palestinians are on the brink of starvation, it said.

Israel on Sunday said it would allow a "basic" amount of food into Gaza, saying it didn't want a "starvation crisis" to jeopardize its new military offensive. The first few trucks entered Monday, as Israel acknowledged pressure from allies. It was not immediately clear how much would be allowed in, or when, or how.

Israel says it imposed the blockade to force Hamas to release hostages, a decision that rights groups call a "starvation tactic" and a violation of international law.

Aid workers are also wrestling with moves by Israel and the U.S. to impose a new aid system, despite their objections. The system would limit distribution to a few locations and put it under armed private contractors — to prevent theft by Hamas, Israel says. Humanitarian workers say it won't meet Gaza's needs and violates humanitarian principles. The U.N. denies that significant aid diversion takes place.

The workers say they should be allowed to do their jobs. Some 170,000 metric tons of aid, including food, sits in trucks a few miles away, just inside Israel.

"The humanitarian community is well-experienced and well-versed in terms of treating malnutrition," said

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Rachel Cummings, emergency coordinator for Save the Children in Gaza. But "we need food into Gaza and to stop this, by design, attack on the children across the whole of Gaza."

Last lifelines are closing

Community kitchens are the last lifeline for most people, but more than 60% have shut down as supplies run out. Those still working can only produce 260,000 meals a day.

At his kitchen in Khan Younis, Nihad Abu Kush and 10 cooks prepare enough meals for about 1,000 people a day. More than 2,000 show up every morning, he said.

There are no lines, just a sea of people terrified of being among the half who will miss out. They push and shove, waving pots for portions from the vats of lentils, beans or peas in tomato sauce.

"I feel so helpless because the numbers grow every day," Abu Kush said. "I look at their faces and I am unable to do anything."

On a recent day, he gave up his own portion after he locked eyes with a child with an empty pot. "I was among the 1,000 who didn't get any," Abu Kush said.

A breaking point

Soboh, a nutritionist with MedGlobal, said her team stretches supplies of malnutrition treatments. Each can of baby formula is divided among several mothers. Therapy food portions are reduced by half. They give supplements only to children up to a year old, no longer up to 2.

But their fixes get overwhelmed in the rising need.

Staff try to dissuade mothers too weak to breastfeed from giving newborns sugar water, which can cause deadly diarrhea and infections, Soboh said.

But it's the mothers' only alternative. Flour sold in the markets is rotten, full of insects, devoid of nutrition and enormously expensive. Still, if they find the cash, parents take risky trips to get it just to fill their children's stomachs, she said.

Aid groups distributing water have reduced daily allowances to 5 liters a day per person, a third of the minimum in emergency conditions. Families must choose between using water to drink, wash hands or to cook, risking infection.

Mahmoud al-Saqqa, Oxfam's food security sector coordinator, said parents tell him their kids are dizzy from lack of food. They search through garbage for scraps.

"We see the hunger in their eyes," he said. His group, like most, distributed its last food stocks weeks ago.

One of Soboh's colleagues, Fady Abed, said desperate adults in his neighborhood ask him for the nutty-butter bars used to treat severely malnourished children to slake their own hunger.

"You feel like you let them down" refusing them, Abed said. He struggles to feed his own family.

"Fear of famine," he said, "is in every home."

Pumping air for 72 hours

Medical workers improvise alternatives as supplies run out and machines break down.

Al-Awda Hospital in northern Gaza lacks fuel and oxygen cylinders, so staff use hand-pumped respirators to keep patients breathing, said hospital director Mohammed Salha.

Staff took turns hand-pumping air for one patient for 72 hours straight. The patient still died.

"People are dying ... because we simply don't have the basics," he said.

At Nasser Hospital in southern Gaza, doctors don't have drills, sealant or titanium plates to treat the many skull fractures from bombardment.

They use expired gelatins to stop bleeding, but that doesn't stop spinal fluid from leaking, which can be deadly, said a foreign doctor volunteering with the aid group Medical Aid for Palestinians.

Sometimes, there's nothing he can do. He has child patients whose cochlear implants are defective, but there's no way to replace them. Without them, "they will never be able to develop normal speech," he said.

The doctor spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations from his organization to avoid reprisals from Israeli authorities.

Israel has cut in half the number of foreign doctors allowed into Gaza since March.

New aid system

Israel imposed the blockade and resumed its military campaign in March, breaking a two-month cease-

fire with Hamas. COGAT, the Israeli military body in charge of overseeing aid, did not comment to the AP. Israeli officials have said they track the calories in Gaza and assert that there is enough aid after an influx during the ceasefire.

Israel and the United States are pressing the U.N. and aid groups to join the planned new distribution system. The U.N. and most aid groups say they can't join because it enables Israel to use aid as a weapon for its political and military goals.

In particular, it would depopulate much of Gaza by forcing Palestinians to move to planned distribution hubs.

"In the end, this is using food to humiliate, control and direct people," said al-Saqqa of Oxfam. "Every human being has the right to food."

It's the end of the world and the Cannes Film Festival does not feel fine

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

CANNES, France (AP) — "Is this what the end of the world feels like?"

So asks a character in one of the most-talked about films of the 78th Cannes Film Festival: Oliver Laxe's "Sirât," a Moroccan desert road trip through, we come to learn, a World War III purgatory.

It's well into "Sirât," a kind of combination of "Mad Max" and "The Wages of Fear," that that reality begins to sink in. Our main characters — Luis (Sergi López) and his son Esteban (Brúno Nuñez) — have come to a desert rave in search of Luis' missing daughter. When the authorities break it up, they join up with a bohemian troupe of ravers who offroad toward a new, faraway destination.

Thumping, propulsive beats abound in "Sirât," not unlike they do at Cannes' nightly parties. In this movie that jarringly confronts the notion of escape from harsh reality, there are wild tragedies and violent plot turns. Its characters steer into a nightmare that looks an awful lot like today's front pages.

"We wanted to be deeply connected to this day and age," Laxe said in Cannes.

As much as Cannes basks in the Côte d'Azur sunshine, storm clouds have been all over its movie screens at the festival, which on Monday passed the halfway point. Portents of geopolitical doom are everywhere in a lineup that's felt unusually in sync with the moment. Tom Cruise, in "Mission: Impossible – Final Awakening," has battled the AI apocalypse. Raoul Peck, in "Orwell: 2 + 2 = 5," has summoned the author's totalitarianism warnings for today. Even the new Wes Anderson ("The Phoenix Scheme") is about an oligarch.

If the French Riviera has often served as a spectacular retreat from the real world, this year's Cannes abounds with movies urgently reckoning with it. It's probably appropriate, then, that many of those films have been particularly divisive.

"Sirât" is laudable for its it's-time-to-break-stuff attitude to its characters, even if that makes for a sometimes punishing experience for the audience. This is a love-or-hate-it movie, sometimes at the same time.

Ari Aster's "Eddington," perhaps the largest American production in recent years to sincerely grapple with contemporary American politics, was dismissed more than it was praised. But for a good while, "Eddington" is breathtakingly accurate in its depiction of the United States circa 2020.

In "Eddington," the conservative, untidy sheriff Joe Cross (Joaquin Phoenix) runs for mayor against the liberal incumbent, Ted Garcia (Pedro Pascal), partly over disagreements on mask mandates. But in Aster's small-town satire, both left and right are mostly under the sway of a greater force: social media and a digital reality that can wreak havoc on daily lives.

"I wrote this film in a state of fear and anxiety about the world," Aster said in Cannes. "I wanted to try and pull back and just describe and show what it feels like to live in a world where nobody can agree on what is real anymore."

Reflecting a world running on a 'new logic'

It's been striking how much this year's Cannes has been defined by anxious, if not downright bleak vi-

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sions of the future. There have been exceptions — most notably Richard Linklater's charming ode to the French New Wave "Nouvelle Vague" and Anderson's delightful "The Phoenician Scheme." But seldom has this year's festival not felt like an ominous big-screen reflection of today.

That's been true in the overall chatter around the festival, which got underway with the new threat of U.S. tariffs on foreign-produced films on the minds of many filmmakers and producers. Rising geopolitical frictions led even the typically very optimistic Bono, in Cannes to premiere his Apple TV+ documentary "Bono: Stories of Surrender," to confess he had never lived at a time where World War III felt closer at hand.

Other films in Cannes weren't as overtly about here and now as "Eddington," but many of them have been consumed with the recurring traumas of the past. Two of the most lauded films from the beginning of the festival — Mascha Schilinski's "Sound of Falling" and "Two Prosecutors," by the Ukrainian filmmaker Sergei Loznitsa — contemplated intimate cases of history repeating itself.

"Two Prosecutors," set in Stalin's Russia, captures the slow-moving crawl of bureaucratic malevolence by adapting a story by the dissident author and physicist Georgy Demidov, who spent 14 years in the gulag. Loznitsa said his film is "not a reflection of the past. It's a reflection of the present."

In the period political thriller "The Secret Agent," Brazilian filmmaker Kleber Mendonça Filho turns to not a real historical tale but a fictional one, set in 1977 during Brazil's military dictatorship.

Wagner Moura brings a natural movie-star cool to the role of Marcelo, a technology expert returning to his hometown of Recife where government corruption is rife and hitmen are on his tail. Vividly textured, with absurdist touches (the hairy leg of a corpse plays as a colorful metaphor for the dictatorship), "The Secret Agent" seeks, and sometimes finds, its own logic of political resistance.

"I really believe that some of the most heartfelt texts come not necessarily from fact but from the logic of what is happening," Filho said in an interview. "Right, now the world seems to be running on some kind of new logic. Ten or 15 years ago, some of these ideas would be completely dismissed, even by the most conservative politicians. I think 'The Secret Agent' is a film full of mystery and intrigue but it does seem to have a certain logic which I associate with my country, Brazil."

Finding the rays of hope

In nonfiction filmmaking, no one may be better today than Peck ("I Am Not Your Negro," last year's "Ernest Cole: Lost and Found") in connecting historical dots. "Orwell: 2 + 2 = 5" marries George Orwell's words (narrated by Damian Lewis) on totalitarian states that demand "the disbelief of objective truth" with the actions of contemporary governments around the world, including Russia, Myanmar and the United States. Images of a bombed-out Mariupol in 2022 runs with its official description: "Peacekeeping operations."

It's not just geopolitical tremors quaking on movie screens in Cannes. Climate change and natural disasters are on the minds of filmmakers, too, sometimes in the most unlikely of movies.

The French animated film "Arco," by illustrator Ugo Bienvenu, is about a boy from the distant future who lives on a "Jetsons"-like platform in the clouds. He travels back in time to another future-time, 2075, where homes are bubbled to protect them from fire and storm, and robots do all of the parenting for working parents who appear to their children only as digital projections.

It's a grim future, particularly so because it feels quite plausible. But the strange charm of "Arco," a brightly colored movie with a whole lot of rainbows, is that it offers a younger generation a dream of a future they might make. A relationship between the boy from the future and a girl who finds him in 2075 sparks not just a friendship but a nourishing vision of what's possible.

"Arco," in that way, is a reminder that the most moving movies about our current doom offer a ray of hope, too.

"People are feeling disenchanted with the world, so we have to re-enchant them," said Laxe, the "Sirât" director. "Times are tough but they're very stimulating at the same time. We'll have to look deeply into ourselves. That's what we're forced to do because it's a tough world now."

'Sesame Street' moves in with Netflix, but will stay on PBS

NEW YORK (AP) — Netflix has thrown "Sesame Street" a safety net with a new streaming deal that offers the popular children's staple a broad reach while keeping it on its long-standing home, PBS, at the same time, the companies announced Monday.

Starting later this year, new episodes will run on Netflix, PBS and the PBS Kids app on the same day. No specific premiere date was immediately announced. Select past episodes will be available on Netflix worldwide.

The change for the more than 50-year-old show comes after Warner Bros. Discovery — which had aired the show since 2016 — last year decided not to renew its deal for new episodes that air on HBO and Max, though episodes will remain there until 2027.

"This unique public-private partnership will enable us to bring our research-based curriculum to young children around the world with Netflix's global reach, while ensuring children in communities across the U.S. continue to have free access on public television to the 'Sesame Street' they love," Sesame Workshop said in its press release.

Sal Perez, the show's executive producer and a Sesame Workshop vice president, told The Associated Press recently that segments on the new season will be longer and "really focused on character," while also focusing on its audience's emotional well-being and development.

For Season 56, episodes will revolve around one 11-minute story, the Netflix release said.

"The more kids want to hang out with our characters on 'Sesame Street,' the more they're going to take in those lessons," said Perez, adding that there would also be updates to the show's look and feel. The new season will also feature more exploration of the "Sesame Street" neighborhood and a look inside the legendary two-story brownstone at 123 Sesame Street that houses Elmo, Bert and Ernie and more.

"I strongly believe that our educational programming for children is one of the most important aspects of our service to the American people, and 'Sesame Street' has been an integral part of that critical work for more than half a century," said Paula Kerger, president and CEO of PBS. "We're proud to continue our partnership in the pursuit of having a profound impact on the lives of children for years to come."

"Sesame Street" has been shown in more than 150 countries, amassing more than 200 Emmys in addition to Grammy and Peabody awards and a Kennedy Center Honor for lifetime artistic achievement. Its fan-favorite characters like Oscar the Grouch, Big Bird and the Cookie Monster will now reside along the likes of Ms. Rachel, Blippi and the residents of "CoComelon Lane." Netflix says "Kids and Family" programming makes up 15% of the streamer's total viewing.

Biden has been diagnosed with aggressive prostate cancer

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Joe Biden has been diagnosed with prostate cancer, his office said Sunday.

The finding came after the 82-year-old reported urinary symptoms, which led doctors to discover a nodule on his prostate. He was diagnosed with prostate cancer on Friday, with the cancer cells having spread to the bone.

"While this represents a more aggressive form of the disease, the cancer appears to be hormone-sensitive which allows for effective management," his office said. "The President and his family are reviewing treatment options with his physicians."

In a post on X on Monday morning, Biden posted a photo of himself and his wife, Jill Biden, and wrote: "Cancer touches us all. Like so many of you, Jill and I have learned that we are strongest in the broken places. Thank you for lifting us up with love and support."

Prostate cancers are graded for aggressiveness using what's known as a Gleason score. The scores range from 6 to 10, with 8, 9 and 10 prostate cancers behaving more aggressively. Biden's office said his score was 9, suggesting his cancer is among the most aggressive.

When prostate cancer spreads to other parts of the body, it often spreads to the bones. Metastasized

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cancer is much harder to treat than localized cancer because it can be hard for drugs to reach all the tumors and completely root out the disease.

However, when prostate cancers need hormones to grow, as in Biden's case, they can be susceptible to treatment that deprives the tumors of hormones.

Outcomes have improved in recent decades and patients can expect to live with metastatic prostate cancer for four or five years, said Dr. Matthew Smith of Massachusetts General Brigham Cancer Center.

"It's very treatable, but not curable," Smith said. "Most men in this situation would be treated with drugs and would not be advised to have either surgery or radiation therapy."

Many political leaders sent Biden their wishes for his recovery.

President Donald Trump, a longtime political opponent, posted on social media that he was saddened by the news and "we wish Joe a fast and successful recovery."

Biden's vice president, Kamala Harris, said on social media that she was keeping him in her family's "hearts and prayers during this time."

"Joe is a fighter — and I know he will face this challenge with the same strength, resilience, and optimism that have always defined his life and leadership," Harris wrote.

Former President Barack Obama said his thoughts and prayers were with Biden, his former vice president, lauding his toughness. "Nobody has done more to find breakthrough treatments for cancer in all its forms than Joe, and I am certain he will fight this challenge with his trademark resolve and grace," Obama wrote on social media.

The health of Biden was a dominant concern among voters during his time as president. After a calamitous debate performance in June while seeking reelection, Biden abandoned his bid for a second term. Harris became the nominee and lost to Trump, a Republican who returned to the White House after a four-year hiatus.

But in recent days, Biden rejected concerns about his age despite reporting in the new book "Original Sin" by Jake Tapper and Alex Thompson that aides had shielded the public from the extent of his decline while serving as president.

In February 2023, Biden had a skin lesion removed from his chest that was a basal cell carcinoma, a common form of skin cancer. And in November 2021, he had a polyp removed from his colon that was a benign, but potentially pre-cancerous lesion.

In 2022, Biden made a "cancer moonshot" one of his administration's priorities with the goal of halving the cancer death rate over the next 25 years. The initiative was a continuation of his work as vice president to address a disease that had killed his older son, Beau, who died from brain cancer in 2015.

His father, when announcing the goal to halve the cancer death rate, said this could be an "American moment to prove to ourselves and, quite frankly, the world that we can do really big things."

Trump's massive import taxes haven't done much economic damage -- yet

By PAUL WISEMAN, CHRISTOPHER RUGABER and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — For months, American consumers and businesses have been hearing that President Trump's massive import taxes – tariffs – would drive up prices and hurt the U.S. economy. But the latest economic reports don't match the doom and gloom: Inflation actually eased last month, and hiring was solid in April.

For now, the disconnect has businesses and consumers struggling to reconcile what they were told to expect, what the numbers say and what they are seeing on the ground. Trump and his supporters are quick to point out that the trade wars of his first term didn't translate into higher overall inflation across the economy.

So is it time to breathe easy?

Not yet, economists say. Trump's tariffs are still huge – the highest since the Great Depression of the 1930s. They're unpredictable: The president frequently announces tariffs only to suspend them days later

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and to conjure up new ones. And they are still working their way through the system.

"We had a good jobs report. We had a cool inflation report, and that's great," said Ernie Tedeschi, director of economics at Yale University's Budget Lab. "But that should not give us comfort about what next month will be, particularly on inflation."

Walmart, for example, warned its customers last week that prices will be going up for everything from clothing to car seats. Prices for some items like bananas have already increased.

True, the truce with China last Monday dramatically reduced the risks to the U.S. economy, and U.S. and global stock markets rallied last week in relief. The United States dropped the import tax that Trump angrily imposed on China – America's third-biggest source of imports – from an eye-watering 145% to 30%; Beijing cut its retaliatory tariffs from 125% to 10%. Economists at JPMorgan Chase, who had forecast last month that the China tariffs made a recession likely, don't expect one now.

Trump's tariffs are the highest since the Great Depression

But even with the lower levies on China, the Yale Budget Lab reported that the cost of Trump's trade war will be high. Climbing prices will reduce the purchasing power of the average household by \$2,800. Shoe prices will rise 15% and clothing 14%. The tariffs will shave 0.7 percentage points off U.S. economic growth this year and increase the unemployment rate — now a low 4.2% — by nearly 0.4 percentage points.

Trump has plastered 10% taxes on imports from almost every country on earth. He's also imposed 25% duties on cars, aluminum, steel, and many imports from Canada and Mexico.

The Yale Budget Lab estimates that Trump policies will push the average U.S. tariff rate to 17.8%, highest since 1934 and up from around 2.5% when Trump took office. (Other economists put his tariff rate at 14% to 15%.) During Trump's first term, the average tariff rose just 1 percentage point despite all the headlines generated by trade policies. Now, according to the budget lab, they are rising 15 percentage points.

And the tariffs have only begun to bite. In April, the import tax revenues collected by U.S. Customs and Border Protection came to a tariff rate of just 4.5%, a fraction of what's coming, Tedeschi said. That's partly because of delays in rolling out the tariffs, including technical glitches that prevented customs agents from collecting them for a couple of weeks.

The full impact has also been delayed because companies beat the clock by bringing in foreign goods before Trump's tariffs took effect. Retailers and importers had also largely halted shipments of shoes, clothes, toys, and other items due to new tariffs, but many are resuming imports from China.

Tedeschi, who was chief economist at President Joe Biden's Council of Economic Advisers, also notes that it just takes time for tariffs to translate into higher prices. During Trump's first term, his January 2018 levies on foreign washing machines didn't yield more expensive appliances until April that year. Still, a Federal Reserve study this month found that duties Trump imposed in 2018 and 2019 meant higher prices as soon as two months later, suggesting consumers could start paying more in June.

Consumers are less willing to accept higher prices

Things have changed from the first time Trump was in the White House, when companies essentially passed along the entire cost of his tariffs. Now American consumers, still scarred by the burst of inflation that followed the COVID-19 pandemic, may be more reluctant to accept higher prices.

"Consumers weren't inflation exhausted in 2018 the way that they are now," Tedeschi said. Surveys by Federal Reserve banks in Atlanta and Dallas have found that most companies would eat at least some of the tariff costs this time around. And one reason that the Labor Department's producer price index fell in April was that retailers and wholesalers reported lower profit margins, a sign that they may have been absorbing some of the tariff cost.

Trump, who has long insisted that foreign countries and not U.S. companies or consumers pay his tariffs, on Saturday lashed out at Walmart for saying it would raise prices. On social media, he demanded that the giant retailer "EAT THE TARIFFS, and do not charge valued customers anything. I'll be watching, and so will your customers!!!"

The economic damage doesn't just come from the cost of tariffs, but from the erratic way the president imposes them. For instance, the 145% China tariffs were just suspended for 90 days. Likewise, Trump has paused high taxes he slapped last month on imports from countries with which the United States runs

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trade deficits. Could those levies come back?

Consumers are clearly fearful that the duties will boost prices, as consumer confidence surveys have plummeted since Trump began ramping up his tariff threats in February. The Conference Board's consumer confidence index has fallen for five straight months to its lowest level since the depths of the pandemic in May 2020.

Costlier coffee and Christmas wreathes are coming

Snowy Owl Coffee Roasters in Sandwich, Massachusetts, which imports beans from Brazil, Nicaragua, Burundi and other countries, is only now planning to raise its prices this week to cover the cost of the 10% tariffs. It plans to add 25 cents to 35 cents to the price for each cup.

"Tariffs are increasing costs and they're adding to a lot of uncertainty around the potential for a downturn," said Shayna Ferullo, 44, co-owner of Snowy Owl. "We are looking closely at the year ahead with the goal of consolidating and operating really, really tightly."

Ferullo will also have to pay much more than she budgeted to renovate her shop in Brewster, Massachusetts -- one of her three retail locations -- because the contractor has raised his estimate, partly due to tariffs on building supplies. She has already elected to not fill one job after an employee left and is looking at ways automation could help reduce her labor costs, though she hasn't laid off any of her 35 employees.

Jared Hendricks, CEO of Village Lighting Co., last month halted shipments of supplies he gets from China -- holiday storage bags, wreathes, holiday lights and garlands. Now that the U.S. and China have reached a truce, he's trying to get the products to the United States in time for the holidays.

He estimates that it will take 10 to 20 days from China to the West Coast ports via ship and another 20 days to 40 days for the goods to go through U.S. Customs, then travel via Union Pacific Railways to his company in Utah. Given all the expected delays, Hendricks said he's worried that his holiday décor won't arrive by Sept. 1 when it should start appearing in stores.

Meanwhile, he's figuring out how to foot a \$1 million bill for the tariffs. He's hoping he can cover the cost by raising prices 10% to 15%.

In the meantime, he's trying to secure a loan against his house to pay for the levies.

"We are moving forward," he said, "but at great cost, personal risk, and weariness."

The NBA's final 4 is set: Thunder, Knicks, Wolves and Pacers remain, and parity reigns again

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

The parity era continues in the NBA.

The New York Knicks haven't won an NBA championship since 1973. The Indiana Pacers won their most recent title that year — in the ABA. The Oklahoma City Thunder franchise has one title in its history, that coming in 1979 when the team called Seattle home. And the Minnesota Timberwolves have never even been to the NBA Finals.

Meet the NBA's final four.

When Commissioner Adam Silver hands one of those teams the Larry O'Brien Trophy next month, it'll mark a league first — seven championship franchises in a seven-year span.

There hasn't been a back-to-back NBA champion since Golden State in 2017 and 2018. From there, the list of champions goes like this: Toronto in 2019, the Los Angeles Lakers in 2020, Milwaukee in 2021, Golden State in 2022, Denver in 2023 and Boston last season.

It's the longest such run of different champions in NBA history; Major League Baseball, the NHL and the NFL have all had longer ones, and not too long ago, either.

But for the NBA, this is different. The league wanted unpredictability, especially after four consecutive Cleveland-vs.-Golden State title matchups from 2015 through 2018.

And things have been highly unpredictable since. No matter what the Finals matchup is this year, the NBA will be seeing 11 conference-champion franchises in the span of seven seasons.

"We've still got eight more wins to achieve our ultimate goal," Minnesota coach Chris Finch said. "We've

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still got two more series. We're only halfway there."

The season is over for 26 of the NBA's 30 clubs. But the fun stuff is just starting.

Conference finals start Tuesday

The Western Conference finals — No. 6 seed Minnesota vs. No. 1 seed Oklahoma City — begin Tuesday night in Oklahoma. The Eastern Conference finals — No. 4 seed Indiana vs. No. 3 seed New York — begin Wednesday night in Manhattan. The Wolves lost the West finals last year; the Pacers lost the East finals a year ago.

"You've got to have big dreams," Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said. "You don't know how often you're going to be in this position."

Indeed, the championship window for teams doesn't seem to be staying open as long as it did in the past.

Boston was a huge favorite to win its second straight title; the Celtics didn't get out of Round 2, in part because they couldn't hold onto big leads and in part because Jayson Tatum ruptured his right Achilles tendon in that series with the Knicks.

"Upset or not, whatever it is, we beat a great team," Knicks guard Jalen Brunson said. "They obviously lost a huge piece ... but they're still a great team."

Damian Lillard tore an Achilles tendon in Round 1, ending Milwaukee's hopes. Cleveland, the top seed in the East, bowed out in Round 2 against Indiana after a slew of Cavs were dealing with health issues. Stephen Curry strained his hamstring; that was all it took to doom Golden State's chances in Round 2 against Minnesota.

"He's our sun," Golden State coach Steve Kerr said. "This is a solar system. He's our sun."

And now, the NBA solar system is about to see new star holding the trophy.

The next one

There is nobody left in these playoffs who has been an NBA Finals MVP. Not even close.

In fact, there are only seven players left — Indiana's Pascal Siakam, Aaron Nesmith and Thomas Bryant; Knicks teammates P.J. Tucker, Cam Payne and Mikal Bridges; and Oklahoma City's Alex Caruso — who have appeared in a Finals game. And most of those appearances didn't add up to much; Siakam is the only player left in these playoffs with more than 100 Finals points.

So, who will the next Finals MVP be? Maybe Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, the Canadian guard and likely MVP from the Thunder? The "Mr. Clutch" award winner, Brunson from the Knicks? Anthony Edwards, the presumed next face of the league from the Timberwolves? Tyrese Haliburton, the dazzling guard and Olympic gold medalist who keeps getting overlooked by everyone outside of Indiana?

None of them would be surprise choices.

"Our ultimate goal isn't just the Western Conference finals," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "You've got to go through there to get there."

Who has the edge?

If the NBA's final four was its own league this season, taking just the head-to-head results between those four clubs would suggest the Thunder are the clear favorite.

Oklahoma City went 6-2 against the other three conference finalists, while New York and Indiana both went 3-4 and Minnesota went 3-5.

The Thunder swept the Pacers and Knicks, and the Pacers swept the Timberwolves.

As far as the head-to-heads going into the conference finals, Oklahoma City and Minnesota split four meetings — with the Timberwolves outscoring the Thunder 475-472 — while the Knicks went 2-1 against Indiana, with all three games decided by at least 11 points.

"You can feel good about it, feel however you want to feel about it," Haliburton said of getting to this point. "But at the end of the day, we're not done. We know we all have a bigger goal at mind. Our goal wasn't just to get to the Eastern Conference finals and be done. Our goal is to win a championship."

Great Scottie! Scheffler pulls away to win PGA Championship for 3rd major title

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Scottie Scheffler had every reason to worry the PGA Championship was slipping away.

A five-shot lead on the front nine was gone in four holes. Every shot seemed to go left and he didn't know why. Jon Rahm was peeling off birdies and on the verge of tracking him down Sunday at Quail Hollow.

And that's when Scheffler showed why he has been golf's No. 1 player for two straight years, why he has compiled more PGA Tour titles quicker than anyone this side of Tiger Woods and Jack Nicklaus since 1950.

And why he now has the Wanamaker Trophy to go along with two Masters titles.

Scheffler turned a tense Sunday into another runaway by not missing a shot when the pressure was at its peak, giving himself another pleasant walk to the 18th green with another major title secure in the hands of golf's best.

"This back nine will be one that I remember for a long time," Scheffler said. "It was a grind out there. I think at one point on the front I maybe had a four- or five-shot lead, and making the turn, I think I was tied for the lead.

"So to step up when I needed to the most, I'll remember that for a while."

There was nothing fancy about it, just fairways and greens and holing the putts that eluded Rahm in his first time in serious contention at a major since he won the 2023 Masters and left at the end of the year for LIV Golf.

Rahm's hopes ended when he failed to convert birdie chances on the two easiest holes on the back nine at Quail Hollow, and then finished bogey-double bogey-double bogey. By then the tournament was effective over. It only cost Rahm money.

The only comfort for Scheffler was looking across the lake on the par-5 15th to see Rahm in a bunker, leading to bogey on the 16th that gave Scheffler a three-shot cushion. Scheffler recalls thinking, "If I birdie here, it's going to go a long way."

He drilled 3-wood just over the back of the green, and from the same spot where Rahm earlier that hit putter 12 feet by the hole, Scheffler coozied it up to a foot for birdie.

Scheffler closed with a bogey he could afford for an even-par 71, giving him a five-shot victory and his third major title. Scheffler became the first player since Seve Ballesteros to win his first three majors by three shots or more.

The margin doesn't match up with the grind. That much was clear when Scheffler raised his arms on the 18th green and then ferociously slammed his cap to the turf, a brand of emotion rarely seen by the 28-year-old Texas star.

"Just a lot of happiness," he said. "Just maybe thankful as well. It was a long week. I felt like this was as hard as I battled for a tournament in my career."

It was a lot sweeter than last year, when he was arrested outside Valhalla Golf Club for charges later dropped that he wasn't following police instructions as they investigated a traffic fatality.

No change of that happening at Quail Hollow. He stayed close enough to walk.

Inside the ropes, this was no walk in the park the final margin might suggest.

Scheffler had a five-shot lead standing on the sixth tee. But with a shaky swing that led to two bogeys, and with Rahm making three birdies in a four-hole stretch around the turn, they were tied when Scheffler got to the 10th tee.

It looked like a duel to the finish, with Bryson DeChambeau doing all he could to get in the mix. Under the most pressure he felt all day, Scheffler didn't miss a shot off the tee or from the fairway until his lead was back to four shots.

Rahm wound up seven shots behind, but the two-time major champion was the only serious threat. After bogey on the 16th hole, he had to take on a dangerous pin at the par-3 17th. It bounded over the sunbaked green into the water for double bogey. And his last tee shot went left off the grassy bank and

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into the stream for another double bogey.

All that work to make up a five-shot deficit at the start of the day and Rahm closed with a 73 to tie for eighth.

"Yeah, the last three holes, it's a tough pill to swallow right now," Rahm said.

"I'll get over it. I'll move on," Rahm said. "Again, there's a lot more positive than negative to think about this week. I'm really happy I put myself in position and hopefully learn from this and give it another go in the U.S. Open."

DeChambeau birdied the 14th and 15th to get within two shots, but he never had another good look at birdie and bogeyed the 18th for a 70. He tied for second with Harris English (65) and Davis Riley, who overcame a triple bogey on No. 7 to play bogey-free the rest of the way and salvaged a 72.

"I'm baffled right now. Just felt like things just didn't go my way this week," DeChambeau said. "I drove it as good as I can. ... I gave myself a good chance. I just felt like a couple breaks went a different way."

J.T. Poston, the North Carolina native who also flirted with an outside chance, bogeyed the last two holes for a 73 to tie for fifth.

English finished his Sunday-best score as Scheffler was making his way down the third hole. He had a flight to catch that afternoon. He also was the clubhouse leader. But he looked at Scheffler's name atop the leaderboard and said with a smile, "I don't see him slipping a whole lot. I see myself catching my flight."

But then Scheffler unable to find his swing. He hit only two fairway on the front nine. He failed to convert birdies on the par-5 seventh and the reachable par-4 eighth. On eight of his nine holes, his miss was to the left. And he was tied with the red-hot Rahm.

But part of Scheffler's greatness is his ability to wear down a field, which he did at the Masters both times he won.

"I hit the important shots well this week, and that's why I'm walking away with the trophy," Scheffler said.

He finished at 11-under 273 and picked up his 15th victory in just his sixth year on the PGA Tour. Dating to 1950, Scheffler is the third-fastest player to go from one to 15 tour wins, behind only Tiger Woods and Jack Nicklaus, and even then by a matter of months.

His victory comes a month after Rory McIlroy captured the Masters to complete the career Grand Slam. The PGA Championship was always going to be a tough act to follow and it didn't come close in terms of drama. But it served as a reminder why Scheffler has been No. 1 for two straight years, and why it will take a lot to replace him.

McIlroy made the cut on the number, shot 72-72 on the weekend and tied for 47th. It was his lowest 72-hole finish in four years in the majors. McIlroy declined all four days to speak to the media.

Scheffler came into the PGA Championship off an eight-shot victory in the CJ Cup Byron Nelson. And then he won a major by five. It was the first time since Woods in 2000 that a player won consecutive PGA Tour starts by five shots or more in the same season.

Portugal's election brings another minority government and a far-right rise

By BARRY HATTON and HELENA ALVES Associated Press

LISBON, Portugal (AP) — Portugal's president convened the country's political parties for consultations Monday, after a general election delivered another minority government as well as an unprecedented showing by populist party Chega (Enough) that added momentum to Europe's shift to the far-right.

The center-right Democratic Alliance, led by the Social Democratic Party, captured 89 seats in the 230-seat National Assembly to win Sunday's ballot. The outcome leaves it without a parliamentary majority, however, and vulnerable to opposition parties that ousted it two months ago in a confidence vote after less than a year in power.

Portugal's third general election in three years provided little hope for ending the worst spell of political instability for decades in the European Union country of 10.6 million people.

"The Portuguese don't want any more early elections," Luis Montenegro, the Democratic Alliance leader

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and incoming prime minister, said late Sunday in an appeal for opposition parties to let him serve a full four-year term.

"We all have to be able to speak to each other and put the national interest first," he said.

Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, who has no executive power, was consulting with parties before inviting the election winner to form a government, in line with the constitution.

Chega upsets Portugal's power dynamics

Chega's result shook up the traditional balance of power in a trend already witnessed elsewhere in Europe with parties such as France's National Rally, the Brothers of Italy, and Alternative for Germany, which are now in the political mainstream.

Chega leader Andre Ventura has appeared at events with the leaders of those parties in recent years.

For the past 50 years, the Social Democrats and the center-left Socialist Party have alternated in power in Portugal.

Chega collected the same number of seats as the Socialists — 58 — and could yet claim second place when four remaining seats decided by voters abroad are attributed in coming days.

"The two-party system is over," Ventura, a lawyer and former soccer pundit, said.

Chega competed in its first election just six years ago, when it won one seat, and has fed off disaffection with the more moderate traditional parties.

Campaigning under the slogan "Save Portugal," it describes itself as a nationalist party and has focused on curbing immigration and cracking down on corruption.

On the streets of Lisbon, 42-year-old bank employee Marta Costa said she felt "disappointment and sadness" at Chega's showing.

"We are losing the world and not building something decent for our children," she said. "I think we are not placing enough value on freedom."

Emilia Gordo, 55, said voters expressed a desire for change. "They (Chega) are trying everything to bring about a change, the country feels a need for change."

The Socialists, meanwhile, are without a leader after Pedro Nuno Santos said he was standing down after the party's worst result since 1987.

The Democratic Alliance, which also includes the smaller Popular Party, lost a confidence vote in parliament in March as opposition lawmakers teamed up against it. That triggered an early election, which had been due in 2028.

The confidence vote was sparked by a political storm around potential conflicts of interest in the business dealings of Prime Minister Luis Montenegro's family law firm. Montenegro has denied any wrongdoing.

Corruption scandals have dogged Portuguese politics in recent years, helping fuel the rise of Chega. But the party has recently fallen foul of its own lawmakers' alleged wrongdoing. One is suspected of stealing suitcases from the Lisbon airport and selling the contents online, and another allegedly faked the signature of a dead woman. Both resigned.

Immigration and housing concern voters

Chega owes much of its success to its demands for a tighter immigration policy that have resonated with voters.

Portugal has witnessed a steep rise in immigration. In 2018, there were fewer than a half-million legal immigrants in the country, according to government statistics. By early this year, there were more than 1.5 million, many of them Brazilians and Asians working in tourism and farming.

Thousands more lack the proper documents to be in Portugal. The Democratic Alliance government announced two weeks before the election that it was expelling about 18,000 foreigners living in the country without authorization. Though such a step is routine, the timing drew accusations that it was trying to capture votes from Chega.

A housing crisis has also fired up debate. House prices and rents have been soaring for the past 10 years, due in part to an influx of white-collar foreigners who have driven up prices.

House prices jumped another 9% last year, said the National Statistics Institute, a government body. Rents in and around the capital Lisbon, where around 1.5 million people live, last year saw the steepest

rise in 30 years, climbing more than 7%, the institute said.

The problem is compounded by Portugal being one of Western Europe's poorest countries.

The average monthly salary last year was around 1,200 euros (\$1,340) before tax, according to the statistics agency. The government-set minimum wage this year is 870 euros (\$974) a month before tax.

Critics say Trump's religion agenda will benefit conservative Christians the most

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

White House Faith Office. A Task Force to Eradicate Anti-Christian Bias. A Religious Liberty Commission. President Donald Trump has won plaudits from his base of conservative Christian supporters for establishing multiple faith-related entities.

"We're bringing back religion in our country," Trump said at a recent Rose Garden event, on the National Day of Prayer, when he announced the creation of the Religious Liberty Commission. "We must always be one nation under God, a phrase that they would like to get rid of, the radical left."

But others, including some Christians, are alarmed by these acts — saying Trump isn't protecting religion in general but granting a privileged status to politically conservative expressions of Christianity that happen to include his supporters.

What's up with the 'separation of church and state' debate?

Critics are even more aghast that he's questioning a core understanding of the First Amendment. "They say 'separation between church and state,'" Trump said at the prayer day gathering, when he talked about establishing the White House Faith Office. "I said, all right, let's forget about that for one time."

Trump's creation of these various bodies is "definitely not normal, and it's very important to not look at them as individual entities," said the Rev. Shannon Fleck, executive director of Faithful America, a progressive Christian advocacy organization.

"They are indicative of an entire system that is being constructed at the national level," she said. "It's a system specifically designed to guide and shape culture in the U.S."

Fleck worries about the combined effect of Trump administration actions and a spate of decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court in recent years. The court, now with three Trump appointees, has lowered barriers between church and state in its interpretations of the First Amendment's ban on any congressionally recognized establishment of religion.

"My freedom of religion runs right up to the point when yours begins, and if I am then trying to establish something that's going to affect your right to practice your faith, that is against the First Amendment," Fleck said.

But religious supporters of Trump are happy with his expansion of religion-related offices.

"We were a nation birthed by prayer, founded on the Judeo-Christian ethic to ensure that people could worship as they wished," said Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, a Republican, at the Rose Garden ceremony where he was announced as chair of the Religious Liberty Commission. Many members are conservative Christian clerics and commentators; some have supported Trump politically. The event featured Christian praise music along with Jewish, Muslim and Christian prayers.

White House assistant press secretary Taylor Rogers, via email, said the commission is ensuring "that all Americans' God-given right is protected, no matter their religion." Rogers said the criticism is coming from anti-Trump advocacy groups that are trying to undermine his agenda.

A closer look at the new religious entities

The three entities created under Trump overlap in their marching orders and, in some cases, their membership.

In February, Trump established the White House Faith Office, led by evangelist Paula White-Cain as a "special government employee," according to the announcement. She's resuming a similar role she held in the first Trump administration.

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White-Cain — who also serves on the new Religious Liberty Commission — was one of the earliest high-profile Christian leaders to support Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and is considered Trump's spiritual adviser.

Her office is designed to consult "experts within the faith community" on "practices to better align with the American values." It also is tasked with religious-liberty training and promoting grant opportunities for faith-based entities; and working to "identify failures" in federal protection for religious liberty.

Also in February, Trump created a Task Force to Eradicate Anti-Christian Bias, led by Attorney General Pam Bondi with representatives from several federal departments.

Its mandate is to expose and reverse what Trump claims were "egregious" violations of Christians' rights under former President Joe Biden. Many of those claims have been disputed, as has the need for singling out for protection the nation's largest and most culturally and politically dominant religious group.

A White House action focused on a specific religion is not unprecedented. The Biden administration, for example, issued strategy plans to combat antisemitism and Islamophobia. Both Trump administrations have issued executive orders on combating antisemitism.

An April hearing of the Task Force to Eradicate Anti-Christian Bias featured witnesses from across federal departments, alleging that Christians during the Biden administration faced discrimination for such things as opposing vaccine mandates or "DEI/LGBT ideology" on religious grounds. Some claimed that schools' legal or tax enforcement actions were actually targeted because of their Christian religion.

The State and Veterans Affairs departments have asked people to report alleged instances of anti-Christian bias.

The White House said the Justice Department formed specific task forces to respond to what it called a "concentration of bias" against Christians and Jews, but that it's committed to combating discrimination against Americans of any faith.

The latest entity to be created, the Religious Liberty Commission, has a mandate to recommend policies to protect and "celebrate America's peaceful religious pluralism."

Patrick, the chair, has supported legislation requiring Texas school districts to allow prayer time for students and says he wants his state to emulate Louisiana in requiring the Ten Commandments to be posted in public school classrooms.

Among the commission's mandates: to look into "conscience protections in the health care field and concerning vaccine mandates" and government "displays with religious imagery."

Among the commissioners are Catholic bishops, Protestant evangelists, a rabbi and attorneys focused on religious liberty cases. Its advisory boards include several Christian and some Jewish and Muslim members.

A commission member, author and broadcaster, Eric Metaxas, supported its work in a column Friday for the conservative site Blaze Media.

"This commission's goal is to strengthen the liberty of every single American — regardless of that person's faith and even of whether that person has any faith," he wrote. "It also aims to restore those liberties attacked by hostile and misguided secularists."

Fulfilling a priority for Trump's conservative Christian backers

Charles Haynes, senior fellow for religious liberty at the Freedom Forum, a nonpartisan foundation focused on First Amendment rights, said the various entities reflect Trump's attempt to fulfill an agenda priority of his conservative Christian supporters.

He said the entities' work reflects their long-standing contention that the First Amendment has "been misapplied to keep Christians out of the public square, to discriminate against Christianity, by which they mean their understandings of Christianity."

Trump's moves and recent Supreme Court cases are reversing a consensus dating at least to the 1940s that the First Amendment strictly prohibits government-sponsored religion at the federal and state levels, Haynes said.

He said the First Amendment actually provides broad protections for religious expressions in settings such as public schools. He helped write a Freedom Forum guide on religion in public schools, endorsed

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by groups across the ideological spectrum. It notes that within some limits, students can pray on their own time in schools, express their faith in class assignments, distribute religious literature, form school religious clubs and receive some accommodations based on religious belief.

But Haynes noted that the Supreme Court is now considering allowing Oklahoma to pay for a Catholic charter school, which he said could erase a long-standing standard that public-funded schools don't teach a particular religion.

"It's a very different day in the United States when both the Supreme Court and the president of the United States appear to be intent on changing the arrangement on religious freedom that we thought was in place," Haynes said. "It's a radical departure from how we've understood ourselves."

Today in History: May 20, Lincoln signs Homestead Act

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, May 20, the 140th day of 2025. There are 225 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On May 20, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act, which was intended to encourage settlements west of the Mississippi River by making federal land available for private ownership and farming. About 10% of the land area of the United States (270 million acres, or 1.1 million square km) would be privatized by 1934.

Also on this date:

In 1927, Charles Lindbergh took off from Roosevelt Field on Long Island, New York, aboard the Spirit of St. Louis on his historic solo flight to France.

In 1932, Amelia Earhart departed from Newfoundland in an attempt to become the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic. (Because of weather and equipment problems, Earhart landed the following day in Northern Ireland instead of her intended destination, France.)

In 1948, Chiang Kai-shek was elected as the first president of the Republic of China (Taiwan).

In 1956, the United States exploded the first airborne hydrogen bomb over Bikini Atoll in the Pacific.

In 1961, a white mob attacked a busload of Freedom Riders in Montgomery, Alabama, prompting the federal government to send in U.S. marshals to restore order.

In 1969, U.S. and South Vietnamese forces captured Ap Bia Mountain, referred to as "Hamburger Hill" by the Americans, following one of the bloodiest battles of the Vietnam War.

In 1985, Radio Marti, operated by the U.S. government, began broadcasting. Cuba responded by attempting to jam its signal.

In 2015, four of the world's biggest banks — JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup's banking unit Citicorp, Barclays and the Royal Bank of Scotland — agreed to pay more than \$5 billion in penalties and plead guilty to rigging the currency markets.

Today's Birthdays: Japanese baseball star Sadaharu Oh is 85. Singer-actor Cher is 79. Actor-comedian Dave Thomas is 76. Sen. Mike Crapo, a Republican from Idaho, is 74. Political commentator Ron Reagan is 67. Musician Jane Wiedlin (The Go-Go's) is 67. Actor Bronson Pinchot is 66. TV personality Ted Allen is 60. Actor Mindy Cohn is 59. Actor Timothy Olyphant is 57. Former racing driver Tony Stewart is 54. Rapper Busta Rhymes is 53. Actor Matt Czuchy (zoo-KREE') is 48. Actor-singer Naturi Naughton is 41. Cyclist Chris Froome is 40. Country musician Jon Pardi is 40.