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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.

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.

Monday, May 26

MEMORIAL DAY

State High School Baseball at Brookings

Tuesday, May 27

Senior Menu: Lemon chicken breast, wild rice green beans, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.

Girls Golf Region at Sioux Valley (Volga), 10 a.m.

State High School Baseball at Brookings

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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.

Gaza Aid Standoff

The UK paused trade negotiations with Israel yesterday, citing concerns over the recent escalation of the war in Gaza. The announcement came alongside new sanctions targeting Israeli settlers and organizations accused of attacking Palestinian communities in the West Bank.

The news followed an 11-week blockade, triggering severe supply shortages and famine warnings across Gaza. Israeli officials told aid agencies Sunday that around 100 trucks per day would be allowed in from Monday to Friday—roughly one-fifth of the prewar average. Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and militants, says more than 53,000 people have been killed since the conflict began in October 2023.

The announcement comes as Israel launched a new military operation in Gaza this week. Israel says the offensive is needed to dismantle Hamas, whose leader Israel is believed to have killed in a recent airstrike. Israel also aims to free the 58 remaining hostages, up to 23 of whom are believed still alive.

COVID-19 Vaccine Requirements

US health officials released new guidelines for COVID-19 vaccine booster shots yesterday, narrowing approval to Americans over 65 and anyone older than 6 months with at least one risk factor for severe illness. For those between 6 months and 64 years, regulators will require more stringent randomized controlled trials to test the clinical efficacy and safety of each booster rather than rely on immune response data.

Developed under the first Trump administration, COVID-19 vaccines became publicly available in December 2020 in the US. Globally, researchers estimate the vaccines saved between 15 million and 20 million lives, with average rates of severe side effects such as myocarditis reported between 1 and 10 per million. Since the pandemic, the uptake of boosters—tweaked annually based on dominant strains—has fallen significantly. About half of Americans 75 or older received this season's shot.

The announcement was made via a New England Journal of Medicine article.

New Orleans Prison Break

A New Orleans jail maintenance worker was arrested Monday for helping 10 inmates escape last week. The 33-year-old employee—who says he acted under duress—shut off water in a jail cell, allowing inmates to remove a toilet and sink fixture, dig a hole, and flee. Before leaving, they scrawled messages on the cell wall: "we innocent" and "to easy LOL" (sic).

The inmates—ages 19 to 42—were being held in Orleans Parish jail on charges including murder and armed robbery. After escaping through a hole in the cell, the inmates ran down a flight of stairs, scaled the prison wall, and fled on foot on Interstate 10. Four have since been recaptured; a search for the six others is ongoing. The escape, which went undetected for hours, is believed to be among the largest in Louisiana's history.

Orleans Parish jail has been under a federal consent decree since 2013, designed to address conditions including overcrowding and understaffing. Observers say some areas of the jail have gone unsupervised for hours.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

George Wendt, six-time Emmy-nominated TV and stage actor best known for "Cheers," dies at age 76. Chess legend Magnus Carlsen draws against "the world" in 46-day game; 143,000 players competed against Carlsen, with their moves determined by popular vote.

NFL owners approve proposal to allow players to compete in flag football at the 2028 Summer Olympics. Indiana Fever-Chicago Sky matchup Sunday hauled in 2.7 million viewers, the most-watched WNBA regular season game since 2000.

Science & Technology

Google debuts real-time language translation for Google Meet, beginning with English-Spanish translation for Google AI subscribers.

Engineers develop membrane improving carbon capture and release cycle; approach is six times more efficient and up to 20% cheaper than existing systems.

New species of dumbo octopus discovered more than 3,425 feet below the surface off the Australian coast; the "flapjack" octopus can flatten itself along the seafloor or stretch vertically like an umbrella.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.4%, Dow -0.3%, Nasdaq -0.4%) driven by tech stocks drop; S&P 500 ends six-day winning streak.

Tesla stock up as CEO Elon Musk commits to staying in the role for five years, plans to reduce political spending.

Insurance broker Acrisure valued at \$32B in latest Bain-led funding round.

Microsoft-backed software unicorn Builder.ai, formerly Engineer.ai, enters insolvency proceedings.

GM CEO Mary Barra tops Fortune's list of 100 most powerful women in business, followed by Accenture CEO Julie Sweet, Citigroup CEO Jane Fraser.

Politics & World Affairs

Trump administration secures release of US Air Force veteran from detention in Venezuela; veteran's father says his son traveled there to get treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder.

European Union adopts four new sets of sanctions against Russia, targeting fleet of ships covertly exporting oil.

Sudan's military says it has taken full control of Khartoum state, ousting all rebel forces.

Sudanese government accuses the United Arab Emirates of launching a drone strike on Port Sudan, the first allegation of direct UAE military involvement in the conflict.

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Building mostly down

The former Jacobson Agency building is nearly torn down with just the rubble to be hauled away. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton City Council weighs infrastructure projects amid funding challenges

By Elizabeth Varin

Several key infrastructure projects headlined discussion at Tuesday's City Council meeting.

Among pressing topics discussed was the proposal to replace the aging city park bathroom with a comfort station, which includes both restrooms and a tornado shelter. However, federal funding may be harder to get, if any is available at all for a project like the comfort station.

FEMA officials announced in April that the agency was ending the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program, and applications approved in fiscal years 2020-2023 were canceled. Groton officials had applied for federal emergency funds, though not through the BRIC program, said Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich. However, it isn't looking positive.

"I don't have an answer, but, if I were going to guess, I don't think they would be awarding that," he said.

Council members Brian Bahr and Karyn Babcock emphasized that they didn't want to take any action before official word is sent from FEMA.

"I personally would like to see the city wait for the rubber stamp," Bahr said, adding that a lot of work went into the proposed project, and he doesn't want to see that go to waste.

Heinrich advised the council to just keep other options in the back of their heads.

The council also continued discussion about Railroad Avenue road improvements.

Ken Hier, senior civil designer at IMEG Corporation, discussed a grant option from the state's Department of Transportation if the city wanted to pursue that as a funding source.

Even still, that road, that project would score real low," he said. "It would be really low priority because there's no utility work under it. ...You'd be applying for a long time without a chance for a community impact grant."

Council members, though, discussed prioritizing another road project before Railroad Avenue.

"We appreciate everything with this, but we've only got a few gravel roads left in town that need to be addressed before this," said Mayor Scott Hanlon.

Hier said problems on Railroad Avenue could get worse down the road.

Council member Bahr said Railroad Avenue has been a good road for the city, but Groton is facing a lot of expenses coming up with the sewer project.

Another project may be coming in the next few years.

A potential state project to overhaul a portion of Highway 12 in town, though details remain scarce for now. The project isn't expected to begin until 2029, but it could impact the multi-million dollar sewer system improvement project as some utility lines would have to be moved.

- The council approved hiring Lincoln Krause as day baseball coach with no previous experience listed.
- The council approved replatting a portion of land east of Groton. The CWE Addition Plat consists of two lots: one 16.35 acre section east of 407th Avenue between 134th Street and the BNSF Railroad and a 52.21 acre section just east of where Highway 12 and 134th Street meet.
- The council approved the second reading of an ordinance increasing the solid waste rate. The new rate, which goes into effect June 1, increases the fee from \$16.50 per month to \$20 per month. It reflects the increase the city saw in the trash collection bid approved earlier this year. The council also approved the second reading of an ordinance amending some language in its electrical rate ordinance. That change went into effect immediate upon being passed by the council.
- City offices will be closed Monday, May 26, for Memorial Day.
- The council held off on a baseball discussion agenda item as nobody outside of the council was at the meeting for the agenda item. However, the council revisited discussion of payments to the concession manager. The manager had previously not received payment for half of the concession stand profit until November. However, the council had pushed to have the payment made sooner after the baseball season ends.

OPENING MAY 2ND
CLOSING JUNE 2ND

WEBER LANDSCAPING GREENHOUSE

620 WEST THIRD AVENUE

GROTON

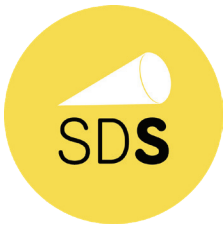
HOURS OF OPERATION

M-F 10-6

SAT 10-4

SUN 12-4





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

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Trump's proposed satellite cuts raise questions about the fate of EROS in South Dakota

Supercomputer at Sioux Falls-area center renamed 'McKinley' because of Trump order

BY: JOHN HULT - MAY 20, 2025 1:59 PM

A preliminary budget request from President Donald Trump takes aim at a satellite program with a 50-year history whose data is housed just northeast of Sioux Falls, at a facility employing hundreds of people.

Trump's discretionary budget request for NASA would cut \$1.1 billion in funding for Earth observation programs, including what the request describes as cuts to the "gold-plated, two billion dollar Landsat Next" mission. The cut amounts to roughly half of the space agency's budget for Earth observation, which includes money for Landsat design.

Landsat Next is planned as the next generation of Landsat, whose nine iterations have created the longest continuously collected Earth observation record in history. The first satellite launched in 1972.

NASA builds and launches Landsat satellites. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) operates them and curates the data collected by them.

The USGS Earth Resources Observation and Science (EROS) Center near Sioux Falls has housed Landsat data since 1973, in addition to millions of images from other satellites and modern and historical aerial imagery, all of which is accessible at no cost to users. Landsat's free data is used to calibrate data from commercial satellites, contributing to what the USGS calculated last fall as a \$25.6 billion return on public investment since the agency began freely sharing data in 2008.

The most recent satellite in the series, Landsat 9, entered low-earth orbit in 2021. Between that satellite and its near-identical predecessor, Landsat 8, the system gathers new imagery data of the entire Earth's surface — as well as imagery from spectral bands like infrared that are invisible to the naked eye and measurements of Earth surface temperatures — every eight days.

Landsat Next was set to launch around 2030, with improvements in resolution and speedier repeat image collection.

Trump's budget request would "restructure" the Landsat Next mission "while NASA studies more affordable ways to maintain the continuity of Landsat imagery, which is used by natural resource managers, States, and industry."

The request also calls for the elimination of \$562 million in USGS funding. The change "eliminates programs that provide grants to universities, duplicate other Federal research programs and focus on social agendas (e.g., climate change) to instead focus on achieving dominance in energy and critical minerals," Trump's budget request says.

The cut to USGS amounts to about a third of its \$1.6 billion budget.

The budget request is separate from the federal government's efforts under Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency to pare down the federal workforce.

Probationary employees across multiple federal agencies were first dismissed in February, but many returned to the federal payroll and placed on paid administrative leave after legal challenges.

It's unclear how those moves to reduce the federal workforce have impacted the EROS Center.

Around 600 government employees and contractors work at the center, according to the latest figures posted on the USGS website, but the site including that figure hasn't changed since March 2023.

Emails from South Dakota Searchlight to USGS press contacts at EROS and in regional and national offices on the number of employees who've departed since Jan. 25 went unanswered.

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Searchlight also asked about the potential impact of the USGS budget cut proposal to EROS science programs, and about how changes to the Landsat program could affect EROS.

A NASA spokesperson told South Dakota Searchlight that the agency would be in a better position to respond "once we receive the President's full budget request in the coming weeks."

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, pointed out that presidential budget requests are "aspirational" and "rarely implemented as written."

"Dusty will continue to be supportive of Landsat's efforts in Congress," said a Johnson spokesperson.

The NASA budget has not emerged as a discussion point in budget reconciliation talks underway in Washington, D.C., on Trump's so-called "big, beautiful bill."

U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds, R-South Dakota, sounded similar notes in his response to questions about Landsat.

"The president's discretionary budget is just that — discretionary. It outlines the president's priorities and wish lists, but it will ultimately be our job in Congress to set the budget and appropriate federal dollars," Rounds said in an emailed statement.

Representatives for Republican Senate Majority Leader John Thune of South Dakota did not return emails requesting comment on Landsat and EROS.

Republican South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden told Searchlight during a visit to Sioux Falls recently that he hadn't heard about requested cuts to the satellite program or to the USGS.

Even so, Rhoden said he trusts that an open relationship with the Trump administration on South Dakota's priorities will help preserve them through budget negotiations.

"They give you some wiggle room as far as what your priorities are, and so I'm kind of optimistic that they are tempering some of those decisions with common sense," Rhoden said.

Trump's actions have had at least one public impact on EROS, though not an operational one.

EROS is home to a supercomputer whose processing power is shared across multiple arms of the Department of Interior. The system came to EROS with the name Denali, named after the tallest peak in the U.S.

Like the Alaska mountain after which the computer was named, the Denali system at EROS was renamed "McKinley" after the issuance of a Trump executive order.

Denali has long been the mountain's name among Alaska's Indigenous Athabascans, but the federal government embraced the name given to it by a prospector for about 100 years. The prospector called it "Mount McKinley," after then-presidential candidate William McKinley.

President Barack Obama renamed it Denali in 2015, matching the name the surrounding national park had taken nearly 40 years earlier.

The order does not mention the USGS or supercomputers, but rather instructs the Department of Interior to "update the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) to reflect the renaming and reinstatement of Mount McKinley."

The EROS supercomputer's name was changed based on the order, however.

"Pursuant to President Trump's Executive Order No. 14172, 'Restoring Names that Honor American Greatness,' this supercomputer has been renamed to McKinley," a poster in the EROS visitor area now reads.

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.

DHS Secretary Kristi Noem stumbles over questions from Democrats on habeas corpus

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - MAY 20, 2025 3:43 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem Tuesday was grilled by senators on the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee about funding estimates for a barrier along the southern border, as well as concerns about the Trump administration's adherence to due process in immigration enforcement.

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Noem was sharply criticized by Democrats for her answers to questions about habeas corpus, which they said she did not define correctly. "Habeas corpus is a constitutional right that the president has to be able to remove people from this country," Noem said before she was cut off by Democratic Sen. Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire, who had asked her for a definition.

"That's incorrect," Hassan said. "Habeas corpus is the legal principle that requires that the government provide a public reason for detaining and imprisoning people. If not for that protection, the government could simply arrest people, including American citizens, and hold them indefinitely for no reason."

As for the cost of President Donald Trump's border plans, even Republicans expressed doubts.

"I know the wall is (of) great symbolic value, but I think we should reassess the cost," Republican Chair Rand Paul of Kentucky said about the House's reconciliation package, which calls for \$46 billion in border wall funding.

Noem appeared before the committee to discuss President Donald Trump's fiscal year 2026 budget request for Congress along with the border security provisions in the reconciliation package. Congressional Republicans are using reconciliation — a special procedure that skirts the Senate's 60-vote filibuster — to put together one bill to fulfill Trump's priorities on border security, tax cuts, energy policy and defense.

"The border crisis is the biggest problem that was facing our country, and it was one that was imperative to fixing for our nation's future," Noem, the former governor of South Dakota, said. "We're solving this crisis at a record pace, and we have delivered the most secure border in American history."

Senate Democrats pressed Noem about DHS spending, noting that she is on track to run out of funding by mid-July, and her agency's immigration crackdown that has led to expensive immigration enforcement.

The top Democrat on the panel, Sen. Gary Peters of Michigan, noted that detaining migrants at the Guantanamo naval base costs as much as \$100,000 a day, compared to \$160 a day at a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility.

"I think that's kind of outrageous," Peters said. "I'm concerned by the staggering cost of this, and I would hope, Secretary (Noem), you could commit to providing this committee a detailed breakdown of the total cost of that operation there."

Noem said she would get the cost breakdown for him.

Questions about habeas corpus

Several Senate Democrats, including Hassan, Andy Kim of New Jersey and Elissa Slotkin of Michigan, questioned comments from senior White House officials such as Stephen Miller, who has said discussions about suspending habeas corpus were underway.

Habeas corpus allows people in the U.S. who believe they are being unlawfully detained to petition for their release in court, and it can be used to challenge immigration detention.

The U.S. Constitution in allowing for habeas corpus to be suspended says "in Cases of Rebellion or Invasion the public Safety may require it." That provision is within Article I of the Constitution, which covers the functions of the legislative branch, or Congress.

Habeas corpus has only been suspended four times in U.S. history, during the Civil War; in almost a dozen South Carolina counties that were overrun by the Ku Klux Klan during reconstruction; in a 1905 insurrection in U.S. territories in the Philippines; and after the Pearl Harbor bombing in Hawaii.

Slotkin told Noem she was concerned by her response that she believes the president has the right to suspend habeas corpus.

"You sat here in front of all of us and swore an oath to the Constitution," Slotkin said to Noem, adding that if the president were to suspend habeas corpus, it would be a "complete overreach."

"It is a right that we all get, that American citizens get, that people who are in the United States legally have," Slotkin said.

Kim asked Noem, a former member of the U.S. House, if she knew what section of the Constitution allows for the suspension of habeas corpus and which article it's under.

Noem did not know the answer to either question.

"It's in Article I," Kim said. "Do you know which branch of government Article I outlines the tasks and

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the responsibilities for?"

Noem said Congress. She then argued former President Abraham Lincoln suspended habeas corpus.

Lincoln suspended habeas corpus between Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia because of the Civil War and initially did so without congressional approval. He later called Congress back into session to get congressional approval for it.

Reality show with competing immigrants

Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut asked Noem if DHS was considering hosting a reality show that would make immigrants compete for citizenship, according to multiple media reports.

Noem vehemently denied that DHS was looking at it.

"There may have been something submitted somewhere along the line, because there are proposals pitched to the department, but me and my executive team have no knowledge of a reality show, and it's not under consideration," she said.

Kim pressed Noem about the recent confrontation between House lawmakers and immigration officials at Delaney Hall in his home state of New Jersey.

Three New Jersey Democratic members – Reps. Bonnie Watson Coleman, LaMonica McIver and Rob Menendez — were in Newark protesting the reopening of Delaney Hall, an immigrant detention center.

The mayor of Newark, Ras Baraka, who was also protesting, was arrested.

The Trump administration Monday levied two felony charges against one of those members, McIver, accusing her of assaulting officers during Baraka's arrest.

Kim said he was concerned about the incident and asked Noem if she was aware that members of Congress do not need prior notice to conduct oversight at DHS facilities.

Members of Congress are allowed to conduct oversight visits at any DHS facility that detains immigrants, without prior notice, under provisions in an appropriations law.

Noem accused the three House members of "storming" the facility.

"We give tours when members of Congress ask for it, we just ask that they not be politicized," she said.

Prep for big sporting events

Florida GOP Sen. Rick Scott and Rand Paul asked Noem about how prepared DHS is for providing security to big sporting events such as the Super Bowl and soccer's World Cup.

Scott wanted to know how security preparations for the 2026 World Cup, which includes games in Miami, are going.

Miami is one of 11 U.S. cities hosting the World Cup. The others are Atlanta; Boston; Dallas; Houston; Kansas City, Missouri; Los Angeles; the San Francisco Bay area; the New York and New Jersey metropolitan area; Philadelphia; and Seattle.

"We are working diligently with FIFA and other entities to ensure that cities and states have the assets that they need. This will be an unprecedented world event," Noem said. "It will be taking place in three different countries and many cities across our country, but also Mexico and Canada, and it will take place over a month."

The World Cup, which first began in the 1930s, is typically held in one country every four years. The last time two countries hosted the month-long event was in 2002, with Japan and South Korea.

Paul asked Noem if the NFL or FIFA, international soccer's governing body, ever paid DHS for its security measures.

Noem said no.

"Here's my point," Paul said. "The NFL makes billions of dollars. These people ought to pay. I mean, it's ridiculous that the average taxpayer could never afford to go to an NFL Super Bowl, (and) has got to pay for their security."

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

RFK Jr. insists he won't target farming; Rounds questions him about canceled grant for SD university

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MAY 20, 2025 3:30 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. testified before Congress on Tuesday that a major report due out later this week from his agency will not disparage farmers or a commonly used pesticide.

Kennedy, who has long been critical of certain aspects of modern agriculture and processed food, at a U.S. Senate hearing urged lawmakers to read the widely anticipated "Make America Healthy Again" report once it's published Thursday, but didn't go into details about any possible recommendations.

"Everybody will see the report," Kennedy said. "And there's nobody that has a greater commitment to the American farmer than we do. The MAHA movement collapses if we can't partner with the American farmer in producing a safe, robust and abundant food supply."

His comments followed stern questioning from Mississippi Republican Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith, who said she had read news reports from "reliable sources" that the MAHA Commission's initial assessment "may unfairly target American agriculture, modern farming practices and the crop protection tools that roughly 2% of our population relies on to help feed the remaining 98%."

"If Americans lose confidence in the safety and integrity of our food supply due to the unfounded claims that mislead consumers, public health will be at risk," Hyde-Smith said. "I've said this before, and it's worth saying again, countries have gone to war over many things — politics, religion, race, trade, natural resources, oil, pride, you name it — but threaten a nation's food supply and allow people to go hungry. Let's see what happens then."

Hyde-Smith, who was her home state's commissioner of agriculture and commerce from 2012 to 2018, probed Kennedy about his past work in environmental law and whether he might be inserting "confirmation bias" into the forthcoming report.

She asked Kennedy if he would try to change the current approval for glyphosate, a commonly used herbicide, that she referred to as "one of the most thoroughly studied products of its kind."

"We're talking about more than 1,500 studies and 50-plus years of review by the EPA and other leading global health authorities that have affirmed its safety when used as directed," Hyde-Smith said. "Have you been able to review thousands of studies and decades of scientific review in a matter of months?"

Kennedy responded that her "information about the report is just simply wrong."

"The drafts that I've seen, there is not a single word in them that should worry the American farmer," Kennedy said.

Hyde-Smith continued her questioning and told Kennedy that it would be "a shame if the MAHA commission issues reports suggesting, without substantial facts and evidence, that our government got things terribly wrong when it reviewed a number of crop protection tools and deemed them to be safe."

Home energy program in Maine

Several other Republicans on the Senate Appropriations Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee raised concerns during the two-hour hearing about how Kennedy has run HHS since they confirmed him in February.

Maine Sen. Susan Collins, chairwoman of the full Appropriations Committee, brought up the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, or LIHEAP, which the Trump administration has called on Congress to eliminate.

"The LIHEAP program, which we've talked about, is absolutely vital for thousands of older Mainers and low-income families," Collins said. "It helps them avoid the constant worry of having to choose between keeping warm, buying essential foods and medications and other basic necessities."

Kennedy sought to distance himself from the president's budget request, saying that he understands "the critical, historical importance of this program."

"President (Donald) Trump's rationale and (the Office of Management and Budget's) rationale is that President Trump's energy policies are going to lower the cost of energy ... so that everybody will get lower

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cost heating oil," Kennedy said.

NIH indirect costs

Subcommittee Chairwoman Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., brought up several issues with Kennedy, including efforts to change how much the National Institutes of Health provides to medical schools and research universities for Facilities and Administrative fees, often called indirect costs.

NIH sought to set that amount at 15% across the board for any institution that receives a research grant from the agency, a significantly lower amount than many of the organizations had negotiated over the years, bringing about strong objections from institutions of higher education.

That NIH policy has not taken effect as several lawsuits work their way through the federal court system.

Kennedy indicated NIH has figured out a way to help medical schools and research universities pay for items like gloves, test tubes and mass spectrometers, particularly at state schools.

"In the public universities, we are very much aware that those universities are using the money well, that it is absolutely necessary for them. And we're looking at a series of different ways that we can fund those costs through them," Kennedy said. "But not through the independent, indirect cost structure, which loses all control, which deprives us of all control of how that money is spent."

Kansas Sen. Jerry Moran, a Republican, brought up the measles outbreak and pressed Kennedy on whether HHS needed additional resources to help his home state and others get the virus under control.

Kennedy testified the "best way to prevent the spread of measles is through vaccination" and that HHS has been urging "people to get their MMR vaccines."

South Dakota grant on mine safety

South Dakota Sen. Mike Rounds called on Kennedy to continue fixing issues created earlier this year when HHS fired people working on mine safety issues at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

"My office has learned that staff at NIOSH's Spokane mining research division have been laid off. This office focuses on the unique challenges of Western mining operations that are often more geologically complex and exposed to harsher conditions," Rounds said. "This division provides critical technical support for institutions like the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, which recently received a \$1.25 million grant to improve underground mining safety. However, the grant has now been canceled due to loss of oversight from the Spokane office."

"This is not just a missed opportunity, it undermines our ability to meet national security goals tied to mineral independence and supply chain resilience."

Kennedy testified that he's been able to bring back 238 workers at the agency and said he would work with Rounds to address ongoing issues.

Pledge to fund Head Start, but no dollar amount

Alabama Sen. Katie Britt, a Republican, asked Kennedy about news reports earlier this year that HHS would ask Congress to zero out funding for Head Start, one of numerous programs left out of the administration's skinny budget request. Head Start provides early learning, health, family and development programs for free for children from low-income families.

Kennedy testified that eliminating Head Start would likely not be in the full budget request, which is set to be released later this year, though the White House budget office has not said when. He said it would ask Congress to fully fund the program, but didn't share a dollar amount.

"There's 800,000 of the poorest kids in this country who are served by this program. It not only teaches the kids preschool skills — reading, writing and arithmetic — before they get to prepare them for school. But it also teaches the parents and teaches them how to be good parents."

Kennedy said there are challenges faced by the Head Start program that he hopes to change during the next four years, including the quality of the food.

"The food they're serving at Head Start is terrible. You need to change that," Kennedy said. "We're poisoning the poorest kids from their youngest years, and we're going to change that."

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

Rapidly expanding school voucher programs pinch state budgets

Critics see a giant new 'entitlement' that will cost billions

BY: KEVIN HARDY, STATELINE - MAY 20, 2025 7:26 AM

In submitting her updated budget proposal in March, Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs lamented the rising costs of the state's school vouchers program that directs public dollars to pay private school tuition.

Characterizing vouchers as an "entitlement program," Hobbs said the state could spend more than \$1 billion subsidizing private education in the upcoming fiscal year. The Democratic governor said those expenses could crowd out other budget priorities, including disability programs and pay raises for firefighters and state troopers.

It's a dilemma that some budget experts fear will become more common nationwide as the costs of school choice measures mount across the states, reaching billions of dollars each year.

"School vouchers are increasingly eating up state budgets in a way that I don't think is sustainable long term," said Whitney Tucker, director of state fiscal policy research at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a think tank that advocates for left-leaning tax policies.

Vouchers and scholarship programs, which use taxpayer money to cover private school tuition, are part of the wider school choice movement that also includes charter schools and other alternatives to public schools.

Opponents have long warned about vouchers draining resources from public education as students move from public schools to private ones. But research into several programs has shown many voucher recipients already were enrolled in private schools. That means universal vouchers could drive up costs by creating two parallel education systems — both funded by taxpayers.

In Arizona, state officials reported most private school students receiving vouchers in the first two years of the expanded program were not previously enrolled in public schools. In fiscal year 2024, more than half the state's 75,000 voucher recipients were previously enrolled in private schools or were being homeschooled.

"Vouchers don't shift costs — they add costs," Joshua Cowen, a professor of education policy at Michigan State University who studies the issue, recently told Stateline. "Most voucher recipients were already in private schools, meaning states are paying for education they previously didn't have to fund."

Voucher proponents, though, say those figures can be misleading. Arizona, like other states with recent expansions, previously had more modest voucher programs. So some kids who were already enrolled in private schools could have already been receiving state subsidies.

In addition to increasing competition, supporters say the programs can actually save taxpayer dollars by delivering education at a lower overall cost than traditional public schools.

One thing is certain: With a record number of students receiving subsidies to attend private schools, vouchers are quickly creating budget concerns for some state leaders.

The rising costs of school choice measures come after years of deep cuts to income taxes in many states, leaving them with less money to spend. An end of pandemic-era aid and potential looming cuts to federal support also have created widespread uncertainty about state budgets.

"We're seeing a number of things that are creating a sort of perfect storm from a fiscal perspective in the states," said Tucker, of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Last year, Arizona leaders waded through an estimated \$1.3 billion budget shortfall. Budget experts said the voucher program was responsible for hundreds of millions of that deficit.

A new universal voucher program in Texas is expected to cost \$1 billion over its next two-year budget

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cycle — a figure that could balloon to nearly \$5 billion by 2030, according to a legislative fiscal note.

Earlier this year, Wyoming Republican Gov. Mark Gordon signed a bill expanding the state's voucher program. But last week, he acknowledged his own "substantial concerns" about the state's ability to fund vouchers and its public education obligations under the constitution.

"I think the legislature's got a very tall task to understand how they're going to be able to fund all of these things," he said in an interview with WyoFile.

Voucher proponents, who have been active at the state level for years, are gaining new momentum with support from President Donald Trump and congressional Republicans.

In January, Trump ordered federal agencies to allow states, tribes and military families to access federal money for private K-12 education through education savings accounts, voucher programs or tax credits.

Last week, Republicans on the House Ways and Means Committee voted in favor of making \$20 billion available over the next four years for a federal school voucher program. Part of broader work on a bill to extend Trump's 2017 tax cuts, the measure would need a simple majority in the House and the Senate to pass.

Martin Lueken, the director of the Fiscal Research and Education Center at EdChoice, a nonprofit that advocates for school choice measures, argues school choice measures can actually deliver savings to taxpayers.

Lueken said vouchers are not to blame for state budget woes. He said public school systems for years have increased spending faster than inflation. And he noted that school choice measures make up a small share of overall state spending — nationally about 0.3% of total state expenditures in states with school choice, he said.

"Public schooling remains one of the largest line items in state budgets," he said in an interview. "They are still the dominant provider of K-12 education, and certainly looking at the education pie, they still receive the lion's share."

"It's not a choice problem. I would say that it's a problem with the status quo and the public school system," he said.

Washington, D.C., and 35 states offer some school choice programs, according to EdChoice. That includes 18 states with voucher programs so expansive that virtually all students can participate regardless of income.

But Lueken said framing vouchers as a new entitlement program is misleading. That's because all students, even the wealthiest, have always been entitled to a public education — whether they've chosen to attend free public schools or private ones that charge tuition.

"At the end of the day, the thing that matters most above dollars are students and families," he said. "Research is clear that competition works. Public schools have responded in very positive ways when they are faced with increased competitive pressure from choice programs."

Public school advocates say funding both private and public schools is untenable.

In Wisconsin, Republican lawmakers are considering a major voucher expansion that would alter the funding structure for vouchers, potentially putting more strain on the state's general fund.

The state spent about \$629 million on its four voucher programs during the 2024-2025 school year, according to the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials, which represents employees in school district finance, human resources and leadership.

The association warns proposed legislation could exacerbate problems with the "unaffordable parallel school systems" in place now by shifting more private schooling costs from parents of those students to state taxpayers at large.

Such expansion "could create the conditions for even greater funding challenges for Wisconsin's traditional public schools and the state budget as a whole," the association's research director wrote in a paper on the issue.

In Arizona, Hobbs originally sought to eliminate the universal voucher program — a nonstarter in the Republican-controlled legislature. She has since proposed shrinking the program by placing income limits

that would disqualify the state's wealthiest families.

That idea also faced Republican opposition.

Legislators are now pushing to enshrine access to vouchers in the state constitution.

Marisol Garcia, president of the Arizona Education Association, the state's 20,000-member teachers union, noted that vouchers and public education funds are both sourced from the general fund.

"So it almost immediately started to impact public services," she said of the universal voucher program.

While the union says vouchers have led to cutbacks of important resources such as counselors in public schools, Garcia said the sweeping program also affects the state's ability to fund other services like housing, transportation and health care.

"Every budget cycle becomes where can we cut in order to essentially feed this out-of-control program?" she said.

Kevin Hardy covers business, labor and rural issues for Stateline from the Midwest.

Abortion providers challenge FDA's remaining mifepristone restrictions in federal court

BY: SOFIA RESNICK AND CHARLOTTE RENE WOODS - MAY 20, 2025 6:57 AM

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. — Abortion pills — and questions over their inherent safety — were back in federal court Monday. Unlike a lawsuit rejected by the U.S. Supreme Court last year, plaintiffs this time are not anti-abortion activists arguing medication abortion should be banned, but abortion providers arguing the remaining restrictions should be lifted to match the drug's 25-year record of safety and efficacy.

The suit seeks to make abortion pills more accessible by removing several existing restrictions on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's mifepristone-misoprostol regimen first approved in 2000. The drug was approved under the FDA's drug safety program called Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (REMS), provisions of which have been steadily eliminated over time but not fully.

On behalf of independent providers in Virginia, Montana, and Kansas, Center for Reproductive Rights senior counsel Linda Goldstein argued the FDA's most recent evaluations did not properly assess whether remaining restrictions are still medically necessary. She argued that the biggest risks the FDA has identified with mifepristone — serious bleeding and infection — are not exclusive to the drug but with all pregnancy terminations, including spontaneous miscarriages, which she said affected about 25% of all pregnancies. Beyond abortion, for which the drug has captured attention, mifepristone is also used to treat miscarriages so that they conclude safely to help prevent infection.

"The FDA has acknowledged that staying pregnant is more dangerous than not staying pregnant," said Goldstein, arguing that at minimum the FDA should be required to explain why drugs that pose similar risks are not subject to the same restrictions.

She noted that of the 20,000 drugs the FDA has approved, only 73 have REMS provisions, and that mifepristone has proven to be a safe drug over time. About 7.5 million U.S. patients have taken it as of the end of last year, Goldstein said. As of December 2024, the FDA has reported 36 patient deaths associated with mifepristone since it was first approved in 2000.

Whole Woman's Health Alliance v. FDA is the first time the U.S. Department of Justice is arguing a position on mifepristone in court since the Trump administration took office. Justice Department attorneys said current regulations are necessary for the most common form of pregnancy termination to be considered safe. When asked by the judge, DOJ attorney Noah Katzen did not confirm or deny whether or not the FDA still considers the drug to be safe and effective overall.

"That is what the FDA determined in the past," Katzen said during the hearing at the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Virginia in Charlottesville, where the case was originally filed in 2023.

Katzen, the FDA's former associate chief counsel until 2021 and currently a trial attorney for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, said the FDA has found that the evidence was "not sufficient" to conclude the

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REMS are no longer necessary.

U.S. District Judge Robert S. Ballou, appointed by Democratic President Joe Biden, appeared more sympathetic to plaintiffs' argument that some of the requirements appear arbitrary in that they don't apply to other drugs with equal or greater risk, including drugs his parents have taken.

Ballou did not rule at the end of Monday's hearing but said he would as soon as possible.

After the hearing, Whole Woman's Health Alliance founder and president Amy Hagstrom Miller told States Newsroom she took note of Katzen's response about whether the FDA considers mifepristone to be safe and effective.

"It was an interesting choice of words," she said.

This lawsuit is among several federal cases involving mifepristone. Earlier this month, the Trump administration filed a brief in the case *Missouri v. FDA*, requesting the court dismiss three states' lawsuits to restrict mifepristone on procedural grounds, but did not comment on the merits of the case or explicitly defend the FDA's current medication abortion policy.

While the *Missouri v. FDA* lawsuit seeks to reinstate regulations loosened between 2016 and 2021, the *Whole Woman's Health v. FDA* lawsuit takes aim at restrictions that require: medical professionals who prescribe mifepristone to register with the drug manufacturer; pharmacies to apply for special certification and maintain copious records, and patients to review and sign a counseling form.

On behalf of plaintiffs, which include Whole Woman's Health Alliance in Virginia and other states, All Families Healthcare and Blue Mountain Clinic in Montana, and Trust Women in Kansas, Goldstein argued that these existing rules are burdensome and make these medications harder to access by limiting the number of providers and pharmacies who can provide and dispense it and impede access to time-sensitive care.

Goldstein noted the "political climate" surrounding mifepristone and pointed to how abortion opponents seek either rescinding of FDA approval for mifepristone or a return to the in-person dispensing requirements. She added how efforts to make abortion medication more difficult to obtain are outlined in Project 2025 — the conservative Heritage Foundation's playbook.

Before and especially since *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in 2022, anti-abortion groups have tried to convince courts that abortion pills, in addition to ending the lives of embryos and fetuses, harm pregnant people at rates that warrant being pulled from the market or at the very least heavily restricted.

During his presidential campaign and since taking office, President Donald Trump and his health appointees have messaged strategically on medication abortion, on the one hand promising to retain its access while also open to examining new evidence suggesting it is unsafe.

Just last week, U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said he would direct the FDA to review abortion pill safety and potentially change its drug label, following the release of an anti-abortion white paper commissioned by far-right funders, whose analysis has been widely criticized by reproductive health scientists and is outflanked by hundreds of studies showing a very low rate of serious adverse events.

Significant for the South

Hagstrom Miller called the current restrictions "politically motivated" and said overturning them would be especially significant for Virginia, which as the least restrictive state in the South, has seen an uptick in people traveling from elsewhere to receive care.

"They're not related to the safety of the medication," Hagstrom Miller said, of the current restrictions. "We just want to ensure that the most popular method for abortion in Virginia and beyond is protected no matter who sits at the White House and who sits in the FDA."

Virginia is in the process of amending its state constitution to enshrine abortion and other reproductive health care procedures or medications. The constitutional amendment passed the legislature on party-line votes this year and must pass again next year before appearing on ballots for voters statewide. Its continued success or failure hinges on the outcome of the state's competitive House of Delegates elections — where Democrats hold a slim majority.

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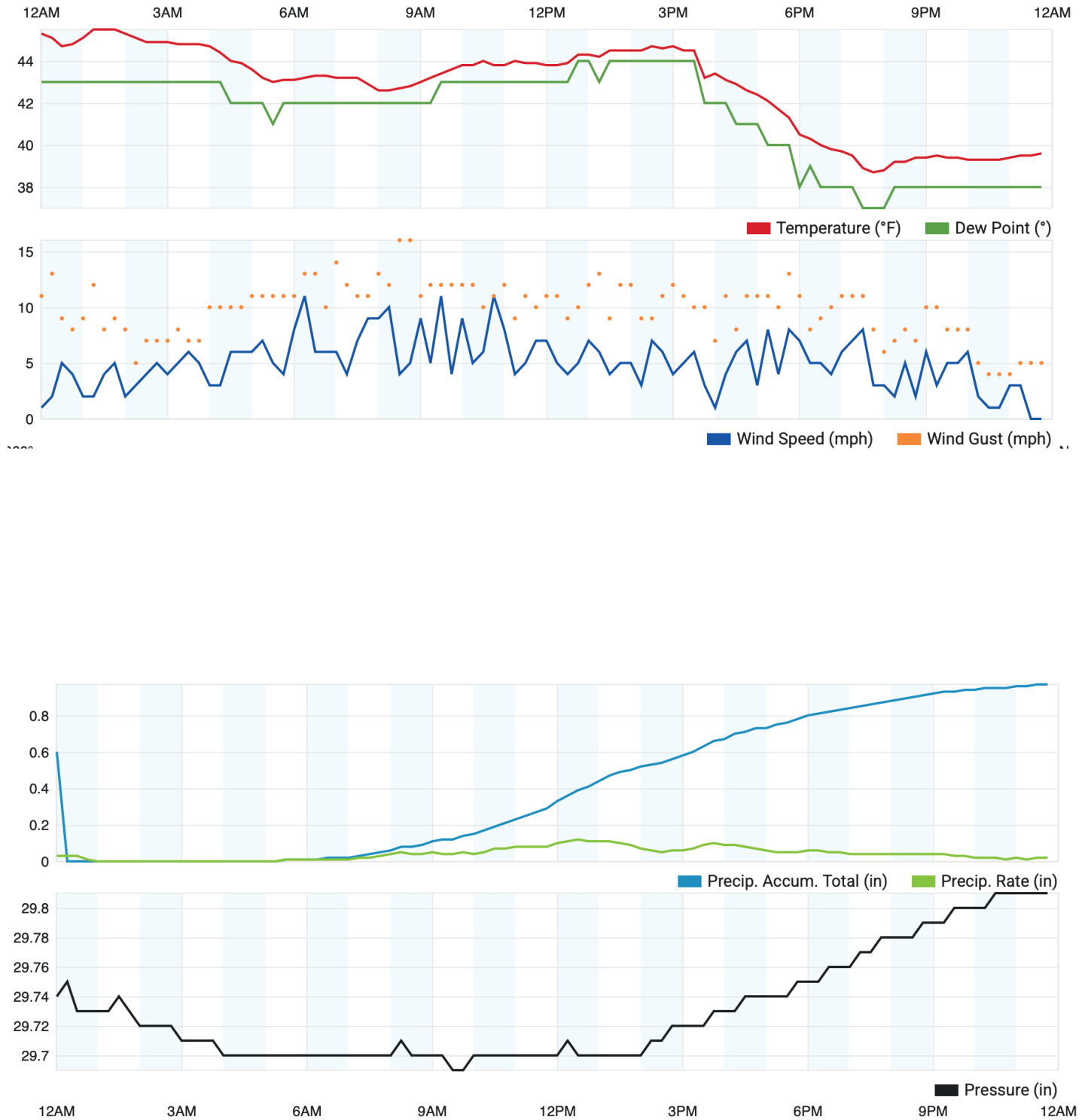
While governors don't have a say in constitutional amendments, the issue is a divergence between gubernatorial candidates Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears and Democratic challenger former Congresswoman Abigail Spanberger. This means that should the amendment fail and partisan control of the House shift, whoever is the next governor could advance or block potential future efforts to walk back Virginia's current abortion access laws.

"It's really important that we protect that safe access to medication abortion no matter where people live — Virginia is playing a key role in the South right now," Hagstrom Miller said.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
				
High: 48 °F	Low: 37 °F	High: 63 °F	Low: 34 °F	High: 63 °F
Chance Rain/Snow then Chance Showers	Chance Showers	Partly Sunny	Mostly Clear then Patchy Frost	Chance Showers

May 21, 2025
3:50 AM



Less Rain & A Slight Warm Up

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			
Another 0.1" to 0.25"	Pockets of Morning Frost	Pockets of Morning Frost	About 0.1" to 0.25"
Highs: 46-56°	Highs: 60-64° Lows: 36-40°	Highs: 55-65° Lows: 33-43°	Highs: 58-66° Lows: 42-46°

Low pressure will sit overhead and slowly weaken, so we will continue to see clouds with off and on light rain and maybe even a little early morning snow. The clouds are slow to move out tonight into Thursday and even early Friday, which means if we do clear out we could see a few spots get a frost. The next systems for late this week will bring a little bit more moisture but at least temperatures will be milder.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 46 °F at 1:21 AM

Low Temp: 39 °F at 7:40 PM

Wind: 20 mph at 7:04 AM

Precip: : 1.05

Day length: 15 hours, 11 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 94 in 1925

Record Low: 25 in 1895

Average High: 72

Average Low: 47

Average Precip in May.: 2.31

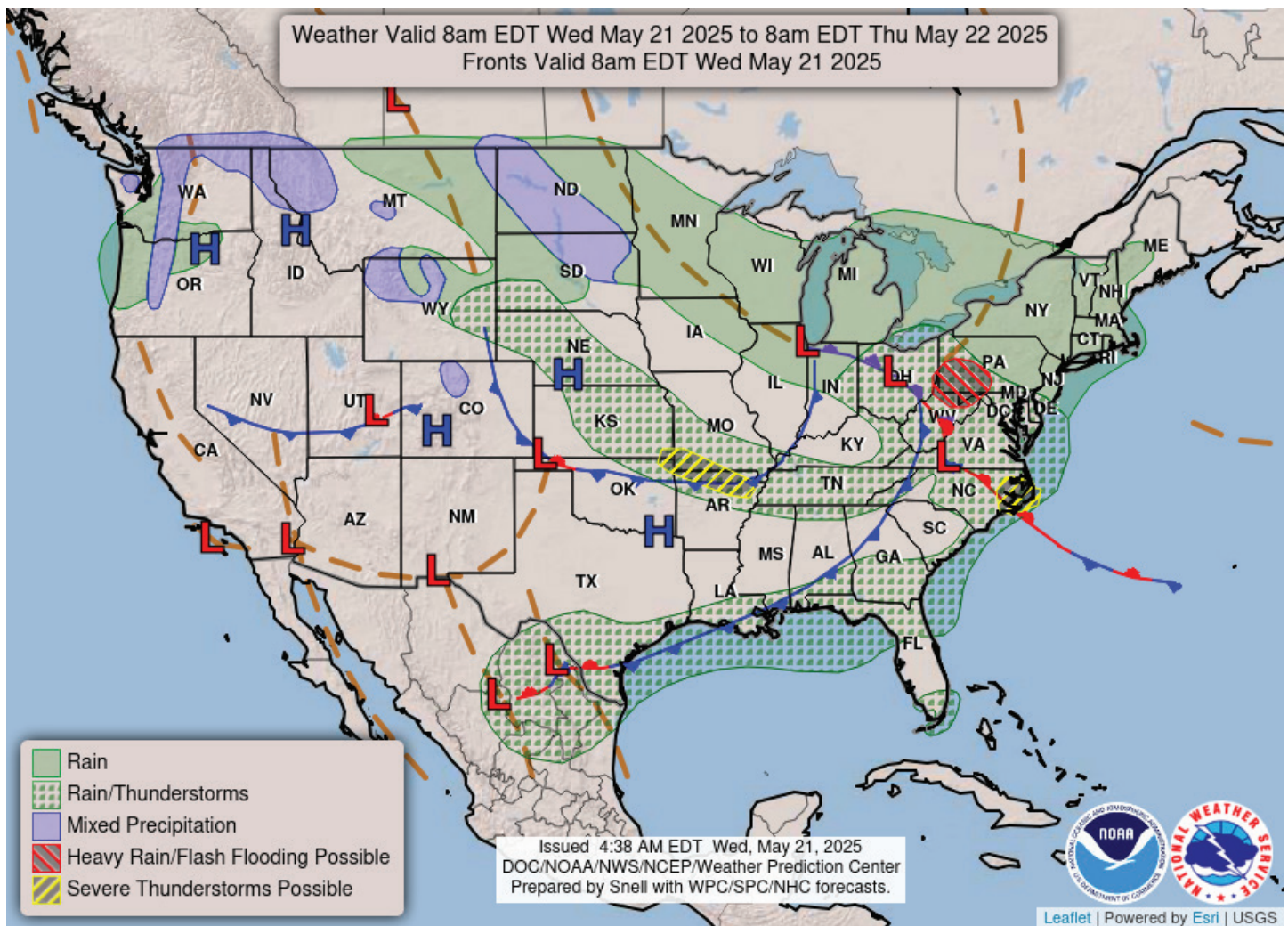
Precip to date in May.: 3.35

Average Precip to date: 6.28

Precip Year to Date: 5.98

Sunset Tonight: 9:04:48 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:52:21 am



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Today in Weather History

May 21st, 1977: Observers south of Clear Lake saw five tornadoes. One was five miles south of town, moving northeast. Another was four miles south and one mile west of Clear Lake. Both destroyed trees and some small buildings. Three other tornadoes were sighted about two miles south of town. These touched down only momentarily, with no damage occurring.

Two tornadoes were seen in southern Codington County. One was seen at Grover, and the other was five miles south of Watertown. No damage was reported.

A tornado was on the ground near Revillo. A few barns and some outbuildings were damaged.

May 21st, 1992: A severe thunderstorm moved over Northwestern Edmunds County, causing high winds and penny-sized hail. In Bowdle, there was considerable wind damage. Tree limbs more than five inches in diameter were broken off and fell on a car. Other tree branches went through the roof of a home. Two pickup trucks were rolled on their sides. Three miles ENE of Bowdle, a garage was moved 20 feet off its foundation and stopped by a large tractor.

1860 - A swarm of tornadoes occurred in the Ohio Valley. Tornadoes struck the cities of Louisville, KY, Cincinnati, OH, Chillicothe, OH, and Marietta, OH, causing a million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1895 - The temperature at Norwalk, OH, dipped to 19 degrees to set a state record for the month of May. (The Weather Channel)

1896 - The mercury soared to 124 degrees at Salton, CA, to establish a U.S. record for May. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1980 - The temperature at Williston ND reached 102 degrees to set a record for May, and the next day the mercury hit 106 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Severe thunderstorms, developing along a sharp cold front crossing the central U.S., produced 60 mph winds and golf ball size hail at Sedalia, MO, and drenched Hagerstown, IN, with six inches of rain in one hour. Temperatures soared into the 90s ahead of the cold front. Paducah, KY, hit 94 degrees for the second day in a row. Light snow blanketed Montana, with three inches reported at Butte. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms swept across southern Louisiana during the morning hours spawning six tornadoes, and producing wind gusts to 88 mph at Jennings. Thunderstorms also produced five inches of rain in two hours at Lake Charles, causing local flooding. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms moving southeastward across the Central Plains Region into Oklahoma and Arkansas produced severe weather through the day and night. Thunderstorms spawned just four tornadoes, but there were 243 reports of large hail and damaging winds. Baseball size hail was reported at Augusta, KS, and thunderstorm winds gusted to 98 mph at Johnson, KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather across the southeastern U.S. for the second day in a row. Severe thunderstorms spawned five tornadoes, including one which injured a person at Richmond KY. There were eighty-seven reports of large hail or damaging winds, with hail three inches in diameter reported at Austin TX. Thunderstorms produced up to five inches of rain in Macon County GA, and heavy rains left nearly eight feet of water over roads near Stepstone KY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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One of the most influential teachers in my life was "Gunny Smith." I met him one beautiful, sunny fall evening in Newport, RI. He stood as straight and rigid as the flag pole beside him. As new Navy Chaplain recruits, we had no idea what to expect. But, one look at his crisp uniform, brightly shined shoes, short hair, and steady gaze left no doubt in our minds that what we expected didn't matter. Our lives were in his hands. He knew it. We would soon accept it.

With obvious confidence in his voice, he said, "Gentlemen, I will soon become the most loved and feared person you will ever meet." He lived up to that statement. He was responsible for teaching us how to live as officers in the Navy and how to survive in combat if necessary. He took his responsibilities seriously.

Solomon took his responsibilities as a father seriously, too. He warned his son to "continually bind God's laws around his heart, tie them around his neck... so when you walk, they will guide you, when you sleep they will watch over you, and when you awake they will speak to you."

In other words, wherever he was, no matter the time or circumstances, whether night or day, "His law" would be a lamp and light always, and, when necessary, correct and discipline him.

"Gunny" and Solomon knew and accepted their responsibilities with all their heart. They were well aware of the fact that lives depended on their effectiveness to prepare heads and hearts, and shape the conduct and attitude of the "untrained" – children and recruits alike!

Today's Prayer: We pray, Heavenly Father, that we will accept the responsibility and fulfill our obligation to You to train others whom You have entrusted to us to accept Your teachings and walk in Your light. May our "walk" be more obvious than our words, as we seek to honor You in all things. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Scripture: "Keep their words always in your heart. Tie them around your neck. When you walk, their counsel will lead you. When you sleep, they will protect you. When you wake up, they will advise you." -Proverbs 6:21-22

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: 05.20.25

18 30 33 55 64 11

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$154,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 44
Mins 40 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: 16 Hrs 59 Mins 40
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.20.25

5 6 16 29 34 8

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 14 Mins 40
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.17.25

2 22 24 30 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 14 Mins 40
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.19.25

11 12 27 30 35 7

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 43 Mins 40
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: 17 Hrs 43 Mins 40
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

A Texas effort to clarify abortion ban reaches a key vote, but doubts remain

By NADIA LATHAN Associated Press/Report for America

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Three years ago, Dr. Austin Dennard left Texas for an abortion after her fetus was diagnosed with a fatal condition. She later testified in a lawsuit how the state's near-total ban on abortion put her health at risk.

On Wednesday, a key vote is scheduled on a bill that aims to clarify medical exceptions under one of the nation's most restrictive bans. But Dennard's feelings are mixed about the bill, which does not list specific medical conditions or include fatal fetal anomalies as exceptions.

"What is broadly now known among practicing physicians in Texas is that abortions are illegal," said Dennard, an OB-GYN in Dallas. "Undoing that broad understanding is going to be difficult."

For the first time since Texas' abortion ban took effect in 2022, both Republicans and Democrats are coalescing behind legislation to clarify medical exceptions. For Republicans, the bill is a significant pivot after years of defending the ban in the face of legal challenges, while some abortion-rights supporters have questioned whether it will make a difference.

The bill would specify that doctors cannot face criminal charges for performing an abortion in a medical emergency that causes major bodily impairment, and it defines a "life-threatening" condition as one capable of causing death. It would not broaden exceptions to include cases of rape or incest.

The bill, which passed the Senate last month, could advance to Republican Gov. Greg Abbott as soon as Wednesday if approved by the GOP-controlled Texas House.

Similar near-total abortion bans across the country have faced numerous legal challenges and criticism from medical professionals who have said that medical exceptions are too vague.

Moves to clarify medical exceptions

Lawmakers in at least nine states with abortion bans have sought to change or clarify medical exceptions that allow doctors to perform an abortion if the mother's life is at risk since *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in 2022, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research organization that supports abortion rights.

Supporters of these bills have said they have the potential to save lives. Critics, including some abortion rights groups, have questioned whether they make state abortion laws easier to understand.

In Kentucky, Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear earlier this year vetoed a bill that GOP lawmakers touted as bringing clarity to that state's near-total abortion ban, saying it would not protect pregnant women. Republican lawmakers later overrode his veto.

Last year, South Dakota released a video for physicians that outlined examples of acceptable medical emergencies that received criticism from abortion rights supporters for not being specific enough.

"I think these bills are trying to get at the reality that exceptions are really hard to comply with," said Kimya Forouzan, principal state policy adviser at the Guttmacher Institute.

Still, Texas Republican Sen. Bryan Hughes, an architect of the state's abortion ban, said the new bill's goal is to avoid confusion among doctors.

"One of the most important things we want to do is to make sure that doctors and hospitals and the hospital lawyers are trained on what the law is," Hughes said.

Navigating exceptions under bans

In 2024, the Texas Supreme Court ruled against Dennard and a group of women who say they were denied an abortion after experiencing serious pregnancy complications that threatened their lives and fertility. The court ruled that the state's laws were clear in allowing doctors to perform an abortion to save the life of the mother.

Texas' efforts underscore the challenges abortion opponents have had to navigate regarding medical exceptions, said Mary Ziegler, a professor at the University of California, Davis School of Law and a histo-

rian of abortion politics in the U.S.

Judges have put enforcement of Utah's abortion ban on hold in a case over exceptions, for example, and they struck down two Oklahoma bans over medical exceptions – though most abortions in that state remain illegal.

For abortion opponents, Ziegler said, it's tricky to craft legislation that does two different things.

"Can you provide clear guidance as to when medical intervention is justified without providing physicians discretion to provide abortions they don't think are emergencies?" Ziegler said.

Texas may advance other anti-abortion laws

Texas' ban prohibits nearly all abortions, except to save the life of the mother, and doctors can be fined up to \$100,000 and face up to 99 years in prison if convicted of performing an abortion illegally.

Attorney General Ken Paxton's office has filed criminal charges against a midwife for allegedly providing illegal abortions and is also suing a New York doctor for prescribing abortion pills to a Texas woman.

Texas Republicans are also advancing efforts to make it a civil offense to mail, deliver or manufacture abortion pills, expanding on a 2021 law that allows private individuals to sue others whom they suspect are helping a woman obtain an abortion.

Putin visited Russia's Kursk region for first time since Moscow said it drove out Ukrainian forces

By The Associated Press undefined

President Vladimir Putin visited Russia's Kursk region for the first time since Moscow claimed that it drove Ukrainian forces out of the area last month, the Kremlin said Wednesday.

Putin visited the region bordering Ukraine the previous day, according to the Kremlin.

Ukrainian forces made a surprise incursion into Kursk in August 2024 in one of their biggest battlefield successes in the more than three-year war. The incursion was the first time Russian territory was occupied by an invader since World War II and dealt a humiliating blow to the Kremlin.

Since the end of 2023, Russia has mostly had the advantage on the battlefield, with the exception of Kursk.

Ukraine, the U.S. and South Korea said that North Korea sent up to 12,000 troops to help the Russian army take back control of Kursk, and Russia said on April 26 that its forces had pushed out the Ukrainian army. Kyiv officials denied the claim.

Putin's unannounced visit appeared to be an effort to show Russia is in control of the conflict — even though its full-scale invasion of its neighbor has been slow and costly in terms of casualties and equipment — amid recent U.S. and European proposals for a ceasefire that Putin has effectively rejected.

Video broadcast by Russian state media showed that Putin visited Kursk Nuclear Power Plant-2, which is still under construction, and met with selected volunteers behind closed doors.

Many of the volunteers wore clothes emblazoned with the Russian flag and the Latin letters "Z" and "V", which are symbols of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"What you are doing now during this difficult situation for this region, for this area, and for the country, will remain with you for the rest of your life as, perhaps, the most meaningful thing with which you were ever involved," Putin said as he drank tea with the volunteers.

Ukraine's surprise thrust into Kursk and its ability to hold land there was a logistical feat, carried out in secrecy, that countered months of gloomy news from the front about Ukrainian forces being pushed backward by the bigger Russian army.

Kyiv's strategy aimed to show that Russia has weaknesses and that the war isn't lost. It also sought to distract Russian forces from their onslaught in the eastern Donetsk region of Ukraine.

The move was fraught with risk. Analysts noted that it could backfire and open a door for Russian advances in Ukraine by further stretching Ukrainian forces that are short-handed along the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line.

The incursion didn't significantly change the dynamics of the war.

Putin told acting Kursk Gov. Alexander Khinshtein that the Kremlin supported the idea of continuing

monthly payments to displaced families that still couldn't return to their homes.

Putin said that he would back a proposal to build a museum in the region to celebrate what acting Gov. Alexander Khinshtein described as "the heroism of our defenders and the heroism of the region's residents."

Disgruntled residents had previously shown their disapproval over a lack of compensation in rare organized protests.

Putin last visited the Kursk region in March, when Ukrainian troops still controlled some parts of the area. He wore military fatigues – a rarely seen sight for the Russian leader, who usually wears a suit – and visited the area's military headquarters where he was filmed with top generals.

Russia's Ministry of Defense said that its air defenses shot down 159 Ukrainian drones across the country overnight, including 53 over the Oryol region and 51 over the Bryansk region.

In Ukraine, Russian drone attacks killed two people and wounded five others in the northern Sumy region, the regional administration said.

In the Kyiv region, four members of a family were injured when debris from a downed drone hit their home, according to the regional administration.

Russia launched 76 Shahed and decoy drones overnight at Ukraine, the Ukrainian air force said.

Trump's 'Golden Dome' missile defense plan was inspired by Israel's multitiered defenses

By The Associated Press undefined

JERUSALEM (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump's plan for a "Golden Dome" to protect the United States from long-range missiles was at least partly inspired by Israel's multitiered missile defenses.

Trump announced the \$175 billion concept in the Oval Office on Tuesday, saying it would put U.S. weapons in space for the first time and be would be "fully operational" by the end of his term in early 2029, though a U.S. official familiar with the program said it could take longer.

Israel's multilayered defenses, often collectively referred to as the "Iron Dome," have played a key role in defending it from rocket and missile fire from Iran and allied militant groups in the conflict unleashed by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack.

The sophisticated system, developed over decades with considerable U.S. support, is capable of detecting incoming fire and deploying only if the projectile is headed toward a population center or sensitive military or civilian infrastructure. Israeli leaders say the system isn't 100% guaranteed, but credit it with preventing serious damage and countless casualties.

Here's a closer look at Israel's multilayered air-defense system:

The Arrow

This system developed with the U.S. is designed to intercept long-range missiles. The Arrow, which operates outside the atmosphere, has been used to intercept long-range missiles launched by Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen and by Iran itself during two direct exchanges of fire last year.

David's Sling

Also developed with the U.S., David's Sling is meant to intercept medium-range missiles, such as those possessed by Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group. It was deployed on multiple occasions throughout the war with Hezbollah, which ended with a ceasefire last year.

Iron Dome

This system, developed by Israel with U.S. backing, specializes in shooting down short-range rockets. It has intercepted thousands of rockets since it was activated early last decade — including volleys launched by Hamas and Hezbollah. Israel says it has a success rate of over 90%.

Iron Beam

Israel is developing a new system to intercept incoming threats with laser technology. Israel has said this system will be a game changer because it would be much cheaper to operate than existing systems. According to Israeli media reports, the cost of a single Iron Dome interception is about \$50,000, while the other systems can run more than \$2 million per missile. Iron Beam interceptions, by contrast, would cost a few dollars apiece, according to Israeli officials — but the system is not yet operational.

Trump selects concept for \$175 billion 'Golden Dome' missile defense system

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has announced the concept he wants for his future Golden Dome missile defense program — a multilayered, \$175 billion system that for the first time will put U.S. weapons in space.

Speaking Tuesday from the Oval Office, Trump said he expects the system will be “fully operational before the end of my term,” which ends in 2029, and have the capability of intercepting missiles “even if they are launched from space.”

It's likelier that the complex system may have some initial capability by that point, a U.S. official familiar with the program said.

Trump, seated next to a poster showing the continental U.S. painted gold and with artistic depictions of missile interceptions, also announced that Gen. Michael Guetlein, who currently serves as the vice chief of space operations, will be responsible for overseeing Golden Dome's progress.

Golden Dome is envisioned to include ground- and space-based capabilities that are able to detect and stop missiles at all four major stages of a potential attack: detecting and destroying them before a launch, intercepting them in their earliest stage of flight, stopping them midcourse in the air, or halting them in the final minutes as they descend toward a target.

For the last several months, Pentagon planners have been developing options — which the U.S. official described as medium, high and “extra high” choices, based on their cost — that include space-based interceptors. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to detail plans that have not been made public.

The difference in the three versions is largely based on how many satellites and sensors — and for the first time, space-based interceptors — would be purchased.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated this month that just the space-based components of the Golden Dome could cost as much as \$542 billion over the next 20 years. Trump has requested an initial \$25 billion for the program in his proposed tax break bill now moving through Congress.

The Pentagon has warned for years that the newest missiles developed by China and Russia are so advanced that updated countermeasures are necessary. Golden Dome's added satellites and interceptors — where the bulk of the program's cost is — would be focused on stopping those advanced missiles early on or in the middle of their flight.

The space-based weapons envisioned for Golden Dome “represent new and emerging requirements for missions that have never before been accomplished by military space organizations,” Gen. Chance Saltzman, head of the U.S. Space Force, told lawmakers at a hearing Tuesday.

China and Russia have put offensive weapons in space, such as satellites with abilities to disable critical U.S. satellites, which can make the U.S. vulnerable to attack.

Last year, the U.S. said Russia was developing a space-based nuclear weapon that could loiter in space for long durations, then release a burst that would take out satellites around it.

Trump said Tuesday that he had not yet spoken to Russian President Vladimir Putin about the Golden Dome program, “but at the right time, we will,” he told reporters at the White House.

In a joint statement earlier this month, China and Russia called the Golden Dome idea “deeply destabilizing in nature,” warning it would turn “outer space into an environment for placing weapons and an arena for armed confrontation.”

There is no money for the project yet, and Golden Dome overall is “still in the conceptual stage,” newly confirmed Air Force Secretary Troy Meink told senators during a hearing Tuesday.

While the president picked the concept he wanted, the Pentagon is still developing the requirements that Golden Dome will need to meet — which is not the way new systems are normally developed.

The Pentagon and U.S. Northern Command are still drafting what is known as an initial capabilities document, the U.S. official said. That is how Northern Command, which is responsible for homeland defense, identifies what it will need the system to do.

The U.S. already has many missile defense capabilities, such as the Patriot missile batteries that the U.S. has provided to Ukraine to defend against incoming missiles as well as an array of satellites in orbit to detect missile launches. Some of those existing systems will be incorporated into Golden Dome.

Trump directed the Pentagon to pursue the space-based interceptors in an executive order during the first week of his presidency.

Japan's agriculture minister resigns after a rice gaffe causes political fallout

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's agriculture minister was forced to resign Wednesday because of political fallout over recent comments that he "never had to buy rice" because he got it from supporters as gifts. The resignation comes as the public struggles with record high prices of the country's traditional staple food.

Taku Eto's comment, which many Japanese saw as out of touch with economic realities, came at a seminar Sunday for the Liberal Democratic Party, which leads an struggling minority government. The gaffe could be further trouble for the party before a national election in July. A major loss could mean a new government or could mean Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba would have to step down.

"I made an extremely inappropriate remark at a time when consumers are struggling with soaring rice prices," Eto told reporters after submitting his resignation at the prime minister's office. Eto's resignation was the first under Ishiba's leadership that began October.

The government has released tons of rice from its emergency stockpile in recent months, but the latest agricultural ministry statistics show little impact from the move. Some supermarkets have started selling cheaper imported rice.

Eto also sought to clarify the comments that got him in trouble. He said he does actually buy white rice himself and was not living on rice given as gifts. He said the gift comment referred to brown rice, which he wants people to become interested in because it can reach market faster.

Ishiba appointed popular former Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, the son of a former prime minister, to lead the ministry, noting his experience in agriculture and fisheries policies and enthusiasm for reforms.

Koizumi told reporters Ishiba instructed him to do everything to stabilize the rice supply and prices to address consumer concern.

"I was told to put rice before anything," Koizumi told reporters. "At this difficult time, I will do utmost to speedily tackle high rice price that people feel and worry in everyday life." He said he shares consumers' concerns as he feeds his children packaged instant rice sometimes.

Ishiba, also a former farm minister, said he wants to strengthen Japan's food security and self-sufficiency. He has proposed agricultural reforms, including increased rice production and possible exports, though critics say he should urgently fix the ongoing rice problem first.

Noting the rice situation, Ishiba said he suspects the rice price surge is "not a temporary but a structural problem."

"It may not be easy to find an answer," he said, but repeated his pledge to do the utmost to ease consumers' difficulties and to reform rice policies.

Koizumi said the measures so far have proved ineffective and that he will speed the effort as soon as he formally takes office later Wednesday.

Party leaders plan to further grill Ishiba at a party leaders' debate at parliament scheduled later in the day.

Japanese rice demand has decreased over recent decades as people's diets have diversified, but rice remains a staple food and integral part of Japanese culture and history.

"Rice is the stable food for the Japanese. When its prices are rising every week, (Eto's) resignation is only natural," said Shizuko Oshima, 73.

The shortfall started last August on panic buying following a government caution over preparedness for a major earthquake. The supply pressure eased after the autumn harvest, but a shortage and price

increases hit again early this year.

Officials have blamed the supply shortage on poor harvests because of hot weather in 2023 and higher fertilizer and other production costs, but some experts blame the government's long-term rice production policy.

The unprecedented release from emergency rice stockpiles was seen in part as an attempt to figure out distribution problems. The government has denied there is now a rice shortage, but officials say it's a mystery why rice is not reaching consumers. Some experts say the rice shortage could be serious but it's difficult to trace rice as its distribution route has become so complex since the end of government control in 1995.

They crossed the border for better schools. Now, some families are leaving the US

By BIANCA VÁZQUEZ TONESS of The Associated Press, NEAL MORTON and ARIEL GILREATH of The Hechinger Report and SARAH WHITES-KODITSCHKE and REBECCA GRIESBACH of AL.com undefined

For the last two months of their life in the United States, José Alberto González and his family spent nearly all their time in their one-bedroom Denver apartment. They didn't speak to anyone except their roommates, another family from Venezuela.

They consulted WhatsApp messages for warnings of immigration agents in the area before leaving for the rare landscaping job or to buy groceries.

But most days at 7:20 a.m., González's wife took their children to school.

The appeal of their children learning English in American schools, and the desire to make money, had compelled González and his wife to bring their 6- and 3-year-old on the monthslong journey to the United States.

They arrived two years ago, planning to stay for a decade. But on Feb. 28, González and his family boarded a bus from Denver to El Paso, where they would walk across the border and start the long trip back to Venezuela.

Even as immigrants in the U.S. avoid going out in public, terrified of encountering immigration authorities, families across the country are mostly sending their children to school.

That's not to say they feel safe. In some cases, families are telling their children's schools that they're leaving.

Already, thousands of immigrants have notified federal authorities they plan to "self-deport," according to the Department of Homeland Security. President Donald Trump has encouraged more families to leave by stoking fears of imprisonment, ramping up government surveillance, and offering people \$1,000 and transportation out of the country.

And on Monday, the Supreme Court allowed the Trump administration to strip legal protections from hundreds of thousands of Venezuelan immigrants, potentially exposing them to deportation. Without Temporary Protective Status, even more families will weigh whether to leave the U.S., advocates say.

Departures in significant numbers could spell trouble for schools, which receive funding based on how many students they enroll.

"The amount of fear and uncertainty that is going through parents' heads, who could blame somebody for making a choice to leave?" said Andrea Rentería, principal of a Denver elementary school serving immigrant students. "I can tell them as a principal that I won't let anybody in this school. Nobody is taking your kid. But I can't say the same for them out in the workforce or driving somewhere."

Rumors of immigration raids on schools became a turning point

When Trump was elected in November after promising to deport immigrants and depicting Venezuelans, in particular, as gang members, González knew it was time to go. He was willing to accept the tradeoff of earning just \$50 weekly in his home country, where public schools operate a few hours a day.

"I don't want to be treated like a delinquent," González said in Spanish. "I'm from Venezuela and have tattoos. For him, that means I'm a criminal."

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It took González months to save up the more than \$3,000 he needed to get his family to Venezuela on a series of buses and on foot. He and his wife didn't tell anyone of their plan except the single mom who shared their apartment, afraid to draw attention to themselves. Telling people they wanted to leave would signal they were living here illegally.

They sent their children to their Denver school regularly until late February, when González's phone lit up with messages claiming immigration agents were planning raids inside schools. That week, they kept their son home.

"Honestly, we were really scared for our boy," González said. "Because we didn't have legal status."

In the months following Trump's inauguration, Denver Public School attendance suffered, according to district data.

Attendance districtwide fell by 3% in February compared with the same period last year, with even steeper declines of up to 4.7% at schools primarily serving immigrant newcomer students. The deflated rates continued through March, with districtwide attendance down 1.7% and as much as 3.9% at some newcomer schools.

Some parents told Denver school staff they had no plans to approach their children's campus after the Trump administration ended a policy that had limited immigration enforcement at schools.

The Denver school district sued the government over that reversal, saying attendance dropped "noticeably" across all schools, "particularly those schools in areas with new-to-country families and where ICE raids have already occurred." A federal judge ruled in March the district failed to prove the new policy caused the attendance decline.

Attendance dropped in many schools following Trump's inauguration

Data obtained from 15 districts across eight additional states, including Texas, Alabama, Idaho and Massachusetts, showed a similar decline in school attendance after the inauguration for a few weeks. In most places, attendance rebounded sooner than in Denver.

From 2022 to 2024, more than 40,000 Venezuelans and Colombian migrants received shelter or other assistance from Denver. Trump said during the campaign he would begin his mass deportation efforts nearby, in the suburb of Aurora, because of alleged Venezuelan gang activity.

Nationwide, schools are still reporting immediate drops in daily attendance during weeks when there is immigration enforcement — or even rumors of ICE raids — in their communities, said Hedy Chang of the nonprofit Attendance Works, which helps schools address absenteeism.

Dozens of districts didn't respond to requests for attendance data. Some said they feared drawing the attention of immigration enforcement.

In late February, González and his wife withdrew their children from school and told administrators they were returning to Venezuela. He posted a goodbye message on a Facebook group for Denver volunteers he used to find work and other help. "Thank you for everything, friends," he posted. "Tomorrow I leave with God's favor."

Immediately, half a dozen Venezuelan and Colombian women asked him for advice on getting back. "We plan to leave in May, if God allows," one woman posted in Spanish.

In Denver, 3,323 students have withdrawn from school through mid-April — an increase of 686 compared with the same period last year. Denver school officials couldn't explain the uptick.

At the 400-student Denver elementary school Andrea Rentería heads, at least two students have withdrawn since the inauguration because of immigration concerns. One is going back to Colombia and the other didn't say where they were headed.

School officials in Massachusetts and Washington state have confirmed some students are withdrawing from school to return to El Salvador, Brazil and Mexico. Haitians are trying to go to Mexico or Canada.

In Chelsea, Massachusetts, a 6,000-student district where nearly half the students are still learning English, a handful of families have recently withdrawn their children because of immigration concerns.

One mother in March withdrew two young children from the district to return to El Salvador, according to district administrator Daniel Mojica. Her 19-year old daughter will stay behind, on her own, to finish

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school – a sign that these decisions are leading to more family separation.

In Bellingham, Washington, two families withdrew their children after an Immigration and Customs Enforcement raid in early April at a local roofing company, where agents arrested fathers of 16 children attending Bellingham schools. Both families returned to Mexico, family engagement specialist Isabel Meaker said.

“There’s a sense, not just with these families, that it’s not worth it to fight. They know the end result,” Meaker said.

Immigrant families are gathering documents they need to return home

Countries with large populations living in the United States are seeing signs of more people wanting to return home.

Applications for Brazilian passports from consulates in the U.S. increased 36% in March, compared to the previous year, according to data from the Brazilian Foreign Ministry. Birth registrations, the first step to getting a Brazilian passport for a U.S.-born child, were up 76% in April compared to the previous year. Guatemala reports a 5% increase over last year for passports from its nationals living in the United States.

Last month, Melvin Josué, his wife and another couple drove four hours from New Jersey to Boston to get Honduran passports for their American-born children.

It’s a step that’s taken on urgency in case these families decide life in the United States is untenable. Melvin Josué worries about Trump’s immigration policy and what might happen if he or his wife is detained, but lately he’s more concerned with the difficulty of finding work.

Demand for his drywall crew immediately stopped amid the economic uncertainty caused by tariffs. There’s also more reluctance, he said, to hire workers here illegally.

(The Associated Press agreed to use only his first and middle name because he’s in the country illegally and fears being separated from his family.)

“I don’t know what we’ll do, but we may have to go back to Honduras,” he said. “We want to be ready.”

The size of the exodus and its impact on schools remains unclear, but already some are starting to worry.

A consultant working with districts in Texas on immigrant education said one district there has seen a significant drop in summer school sign-ups for students learning English.

“They’re really worried about enrollment for the fall,” said Viridiana Carrizales, chief executive officer of ImmSchools, a nonprofit that advises school districts how to meet the needs of immigrant students and their families.

Education finance experts predict budget problems for districts with large immigrant populations.

“Every student that walks in the door gets a chunk of money with it, not just federal money, but state and local money, too,” said Marguerite Roza, a Georgetown University professor focusing on education finance. “If a district had a lot of migrant students in its district, that’s a loss of funds potentially there. We think that’s a real high risk.”

Trump’s offer to pay immigrants to leave and help them with transportation could hasten the departures.

González, now back in Venezuela, says he wouldn’t have accepted the money, because it would have meant registering with the U.S. government, which he no longer trusts. And that’s what he’s telling the dozens of migrants in the U.S. who contact him each week asking the best way home.

Go on your own, he tells them. Once you have the cash, it’s much easier going south than it was getting to the U.S. in the first place.

US must keep control of migrants sent to South Sudan in case removals were unlawful, judge rules

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge ruled late Tuesday that U.S. officials must retain custody and control of migrants apparently removed to South Sudan in case he orders their removals were unlawful.

U.S. District Judge Brian E. Murphy in Massachusetts issued the ruling after an emergency hearing, after attorneys for immigrants said the Trump administration appears to have begun deporting people from Myanmar and Vietnam to South Sudan — despite a court order restricting removals to other countries.

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Murphy said the government must "maintain custody and control of class members currently being removed to South Sudan or to any other third country, to ensure the practical feasibility of return if the Court finds that such removals were unlawful."

While Murphy left the details to the government's discretion, he said he expects the migrants "will be treated humanely."

Attorneys for the migrants told the judge that immigration authorities may have sent up to a dozen people from several countries to Africa, which they argue violates a court order saying people must get a "meaningful opportunity" to argue that sending them to a country outside their homeland would threaten their safety.

The apparent removal of one man from Myanmar was confirmed in an email from an immigration official in Texas, according to court documents. He was informed only in English, a language he does not speak well, and his attorneys learned of the plan hours before his deportation flight, they said.

A woman also reported that her husband from Vietnam and up to 10 other people were flown to Africa Tuesday morning, attorneys from the National Immigration Litigation Alliance wrote.

The attorneys asked Murphy for an emergency court order to prevent the deportations. Murphy, who was appointed by President Joe Biden, previously found that any plans to deport people to Libya without notice would "clearly" violate his ruling, which also applies to people who have otherwise exhausted their legal appeals.

Murphy said in his Tuesday order that U.S. officials must appear in court Wednesday to identify the migrants impacted, address when and how they learned they would be removed to a third country, and what opportunity they were given to raise a fear-based claim. He also ruled that the government must provide information about the whereabouts of the migrants apparently already removed.

The Department of Homeland Security and the White House did not immediately return messages seeking comment.

Some countries do not accept deportations from the United States, which has led the Trump administration to strike agreements with other countries, including Panama, to house them. The Trump administration has sent Venezuelans to a notorious prison in El Salvador under an 18th-century wartime law hotly contested in the courts.

South Sudan has suffered repeated waves of violence since gaining independence from Sudan in 2011 amid hopes it could use its large oil reserves to bring prosperity to a region long battered by poverty. Just weeks ago, the country's top U.N. official warned that fighting between forces loyal to the president and a vice president threatened to spiral again into full-scale civil war.

The situation is "darkly reminiscent of the 2013 and 2016 conflicts, which took over 400,000 lives," Nicholas Haysom, head of the almost 20,000-strong U.N. peacekeeping mission.

The U.S. State Department's annual report on South Sudan, published in April 2024, says "significant human rights issues" include arbitrary killings, disappearances, torture or inhumane treatment by security forces and extensive violence based on gender and sexual identity.

The U.S. Homeland Security Department has given Temporary Protected Status to a small number of South Sudanese already living in the United States since the country was founded in 2011, shielding them from deportation because conditions were deemed unsafe for return. Secretary Kristi Noem recently extended those protections to November to allow for a more thorough review.

Arrested New Orleans jail worker says he helped inmates escape after stabbing threat

By JACK BROOK and SARA CLINE Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A New Orleans jail maintenance worker has been arrested and is being held on a \$1.1 million bond after admitting he turned water off to a toilet covering a hole in a cell wall, allowing 10 men to squeeze through the gap in one of the largest jailbreaks in recent U.S. history.

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The inmates pulled off the daring escape early Friday by yanking open a faulty cell door, moving the toilet and slithering through the hole. Graffiti on the wall included the message "To Easy LoL," with an arrow pointing to the gap.

On Tuesday evening state police confirmed that Corey Boyd, 19, became the fifth of the escapees to be apprehended.

Boyd is accused of killing a person who caught him and others trying to break into a car in April 2024, the Times-Picayune/ NOLA.com reported, allegedly striking the victim with a vehicle before someone else shot the person. He has been charged with second-degree murder and pleaded not guilty.

Officials have underscored multiple security lapses in the escape, including ineffective cell locks and the fact that the inmates got out when the lone guard monitoring them went to get food. The absence of the inmates, many charged with or convicted of violent offenses such as murder, was not reported to law enforcement for hours.

During a tense New Orleans City Council meeting on Tuesday, Orleans Parish Sheriff Susan Hutson, who oversees the jail, said she takes "full accountability."

"There were procedural failures and missed notifications, but there were also intentional wrongdoings. This was a coordinated effort aided by individuals inside our own agency who made the choice to break the law," Hutson said. "We are continuing to pursue everyone involved."

Responding to a question from Councilmember Oliver Thomas, Hutson said she could not guarantee that inmates would not be left unattended again, noting that the jail is operating with 60% staffing capacity.

Hutson announced in the evening that she was pausing her reelection campaign, saying in a social media post that "restoring public trust and my commitment to security, accountability, and public safety must come before politics."

Hutson has been sheriff since May 2022, and there are several challengers for the position in the election later this year.

Arrested staffer describes his involvement in the escape

The inmates escaped by removing a sink-toilet combination unit from a cell and then cutting steel bars behind the sink, Hutson said. After bending the bars, they slipped out. It's unclear what they used to saw through the bars.

Authorities believe sheriff's employees helped, and three have been suspended. On Tuesday authorities made their first staff arrest.

Maintenance worker Sterling Williams, 33, admitted that one of the escapees "advised him to turn the water off in the cell," the Louisiana Attorney General's office said in a statement.

Williams is charged with 10 counts of principal to simple escape and one count of malfeasance in office, with a \$100,000 bond per charge.

Michael Kennedy, Williams' appointed attorney, said he intends to plead not guilty.

Several of Williams' family members did not respond to requests for comment.

Why did he allegedly help?

Williams said one of the escapees threatened to "shank" him if he did not turn off the water, according to an arrest affidavit. Another tried to take Williams' phone and attempted to get him to bring a book with cash app information.

Attorney General Liz Murrill said Williams "made some bad decisions" and should have brought the threat and escape plan to someone's attention.

Thomas said the sheriff's office has a responsibility to protect employees and create a safe environment for reporting threats and other problems.

"We cannot allow the inmates to run the facilities. That can't happen," Thomas said. "We cannot allow them to threaten the men and women who work there."

According to the affidavit, Williams "willfully and maliciously assisted with the escape" and without his help the escapees would have flooded the cell and drawn attention.

Murrill told reporters that no additional charges have been filed against other employees but the investigation continues and "there could be more arrests."

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Delays and ongoing security concerns

Officials have pointed to other security lapses before, during and after the jailbreak.

New Orleans officials grilled the sheriff's office about why there was an hourslong delay in reporting the escape.

While a head count of inmates normally starts around 6:30 a.m. and takes less than an hour, sheriff's officials said they were still verifying whether inmates had escaped more than two hours later, according to Jeworski "Jay" Mallett, the jail's chief of corrections. City and state police did not find out until around 10:30 a.m., more than nine hours after they broke out of the facility.

Local police, who have "exponentially vaster" resources to track down the inmates, should have been notified immediately, Councilmember J.P. Morrell said.

"There were failures, failures in our personnel," Hutson said.

Many state and local officials say blame rests squarely on Hutson.

Still on the lam

Five of the fugitives remain at large. Many of them were in jail awaiting trial or sentencing, including for murder charges.

"There are witnesses and victims, and all of those people are very, rightfully, unnerved by all of this," Murrill said.

Christian Padilla, 30, who lives near where police were searching for Boyd, said he was relieved they caught him.

"That's one less to worry about on the streets," he said.

The sheriff's office said more than 200 law enforcement personnel were part of the search for the fugitives. Up to \$20,000 was offered for information leading to the capture of each one.

Antoine Massey, identified in the affidavit as the one who threatened to stab Williams, is one of those still on the run. According to the Morehouse Parish Sheriff's Office, Massey also escaped from a jail in northeast Louisiana in 2019 and was recaptured the same day in a town in Texas, some 300 miles (480 kilometers) away.

"He was in the exercise yard and somehow cut part of the chain-link fence, enough to shimmy through the hole," Morehouse Parish Sheriff Chief Deputy James Mardis said, adding that an accomplice was waiting with a car.

New Orleans Police Superintendent Anne Kirkpatrick said she believes most of the escapees are within city limits. Officials have warned that anyone aiding them will face charges.

Meanwhile around 60 inmates at the jail have been transferred to more secure state prisons.

Israeli strikes kill at least 85 in Gaza as Israel allows more aid into Palestinian territory

By WAFAA SHURAF, SAMY MAGDY and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel pressed ahead Tuesday with its new military offensive in Gaza despite mounting international criticism, launching airstrikes that health officials said killed at least 85 Palestinians. Israeli officials said they also allowed in dozens more trucks carrying aid.

Two days after aid began entering Gaza, the desperately needed new supplies have not yet reached people in Gaza, which has been under an Israeli blockade for nearly three months, according to the United Nations. Experts have warned that many of Gaza's 2 million residents are at high risk of famine.

Under pressure, Israel agreed this week to allow a "minimal" amount of aid into the Palestinian territory after preventing the entry of food, medicine and fuel in an attempt to pressure the Hamas militant group. U.N. spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said that although the aid has entered Gaza, aid workers were not able to bring it to distribution points where it is most needed, after the Israeli military forced them to reload the supplies onto separate trucks and workers ran out of time.

COGAT, the Israeli defense body that oversees humanitarian aid, said five trucks entered Monday and

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93 trucks entered Tuesday. But Dujarric said the U.N. confirmed only a few dozen trucks entered Gaza on Tuesday.

The aid included flour for bakeries, food for soup kitchens, baby food and medical supplies. The U.N. humanitarian agency said it is prioritizing baby formula in the first shipments.

But none of that aid actually reached Palestinians, according to the U.N. Dujarric described the new security process for getting aid cleared to warehouses as "long, complex, complicated and dangerous." He said Israeli military requirements for aid workers to unload and reload the trucks are hindering efforts to distribute the aid. COGAT did not immediately comment on the new procedures.

The United Nations humanitarian agency received approval for about 100 trucks to enter Gaza, spokesman Jens Laerke said, which is far less than the 600 that entered daily during the latest ceasefire that Israel ended in March. Israel's Foreign Ministry said dozens are expected to enter each day.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he decided to let in limited aid after pressure from allies, who told him they couldn't support Israel while devastating images of starvation were coming out of Gaza.

U.K. suspends trade negotiations and sanctions settler movement

But some close allies say the limited aid is not enough.

The British government on Tuesday said it was suspending free trade negotiations with Israel and was leveling new sanctions targeting settlements in the occupied West Bank. The move came a day after the U.K, France and Canada condemned Israel's handling of the war in Gaza and its actions in the West Bank and threatened to take action.

"I want to put on record today that we're horrified by the escalation from Israel," British Prime Minister Keir Starmer told Parliament.

Israel's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Oren Marmorstein called the new sanctions "unjustified and regrettable" and claimed Israel and the U.K. had not been talking about free trade.

The U.K. leveled sanctions against three settlers and a number of organizations, including settler leader Daniella Weiss and the movement she heads. In response, Weiss said hundreds of families are ready to build Jewish settlements in Gaza.

Israel launched its new military operation in Gaza over the weekend, 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 during the latest onslaught, according to health officials.

Israeli politician criticizes killing 'babies as a hobby'

Criticism against Israel's conduct in Gaza also came at home. A leader of center-left politics said 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 inside 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 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 him of echoing "disgraceful antisemitic blood libels" against the country.

Golan, who donned his uniform during Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack to join the fight against the 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.

At an evening news conference, Golan said he refused to be silent "because the meaning of silence is to join in the abandonment of the IDF and the abandonment of the hostages and the abandonment of the State of Israel." He called on the opposition to band together to oppose the government's plans for Gaza.

Strikes pound Gaza as Netanyahu recalls negotiating team

In the latest assaults, two strikes 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 Gaza's Health Ministry. The

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Israeli military said it targeted a Hamas command center and warned civilians ahead of time.

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 al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital.

Two strikes in Khan Younis killed 10 people, according to Nasser Hospital. Israel said it was targeting militants and blames Hamas for civilian deaths because the group operates in densely populated areas.

On Tuesday, Netanyahu said he was recalling his high-level negotiating team from the Gulf state of Qatar after a week of ceasefire talks failed to bring results. A working team will remain in the Qatari capital of Doha.

Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said a "fundamental gap" remained between the two parties and that none of the proposals were able to bridge their differences.

Hamas said no real ceasefire talks have taken place since Saturday in Doha. The group accused Netanyahu of "falsely portraying participation" and attempting to "mislead global public opinion" by keeping Israel's delegation there without engaging in serious negotiations.

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 of whom are 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.

Cassie's mother says Sean 'Diddy' Combs demanded \$20K because her daughter was seeing someone else

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — An angry Sean "Diddy" Combs demanded \$20,000 from Casandra "Cassie" Ventura's mother and threatened to release explicit sex tapes of his longtime girlfriend after learning she was dating someone else, the mother testified Tuesday at the hip-hop mogul's sex trafficking trial.

Regina Ventura said she felt "physically sick" when her daughter sent her an email in late 2011 to say Combs threatened to release two explicit videos of her and send someone to hurt her and the man she was seeing, the rapper Kid Cudi.

"I did not understand a lot of it. The sex tapes threw me," Ventura told the Manhattan federal court.

Ventura, of New London, Connecticut, said she then received a demand from Combs for \$20,000.

"He was angry that he had spent money on her and she went with another person," she said.

Cudi, whose real name is Scott Mescudi, is expected to testify by Thursday.

Ventura said she tapped a home equity loan to pay Combs because she was "scared for my daughter's safety." Days later, she said, the money was returned and Cassie was soon dating Combs again.

Ventura testified for less than a half-hour, in part because defense attorney Marc Agnifilo declined to cross-examine her. During her testimony, the jury viewed photos of bruises on Cassie's body that Ventura testified were taken when her daughter came home for Christmas in 2011.

Before the jury arrived Tuesday, Agnifilo tried to persuade Judge Arun Subramanian to disallow the testimony, saying it was "purely prejudicial." The judge allowed it though, saying the threats to release sex tapes and harm Cassie made it an instance of "potential extortion."

A federal agent describes a raid of Combs' home

Jurors also saw parts of two AR-15 rifles found last year during a raid on Combs' mansion on Star Island, a celebrity enclave off of Miami.

Homeland Security Agent Gerard Gannon testified that investigators in March 2024 rammed through Combs' security gate in an armored vehicle and had teams on boats nearby. Besides weapons, they found 7-inch high heels and items prosecutors say Combs used at his freak-off sex marathons like lingerie, sex toys, baby oil, lubricant and condoms.

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The testimony came in week two of a projected two-month trial. Combs, 55, has pleaded not guilty. If convicted, the Bad Boy Records founder could face 15 years to life in prison.

A former assistant describes working for Combs

Earlier Tuesday, David James, Combs' personal assistant from 2007 to 2009, testified that the job seemed to have increasing perils. He said he quit when he realized Combs had put his life in danger by forcing him to drive a car as the angry rapper sat in the back with three handguns on his lap.

James said his job sometimes required him to ensure that hotel rooms where Combs stayed under the name "Frank Black" were stocked with the musician's comforts, including fresh underwear, an iPod, apple sauce, vodka, baby oil, Viagra and condoms.

There were also surprising moments, James said, like once in 2008 when he obeyed a Combs command to bring an iPod from his Miami home to a hotel room, where he opened the door to see Cassie on the bed with a white comforter pulled up to her neck and an unfamiliar naked man fleeing the room.

Another time, he said, Combs showed him a video he'd recorded at a party of James dancing wildly and said: "Ok. I'm going to keep this footage in case I ever need it." James said he took it as a threat to keep him in line.

Cassie testified last week that Combs threatened that if she didn't do as he said, he would release videos of her having sex with male escorts during freak-offs.

James also described being required to take lie detector tests twice when Combs was trying to learn who stole cash and a watch.

He said Combs was on drugs nearly every day, often taking Percocet by day and ecstasy by night. When he stocked Combs' hotel rooms, he said, drugs were in a bag dropped off by security, including a pill meant to look like former President Barack Obama.

The moment when James saw the three guns on Combs' lap came when he testified that he was involved in Combs' attempt to confront his music industry rival Suge Knight at a Los Angeles diner in November 2008 — an incident that Cassie also testified about. He said he quit soon afterward.

"I was real shook up by it," James testified. "This was the first time being Mr. Combs' assistant that I realized my life was in danger."

More testimony about freak-offs

Before Tuesday's lunch break, Sharay Hayes, an exotic dancer known as "The Punisher," testified that Combs and Cassie brought him into the freak-offs world. He said a woman — Cassie using a pseudonym — called and told him it was her birthday and that her husband said she should hire a dancer.

Hayes said he arrived at a Manhattan hotel room expecting to perform a striptease for a small group of people but instead found the woman who hired him — whom he later found out was Cassie — alone with an otherwise naked man who hid his face with a burqa-like cloth. That man, he said, turned out to be Combs.

Hayes recalled seeing bottles of baby oil in bowls of water and getting handed a stack of \$800 in cash. Later, after Combs watched him have a sexual encounter with Cassie, he said he was handed an additional \$1,200. He said he was a fan of Combs but didn't realize it was him in the room until a subsequent encounter at another hotel where the message on the TV screen said: "Essex House would like to welcome Mr. Sean Combs."

New Trump vaccine policy limits access to COVID shots

By MATTHEW PERRONE and LAURAN NEERGAARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration said Tuesday it will limit approval for seasonal COVID-19 shots to seniors and others at high risk pending more data on everyone else — raising questions about whether some people who want a vaccine this fall will be able to get one.

Top officials for the Food and Drug Administration laid out new standards for updated COVID shots, saying they'd continue to use a streamlined approach to make them available to adults 65 and older as well as children and younger adults with at least one high-risk health problem.

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But the FDA framework, published Tuesday in the New England Journal of Medicine, urges companies to conduct large, lengthy studies before tweaked vaccines can be approved for healthier people. It's a stark break from the previous federal policy recommending an annual COVID shot for all Americans six months and older. In the paper and a subsequent online webcast, the FDA's top vaccine official said more than 100 million Americans still should qualify for what he termed a booster under the new guidance.

Dr. Vinay Prasad described the new approach as a "reasonable compromise" that will allow vaccinations in high-risk groups to continue while generating new data about whether they still benefit healthier people.

"For many Americans we simply do not know the answer as to whether or not they should be getting the seventh or eighth or ninth or tenth COVID-19 booster," said Prasad, who joined the FDA earlier this month. He previously spent more than a decade in academia, frequently criticizing the FDA's handling of drug and vaccine approvals.

It's unclear what the upcoming changes mean for people who may still want a fall COVID-19 shot but don't clearly fit into one of the categories.

"Is the pharmacist going to determine if you're in a high-risk group?" asked Dr. Paul Offit, a vaccine expert at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. "The only thing that can come of this will make vaccines less insurable and less available."

The nation's leading pediatrics group said FDA's approach will limit options for parents and their children.

"If the vaccine were no longer available or covered by insurance, it will take the choice away from families who wish to protect their children from COVID-19, especially among families already facing barriers to care," said Dr. Sean O'Leary of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows more than 47,000 Americans died from COVID-related causes last year. The virus was the underlying cause for two-thirds of those and it was a contributing factor for the rest. Among them were 231 children whose deaths were deemed COVID-related, 134 of them where the virus was the direct cause -- numbers similar to yearly pediatric deaths from the flu.

The new FDA approach is the culmination of a series of recent steps under Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. scrutinizing the use of COVID shots and raising questions about the broader availability of vaccines. It was released two days ahead of the first meeting of FDA's outside vaccine experts under Trump.

Last week the FDA granted full approval of Novavax's COVID-19 vaccine but with major restrictions on who can get it — and Tuesday's guidance mirrors those restrictions. The approval came after Trump appointees overruled FDA scientists' earlier plans to approve the shot without restrictions.

Pfizer and Moderna, makers of the most commonly used COVID shots, each said they would continue to work with the agency.

For years, federal health officials have told most Americans to expect annual updates to COVID-19 vaccines, similar to the annual flu shot. Just like with flu vaccines, until now the FDA has approved updated COVID shots so long as they show as much immune protection as the previous year's version.

But FDA's new guidance appears to be the end of that approach, according to Prasad and FDA Commissioner Marty Makary, who co-authored the journal paper and joined the FDA webcast.

Prasad and Makary criticized the U.S.'s "one-size-fits-all," contrasting it with some European countries that recommend boosters based on age, risk and other factors.

Prasad said the FDA will ask all manufacturers to do new clinical trials in healthy people ages 50 to 64, randomly assigning them to get a vaccine or a placebo and tracking outcomes with special attention to severe disease, hospitalization or death. Companies might need to repeat that requirement for future vaccine approvals if there's a large virus mutation rather than the past year's incremental evolution. Companies are also free to test their vaccines for approval in younger adults and children, Prasad said, adding "this is a free country."

Since becoming the nation's top health official in February, Kennedy has filled the FDA and other health agencies with outspoken critics of the government's handling of COVID shots, including Makary and Prasad. Under federal procedures, the FDA releases new guidance in draft form and allows the public to comment before finalizing its plans. The publication of Tuesday's policy in a medical journal is highly unusual and

could run afoul of federal procedures, according to FDA experts.

Health experts say there are legitimate questions about how much everyone still benefits from yearly COVID vaccination or whether they should be recommended only for people at increased risk.

In June, an influential panel of advisers to the CDC is set to debate which vaccines should be recommended to which groups.

The FDA's announcement appears to usurp that advisory panel's job, Offit said. He added that CDC studies have made clear that booster doses do offer protection against mild to moderate illness for four to six months after the shot even in healthy people.

Trump on Capitol Hill implores divided Republicans to unify behind his big tax cuts bill

By LISA MASCARO, KEVIN FREKING, LEAH ASKARINAM and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump implored House Republicans at the Capitol to drop their fights over his big tax cuts bill and get it done, using encouraging words but also the hardened language of politics over the multitrillion-dollar package that is at risk of collapsing before planned votes this week.

During the more than hour-long session Tuesday, Trump warned Republicans not to touch Medicaid with cuts, and he told New York lawmakers to end their fight for a bigger local tax deduction, reversing his own campaign promise. The president, heading into the meeting, called himself a "cheerleader" for the Republican Party and praised Speaker Mike Johnson. But he also criticized at least one of the GOP holdouts as a "grandstander" and warned that anyone who doesn't support the bill would be a "fool."

"We have unbelievable unity," Trump said as he exited. "I think we're going to get everything we want."

The president arrived at a pivotal moment. 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. Lawmakers are also being asked to add some \$350 billion to Trump's border security, deportation and defense agenda.

Inside, he spoke privately in what one lawmaker called the president's "weaving" style and took questions.

The president also made it clear he's losing patience with the various holdout factions of the House Republicans, according to a senior White House official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private meeting.

But Trump himself disputed that notion as well as reports that he used an expletive in warning not to cut Medicaid. Instead, he said afterward, "That was a meeting of love." He received several standing ovations, Republicans said.

Yet it was not at all clear that Trump, who was brought in to seal the deal, changed minds.

"We're still a long ways away," said Rep. Andy Harris, R-Md., the chair of the House Freedom Caucus.

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.

With House Democrats lined up against the package as a giveaway to the wealthy at the expense of safety net programs, 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.

"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.

In one surprise move, the Senate quickly approved one of Trump's top priorities, an end to taxation on certain tipped income, without objection from either party. The vote enables Democrats to try to claim victory on a potentially popular provision, even though they oppose the larger tax package. It also links them closer to Trump in ways that could be difficult once the Senate takes up the broader debate.

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.

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Asked about one of the conservative Republicans, Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky, Trump lashed out. "I think he is a grandstander, frankly," the president continued. "I think he should be voted out of office."

But Massie, a renegade who often goes it alone and wears a clock lapel pin that tallies the nation's debt load, said afterward he's still a no vote.

Also unmoved was Rep. Mike Lawler, one of the New York Republicans leading the fight for a bigger state and local tax deduction, known as SALT: "As it stands right now, I do not support the bill. Period."

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. There's also a higher standard deduction, of \$32,000 for joint filers, and a bigger child tax credit.

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.

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 the rolling back of clean energy tax credits.

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.

Trump, who had campaigned on fully reinstating the unlimited SALT deduction, now appears to be satisfied with the proposed compromise, arguing it only benefits "all the Democratic" states.

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

George Wendt, who played beloved barfly Norm on 'Cheers' and found another home onstage, dies at 76

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — George Wendt, an actor with an Everyman charm who played the affable, beer-loving barfly Norm on the hit 1980s TV comedy "Cheers" and later crafted a stage career that took him to Broadway in "Art," "Hairspray" and "Elf," has died. He was 76.

Wendt's family said he died early Tuesday morning, peacefully in his sleep while at home, according to the publicity firm The Agency Group.

"George was a doting family man, a well-loved friend and confidant to all of those lucky enough to have known him," the family said in a statement. "He will be missed forever." The family has requested privacy during this time.

Despite a long career of roles onstage and on TV, it was as gentle and henpecked Norm Peterson on "Cheers" that he was most associated, earning six straight Emmy Award nominations for best supporting actor in a comedy series from 1984-89.

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The series was centered on lovable losers in a Boston bar and starred Ted Danson, Shelley Long, Rhea Perlman, Kelsey Grammer, John Ratzenberger, Kirstie Alley and Woody Harrelson. It would spin off another megahit in "Frasier" and was nominated for an astounding 117 Emmy Awards, winning 28 of them.

Wendt, who spent six years in Chicago's renowned Second City improv troupe before sitting on a barstool at the place where everybody knows your name, didn't have high hopes when he auditioned for "Cheers."

"My agent said, 'It's a small role, honey. It's one line. Actually, it's one word.' The word was 'beer.' I was having a hard time believing I was right for the role of 'the guy who looked like he wanted a beer.' So I went in, and they said, 'It's too small a role. Why don't you read this other one?' And it was a guy who never left the bar," Wendt told GQ in an oral history of "Cheers."

'Cheers' and a barstool

"Cheers" premiered on Sept. 30, 1982, and spent the first season with low ratings. NBC president Brandon Tartikoff championed the show, and it was nominated for an Emmy for best comedy series in its first season. Some 80 million people would tune in to watch its series finale 11 years later.

Wendt became a fan favorite in and outside the bar — his entrances were cheered with a warm "Norm!" — and his wisecracks always landed. "How's a beer sound, Norm?" he would be asked by the bartender. "I dunno. I usually finish them before they get a word in," he'd respond.

While the beer the cast drank on set was nonalcoholic, Wendt and other "Cheers" cast members have admitted they were tipsy on May 20, 1993, when they watched the show's final episode then appeared together on "The Tonight Show" in a live broadcast from the Bull and Finch Pub in Boston, the bar that inspired the series.

"We had been drinking heavily for two hours but nobody thought to feed us," Wendt told the Beaver County Times of Pennsylvania in 2009. "We were nowhere near as cute as we thought we were."

Perlman, who regularly served Wendt on "Cheers," in a statement called him "the sweetest, kindest man I ever met. It was impossible not to like him.

"As Carla, I was often standing next to him, as Norm always took the same seat at the end of the bar, which made it easy to grab him and beat the crap out of him at least once a week. I loved doing it and he loved pretending it didn't hurt. What a guy! I'll miss him more than words can say."

After "Cheers," Wendt starred in his own short-lived sitcom "The George Wendt Show" — "too bad he had to step out of Norm and down so far from that corner stool for his debut stanza," sniffed Variety — and had guest spots on TV shows like "The Ghost Whisperer," "Harry's Law" and "Portlandia." He was part of a brotherhood of Chicago Everymen who gathered over sausage and beers and adored "Da Bears" on "Saturday Night Live." In 2023, he competed on "The Masked Singer."

Second career on stage

But he found steady work onstage: Wendt slipped on Edna Turnblad's housecoat in Broadway's "Hair-spray" beginning in 2007, and was in the Tony Award-winning play "Art" in New York and London.

He starred in the national tour of "12 Angry Men" and appeared in a production of David Mamet's "Lakeboat." He also starred in regional productions of "Death of a Salesman," "The Odd Couple," "Never Too Late" and "Funnyman."

"A, it's by far the most fun, but B, I seem to have been kicked out of television," Wendt told the Kansas City Star in 2011. "I overstayed my welcome. But theater suits me."

Wendt had an affinity for playing Santa Claus, donning the famous red outfit in the stage musical "Elf" on Broadway in 2017, the TV movie "Santa Baby" with Jenny McCarthy in 2006 and in the doggie Disney video "Santa Buddies" in 2009. He also played Father Christmas for TV specials by Larry the Cable Guy and Stephen Colbert.

"I think it just proves that if you stay fat enough and get old enough, the offers start rolling in," the actor joked to the AP in his Broadway dressing room.

Born in Chicago, Wendt attended Campion High School, a Catholic boarding school in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, and then Notre Dame, where he rarely went to class and was kicked out. He transferred to Rockhurst University in Kansas City and graduated, after majoring in economics.

He found a home at Second City in both the touring company and the mainstage.

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"I think comedy is my long suit, for sure. My approach to comedy is usually not full-bore clownish," he told the AP. "If you're trying to showboat or step outside, it doesn't always work. There are certain performers who almost specialize in doing that, and they do it really well. But that's not my approach."

Cheers for beer

He had a lifelong association with beer. He had his first taste as an 8-year-old and got drunk at 16, at the World's Fair in New York.

His beer knowledge was poured into the book "Drinking With George: A Barstool Professional's Guide to Beer," co-written with Jonathan Grotenstein. One line: "Will Rogers once said he never met a man he didn't like. I feel the same about beer."

Part autobiography, part beer drinker's guide, the book had Wendt's conversational tone and lists, such as "Five Good Bar Bets," "77 Toasts from Around the World" and "(More Than) 100 Ways to Say That You're Drunk," which alphabetically lists 126 synonyms from "annihilated" through "zozzled."

He is survived by his wife, Second City alum Bernadette Birkett, who voiced Norm's never-seen not-so-better half, Vera, on "Cheers"; his children, Hilary, Joe and Daniel; and his stepchildren, Joshua and Andrew.

"From his early days with The Second City to his iconic role as Norm on 'Cheers,' George Wendt's work showcased how comedy can create indelible characters that feel like family. Over the course of 11 seasons, he brought warmth and humor to one of television's most beloved roles," National Comedy Center Executive Director Journey Gunderson said in a statement.

Rubio defends Trump's foreign policy as Democrats press him on Gaza aid and white South Africans

By MATTHEW LEE and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Democratic senators sparred Tuesday over the Trump administration's foreign policies, ranging from Ukraine and Russia to the Middle East, Latin America, the slashing of the U.S. foreign assistance budget and refugee admissions.

Rubio defended the administration's decisions to his former colleagues during a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, his first since being confirmed on President Donald Trump's Inauguration Day.

He said "America is back" and claimed four months of foreign-policy achievements, even as many of them remain frustratingly inconclusive. Among them are the resumption of nuclear talks with Iran, efforts to bring Russia and Ukraine into peace talks and efforts to end the war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas.

America's top diplomat praised agreements with El Salvador and other Latin American countries to accept migrant deportees, saying "secure borders, safe communities and zero tolerance for criminal cartels are once again the guiding principles of our foreign policy."

He also rejected assertions that massive cuts to his department's budget would hurt America's standing abroad. Instead, he said the cuts would actually improve the U.S. reputation internationally.

Hearing opens with a joke, then turns serious

Committee Chairman Jim Risch opened the hearing with praise for Trump's changes and spending cuts and welcomed what he called the administration's promising nuclear talks with Iran.

Risch also noted what he jokingly called "modest disagreement" with Democratic lawmakers, who used Tuesday's hearing to confront Rubio about Trump administration moves.

Ranking Democratic member Jeanne Shaheen argued that the Trump administration has "eviscerated six decades of foreign-policy investments" and given China openings around the world.

"I urge you to stand up to the extremists of the administration," the New Hampshire senator said.

Other Democrats excoriated the administration for its suspension of the refugee admissions program, particularly while allowing white Afrikaners from South Africa to enter the country.

Some Republicans also warned about drastic foreign assistance cuts, including former Senate leader Mitch McConnell and Susan Collins. They expressed concern that the U.S. is being outmaneuvered by its rivals internationally after the elimination of thousands of aid programs.

"The basic functions that soft power provides are extremely important," McConnell told Rubio at a sec-

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and hearing later in the day before the Senate Appropriations Committee. "You get a whole lot of friends for not much money."

Rubio says the US is encouraging but not threatening Israel on Gaza aid

Rubio told the Appropriations Committee that the Trump administration is encouraging but not threatening Israel to resume humanitarian aid shipments into Gaza.

He said the U.S. is not following the lead of several European countries that have imposed sanctions or warned of actions against Israel amid the dearth of assistance reaching vulnerable Palestinians. However, he said U.S. officials have stressed in discussions with the Israelis that aid is urgently needed for civilians in Gaza who are suffering during Israel's military operation against Hamas.

"We're not prepared to respond the way these countries have," but the U.S. has engaged with Israel in the last few days about "the need to resume humanitarian aid," Rubio said. "We anticipate that those flows will increase over the next few days and weeks — it's important that that be achieved."

And Rubio acknowledged that the administration was approaching foreign governments about taking mass numbers of civilians from Gaza but insisted that any Palestinians leaving would be "voluntary."

"There's no deportation," Rubio said. "We've asked countries preliminarily whether they will be open to accepting people not as a permanent solution, but as a bridge to reconstruction" in Gaza.

Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., condemned it as a "strategy of forced migration."

Also on the Middle East, Rubio said the administration has pushed ahead with attempts to broker a ceasefire in Gaza and promote stability in Syria.

He stressed the importance of U.S. engagement with Syria, saying that otherwise, he fears the interim government there could be weeks or months away from a "potential collapse and a full-scale civil war of epic proportions."

Rubio's comments addressed Trump's pledge to lift sanctions burdening Syria's new transitional government, which is led by a former militant chief who led the overthrow of the country's longtime oppressive leader, Bashar Assad, late last year. The U.S. sanctions were imposed under Assad.

Rubio and senators clash over white South Africans entering the country

In two particularly contentious exchanges, Kaine and Van Hollen demanded answers on the decision to suspend overall refugee admissions but to exempt Afrikaners based on what they called "specious" claims that they have been subjected to massive discrimination by the South African government. Rubio gave no ground.

In one tense exchange, Kaine pressed Rubio to say whether there should be a different refugee policy based on skin color.

"I'm not the one arguing that," Rubio said. "Apparently, you are, because you don't like the fact they're white."

"The United States has a right to pick and choose who we allow into the United States," he said. "If there is a subset of people that are easier to vet, who we have a better understanding of who they are and what they're going to do when they come here, they're going to receive preference."

He added: "There are a lot of sad stories around the world, millions and millions of people around the world. It's heartbreaking, but we cannot assume millions and millions of people around the world. No country can."

Weinstein trial turns tense as accuser gestures at him and lawyers clash over a movie reference

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A key witness stared down Harvey Weinstein and pointed sharply at him as she left court in sobs Tuesday, marking one of the most heated points of the former studio boss' sex crimes retrial.

And that was before noon. By the end of the day, prosecutors and defense lawyers were clashing over a question related to the 1989 movie "When Harry Met Sally ...," an unexpected flashpoint about a film

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Weinstein didn't produce.

The finger-pointing confrontation came after Jessica Mann described Weinstein grabbing, dragging, forcefully undressing and raping her in a Beverly Hills, California, hotel room around the beginning of 2014, after she told him she was dating someone else.

"You owe me one more time!" Weinstein bellowed, according to Mann, who wiped her eyes and took heaving breaths as she testified. Weinstein — who denies ever raping or sexually assaulting anyone — briefly shook his head as he watched from the defense table.

After Mann finished her narrative, she continued crying and didn't answer when a prosecutor asked whether she needed a break. Judge Curtis Farber called for one.

When Mann passed the defense table on her way out, she turned toward the seated Weinstein, aimed a finger at her eyes and then at him. It wasn't clear how many jurors saw the gesture, and Mann didn't respond to a question outside court about what she meant to convey.

After they left, Weinstein lawyer Arthur Aidala requested a mistrial, as the defense has repeatedly done before. He cited Mann's gesticulation, questioned her displays of emotion and complained that she shouldn't have been asked about the alleged Los Angeles rape, as Weinstein isn't actually charged with it.

The Oscar-winning producer is charged with raping Mann on another occasion, in 2013 in New York, and forcing oral sex on two other women separately in 2006. He has pleaded not guilty to all the charges.

Farber denied the mistrial request but suggested that Mann be told not to make any more such moves. The judge noted that he had also seen Weinstein react visibly and mutter at times during the trial.

Mann returned to the witness stand without looking at Weinstein, who watched her stone-faced.

She resumed testifying through an edgy morning. And it got edgier in the afternoon, when Aidala began questioning Mann, 39, about her fraught and complex history with Weinstein, 73. She has said she had a consensual, on-and-off relationship with the then-married Weinstein, but that he was volatile and violated her if she refused him.

In an opening statement last month, Aidala portrayed Mann as an aspiring actor who had only willing sexual encounters with a Hollywood bigwig she thought could help her.

During questioning Tuesday, the attorney noted she accepted party invitations, dinners and rides from Weinstein and underscored the fact that she continued to see the producer after he allegedly raped her. Aidala also zeroed in on her testimony Monday that she tried to reject Weinstein's first sexual advance but ultimately pretended to enjoy it.

Mann had testified that she gave in because he wouldn't let her leave, and she faked an orgasm in order to extricate herself. Aidala pressed for specifics on how she had "lied to" Weinstein.

"Meg Ryan in the restaurant," Mann replied, referring to a memorable scene involving Ryan's character in "When Harry Met Sally"

Mann explained that she had been "making noises," and Aidala began asking her to elaborate. Prosecutors jumped in to object. After an out-of-earshot discussion among the lawyers and judge, Aidala moved on to another question.

After jurors and Mann went home for the day, prosecutor Matthew Colangelo complained that Aidala's questioning went "beyond the pale." Aidala insisted he "was never going to ask her to start moaning," and he said the matter was relevant to Weinstein's understanding of what happened between him and Mann.

Weinstein went from movie mogul to #MeToo pariah in 2017, after allegations emerged that he had sexually harassed and sexually abused women for years. He was later convicted of various sex crimes in both New York and California, but his New York conviction was later overturned, leading to the retrial.

It has been tense at times as his accusers underwent days of questioning. One, Miriam Haley, cursed at Weinstein from the witness stand. Another, Kaja Sokola, was dismayed by questions about her private journal, which Weinstein's lawyers got without her knowledge.

The Associated Press generally does not identify people who allege they have been sexually assaulted unless they agree to be identified. Haley, Mann and Sokola have done so.

Survivors of clergy sexual abuse turn up calls for reforms from new pope's American hometown

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Survivors of clergy sexual abuse amplified calls Tuesday for a global zero-tolerance policy from the new pope's American hometown and raised questions about Leo XIV's history of dealing with accused priests from Chicago to Australia.

The cases span Robert Prevost's previous posts. They include leading a Catholic religious order, bishop and as head of the Vatican's office for bishops, where he was made cardinal.

The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, or SNAP, called out alleged abuse by Chicago priests and other clergy in Peru, Colombia, Canada and Australia where it contended the new pope should have done more.

Along with a worldwide zero-tolerance law for accused priests, SNAP has called for a global truth commission, survivor reparations and church transparency measures.

"It is our hope that Pope Leo does the right thing," Shaun Dougherty, SNAP president, told reporters in Chicago. "It is our gut, in our experience, that says that he will need the pressure."

Associated Press requests for comment to the Vatican media office Tuesday and its diplomatic representative to the United States didn't receive immediate replies.

No one has accused the new pope of any act of abuse himself or knowingly keeping confirmed abusers in public ministry, which has been the biggest scandal plaguing the Catholic Church recently.

Instead, victims' advocates said he should have involved authorities earlier, been vocal about accused priests and worked to strip them of their titles. SNAP has been gathering evidence of how the church has covered for abusers and provided internal communications referencing cases, including in Chicago.

"This is the underground story of Prevost, this is the side of him and his management and decisions that we're finally able to bring to light," said Peter Isely with SNAP.

Some cases span the time when Prevost was based in Chicago as the Midwest regional leader of the Order of St. Augustine, a job he took in 1999. Three years later, he became worldwide leader of the Augustinians.

One priest who faced dozens of abuse allegations left the church in 1993 before landing a job as a Shedd Aquarium tour guide on a recommendation from a top Augustinian official. The priest worked at the popular tourist and school field trip destination in Chicago for nearly a decade before Shedd officials learned about the abuse claims.

"Had Shedd Aquarium received any information regarding the kind of allegations that have been brought to our attention, we would not have hired this individual," a 2003 letter from the aquarium said.

Advocates said Prevost inherited the case when he became Augustinian provincial leader and should have stepped in earlier, considering the priest's new job working directly with children.

Survivors have demanded the church adopt a global policy that a priest be permanently removed from ministry for a single act of sexual abuse that is either admitted to or established according to church law. That has been the policy in the U.S. church since the height of the U.S. scandal in 2002, but the Vatican hasn't imposed it worldwide.

SNAP also cited a case in the Diocese of Chiclayo, Peru, which then-Bishop Prevost led from 2014 to 2023. Three women came forward in 2022 to accuse two priests of sexual abuse.

The diocese forwarded information about the case to a Vatican office, which closed the case without a finding. However, the diocese later reopened the investigation after Prevost left for a Vatican post.

Critics said Prevost failed to investigate sufficiently.

The Vatican and Prevost's successor determined Prevost acted correctly as far as church law is concerned. The Vatican noted he imposed preliminary restrictions on the accused priest pending investigation by Peruvian authorities, who concluded that the statute of limitations had expired.

As a bishop in Peru and then prefect at the Vatican, Prevost was intimately involved in an investigation into an influential Catholic movement in Peru, Sodalitium Christianae Vitae, which was suppressed earlier this year by Pope Francis because of alleged abuses.

As a result, Prevost made plenty of enemies in the movement who have shared the allegations against him on social media in what some in the Vatican say was a campaign to try to discredit him.

SNAP also cited Prevost's role from 2023 to 2025 leading the Dicastery for Bishops. It cited cases of accused bishops from Canada, Colombia and Australia who resigned amid abuse allegations but were allowed to retain their status as bishops.

While Prevost's office would have handled investigations of accused bishops, the final decisions would have been those of Leo's predecessor, Pope Francis, because the pontiff has ultimate authority over bishops.

Musk vows to put hundreds of thousands of self-driving Teslas on US roads by the end of next year

By JON GAMBRELL and BERNARD CONDON Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Elon Musk said that he expects hundreds of thousands of self-driving Teslas will be on the road requiring no human intervention by the end of next year and that he is committed to staying as CEO of the company for at least another five years.

The billionaire also said in a pair of interviews on Tuesday that he has no regrets about leading the job-slashing Department of Government Efficiency under the Trump administration. He downplayed any damage to the Tesla brand from that role, saying demand for Teslas has experienced a "major rebound." That's potentially a big development given that the latest public sales figures from Europe and U.S. show steep declines in sales for several months running.

"We'll probably have hundreds of thousands, if not over a million, Teslas doing self-driving in the U.S.," Musk said in an CNBC interview Tuesday, adding that passengers won't need to pay attention to the road. "Like you're asleep and you wake up at your destination."

His comment about sticking around as CEO was made earlier in the day at the Qatar Economic Forum hosted by Bloomberg.

Musk has been promising fully autonomous, self-driving vehicles "next year" for a decade but the pressure is on now as Tesla begins a test run of its self-driving taxi service in Austin, Texas, next month.

"This is a watershed time for Tesla, and Musk is doubling down on these numbers," said Wedbush Securities analyst Dan Ives. "These are pretty bullish forecasts."

Tesla's stock closed Tuesday up nearly 1% to \$345. After a steep fall this year, the stock is up more than 50% in little over a month as investors have cheered Musk's decision to scale back his time in Washington and spend more time running the company.

Musk also gave new details about the Austin service, saying Tesla taxis will be remotely monitored at first and "geofenced" to certain areas of the city deemed the safest to navigate. He told CNBC that he expected to initially run 10 or so taxis, increase that number rapidly and start offering the service in Los Angeles, San Antonio, San Francisco and other cities.

Federal safety regulators recently asked Tesla to explain how its driverless taxis will operate safely in Austin when there is fog, sun glare, rain and other low-visibility conditions that have been tied to accidents involving the company's driver-assistance software. However, federal regulators have limited powers over new Tesla taxis that operate without a steering wheel or brake pedals because there are no national regulations on self-driving technology.

Musk also dismissed autonomous vehicle rivals such as Waymo, a driverless taxis service that has jumped ahead of Tesla with already 250,000 paid trips each week in several cities.

"I think it'll be better," he said of Tesla's taxis. Then added, "I don't really think about competitors. I just think about making the product as perfect as possible."

The question about his expected tenure in Tesla's top job came in a video appearance at the Qatar Economic Forum after Musk traveled to Doha as part of Trump's Mideast trip last week. Musk, who also runs SpaceX, Starlink and other companies, offered terse responses and became combative over questions regarding his businesses and how his involvement in politics had affected his businesses.

Moderator Mishal Husain asked: "Do you see yourself and are you committed to still being the chief

executive of Tesla in five years' time?"

Musk responded: "Yes."

Husain pushed further: "No doubt about that at all?"

Musk added, chuckling: "I can't be still here if I'm dead."

Tesla has faced intense pressure as Musk worked with Trump as part of DOGE, particularly amid its campaign of cuts across the U.S. federal government.

Asked if what he faced made him think twice about his involvement in politics, Musk grew quiet and looked off camera for a moment before responding.

"I did what needed to be done," he said. "I'm not someone who has ever committed violence and yet massive violence was committed against my companies, massive violence was threatened against me."

He added: "Don't worry: We're coming for you."

Asked about his political donations, which include at least \$250 million to support Trump's election, Musk said that he would "to do a lot less in the future."

"I think I've done enough," he said.

Musk has seen a Tesla pay package he was due, once valued at \$56 billion, stopped by a Delaware judge. Musk on Tuesday referred to Chancellor Kathaleen St. Jude McCormick as an "activist who is cosplaying a judge in a Halloween costume."

Yet he acknowledged his Tesla pay was a part of his consideration about staying with the automaker, though he also wanted "sufficient voting control" so he "cannot be ousted by activist investors."

"It's not a money thing, it's a reasonable control thing over the future of the company, especially if we're building millions, potentially billions of humanoid robots," he added.

Prosecutors charge McIver with pushing and grabbing agents while trying to stop mayor's arrest

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

Federal prosecutors alleged Democratic Rep. LaMonica McIver of New Jersey pushed and grabbed officers while attempting to block the arrest of the Newark mayor outside an immigration detention facility, according to charges in court papers unsealed on Tuesday.

In an eight-page complaint, interim U.S. Attorney Alina Habba's office said McIver was protesting the removal of Newark Mayor Ras Baraka from a congressional tour of the Delaney Hall detention center in Newark on May 9.

The complaint says she attempted to stop the arrest of the mayor and pushed into agents for Homeland Security Investigations and Immigration and Customs Enforcement. She faces two counts of assaulting, resisting and impeding an officer.

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.

Habba had charged Baraka with trespassing after his arrest but dismissed the allegation on Monday when she said in a social media post she instead was charging the congresswoman.

Prosecuting 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 broader and more consequential struggle between a Trump administration engaged in overhauling immigration policy and a Democratic party scrambling 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.

Members of Congress are authorized by law to go into federal immigration facilities as part of their oversight powers, even without advance notice. Congress passed a 2019 appropriations bill that spelled

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out the authority.

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

The complaint says she "slammed" her forearm into an agent and then tried to restrain the agent by grabbing him.

Tom Homan, President Donald Trump's top border adviser, said during an interview on Fox News Tuesday "she broke the law and we're going to hold her accountable"

"You can't put hands on an ICE employee. we're not going to tolerate it," he said.

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

On Tuesday Democratic lawmakers pushed back against the charges.

New Jersey Democratic Rep. Frank Pallone called the arrest "outrageous" and said the lawmakers "were met by unidentified masked agents with loaded weapons, and now they face charges? The department of justice and ICE are weaponizing this place."

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said Tuesday during a Congressional hearing that lawmakers can conduct oversight but accused those who visited the Newark detention facility of showing up with a "mob" intending to break in and attack law enforcement.

New Jersey Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman, who along with Rep. Rob Menendez had joined McIver at the detention center, told reporters Tuesday that her and Menendez's attorneys are scheduled to meet Wednesday with Habba's office.

"That's the first contact that we've actually had from her so we don't know what she has intended, but we're ready for whenever it might be," she said.

Watson Coleman added that Habba's office has indicated that charges are still on the table.

"It's a possibility and it may be a probability. We shall see," she said.

A message seeking comment Tuesday was left with Habba's office.

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.

Markers in blood and urine may reveal how much ultraprocessed food we are eating

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

Molecules in blood and urine may reveal how much energy a person consumes from ultraprocessed foods, a key step to understanding the impact of the products that make up nearly 60% of the American diet, a new study finds.

It's the first time that scientists have identified biological markers that can indicate higher or lower intake of the foods, which are linked to a host of health problems, said Erikka Loftfield, a National Cancer Institute researcher who led the study published Tuesday in the journal PLOS Medicine.

"It can potentially give us some clues as to what the underlying biology might be between an ultraprocessed food association and a health outcome," Loftfield said.

Ultraprocessed foods – sugary cereals, sodas, chips, frozen pizzas and more – are products created through industrial processes with ingredients such as additives, colors and preservatives not found in home

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kitchens. They're ubiquitous in the U.S. and elsewhere, but studying their health impacts is hard because it's difficult to accurately track what people eat.

Typical nutrition studies rely on recall: asking people what they ate during a certain period. But such reports are notoriously unreliable because people don't remember everything they ate, or they record it inaccurately.

"There's a need for both a more objective measure and potentially also a more accurate measure," Loftfield explained.

To create the new scores, Loftfield and her colleagues examined data from an existing study of more than 1,000 older U.S. adults who were AARP members. More than 700 of them had provided blood and urine samples, as well as detailed dietary recall reports, collected over a year.

The scientists found that hundreds of metabolites – products of digestion and other processes – corresponded to the percentage of energy a person consumes from ultraprocessed foods. From those, they devised a score of 28 blood markers and up to 33 urine markers that reliably predicted ultraprocessed food intake in people consuming typical diets.

"We found this signature that was sort of predictive of this dietary pattern that's high in ultraprocessed food and not just a specific food item here and there," she said.

A few of the markers, notably two amino acids and a carbohydrate, showed up at least 60 times out of 100 testing iterations. One marker showed a potential link between a diet high in ultraprocessed foods and type 2 diabetes, the study found.

To confirm the findings, Loftfield measured the scoring tool with participants in a carefully controlled 2019 National Institutes of Health study of ultraprocessed foods.

In that study, 20 adults went to live for a month at an NIH center. They received diets of ultraprocessed and unprocessed foods matched for calories, sugar, fat, fiber and macronutrients for two weeks each and were told to eat as much as they liked.

Loftfield's team found that they could use the metabolite scores to tell when the individual participants were eating a lot of ultraprocessed foods and when they weren't eating those foods.

The results suggested the markers were "valid at the individual level," Loftfield said.

It's still early research, but identifying blood and urine markers to predict ultraprocessed foods consumption is "a major scientific advance," said Dr. Dariush Mozaffarian, director of the Food Is Medicine Institute at Tufts University, who was not involved in the study.

"With more research, these metabolic signatures can begin to untangle the biologic pathways and harms of UPF and also differences in health effects of specific UPF food groups, processing methods and additives," he said.

Loftfield said she hopes to apply the tool to existing studies where blood and urine samples are available to track, for instance, the effect of consuming ultraprocessed foods on cancer risk.

At a time when support for government research is being cut, funding remains uncertain.

"There's a lot of interest across the board — scientifically, public interest, political interest — in the question of: Does ultraprocessed food impact health and, if so, how?" she said. "How can we fund the studies that need to be done to answer these questions in a timely way?"

Elon Musk says he will cut back on political spending after heavily backing Trump in 2024

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, THOMAS BEAUMONT and RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Elon Musk, the richest person in the world and a key financial supporter of President Donald Trump, said Tuesday that he'll be spending "a lot less" on political campaigns, a reversal that could be a setback for Republicans ahead of next year's midterm elections.

Musk disclosed his decision via videoconference during a Bloomberg forum in Doha, Qatar. It speaks to his possible disenchantment with politics after his tumultuous tenure as Trump's pick to lead the newly created Department of Government Efficiency, which has fallen far short of its goals for reducing federal

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spending. Musk has scaled back his government role to spend more time at his businesses, including Tesla, which have seen intense blowback. Tesla reported a big drop in profits in the first quarter.

"In terms of political spending I'm going to do a lot less in the future," Musk said. Asked why, he responded that "I think I've done enough."

Musk's statement marks a reversal of the course he had set during the 2024 campaign — when he was among the very top political spenders — and immediately after.

Musk spent at least \$250 million supporting Trump in the presidential campaign, as the main contributor to America PAC, a super PAC that was active in advertising and funding door-to-door canvassing groups across the seven most-competitive states in the November presidential election.

Musk relished in the publicity, campaigning alongside Trump at times and headlining some of his own campaign rallies on the GOP nominee's behalf.

And while he took credit for helping Trump return to the White House, Musk suffered a public defeat in April, after he became deeply involved in a Wisconsin Supreme Court campaign. Musk-backed groups America PAC and Rebuilding America's Future spent more than \$21 million on the April 1 election in support of the Republican-backed candidate Brad Schimel.

But Schimel's defeat by 10 percentage points in Wisconsin, a state Trump carried just five months earlier, was a blow to Musk, who campaigned for Schimel in Green Bay the weekend before the election and had also pledged to enforce Trump's agenda in the 2026 midterm elections.

A week after Trump's November victory, Musk said the political action committees he supported would "play a significant role in primaries," adding later that he might help finance Republican challengers to GOP members of Congress who did not support Trump's nominees.

"How else? There is no other way," Musk wrote on X, which he rebranded after purchasing Twitter, in response to the suggestion of supporting intraparty challenges.

An adviser to Musk's PACs declined to comment Tuesday.

Once Trump took office, Musk held a prominent role as an adviser and leader of DOGE. He and his acolytes in the department fanned out widely across the federal government to enact deep cuts to the workforce and spending, in some cases seeking to shutter entire agencies altogether.

DOGE has pushed to fire tens of thousands of workers in downsizing at agencies, ranging from the IRS to Health and Human Services, and pressured tens of thousands more to take buyout and early retirement offers. And they sought to shut down agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

With backing from DOGE, agencies have cancelled tens of thousands of government contracts and grants that they say do not align with the administration's priorities. Some of those moves were done so quickly that they had to be reversed after pushback or court rulings finding that they were illegal.

Critics say it amounts to a reckless chain-saw approach that could destroy much of the nation's apolitical civil service, impair services for vulnerable populations, and halt critical research.

DOGE claims on its "Wall of Receipts" it has saved an estimated \$170 billion, but those savings numbers have been shown to be flawed and inflated in many cases.

Musk's role prompted intense pushback, including protests at his electric vehicle company, Tesla. Speaking to reporters earlier this month as he prepared to step back from DOGE, Musk noted the backlash.

"Being attacked relentlessly is not super fun," he said. "Seeing cars burning is not fun," he added, referring to the instances of Tesla cars being smashed or set on fire.

Musk's announced intention to step back from political spending comes during multiple new business opportunities, including a deal to host the latest versions of his Grok artificial intelligence chatbot on Microsoft's data centers.

Meanwhile, his brain-computer interface company Neuralink is planning to implant its experimental devices in dozens more people and his electric-vehicle company Tesla is developing a humanoid robot that Musk hopes to one day send to Mars.

Musk could change his mind about campaign spending. The 2026 midterm campaigns are just getting

off the ground, while some candidates have not yet announced their candidacy for elections that remain 18 months away.

But as of Tuesday, Musk said he did not expect to.

"Well, if I see a reason to do political spending in the future, I will do it," Musk said. "I do not currently see a reason."

Video of the Nottoway Plantation fire sparks jubilation. It's about anger and pain over slavery, too

By FERNANDA FIGUEROA and AARON MORRISON Associated Press

After a fire engulfed a mansion at Louisiana's Nottoway Plantation, one of the largest remaining pre-Civil War houses in the Deep South where scores of enslaved Africans labored, video footage of the combusted landmark lit the internet ablaze with mass jubilation and consternation over the weekend.

For some, it was a moment to celebrate what they saw as centuries-deferred vengeance for enslaved ancestors. There was no shortage of memes and humorous social media posts to ignite the celebrations: from video of the plantation's burning mansion set to the R&B hit song "Let It Burn" by Usher to other footage with the volume of burning wood cranked all the way up to trigger a cozy autonomous sensory meridian response.

"Went and watched (Nottoway Plantation) burn to the ground!" historian Mia Crawford-Johnson wrote in the Instagram caption of a grinning selfie taken Thursday across from the burned mansion near the banks the Mississippi River.

For others, it was a moment of sadness. Nottoway Plantation has for years been a venue for weddings and other events celebrating cherished milestones. Not to mention, proof of the ingenuity and skill of the enslaved people held on the plantation has been reduced to ashes.

Preservationists say the jubilant reactions to the charred mansion reflect the trauma and anger many people, especially Black Americans, still carry over the history and legacy of chattel slavery in the United States. Antebellum era plantations were built under grueling conditions on the backs of enslaved people, and many are now sites of honor on the National Register of Historic Places.

Some plantations try to ignore their past

But some plantations also de-emphasize or overlook their full histories, foregoing mentions of slavery altogether. That is why the "good riddance" sentiment seemed to outweigh expressions of grief over Nottoway Plantation, which makes no mention of enslaved former inhabitants on its website.

Many sites of enslavement in the U.S. have been repurposed as places that actively participate in the erasure of their history, said Ashley Rogers, executive director of the Whitney Plantation Museum, located 40 miles (65 kilometers) west of New Orleans. She said the burning of Nottoway is not actually part of the movement for preservation, since nothing was truly being done on the property to tell its full history.

"It was a resort," Rogers said. "I don't know that it being there or not being there has anything to do with how we preserve the history of slavery. They already weren't."

Joseph McGill, executive director of the Slave Dwelling Project, a nonprofit focused on helping the U.S. acknowledge its history with slavery, said the reaction from the Black community about Nottoway burning represents years of complicated emotions related to plantations. But as a preservationist, McGill said it is unfortunate Nottoway burned down, even if it was failing at telling history.

"I would like to see buildings preserved so that those buildings could tell the stories of all the people who inhabited those spaces," McGill said. "We have been failing at that, but at least when the buildings are there the opportunity always exists to do the right thing."

Nottoway Plantation became a resort and event venue

Before the fire, Nottoway was a resort and event venue, and its website described it as "the South's largest remaining antebellum mansion." Iberville Parish President Chris Daigle called the plantation "a cornerstone of our tourism economy and a site of national significance."

The sprawling property exists on a former sugar plantation owned by sugar baron John Hampden

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Randolph. Located about 65 miles (105 kilometers) northwest of New Orleans, the 53,000-square-foot (4,924-square-meter) mansion had a three-story rotunda adorned with giant white columns and hand-carved Italian marble fireplaces, according to a description on its website. A brochure advertises 40 overnight rooms, a honeymoon suite, a lounge, fitness center, outdoor pool and cabana, among other resort features.

In 1860, 155 enslaved people were held at the property, National Park Service records show.

After the blaze, which drew an emergency response from nearly a dozen fire departments from surrounding towns, the property's owner said the fire had led to a "total loss" and that he hoped to rebuild the mansion.

Rogers said it is unfortunate Nottoway's mansion burned down, as it did serve as a testament to the "skill of enslaved craftspeople and free people of color who built it and who did a lot of the incredible design work that was inside of that building."

There are plenty of plantations, unlike Nottoway, that do not allow weddings or other celebratory events. For example, the Whitney, which documents slavery at a pre-Civil War plantation, draws tens of thousands of visitors annually and is known for centering the stories of enslaved people.

The Nottoway fire has also restarted a public discourse over plantations. Rogers, the Whitney museum director, said this is not new discourse, but can feel like such because there are not many places where productive conversations can be had about slavery and how to tell its history.

Racism and slavery dominate cultural debates

How, where and when to talk about the history of U.S. racism and slavery has dominated political and cultural debates in recent years. An executive order issued in March by the Trump White House seeks to root out "divisive, race-centered ideology" in the Smithsonian Institution, which operates a broad range of cultural centers in Washington. Among the order's targets is the National Museum of African American History and Culture, a popular Smithsonian attraction that chronicles chattel slavery, Jim Crow segregation and its lingering effects.

Relatedly, plantations and other national historic sites with ties to civil rights have long been places where visitors and descendants of enslaved people go to learn about the past. But they are also places where visitors may encounter naysayers and deniers challenging the tour guide's presentation about slavery.

Rogers said there are plenty of others sites besides Nottoway accurately telling Black history that need to be preserved.

"I don't think one plantation burning down is going to change how we talk about slavery in this country," she said. "All it does is exposes wounds that are already there."

Iran's supreme leader rejects US stance on uranium enrichment

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran's supreme leader on Tuesday pushed back against U.S. criticism of the country's nuclear program, saying that Tehran won't seek permission from anyone to enrich uranium and calling American statements "nonsense."

"They say, 'We won't allow Iran to enrich uranium.' That's way out of line," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said during a memorial for late President Ebrahim Raisi, who died in a helicopter crash last year. "No one in Iran is waiting for their permission. The Islamic Republic has its own policies and direction — and it will stick to them."

Khamenei's remarks came as indirect talks between Iran and the U.S. reportedly continue, though he expressed doubt about their outcome.

"Yes, indirect negotiations were held during Raisi's time too, just like now," he said. "But they didn't go anywhere — and we don't expect much from the current ones either. Who knows what will happen."

His comments reflect Tehran's growing frustration with the stalled nuclear discussions, as well as the broader tensions that have defined U.S.-Iran relations in recent years.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei told the state-run IRNA news agency that "no definitive decision has been made about the next round of negotiations," adding that "the Islamic Republic of Iran is reviewing the matter while considering the U.S. side's contradictory and constantly changing positions."

IRNA also reported that Kazem Gharibabadi, the deputy foreign minister, said that Tehran had received a proposal regarding the next round of indirect talks with Washington and was currently reviewing it.

With little progress after phone calls and talks, Ukraine's allies hit Russia with new sanctions

By ILLIA NOVIKOV and YEHOR KONOVALOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Kyiv's European allies slapped new sanctions Tuesday on Moscow, a day after a phone call between U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin failed to produce a breakthrough on ending the 3-year-old war in Ukraine.

"We have made clear again and again that we simply expect one thing from Russia now: namely, a ceasefire, unconditional and immediate," German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul said in addressing the sanctions. "We welcome the fact that Ukraine is still prepared to do this. We note with disappointment that Russia has not yet taken this decisive step, and we will have to react to this."

Diplomatic efforts have seen little progress in halting the fighting, including Monday's phone call between Trump and Putin, and Friday's direct talks between Russian and Ukrainian delegations in Istanbul. In the phone call, Putin promised 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," said Tatiana Stanovaya, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, in a post on X.

Russian media struck a triumphal tone in reporting Putin's conversation with Trump.

Ukrainian leader seeks pressure on Moscow

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on his Telegram channel that "it is obvious that Russia is trying to buy time to continue the war and occupation. We are working with partners to put pressure on the Russians to behave differently."

The new European Union sanctions targeted almost 200 ships from Russia's "shadow fleet" illicitly transporting oil to skirt Western restrictions. It also imposed asset freezes and travel bans on several officials as well as on a number of Russian companies.

Ukrainian officials have said about 500 aging ships of uncertain ownership and safety practices are dodging sanctions and keeping oil revenues flowing to Moscow.

The U.K. also targeted the shadow fleet with 100 new sanctions and also aimed at disrupting the supply chains of Russian weapons, officials said.

"Putin's latest strikes once again show his true colors as a warmonger," British Foreign Secretary David Lammy said.

But Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said Tuesday: "Russia never responds to ultimatums."

No new sanctions on Russia from Trump

Trump has threatened to step up sanctions and tariffs on Russia but hasn't acted so far.

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 Putin last week but the Russian leader spurned that offer.

Trump, who had pledged during his campaign to end the war in one day, said his personal intervention was needed to push peace efforts forward. He held separate phone calls with both Putin and Zelenskyy, and said the two countries would "immediately" begin ceasefire negotiations, but there were no details 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.

Russia launched 108 Shahed and decoy drones at Ukraine overnight, the Ukrainian air force said. One drone dropped explosives on a passenger bus in the Dniproviskyi district of the Kherson region, injuring

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two people, the local administration said.

Putin wants Ukraine to renounce joining NATO, sharply cut its military, and withdraw its forces from the four Ukrainian regions Moscow has seized but doesn't fully control, among other demands to curb the country's sovereignty.

After the phone call, the Russian state news agency RIA Novosti published an article headlined, "Europe's hopes crushed: Trump refuses to go to war with Putin."

In the pro-Kremlin tabloid Moskovsky Komsomolets, columnist Mikhail Rostovsky also portrayed the call as a blow for Ukraine's European allies.

"Kyiv will agree to a serious, fully fledged conversation with Russia only if it has no other options left. Trump is gradually cutting off these other options for Zelenskyy," he wrote. "And this is very, very good."

Since Trump took office, Washington has urged Russia and Ukraine to end Europe's biggest conflict since World War II.

European leaders remain skeptical of Putin

After Monday's phone calls, European officials remained skeptical about Russia's intentions.

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

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

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

In Kyiv, there was skepticism about Putin's motives.

Peace "is not possible now. Only when (the Russians) run out of resources and army manpower. They are ready to fight, at least for this summer," Svitlana Kyrlyiuk, 66, told The Associated Press. Putin will "stall for time, and that's it," she said.

Volodymyr Lysytsia, a 45-year-old serviceman visiting the capital for rehabilitation, said Putin has made the front lines in eastern Ukraine a wasteland, with "nothing there, only scorched earth, everything bombed."

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."

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

Trump alleges 'genocide' in South Africa. White Afrikaner farmers reject that

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, 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 denied 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 number of violent attacks on farmers in the first years following the decades-long racial segregation system of apartheid. "But the complex problem of crime on our farms, as elsewhere, demands 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

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

White farmers echoed his thoughts and called for more resources and policing — but said there wasn't any genocide that would make them flee South Africa.

"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.

"We are not interested in going anywhere," he added. "The thing we want to do is be part of this country."

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%.

New salmonella outbreak tied to same Florida grower with tainted cucumbers last year

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

U.S. health officials are investigating a new outbreak of salmonella illnesses tied to a Florida grower whose tainted cucumbers were linked to more than 550 illnesses last year.

Cucumbers grown by Florida-based Bedner Growers and distributed by Fresh Start Produce Sales have been linked to illnesses in at least 26 people in 15 states, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration reported late Monday. At least nine people have been hospitalized; no deaths have been reported.

The cucumbers were sold to restaurants, stores and food service distributors between April 29 and May 19 and may still be within their shelf life this week. Illnesses were reported between April 2 and April 28, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The outbreak was detected as part of a follow-up inspection in April to a 2024 outbreak that sickened 551 people and led to 155 hospitalizations in 34 states and Washington, D.C. In that outbreak, investigators found salmonella bacteria linked to many of the illnesses in untreated canal water used at farms operated by Bedner Growers and Thomas Produce Company.

In the current outbreak, officials found salmonella bacteria from samples on the farm that matched samples from people who got sick.

Health officials are investigating where the potentially contaminated cucumbers were distributed. Several people who fell ill ate cucumbers on cruise ships leaving ports in Florida, according to the CDC. Organic cucumbers are not affected, officials said.

Retailers should notify consumers who may have bought the tainted produce. If consumers don't know the source of cucumbers, they should throw them away, officials said.

Symptoms of salmonella poisoning include diarrhea, fever, severe vomiting, dehydration and stomach cramps. Most people who get sick recover within a week. Infections can be severe in young children, older adults and people with weakened immune systems, who may require hospitalization.

Syria's driest winter in nearly 7 decades triggers a severe water crisis in Damascus

By GHAITH ALSAYED and OMAR SANADIKI Associated Press

BARADA VALLEY, Syria (AP) — Inside a mountain above the Syrian capital, Hassan Bashi walked through tunnels that used to be filled with water from a spring famous for its pure waters.

The spring rises inside the ruins of a Roman temple in the Barada Valley and flows toward Damascus, supplying the city with drinking water for thousands of years. Normally, during the winter flood season, water fills all the tunnels and washes over much of the temple.

Now, there is only a trickle of water following the driest winter in decades.

Bashi, who is a guard but also knows how to operate the pumping and water filtration machines in the absence of the engineer in charge, displayed an old video on his cell phone of high waters inside the ruins.

“I have been working at the Ein al-Fijeh spring for 33 years and this is the first year it is that dry,” Bashi said.

The spring and the Barada River that it feeds are the main source of water for 5 million people, supplying Damascus and its suburbs with 70% of their water.

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As the city suffers its worst water shortages in years, many people now rely on buying water from private tanker trucks that fill from wells. Officials are warning that the situation could get worse in the summer and urge residents to use water sparingly while showering, cleaning or washing dishes.

"The Ein al-Fijeh spring is working now at its lowest level," said Ahmad Darwish, head of the Damascus City Water Supply Authority, adding that the current year witnessed the lowest rainfall since 1956.

The channels that have been there since the day of the Romans two millennia ago were improved in 1920 and then again in 1980, he said.

Darwish said the spring water comes mainly from rainfall and melted snow off the mountains along the border with Lebanon, but because of this year's below-average rainfall, "it has given us amounts that are much less than normal."

There are 1.1 million homes that get water from the spring, and in order to get through the year, people will have to cut down their consumption, he said.

The spring also feeds the Barada River, which cuts through Damascus and which is also mostly dry this year.

In the city's eastern area of Abbasids, Bassam Jbara is feeling the shortage. His neighborhood only gets water for about 90 minutes a day, compared with previous years when water was always running when they turned on the taps.

Persistent electricity cuts are making the problem worse, he said, as they sometimes have water but no power to pump it to the tankers on the roof of the building. Jbara once had to buy five barrels of un-drinkable water from a tanker truck that cost him and his neighbors \$15, a large amount of money in a country where many people make less than \$100 a month.

"From what we are seeing, we are heading toward difficult conditions regarding water," he said, fearing that supplies will drop to once or twice a week over the summer. He is already economizing.

"The people of Damascus are used to having water every day and to drinking tap water coming from the Ein al-Fijeh spring, but unfortunately the spring is now weak," Jbara said.

During Syria's nearly 14-year civil war, Ein al-Fijeh was subjected to multiple shellings, changing between forces of then- President Bashar Assad and insurgents over the years.

In early 2017, government forces captured the area from insurgents and held it until December, when the five-decade Assad dynasty collapsed in a stunning offensive by fighters led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group, or HTS, of current President Ahmad al-Sharaa.

Tarek Abdul-Wahed returned to his home near the spring in December, nearly eight years after he was forced to leave with his family. He is now working on rebuilding the restaurant he had once owned — it was blown up by Assad's forces after Abdul-Wahed left.

He looked at the parched region that used to be filled with tourists and Syrians who would come in the summer to enjoy the cool weather.

"The Ein al-Fijeh spring is the only artery to Damascus," Abdul-Wahed said as reconstruction work was ongoing in the restaurant, which had helped 15 families in the area make a living in addition to the employees who came from other parts of Syria.

"Now it looks like a desert. There is no one," he said. "We hope that the good old days return with people coming here."

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

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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 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

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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.

Today in History: May 21, Clara Barton founds American Red Cross

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, May 21, the 141st day of 2025. There are 224 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On May 21, 1881, the American Red Cross was founded by nurse and educator Clara Barton in Washington D.C.

Also on this date:

In 1924, 14-year-old Bobby Franks was murdered in a "thrill killing" carried out by University of Chicago students Nathan Leopold Jr. and Richard Loeb (Bobby's distant cousin).

In 1927, Charles A. Lindbergh landed his Spirit of St. Louis monoplane near Paris, completing the first solo airplane flight across the Atlantic Ocean in 33 1/2 hours.

In 1932, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean as she landed in Northern Ireland, about 15 hours after leaving Newfoundland.

In 1941, a German U-boat sank the American merchant steamship SS Robin Moor in the South Atlantic after the ship's passengers and crew were allowed to board lifeboats.

In 1955, Chuck Berry recorded his first single, "Maybellene," for Chess Records in Chicago.

In 1972, Michelangelo's Pieta, in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, was damaged by a hammer-wielding man. (The sculpture went back on display 10 months later after its damaged elements were reconstructed.)

In 1979, former San Francisco City Supervisor Dan White was convicted of voluntary manslaughter in the slayings of Mayor George Moscone and openly gay Supervisor Harvey Milk. Outrage over White's lenient sentence sparked the White Night riots that evening.

In 1991, former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated amid Indian national elections by a suicide bomber.

Today's Birthdays: Baseball Hall of Fame manager Bobby Cox is 84. Singer Ronald Isley (The Isley Brothers) is 84. Singer Leo Sayer is 77. Actor Mr. T is 73. Actor Judge Reinhold is 68. Filmmaker Nick Cassavetes is 66. Actor Lisa Edelstein is 59. Comedian-TV presenter Noel Fielding is 52. Actor Fairuza Balk is 51. Actor Da'Vine Joy Randolph is 39. Country musician Cody Johnson is 38. Actor Hannah Einbinder is 30. NFL quarterback Josh Allen is 29.