

Groton Daily Independent

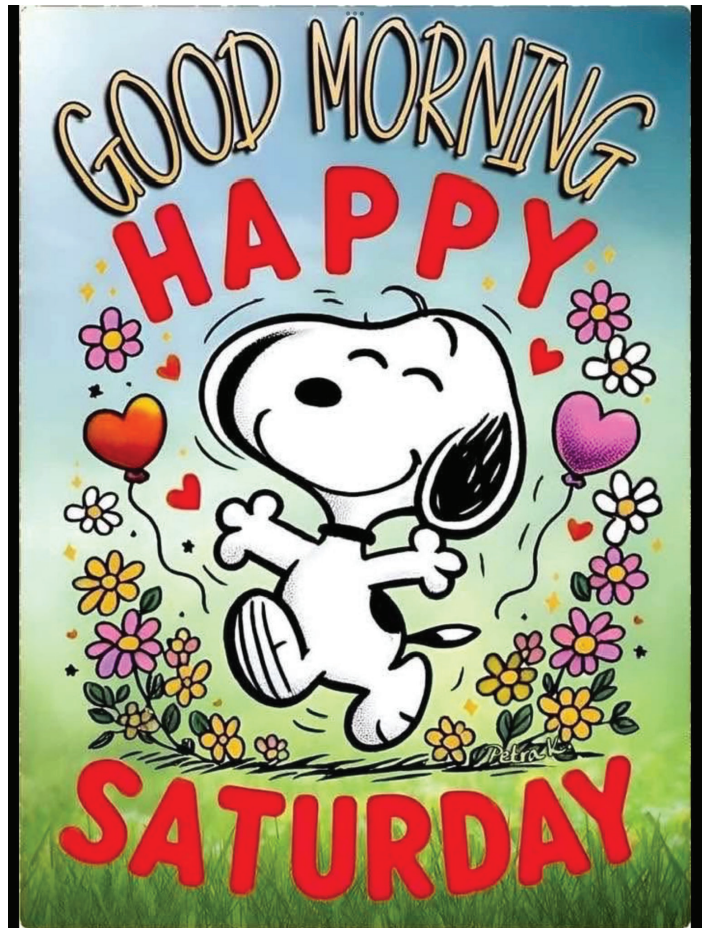
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Saturday, May 31

State Track Meet in Sioux Falls

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



Sunday, June 1:

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

Emmanuel Lutheran worship 9 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 with communion at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.

Legion at Volga (vs. Canton at 2 p.m., Volga at 4 p.m.)

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1440

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

Humanitarian Parole Ruling

The US Supreme Court yesterday granted the Trump administration the authority to revoke temporary humanitarian parole for roughly 532,000 immigrants from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela while legal proceedings over an effort to end the special legal protection continue.

The decision overturns a lower court's ruling that blocked the mass termination of their legal status under a special Biden-era program allowing vetted migrants to live and work in the US for up to two years with domestic sponsors. Supreme Court Justices Ketanji Brown Jackson and Sonia Sotomayor dissented, criticizing the majority for not considering the potential harm to migrants, including family separation and detention. The case is separate from other lawsuits challenging the administration's use of the Alien Enemies Act to deport Venezuelan nationals.

The order comes a day after the administration published a list of sanctuary cities and counties that could be targeted for not complying with federal immigration laws.

At least 111 people dead after floods submerge market town in Nigeria.

The deaths came after torrential rains and a dam collapse flooded Mokwa, a market town in central Nigeria, which serves as a key hub where southern traders buy food from northern farmers. Flooding routinely kills hundreds of people each year across the country, worsened by poor drainage, blocked waterways, and unregulated construction.

White House acknowledges errors in "Make America Healthy Again" report.

The report (read [here](#)), led by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., has come under scrutiny after researchers and journalists found it cited several studies that do not exist or misrepresented the findings of actual studies. The administration attributed the errors to "formatting issues." Critics argue the errors raise questions about the report's credibility and the role of potential AI-generated content.

Taylor Swift regains control of her music, buys back her first six albums.

The 35-year-old bought the master recordings of her albums from Shamrock Capital, ending a yearslong dispute over the ownership of her catalog, including music videos, artwork, and unreleased tracks. The purchase price was reportedly around \$360M but not officially disclosed. The milestone follows Swift's publicized conflict with record executive Scooter Braun, who previously owned her masters, leading to Swift's "Taylor's Version" rerecordings.

Ancient Mayan city unearthed in Guatemala, including pyramids.

Archaeologists have uncovered the remains of a nearly 3,000-year-old Mayan city called Los Abuelos in northern Guatemala, featuring pyramids, monuments, and a unique canal system. Los Abuelos means "The Grandparents" and gets its name from two human-like rock sculptures at the site. The finding suggests the city was a major ceremonial center during the Middle Preclassic period.

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Scientists pinpoint gene responsible for survival of bubonic plague.

Scientists discovered changes in a single gene, known as *pla*, in the plague bacterium *Y. pestis* allowed the plague to persist and spread over centuries. Strains with fewer copies of the gene became less deadly but more transmissible, enabling the disease to linger across Europe, Asia, and Africa long after the initial Black Death outbreak during the 14th century.

Fed's preferred inflation gauge rises lower than expected in April.

The core personal consumption expenditures price index, which measures costs consumers pay across a wide range of items, excluding food and energy, rose 2.5% year over year and 0.1% month over month. The annualized rate is down from 2.6% in March. The index is the Federal Reserve's preferred inflation measure; the central bank targets 2% annual inflation.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Gina W. in Spring, Texas.

"I was taking my one-year-old son to his first birthday party ever—a little boy who he goes to school with was also turning one. My husband got sick at the last minute, so the two of us headed out alone. I had purchased a toy online that arrived much bigger than expected, but I figured I could handle carrying it and my son, not realizing I would have to park so far away from the home. As I was holding my son, contemplating how to do this, a woman out on a walk asked if I needed help. She grabbed the present and walked it all the way to the door. She told me my son was precious and to enjoy these times, and went on her way. It was a small gesture, but helped me out so much!"

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Groton Post 39 Firing On All Cylinders Against Redfield Post 92

By GameChanger Media

Groton Legion Post 39 won big over Redfield Post 92 11-1 on Friday at Redfield.

Groton Legion Post 39 jumped out to the lead in the top of the first inning after Brevin Fliehs tripled, scoring two runs, an error scored one run, and Nick Groeblichhoff singled, scoring two runs.

Groton Legion Post 39 added one run in the third after Groeblichhoff grounded out.

Nick Morris earned the win for Groton Legion Post 39. The hurler surrendered four hits and one run over five innings, striking out three and walking three. Eli Morrisette took the loss for Redfield Post 92. The hurler went three innings, surrendering six runs (four earned) on four hits, striking out three and walking four.

Groeblichhoff led Groton Legion Post 39 with three runs batted in from the number eight spot in the lineup. Groeblichhoff went 1-for-3 on the day. Lincoln Krause went 2-for-3 at the plate to lead Groton Legion Post 39 in hits. Groton Legion Post 39 had a strong eye at the plate, amassing eight walks for the game. Karsten Fliehs, Teylor Diegel, and Fliehs led the team with two free passes each. Krause, Diegel, and Fliehs each stole multiple bases for Groton Legion Post 39. Groton Legion Post 39 stole nine bases in the game. Groton Legion Post 39 were sure-handed in the field and didn't commit a single error. Fliehs had the most chances in the field with four.

Micah Zastrow went 2-for-2 at the plate and led the team with one run batted in.

Groton Legion Post 39 will travel to Canton for their next game on Sunday.

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Groton Legion Post 39 **11 - 1** Redfield Post 92, Clay Kiser 18U

📍 Away 📅 Friday May 30, 2025

	1	2	3	4	5	R	H	E
GRTN	5	0	1	2	3	11	8	0
RDFL	0	0	1	0	0	1	4	3

BATTING

Groton Legion Post 39	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
T Diegel #7 (CF)	2	2	1	1	2	0
B Imrie #1 (RF)	3	1	1	1	1	0
B Fliehs #6 (SS)	2	1	1	2	2	0
C Simon #4 (1B)	1	1	0	2	0	0
K Kucker #9 (2B)	4	2	1	1	0	0
G Englund #18 (3B)	2	0	0	0	1	0
K Fliehs #10 (C)	1	0	0	0	2	1
N Groeblich... #12	3	0	1	3	0	0
J Erdmann #0 (LF)	3	1	1	0	0	2
L Krause #2 (DH)	3	2	2	0	0	0
CR: R Schelle #8	0	1	0	0	0	0
Totals	24	11	8	10	8	3

3B: B Fliehs, **TB:** N Groeblichhoff, K Kucker, J Erdmann, T Diegel, L Krause 2, B Fliehs 3, B Imrie, **SF:** C Simon, **HBP:** C Simon 2, **SB:** C Simon, K Kucker, T Diegel 2, L Krause 2, B Fliehs 2, B Imrie, **LOB:** 8

PITCHING

Groton Legion Post 39	P	IP	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
N Morris #17	5.0	4	1	1	3	3	0
Totals	5.0	4	1	1	3	3	0

W: N Morris, **P-S:** N Morris 81-54, **BF:** N Morris 22

Redfield Post 92, Clay Kiser 18U	H	RBI	BB	SO		
K Hurd #24 (LF)	3	0	0	0	2	
T Bray #17 (3B)	3	0	1	0	0	1
M Zastrow #7 (1B)	2	0	2	1	0	0
E Morriss... #34 (P)	1	0	0	0	1	0
N Johnson #5 (CF)	2	0	0	0	0	0
C Odland #2 (SS)	2	0	1	0	0	0
K Weller #23 (C)	2	0	0	0	0	0
J Rude #12 (2B)	2	0	0	0	1	0
A Shottenkirk #10	0	0	0	0	0	0
T Nueharth #224	2	0	0	0	0	0
H Binger #15 (RF)	0	1	0	0	1	0
Totals	19	1	4	1	3	3

TB: T Bray, C Odland, M Zastrow 2, **SB:** T Bray, C Odland, **LOB:** 6

Redfield Post 92, Clay Kiser 18U	P	IP	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
E Morri... #34	3.0	4	6	4	4	3	0
J Rude #12	1.2	4	5	4	4	0	0
H Binger #15	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	5.0	8	11	8	8	3	0

P-S: J Rude 62-27, H Binger 2-1, E Morrisette 77-41, **HBP:** J Rude, E Morrisette, **BF:** J Rude 15, H Binger, E Morrisette 19

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Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion Trounce Redfield

By GameChanger Media

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion easily dispatched Redfield on Friday, 11-2.

Redfield got on the board in the bottom of the first inning after #7 walked, and #17 hit a sacrifice fly, each scoring one run.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion tied the game in the top of the third thanks to a single by Alex Abeln, and a passed ball.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion flipped the game on its head in the top of the fourth, scoring five runs on three hits to take the lead, 7-2. The biggest blow in the inning was a double by Abeln that drove in two.

Ryder Schelle earned the win for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. The right-handed pitcher allowed three hits and two runs over five innings, striking out two and walking three. #15 began the game for Redfield. The starting pitcher gave up four hits and seven runs (six earned) over three and two-thirds innings, striking out eight and walking seven.

Abeln led Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion with four runs batted in. The right-handed hitter went 2-for-4 on the day. Nick Groeblichhoff led Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion with four walks. Overall, the team had a strong eye at the plate, accumulating 10 walks for the game. Lincoln Krause stole two bases. Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion ran wild on the base paths, tallying seven stolen bases for the game. Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion turned one double play in the game.

#17 led the team with one run batted in. #2 led Redfield with two hits in three at bats. #7 stole two bases.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion will travel to Britton U17 Teeners for their next game on Tuesday.

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Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion 11 - 2 Redfield

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	1	2	3	4	5	R	H	E
GRTN	0	0	2	5	4	11	6	2
RDFL	2	0	0	0	0	2	3	3

BATTING

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
L Krause #2 (CF)	1	2	0	1	3	0
A Abeln #5 (2B)	4	1	2	4	0	1
R Schelle #8 (P)	4	2	1	1	0	1
N Groebl... #13 (1B)	0	1	0	0	4	0
T Schuster #3 (SS)	2	0	0	0	1	0
I Scepan... #20 (3B)	3	0	0	0	0	3
K Oswald #12 (LF)	3	1	1	0	0	2
J Bisbee #15 (C)	3	1	1	0	0	1
X Ellene... #21 (RF)	1	1	0	0	2	1
B Fliehs #19 (1B)	2	2	1	0	0	1
Totals	23	11	6	6	10	10

2B: B Fliehs, A Abeln, **3B:** R Schelle, **TB:** R Schelle 3, J Bisbee, B Fliehs 2, A Abeln 3, K Oswald, **HBP:** B Fliehs, T Schuster, **SB:** R Schelle, J Bisbee, N Groebelinghoff, T Schuster, K Oswald, L Krause 2, **LOB:** 9

PITCHING

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion	IP	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
R Schelle #8	5.0	3	2	2	3	2
Totals	5.0	3	2	2	3	2

W: R Schelle, **P-S:** R Schelle 73-42, **WP:** R Schelle, **BF:** R Schelle 20

Redfield	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
#15 (P)	3	0	0	0	0	1
#2 (SS)	3	1	2	0	0	0
#7 (CF)	1	1	0	0	1	0
#17 (C)	1	0	0	1	0	0
#32 (1B)	2	0	1	0	0	1
#12 (2B)	1	0	0	0	1	0
#42 (3B)	1	0	0	0	1	0
#4 (RF)	2	0	0	0	0	0
#13 (LF)	2	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	16	2	3	1	3	2

TB: #2 2, #32, **SF:** #17, **SB:** #7 2, **LOB:** 3

Redfield	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
#15	3.2	4	7	6	7	8	0
#2	0.1	2	4	4	2	1	0
#17	1.0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Totals	5.0	6	11	10	10	10	0

P-S: #2 26-15, #15 83-43, #17 14-8, **WP:** #2, **HBP:** #2, #15, **BF:** #2 6, #15 25, #17 4

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U Stymied By Clark Area 14U

By GameChanger Media

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U couldn't keep up with Clark Area 14U and fell 19-4 on Friday.

Clark Area 14U jumped out to the lead in the top of the first inning after Kaden Wookey tripled, scoring two runs, Wyatt Schlagel singled, scoring one run, a passed ball scored one run, and Jaden LaPlante grounded out, scoring one run.

A triple by Schlagel, and a single by Isaac Johnson helped Clark Area 14U extend their early lead in the second.

Clark Area 14U added to their early lead in the top of the third inning when Grant Nelson grounded out, scoring one run, and Miles Olson doubled, scoring two runs.

Clark Area 14U scored eight runs on five hits in the top of the fifth inning. Olson doubled, scoring two runs, Wookey doubled, scoring two runs, an error scored two runs, and #39 singled, scoring two runs.

Cade Gaikowski earned the win for Clark Area 14U. The right-handed pitcher gave up zero hits and zero runs over two innings, striking out none and walking none. Kyson Kucker took the loss for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. The reliever went two innings, giving up eight runs (six earned) on six hits, striking out two and walking four. Keegan Kucker stepped on the mound first for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. The starter gave up nine hits and 11 runs (nine earned) over three innings, striking out one and walking four. Benny Pommer stepped on the mound first for Clark Area 14U. The starting pitcher gave up five hits and four runs over three innings, striking out three and walking four.

Asher Zimmerman led Groton Jr. Teeners 14U with two runs batted in. The catcher went 1-for-3 on the day. Noah Scepaniak, Zimmerman, Trayce Schelle, Wesley Borg, and Lincoln Shilhanek each collected one hit for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U.

Clark Area 14U tallied 15 hits in the game. Schlagel and Olson each collected three hits for Clark Area 14U. Olson and Wookey were tough to handle back-to-back in the lineup, as each drove in four runs for Clark Area 14U. Johnson and #39 each collected multiple hits for Clark Area 14U. Clark Area 14U had patience at the plate, collecting eight walks for the game. Aksel Gjerde and Gaikowski led the team with two free passes each. Johnson stole two bases. Clark Area 14U turned one double play in the game.

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Clark Area 14U **19 - 4** Groton Jr. Teeners 14U

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	1	2	3	4	5	R	H	E
CLRK	5	3	3	0	8	19	15	3
GRTN	0	3	0	1	0	4	5	2

BATTING

Clark Area 14U	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
C Gaiko... #00 (SS)	3	3	1	0	2	0
M Olson #15 (C)	3	1	3	4	1	0
K Wookey #8 (2B)	3	3	2	4	1	0
W Schla... #27 (CF)	4	3	3	3	0	1
I Johnson #5 (1B)	3	2	2	1	1	0
B Pommer #99 (P)	4	0	1	0	0	1
J LaPlan... #29 (3B)	4	2	1	3	0	0
A Gjerde #66 (RF)	1	2	0	0	2	1
J Schm... #91 (RF)	0	1	0	0	1	0
G Nelson #25 (LF)	2	0	0	1	0	0
K Wook... #39 (LF)	2	1	2	2	0	0
CR: G Wellnitz #49	0	1	0	0	0	0
Totals	29	19	15	18	8	3

2B: B Pommer, K Wookey, M Olson 2, **3B:** W Schlagel, K Wookey, **TB:** I Johnson 2, W Schlagel 5, C Gaikowski, B Pommer 2, J LaPlante, K Wookey 2, K Wookey 5, M Olson 5, **SB:** I Johnson 2, W Schlagel, J Schmidt, J LaPlante, **LOB:** 3

PITCHING

Clark Area 14U	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
B Pom... #99	3.0	5	4	4	4	3	0
C Gaik... #00	2.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	5.0	5	4	4	4	3	0

W: C Gaikowski, **P-S:** C Gaikowski 13-6, B Pommer 61-32, **WP:** C Gaikowski, **HBP:** C Gaikowski, **BF:** C Gaikowski 6, B Pommer 18

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
K Kucker #2 (P)	3	0	0	0	0	0
A Zimmer... #6 (C)	3	0	1	2	0	1
T Schelle #3 (SS)	3	0	1	0	0	0
Z Fliehs #23 (3B)	3	0	0	0	0	0
S Crank #20 (RF)	1	1	0	0	1	1
L Shilha... #22 (1B)	3	1	1	1	0	0
W Borg #12 (2B)	1	2	1	0	1	0
K Kucker #1 (LF)	1	0	0	0	1	1
N Scepa... #13 (CF)	1	0	1	1	1	0
Totals	19	4	5	4	4	3

2B: W Borg, **TB:** W Borg 2, T Schelle, N Scepaniak, L Shilhanek, A Zimmerman, **CS:** Z Fliehs, **HBP:** S Crank, **LOB:** 5

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
K Kucker #2	3.0	9	11	9	4	1	0
K Kucker #1	2.0	6	8	6	4	2	0
Totals	5.0	15	19	15	8	3	0

L: K Kucker, **P-S:** K Kucker 63-28, K Kucker 59-29, **WP:** K Kucker 3, **BF:** K Kucker 21, K Kucker 16

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Groton Jr. Teeners 14U Win In Fashion With Walk Off over Clark

By GameChanger Media

It came down to the wire on Friday, as Groton Jr. Teeners 14U grabbed the victory in walk-off fashion, 5-4, over Clark Area 14U. The game was tied at four in the bottom of the fifth when Noah Scepaniak was struck by a pitch, driving in a run.

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U opened the scoring in the second after Gavin Hanten singled, scoring one run.

Clark Area 14U jumped back into the lead in the top of the third inning after Groton Jr. Teeners 14U committed an error, Kaden Wookey singled to center field, Wyatt Schlagel walked, and Groton Jr. Teeners 14U committed an error, each scoring one run.

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U tied the game in the bottom of the third thanks to an error, and a double by Lincoln Shilhanek.

Shilhanek earned the win for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. The starter surrendered four hits and four runs (two earned) over five innings, striking out four and walking five. Miles Olson took the loss for Clark Area 14U. The right-handed pitcher went two and one-third innings, surrendering one run on three hits, striking out five and walking three. Easton Huber led things off on the mound for Clark Area 14U. The hurler gave up three hits and four runs (three earned) over two innings, striking out two and walking six.

Shilhanek led Groton Jr. Teeners 14U with two runs batted in. The pitcher went 2-for-3 on the day. Groton Jr. Teeners 14U had patience at the plate, amassing nine walks for the game. Kolton Antonsen and Kyson Kucker led the team with two free passes each.

Leadoff hitter Grant Nelson led Clark Area 14U with two hits in three at bats. Olson and Wookey were a one-two punch in the lineup, as each drove in one run for Clark Area 14U. Nelson stole two bases. Clark Area 14U ran wild on the base paths, amassing seven stolen bases for the game.

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Clark Area 14U 4 - 5 Groton Jr. Teeners 14U

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	1	2	3	4	5	R	H	E
CLRK	0	0	4	0	0	4	4	1
GRTN	0	1	3	0	1	5	6	4

BATTING

Clark Area 14U	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
G Nelson #25 (SS)	3	1	2	0	0	0
M Olson #15 (DH)	3	1	0	1	0	1
K Wookey #8 (C)	2	1	1	1	1	0
W Schla... #27 (1B)	1	0	0	0	1	0
I Johnson #5 (3B)	2	0	1	0	0	0
J LaPla... #29 (3B)	1	0	0	0	0	0
K Wookey #39 (CF)	2	1	0	0	0	0
C Gaik... #00 (SS)	0	0	0	0	1	0
J Schmidt #91 (LF)	1	0	0	0	1	1
B Pom... #99 (2B)	1	0	0	0	0	0
M Sever... #83 (RF)	2	0	0	0	1	2
A Gjerde #66 (RF)	0	0	0	0	0	0
G Wellnitz #49 (2B)	2	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	20	4	4	2	5	4

TB: G Nelson 2, K Wookey, I Johnson, **HBP:** W Schlagel,
SB: G Nelson 2, K Wookey, M Olson, K Wookey, W
Schlagel, C Gaikowski, **LOB:** 7

PITCHING

Clark Area 14U	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
E Huber #22	2.0	3	4	3	6	2	0
M Olson #15	2.1	3	1	1	3	5	0
Totals	4.1	6	5	4	9	7	0

L: M Olson, **P-S:** M Olson 62-33, E Huber 52-19, **WP:** M
Olson, **HBP:** M Olson, **BF:** M Olson 14, E Huber 15

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
A Zimmer... #6 (CF)	2	0	1	0	1	1
K Kucker #2 (C)	2	0	0	0	1	0
T Schelle #3 (SS)	2	1	1	0	1	0
Z Fliehs #23 (1B)	2	1	0	0	1	1
S Crank #20 (3B)	2	1	0	0	1	2
L Shilhanek #22 (P)	3	1	2	2	0	0
K Antonsen #7 (2B)	1	1	0	0	2	1
K Kucker #1 (LF)	1	0	1	0	2	0
T Leicht #5 (RF)	2	0	0	0	0	1
N Scep... #13 (RF)	0	0	0	1	0	0
G Hanten #4	2	0	1	1	0	1
W Borg #12	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	19	5	6	4	9	7

2B: L Shilhanek, **TB:** G Hanten, L Shilhanek 3, A
Zimmerman, K Kucker, T Schelle, **HBP:** N Scepaniak,
SB: K Kucker, K Kucker, T Schelle, **LOB:** 8

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
L Shilh... #22	5.0	4	4	2	5	4	0
Totals	5.0	4	4	2	5	4	0

W: L Shilhanek, **P-S:** L Shilhanek 88-51, **WP:** L
Shilhanek, **HBP:** L Shilhanek, **BF:** L Shilhanek 26

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JVT Annual Meeting Credit Winners

Over 55 door prizes were handed out during JVT's 68th Annual Meeting which included these credit winners: Troy & Kelli Millard \$500 credit; Marie Sternhagen \$250 credit; Casey Johnson \$250 credit; Teresa Davies \$100 credit; and Lee Ann Harrell \$100 credit. (Courtesy Photo)



JVT Board of Directors

The JVT Board of Directors are Jim Cremer, Attorney; Mark Wattier, District 6; Garrett Rahm, District 7; Bob Wegner, District 3; Bill Ewalt, District 4; Duane Jark, District 5 (retired); Roger Zastrow, District 1; Wendell Rye, District 2; and James Groft, CEO. (Courtesy Photo)

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JVT Scholarship Winners

CEO James Groft presented certificates to Gabrielle Millard of Frederick Area (right) and Axel Warrington of Groton Area (left) in recognition of winning the Bob Peterson Memorial Telecommunications Scholarship. Joshua Thorson of Northwestern Area HS was also a scholarship winner, but unable to attend the meeting. (Courtesy Photos)

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New School Record for the Girls 4x400m Relay!

Laila Roberts, Taryn Traphagen, McKenna Tietz, and Kella Tracy ran a school record breaking time of 4:03.18 today at the State Meet in Sioux Falls! The 44-year old record of 4:06.83 was previously set by Abeln, Donovan, Gengerke, and Ackman in 1981. (Photo from Groton Area Facebook Page)



New School Record in the Girls 300m Hurdles!

Sophomore, McKenna Tietz, ran a school record breaking time of 47.46 today at the State Meet in Sioux Falls! The 48.04 record, was previously set by Diane Dohman (1986) and Katie Anderson (2002)!

(Photo from Groton Area Facebook Page)

State Track Recap from Friday From Groton Area Facebook Page

What another TERRIFIC day for the Groton Tiger Track Team at State! Here is a recap of Day #2:

- McKenna Tietz placed 8th in the 300m Hurdles with a personal best time of 47.46. She qualified for finals today!

- The Girls 4x200m Relay Team, consisting of Laila Roberts, Kella Tracy, McKenna Tietz, and Taryn Traphagen, finished 4th with a time of 1:47.47 - they will compete in the finals today!

- The Girls 4x400m Relay Team, consisting of Laila Roberts, Taryn Traphagen, McKenna Tietz, and Kella Tracy, finished 2nd with a season best 4:03.18 - they will compete in the finals today!

- The Boys 4x400m Relay Team, consisting of Blake Pauli, Jayden Schwan, Ethan Kroll, and Jordan Schwan, finished 19th, with a time of 3:39.57!

- Keegen Tracy placed 9th in the 400m Dash with a time of 51.54! He just missed qualifying for finals.

- Keegen Tracy finished 15th in the 200m Dash with a time of 23.08!

- Blake Pauli placed 10th in the 800m Run with a personal best time of 2:00.16!

- In the Girls 800m Run, Ryelle Gilbert placed 19th with a personal best time of 2:23.19 and Faith Traphagen placed 24th with a time of 2:26.89!

- Jayden Schwan finished 13th in the 3200m Run, with a personal best time of 10:15.87!

- Emma Kutter finished 21st in the Girls Shot Put with a throw of 32ft 2in!

- Ethan Kroll finished 23rd in the Boys Triple Jump with a leap of 38ft 1in!

Competing today will be:

- Girls 1600m Run - Ryelle Gilbert

- Boys 1600m Run - Jayden Schwan

- Girls 4x200m Relay

- Girls 300m Hurdles - McKenna Tietz

- Girls 4x400m Relay

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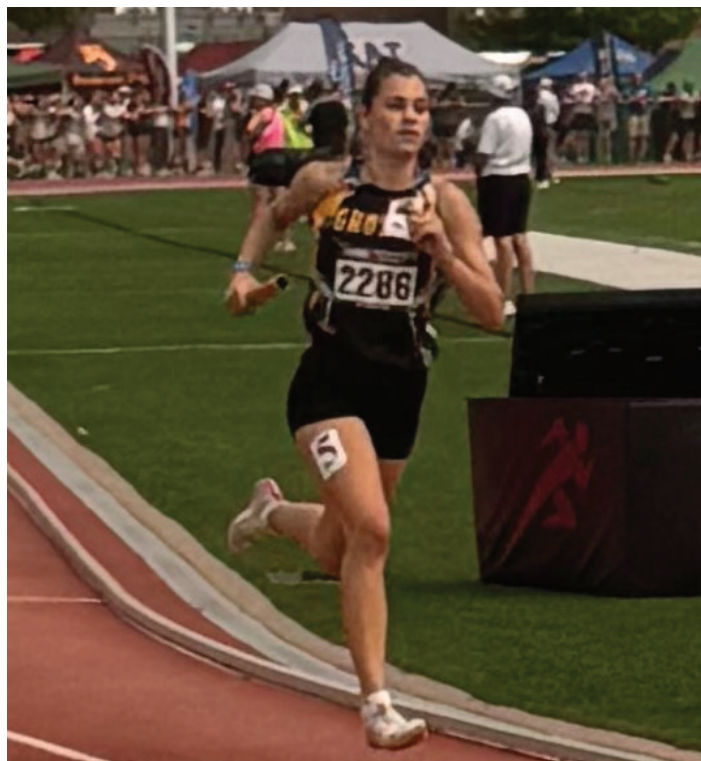
Ethan Kroll in the triple jump Friday. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



(Photo by Bruce Babcock)



(Photo by Bruce Babcock)



(Photo by Bruce Babcock)

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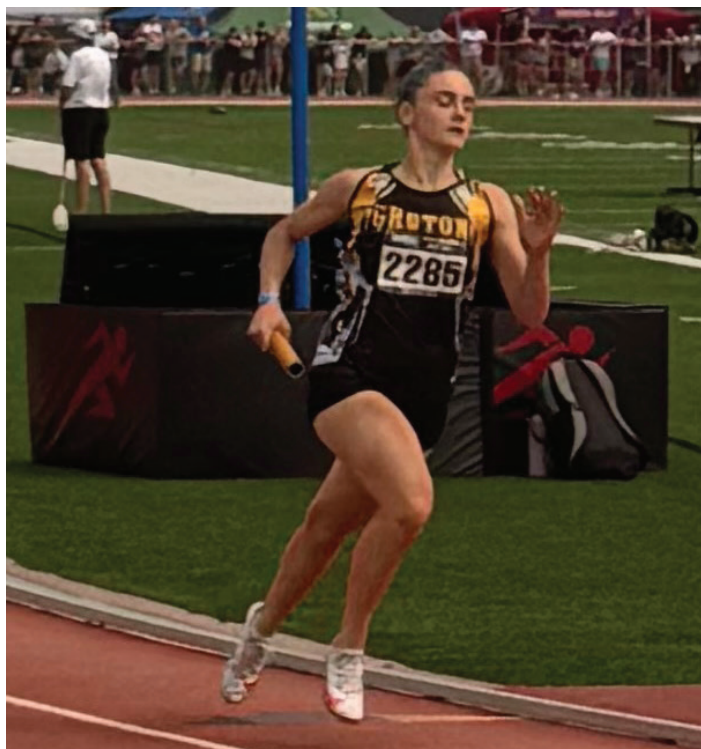
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(Photo by Bruce Babcock)



(Photo by Bruce Babcock)



(Photo by Bruce Babcock)



(Photo by Bruce Babcock)

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Coach Aaron Helvig and Emma Kutter during the State A girls shot put. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



(Photo by Bruce Babcock)



(Photo by Bruce Babcock)



(Photo by Bruce Babcock)



(Photo by Bruce Babcock)

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(Photo by Bruce Babcock)



(Photo by Jodi Schwan)



Friday, day 2, of the South Dakota State Track meet at the Howard Wood stadium in Sioux Falls. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)

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(Photo by Jodi Schwan)



(Photo by Jodi Schwan)



(Photo by Jodi Schwan)



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(Photo by Jodi Schwan)



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(Photo by Jodi Schwan)

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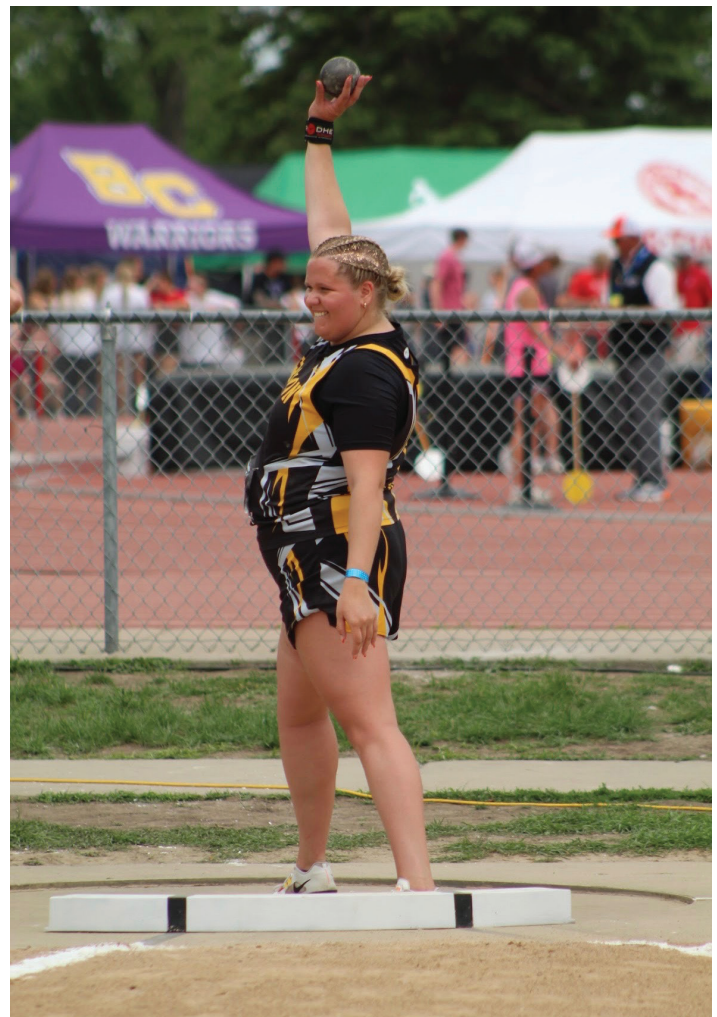
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(Photo by Jodi Schwan)



(Photo by Jodi Schwan)



(Photo by Jodi Schwan)



(Photo by Jodi Schwan)

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(Photo by Jodi Schwan)



(Photo by Jodi Schwan)



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(Photo by Jodi Schwan)

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(Photo by Jodi Schwan)



(Photo by Jodi Schwan)



(Photo by Jodi Schwan)



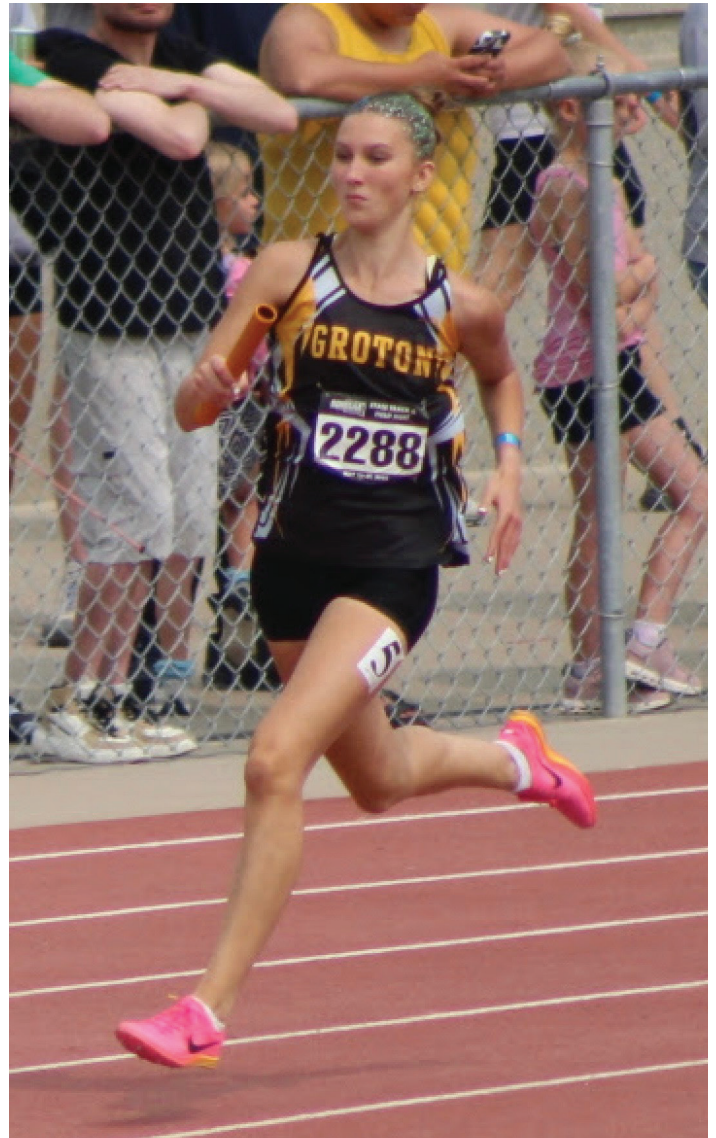
(Photo by Jodi Schwan)

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(Photo by Jodi Schwan)



(Photo by Jodi Schwan)

OPENING MAY 2ND
CLOSING JUNE 2ND

WEBER LANDSCAPING GREENHOUSE

620 WEST THIRD AVENUE

GROTON

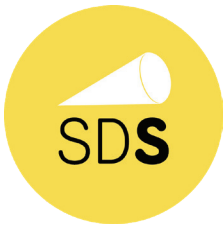
HOURS OF OPERATION

M-F 10-6

SAT 10-4

SUN 12-4





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Federal action could make SD's Medicaid work requirements 'an exercise in futility,' official says **One person speaks at first public hearing, citing concerns for Indian Health Service patients**

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MAY 30, 2025 3:45 PM

South Dakota's proposal to implement work requirements for Medicaid expansion could be "an exercise in futility" now that the federal government is also considering it, said state Department of Social Services Secretary Matt Althoff.

The state began drafting its proposal immediately following the end of the state legislative session in March, Althoff said, before debates about work requirements heated up at the congressional level.

Department officials presented their plan at the state Board of Social Services meeting Friday morning via video conference, just before the first of two public hearings on the proposal.

"Respectfully, humbly, we ask for your grace," Althoff told board members, "because we're asking for your feedback on something that might be obsoleted by the vote of 100 senators and the stroke of a pen from our president."

Medicaid is government-funded health insurance for people with low incomes. South Dakotans voted in 2022 to expand Medicaid to adults with incomes up to 138% of the poverty level, a decision that allowed the state to capitalize on a 90% federal funding match — funding that could be in jeopardy, pending the outcome of congressional action. Last year, voters passed another constitutional amendment to let the state seek approval from the federal government to impose work requirements on expansion enrollees.

Difference between SD and federal proposals

At the federal level, proposed Medicaid work requirements would mandate those between ages 19 and 65 who rely on the program to work, participate in community service, or attend an educational program for at least 80 hours each month. The work requirement would be applied at the time of application, and Medicaid renewal would be changed to every six months instead of an annual basis.

South Dakota's plan would require adult Medicaid recipients work, train, attend school or serve as a caretaker for a child or elderly or disabled person in their home unless they meet an exception. Compliance with the state-level work rules would be reviewed on an annual basis, at the time of Medicaid renewal, rather than at the time of application. The state would not require a set number of hours of work or education time.

Heather Petermann, Medicaid director at the department, said the requirement would be a "complement" to Medicaid to "encourage" work without "trying to track arbitrary work hours."

"This approach really recognizes that for many individuals who need assistance with health care, that comes first," Petermann said. "Then it allows them to maintain their health so that they can work, or obtain the health needed to seek employment."

The federal government also has more exceptions in its proposal than the state, including tribal community members, people who are in foster care or were in foster care who are younger than 26, and people released from incarceration in the last 90 days.

South Dakota would allow exceptions for people who are:
Pregnant or postpartum.

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Disabled, as determined by the Social Security Administration.

Diagnosed with cancer or another serious or terminal medical condition by a physician.

In an intensive behavioral health treatment program, hospitalized or living in a nursing home.

In an area with unemployment 20% or more above the national average and are exempt from Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents.

As of last month, 30,542 South Dakotans were covered by the Medicaid expansion. The state estimates 80% of them already work or qualify for an exception.

The proposed state-level work requirement would reduce enrollment by an estimated 5-10% in the first year. That would save the Medicaid program between \$48.9 million and \$71 million in the first year, the department says.

The federal proposal as it stands now will cost more administratively than South Dakota's proposed work requirements, Althoff added. States "will be asked to absorb" costs if the federal proposal is adopted. The state's proposal requires less administrative oversight to reduce anticipated costs, due in part to the state's tight budget approved by the Legislature this year.

"That's just sort of naming the tension about how not having new funds is sort of an important wrinkle to our development process," Althoff said. "It's really having to be done within an existing budget."

Board member Colleen Winter said the proposal is "respectful" of the individuals the department serves.

Work requirements are already in place for some federal programs, such as SNAP, and state efforts, such as child care assistance and parental reunification expectations within Child Protection Services.

Department hears from one person during public hearing

While more than 20 people sat in on a virtual public hearing regarding the state's proposed Medicaid work requirements on Friday, only one member of the public spoke.

Attorney Nathaniel Amdur-Clark spoke on behalf of the Great Plains Tribal Leaders Health Board. He said his client wants to see an exception for Indian Health Service beneficiaries.

Native Americans who are tribal enrolled members are eligible to receive health care services through the federal Indian Health Service. Those individuals are eligible for Medicaid coverage even if they do not meet other Medicaid requirements, such as income limits, "to implement and further trust and treaty obligations the U.S. has to provide health care" for tribal members, Amdur-Clark said.

Though Althoff and Petermann did not respond to Amdur-Clark's comments about IHS patients, they did address the subject during the earlier board meeting. Petermann said the proposal includes "geographic exemptions," including areas of the state with "high unemployment."

"Things like that would also apply to tribal members and American Indians, but we otherwise did not call out or exclude American Indians," Petermann said. "The approach is that this is a benefit and we want that dignity and pride to be part of the benefit for everybody, so they would be treated the same in this approach."

Amdur-Clark added that there are technical concerns regarding exemptions in the proposal and that more work is needed to achieve "real tribal consultation." The department met with some tribal leaders last week to discuss the proposal, Althoff said.

Shelly Ten Napel, CEO of the Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas, said in an emailed statement that her organization is monitoring state and federal work requirement proposals closely. The group did not give input at the first public meeting, but plans to share its perspective on state work requirements during the public comment period.

Ten Napel opposed last year's ballot measure authorizing the state's pursuit of work requirements. Compared to the work requirement proposal being considered in Congress, Ten Napel said, the state proposal is "overall pretty reasonable."

Gov. Larry Rhoden's administration "did a careful job of responding to concerns" raised during the debate last year, Ten Napel said, including administrative burdens and exceptions.

"We look forward to working with them to ensure smooth implementation of the new rules if they are

approved by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services,” Ten Napel said in the statement. “We also encourage members of Congress to take a careful look at the common sense approach South Dakota is taking and rethink some of the heavy-handed rules currently under consideration in the Big Beautiful Bill.”

The “big beautiful bill” is the budget reconciliation legislation that the U.S. House sent to the Senate last week, including a Medicaid work requirements provision.

Petermann said during the board meeting that South Dakota could perhaps seek to impose its own work requirements, even if the federal legislation passes.

“For example, some of the draft language does include references to things like ‘the provisions from the federal legislation cannot be waived,’ but we don’t know whether that means states still could or couldn’t have something that is less or more restrictive, as long as it has the same components,” Petermann said. “We really don’t know for sure yet.”

If the state moves forward, it will submit an application to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in July or August. After that, the proposal would go through a federal comment period and application review.

The department’s next public hearing on the proposed Medicaid work requirements is set for 11 a.m. Central on June 12 at the Sioux Falls office of the Department of Social Services, and online.

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

A Medicaid patient had a heart attack while traveling in SD. He owed almost \$78,000.

BY: ARIELLE ZIONTS, KFF HEALTH NEWS - MAY 30, 2025 8:30 AM

On Christmas Day at the WaTiki indoor water park, Hans Wirt was getting winded from following his son up the stairs to the waterslides.

Wirt’s breathing became more labored once they returned to the nearby hotel where they and Wirt’s girlfriend were staying while visiting family in Rapid City, South Dakota.

Then he grew nauseated and went pale. Wirt thought the cause might have been the altitude change between his home in Deltona, Florida — 33 feet above sea level — and Rapid City, at the edge of the Black Hills. But his 12-year-old son was worried and called for an ambulance.

“I could tell by the look in his eyes that there was something a little more to this,” Wirt said. “So I can kind of thank my son for saving my life.”

It turned out the 62-year-old was having a heart attack. A “lousy Christmas present,” Wirt said.

Medics stabilized Wirt before taking him to Monument Health — the only hospital in Rapid City with an emergency room — where he was treated over two days.

Then the bill came.

The Medical Procedure

Paramedics used a defibrillator to restore a normal heart rhythm. Doctors at the hospital gave Wirt various medications, used an electrocardiograph and other diagnostic and monitoring devices, and inserted stents into his arteries to improve blood flow to his heart.

The Final Bill

\$95,523.73, including \$32,998.90 for medical supplies, mostly related to the stents, and \$28,879 for treatment in a cardiac catheterization lab. After unspecified hospital adjustments to the bill, Wirt owed

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\$77,574.44.

The Billing Problem: Medicaid Across State Lines

Wirt is covered by Florida's Medicaid program through Sunshine Health, a managed-care plan. But the South Dakota hospital refused to submit the bill to his out-of-state Medicaid plan, instead sending it to Wirt and eventually threatening to send the debt to a collection agency.

Medicaid, the government health insurance program primarily for low-income people and those with disabilities, is jointly funded by the federal government and states. States are responsible for administering Medicaid, and most contract with private insurance companies like Sunshine Health.

Federal law says state Medicaid programs must reimburse out-of-state hospitals for beneficiaries' care in an emergency.

Many hospitals bill out-of-state Medicaid plans in such situations. If they don't, they risk not being reimbursed at all, since Medicaid recipients probably won't be able to afford large bills, said Katy DeBriere, who was legal director for the Florida Health Justice Project when she spoke with KFF Health News in April.

But there's no federal law that requires them to do so, she said.

Federal court opinions have noted that hospitals are not required to bill Medicaid for every individual beneficiary they treat, even if they generally accept Medicaid.

Monument Health didn't bill Wirt's insurance because the hospital isn't enrolled as a health care provider with Florida Medicaid, said hospital spokesperson Stephany Chalberg. She told KFF Health News that Monument bills Medicaid plans only in South Dakota and four bordering states: Wyoming, Montana, Nebraska, and Minnesota.

The hospital's website says Medicaid patients who are not enrolled in one of those states "are responsible for any charges."

"Due to the significant credentialing requirements of our multiple hospitals and hundreds of physicians we do not participate with all states," a hospital representative wrote in a message to Wirt.

According to Florida's Medicaid website, out-of-state providers who have treated one of its enrollees must submit five documents to bill the program, including a six-page application, a copy of the provider's license, and a claim form.

The process is different in each state, and many Medicaid programs reimburse out-of-state providers at lower rates than those that are in-state, according to the Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission, a federal agency that advises Congress.

Provider enrollment barriers leave "beneficiaries in an untenable situation, preventing them from accessing the coverage to which they are legally entitled," Chalberg said.

Wirt decided to submit his bill to his Medicaid plan on his own. But he said Sunshine Health told him it can only process bills received directly from providers.

Elizabeth Boyd, a spokesperson for Sunshine Health, told KFF Health News that its staff contacted the hospital on Wirt's behalf. She did not respond when asked why the plan can't process bills submitted by patients or what more it could have done to help Wirt.

The Resolution

A few days after KFF Health News emailed officials at Monument Health for this story, Wirt noticed his balance due fell from more than \$77,000 to \$0.

Chalberg told KFF Health News that Monument Health covered Wirt's bill through its charity care program. She said that "appropriate patients" are told about the program and that "before any bill is sent to collections, it is evaluated to determine whether the patient may qualify for our financial assistance policy."

To retain tax-exempt status, nonprofit hospitals must have programs that provide free or discounted care to patients who can't afford their bills.

But Wirt said that when he first contacted Monument Health after receiving his bill and said he couldn't afford to pay it, officials didn't mention the program. He said they didn't share any resources when he

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asked whether there were outside groups that could help him pay the bill. Wirt said hospital officials just recommended setting up a payment plan, but the monthly bills were still too high for him to afford. "There's a reason why I'm on Medicaid," Wirt said. "It's just beyond me how they can expect somebody who had Medicaid to come up with that kind of money. It's unrealistic."

The Takeaway

Sarah Somers, legal director at the National Health Law Program, said the various "cogs in the Medicaid system" didn't operate correctly in Wirt's situation. "Nobody's exerting themselves enough to just smooth the way for this person."

States are responsible for managing Medicaid and are therefore the main "cog," Somers said. She said Medicaid managed-care companies are also supposed to intervene.

Somers and DeBriere said Medicaid recipients who receive bills they don't think they owe should file a complaint with their state's Medicaid program and, if they have one, their managed-care plan. They can also ask whether there is a Medicaid or managed-care caseworker who can advocate on their behalf.

The attorneys said patients should also contact a legal aid clinic or a consumer protection firm that specializes in medical debt. DeBriere said those organizations can help file complaints and communicate with the hospital.

DeBriere said that, had she assisted Wirt, she would have immediately sent a letter to Monument Health ordering it to stop billing him and to either register with Florida Medicaid to submit his bill or offer him charity care.

Wirt said the doctors who treated him and the medical care he received at Monument Health were excellent. He said he spoke out about the hospital's billing practices because he doesn't want others to endure the same experience.

"If I get sick and have a heart attack, I have to be sure that I do that here in Florida now instead of some other state," he joked.

Bill of the Month is a crowdsourced investigation by KFF Health News and The Washington Post's Well+Being that dissects and explains medical bills. Since 2018, this series has helped many patients and readers get their medical bills reduced, and it has been cited in statehouses, at the U.S. Capitol, and at the White House. Do you have a confusing or outrageous medical bill you want to share? Tell us about it!

KFF Health News is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues and is one of the core operating programs at KFF—an independent source of health policy research, polling, and journalism. Learn more about KFF.

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Arielle Zions, rural health care correspondent for KFF Health News, is based in South Dakota. She primarily covers South Dakota and its neighboring states and tribal nations. Arielle previously worked at South Dakota Public Broadcasting, where she reported on business and economic development. Before that, she was the criminal justice reporter at the Rapid City Journal and a general assignment reporter at the Nogales International, on the border of Arizona and Mexico. She graduated from Pitzer College in Claremont, California. Arielle lives in Rapid City with her cat, Sully.

Trump sends detailed budget request cutting spending by \$163 billion to Congress

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MAY 30, 2025 8:40 PM

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration released significantly more detail about its budget request Friday evening, giving Congress the information it needs for lawmakers to draft the annual government funding bills.

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The 1,224-page document sheds light on where exactly President Donald Trump and White House budget director Russ Vought want lawmakers to cut federal spending during the upcoming fiscal year.

The Office of Management and Budget released a "skinny" version of the annual proposal in early May, requesting lawmakers cut domestic spending by \$163 billion and keep funding for defense programs flat in the dozen annual appropriations bills.

While the documents in that request provided some insight into how Trump wants to reshape the size and scope of about \$1.7 trillion in discretionary funding, which is spending that Congress directs, they didn't include the level of detail that the Appropriations committees need to begin their work.

The appendix document released Friday should aid in that, though it does not represent a full budget request. That type of proposal would include the White House's goals for mandatory programs, like Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, which make up about two-thirds of federal spending. Such spending is required by law and is not subject to annual appropriations.

A full budget request also typically includes tax policy proposals, though with Republicans in Congress already working to enact an extension of the 2017 GOP tax law in the "big, beautiful bill," those sections would likely be of little use to lawmakers at this point.

Work on spending bills launching

The House Appropriations Committee is scheduled to release and debate its 12 government funding bills throughout June, before voting to send those measures to the floor.

Chairman Tom Cole, R-Okla., will likely include funding levels and policy closely aligned with the White House request, since legislation in that chamber can pass a floor vote with a simple majority.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Susan Collins, R-Maine, has a more challenging task, since regular bills in that chamber require bipartisanship to get past the 60-vote legislative filibuster. Republicans control the Senate with 53 members.

In general, that means the Senate panel's bills tend to look much more like the final version that becomes law than the House bills, though not always.

Both chambers are supposed to reach a bipartisan, bicameral agreement on the dozen bills before the start of the next fiscal year on Oct. 1, but that rarely happens.

Congress is much more likely to use a stopgap spending bill until mid-December to give members more time to negotiate funding levels and policies on thousands of government programs.

The House and Senate were unable to reach agreement for this fiscal year, and instead leaned on a series of three continuing resolutions to keep the government up and running.

Partial shutdown could loom again

Tensions over the proposed funding cuts in Trump's first budget request of his second term could reach a boiling point if Cole, Collins, House ranking member Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut and Senate ranking member Patty Murray cannot broker an agreement before their deadline.

Failure to enact some sort of government funding legislation — either the dozen full-year bills, or a stopgap spending measure — would lead to a partial government shutdown.

Murray, D-Wash., wrote in a statement released Friday evening that it was "telling that President Trump has chosen to release his budget on a Friday night with no fanfare whatsoever."

"This is a draconian proposal to hurt working people and our economy, and it is dead on arrival in Congress as long as I have anything to say about it," Murray wrote. "But this is just another reminder we need Republicans to join us to reject these reckless cuts, focus on the investments we actually need to make in our communities and security, and to finally force Trump to follow the law and end his devastating funding freeze."

DeLauro wrote in a statement that the "government envisioned by President Trump only serves billionaires and the biggest corporations and would do nothing to lower the cost of living."

"This is not a complete budget," she wrote. "We are supposed to start putting together the funding bills

for 2026 next week. If, as expected, House Republicans follow what President Trump has proposed so far, it is not a serious effort to deliver for the American people."

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.

PBS, Minnesota public TV station sue Trump over executive order cutting off funds

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MAY 30, 2025 5:31 PM

WASHINGTON — The Public Broadcasting Service and Lakeland PBS in Minnesota sued the Trump administration Friday, arguing an executive order seeking to cut off their federal funding violates the Constitution and would "upend public television."

The lawsuit was filed just days after a collection of National Public Radio stations sued President Donald Trump over the same executive order, which blocked the Corporation for Public Broadcasting from funding the networks.

PBS wrote in its 48-page filing that it disagrees with claims made by the executive order, including that federal spending on public media is "corrosive to the appearance of journalistic independence" and that the news organization doesn't present "a fair, accurate, or unbiased portrayal of current events to taxpaying citizens."

"PBS disputes those charged assertions in the strongest possible terms," the lawsuit states. "But regardless of any policy disagreements over the role of public television, our Constitution and laws forbid the President from serving as the arbiter of the content of PBS's programming, including by attempting to defund PBS."

The case was filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, but hadn't been assigned to a judge as of Friday evening.

White House: PBS supports 'a particular political party'

White House principal deputy press secretary Harrison Fields wrote in a statement responding to the lawsuit that the "Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) is creating media to support a particular political party on the taxpayers' dime.

"Therefore, the President is exercising his lawful authority to limit funding to NPR and PBS. The President was elected with a mandate to ensure efficient use of taxpayer dollars, and he will continue to use his lawful authority to achieve that objective."

The lawsuit says Trump's executive order violates the law that governs the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which gives it independence from politicians who might try to control its programs.

"Congress took pains to ensure that the development of public television would be free from political interference, including with respect to content and funding decisions," the suit states.

It also claims implementing the order would violate the First Amendment of the Constitution.

"The EO makes no attempt to hide the fact that it is cutting off the flow of funds to PBS because of the content of PBS programming and out of a desire to alter the content of speech," the lawsuit states. "That is blatant viewpoint discrimination and an infringement of PBS and PBS Member Stations' private editorial discretion."

PBS says federal funds 'instrumental' for operations

The lawsuit says the loss of funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting envisioned in the executive order would upend programming at PBS and its member stations throughout the country.

"Public television stations receive approximately \$325 million in annual federal funding from CPB, nearly all of which goes to PBS Member Stations," the lawsuit states. "Those funds, which comprise more than 50% of the overall budgets of certain PBS Member Stations, are instrumental to enabling them to operate, to produce programming that serves their local communities, and to pay PBS dues that make PBS programming and services possible."

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.

Musk departs White House but says DOGE will carry on; won't comment on report of drug use

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MAY 30, 2025 4:18 PM

WASHINGTON — Billionaire Elon Musk said Friday he will continue to advise President Donald Trump despite stepping away from his official role as a special government employee.

During a wide-ranging Oval Office press conference, Musk — sporting a bruised right eye he blamed on a punch he invited from one of his sons, 5-year-old X — also said he expects U.S. DOGE Service will continue trying to cut at least \$1 trillion in federal spending, setting the middle of next year as a target date.

"This is not the end of DOGE, but really the beginning," Musk said. "My time as a special government employee necessarily had to end — it was a limited time thing, it's 134 days I believe, which ends in a few days. So it comes with a time limit. But the DOGE team will only grow stronger over time. The DOGE influence will only grow stronger."

Musk then compared his initiative to Buddhism, a religion practiced by hundreds of millions of people, saying DOGE jobs were "like a way of life" that he hoped would permeate throughout the federal government.

DOGE's efforts so far have led to about \$160 billion in spending cuts, Musk said. That's a small fraction of the \$6.8 trillion the federal government spent during the most recent fiscal year and short of the goal he set before joining the administration.

Musk said DOGE was "relentlessly pursuing" at least \$1 trillion in spending cuts to benefit American taxpayers, shortly after pointing out a golden eagle on the ceiling of the Oval Office that Trump said used to be plaster.

"Nobody ever really saw it. They didn't know the eagle was up there, and we highlighted it," Trump said. "Essentially it's a landmark, a great landmark, and that's 24-karat gold. And everybody loved it. Now, they all see it when they come in. So it's been good."

Musk hailed Trump for ensuring the Oval Office "finally has the majesty that it deserves." Neither man shared how much was spent to redesign the eagle.

Musk plans to refocus his professional efforts on his companies, including Tesla and SpaceX.

New York Times story on Musk drug use

Trump said he "hopes" that Musk continues to advise him on government issues, even though he will no longer be employed by the White House.

Republican lawmakers, Trump said, are "totally committed to making the DOGE cuts permanent and stopping much more of the waste in the months to come."

"We want to get our great, big, beautiful bill finished and done," Trump said, referring to a tax and spending cuts package the House passed earlier this month. "We put some of this into the bill, but most of it's going to come later. We're going to have it (codified) by Congress, affirmed by Congress. In some cases, we'll make cuts, in some cases we'll just use it in a different layer to save the money. But it's hundreds of billions of dollars."

Musk declined to answer a question about a bombshell New York Times report published earlier in the day that detailed his ongoing use of drugs, including ketamine, ecstasy and psychedelic mushrooms.

Trump desires bigger tax cuts from Senate

Trump said during the press conference he hopes the U.S. Senate amends the "big, beautiful bill" by cutting more government spending, without specifying which programs.

That package would cut about \$1.5 trillion in federal funding for several programs during the next decade, including Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office is expected to release its full analysis of the package next week, including how changes made just before the bill went to the floor will impact state budgets and people's access to safety net programs.

Trump also called on senators to further lower taxes in the package,

"It's an unbelievable bill...It cuts, you know, it's a huge cutting," Trump said. "But there's things I'd like to see, maybe cut a little bit more. I'd like to see a bigger cut in taxes. It's going to be the largest tax decrease or cut in the history of our country. I'd like to see it get down to an even lower number. I was shooting for a slightly lower number. I would have liked to have done that."

Trump appeared to renew his call for Congress to completely eliminate the debt limit, even though the tax and spending cuts package would raise that ceiling by \$4 trillion.

"I agree with Elizabeth Warren on that. I think we should get rid of it," Trump said, referring to the Democratic senator from Massachusetts. "It's too catastrophic."

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.

U.S. Supreme Court permits deportation of another half million migrants, for now

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - MAY 30, 2025 11:16 AM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court Friday said it will allow the Trump administration to remove deportation protections for more than 500,000 nationals from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela who were given permission to temporarily remain and work in the United States by the Biden administration.

The move by the high court — which permits the deportations while a lawsuit continues to work its way through the courts — came after a district court in Massachusetts in April blocked the Trump administration from ending the Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela, or CHNV, program for 532,000 people.

It's the second decision by the Supreme Court this month stripping immigrants of some form of temporary legal protections, affecting more than 800,000 people in the country without permanent legal status who are now subject to swift deportation.

On May 19, the Supreme Court allowed the Trump administration to end Temporary Protected Status for 350,000 Venezuelans who were granted the protection from deportation because their home country was deemed too unstable to return to due to the political regime.

Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin welcomed the ruling.

"Ending the CHNV parole programs, as well as the paroles of those who exploited it, will be a necessary return to common-sense policies, a return to public safety, and a return to America First," she said in a statement.

Todd Schulte, the president of the immigration advocacy group FWD.us, said in a statement that the high court's decision "penalizes half a million people for complying with our immigration laws."

"This decision will have devastating and immediate consequences, and is part of a broader attempt by the executive branch to justify further immigration enforcement crackdowns against families across the country," Schulte said. "The government failed to show any harm remotely comparable to that which will come from a half million people losing their jobs and becoming subject to deportation."

Friday's case is one of several immigration-related emergency requests the Department of Justice has brought to the high court, as the Trump administration aims to carry out mass deportations, wind down temporary legal pathways for immigrants and redefine the constitutional right of birthright citizenship.

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No judicial review for parole, DOJ argues

In the emergency filing to the high court in Friday's case, Solicitor General D. John Sauer argued that the Immigration Nationality Act bars judicial review of discretionary decisions, such as what is called humanitarian parole, for the CHNV program.

He added that Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem terminated the program because it does not align with the interests of the Trump administration.

Liberal justices Sonia Sotomayor and Ketanji Brown Jackson dissented.

"The Court has plainly botched this assessment today," Jackson wrote in her dissent. "It undervalues the devastating consequences of allowing the Government to precipitously upend the lives and livelihoods of nearly half a million noncitizens while their legal claims are pending."

She argued that the Trump administration did not prove it would be harmed by the preliminary injunction. An appeals court previously rejected the government's request to put the lower court's order on hold.

"While it is apparent that the Government seeks a stay to enable it to inflict maximum predecision damage, court-ordered stays exist to minimize—not maximize—harm to litigating parties," Jackson wrote.

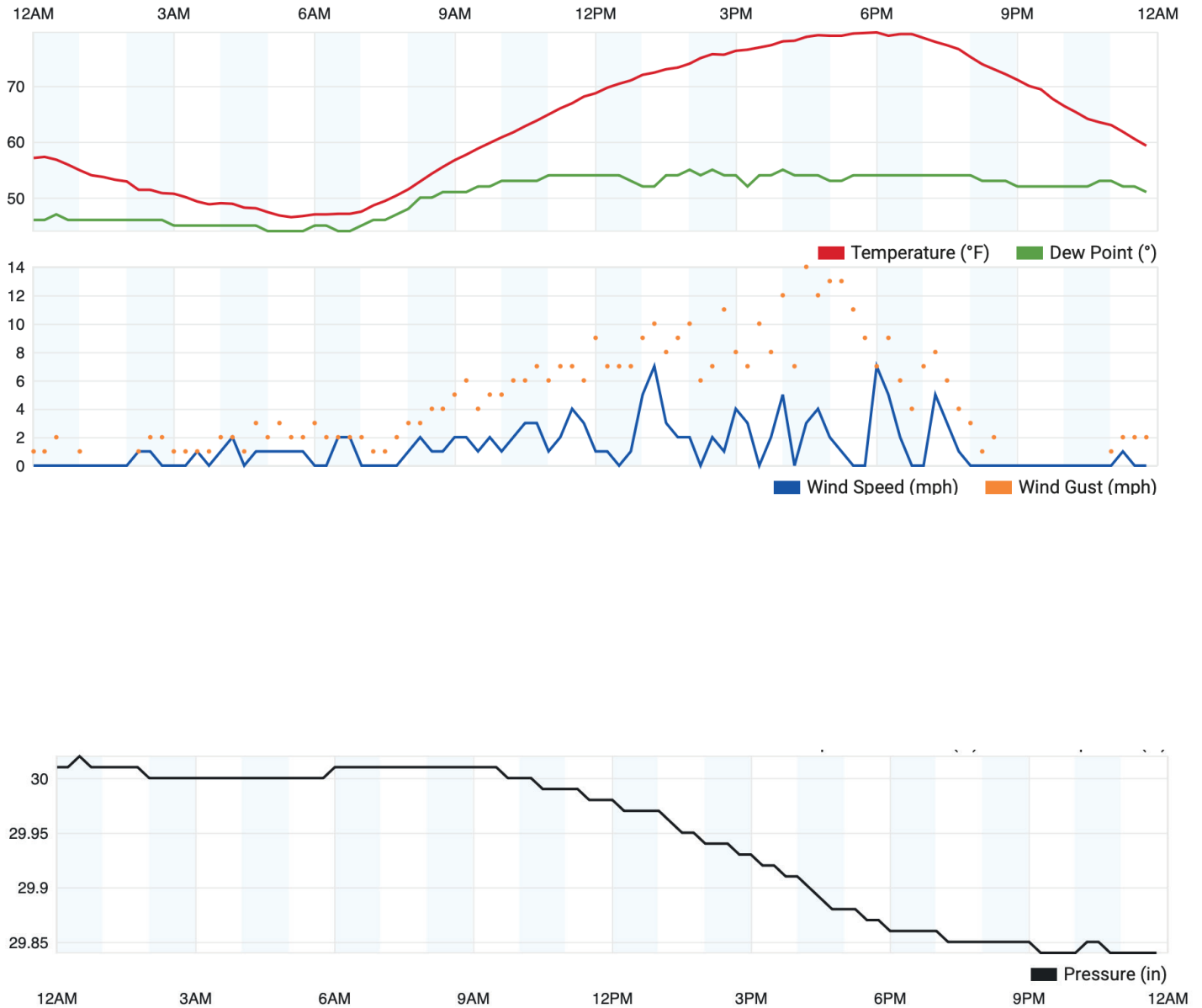
President Joe Biden created the CHNV program in 2023. It temporarily granted work permits and allowed thousands of nationals from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela to remain in the country if they were sponsored by someone in the United States and passed a background check.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 85 °F

Areas Smoke

Tonight



Low: 56 °F

Areas Smoke

Sunday



High: 87 °F

Areas Smoke

Sunday Night



Low: 59 °F

Areas Smoke
then Partly
Cloudy

Monday



High: 85 °F

Mostly Sunny
then Chance
T-storms and
Breezy



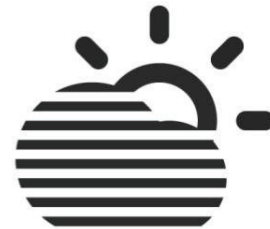
Smoke through the Weekend & into next Week

May 31, 2025
4:29 AM

Periods of Poor Visibility and Air Quality Possible

Mainly elevated smoke to mix with more surface smoke this afternoon through at least Sunday. This will cause **areas of smoke with off and on visibility restrictions.**

Showers and storms are expected Monday, with another round of smoke moving in behind the rain.



For the latest air quality readings, and air quality forecasts, view the EPA page at
<https://www.airnow.gov/> or
<https://gispub.epa.gov/airnow/>

Periods of poor visibility and air quality will remain through at least Sunday. While rain with showers and thunderstorms are expected Monday, another round of smoke will likely move in behind the rain. Smoke from wildfires can hurt your eyes, irritate your lungs, and worsen respiratory illness. For the latest air quality readings, and air quality forecasts, view the EPA page at <https://www.airnow.gov/> or <https://gispub.epa.gov/airnow/>

THREAT ASSESSMENT

HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

2

WHAT THIS MEANS:
SCATTERED severe storms
possible

TIMING

MONDAY afternoon
into MONDAY evening

PRIMARY THREATS



LARGE HAIL



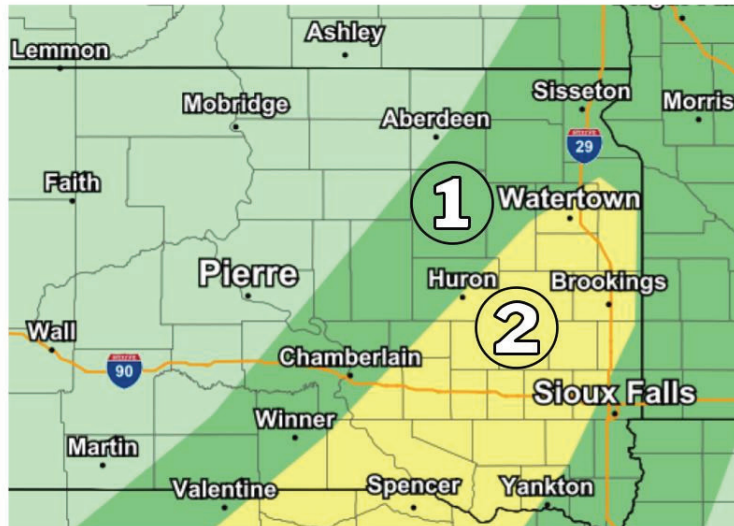
DAMAGING WIND

SECONDARY THREATS



HEAVY
RAIN

Scattered **SEVERE STORMS** Monday



What To Expect

- Chance of showers & storms increasing to 70% over eastern SD late Monday afternoon into Monday night
- Some of the storms Monday afternoon into Monday evening could become severe

What To Do?

- Stay up to date on the latest forecast for Monday



Scattered severe storms are possible Monday afternoon into Monday evening, primarily over portions of eastern South Dakota. Stay up to date on the latest forecast for Monday, as the timing and threat area may change.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 80 °F at 5:38 PM

Low Temp: 46 °F at 5:27 AM

Wind: 14 mph at 4:26 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 29 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 100 in 1934

Record Low: 23 in 1897

Average High: 76

Average Low: 51

Average Precip in May.: 3.28

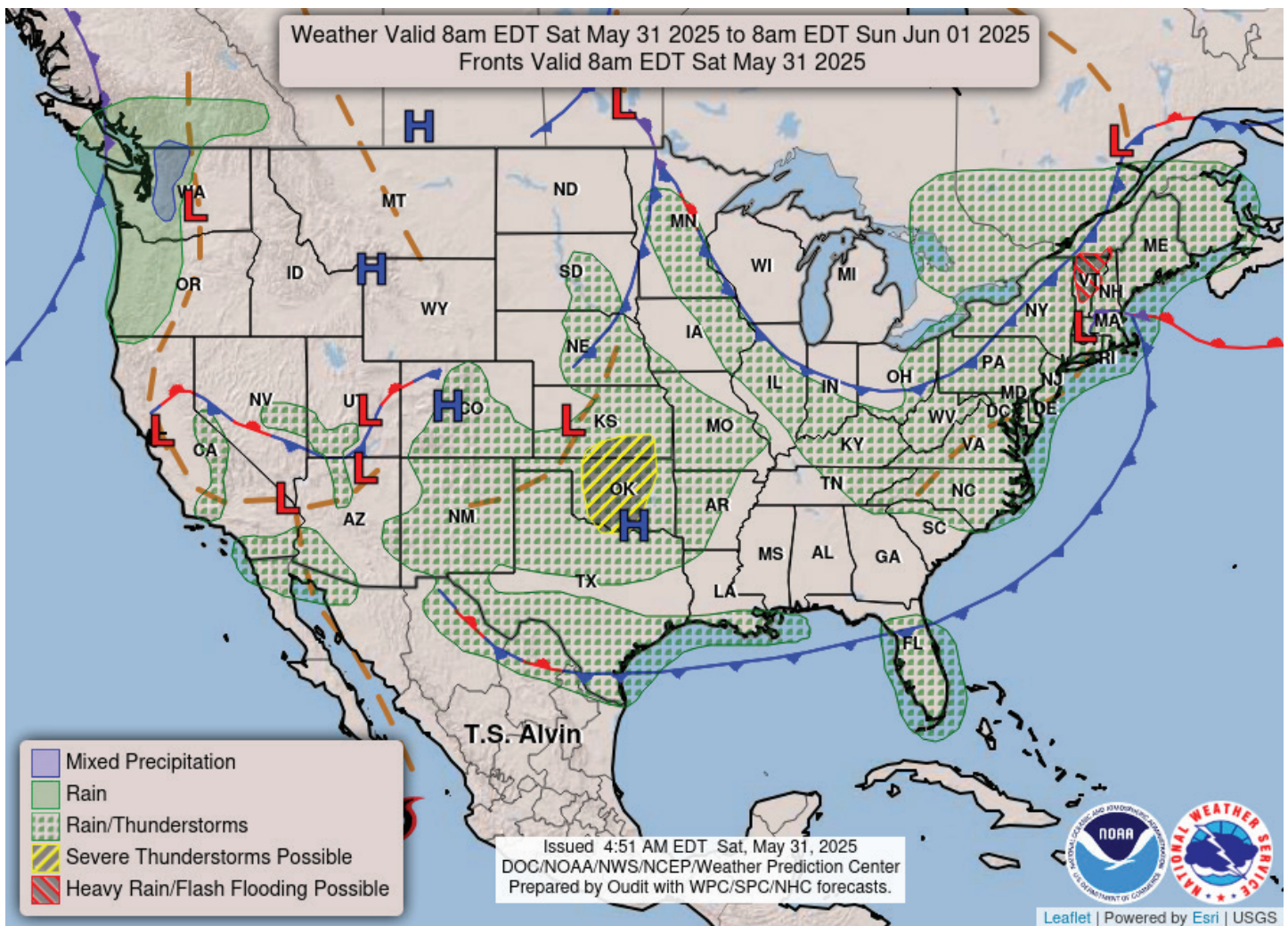
Precip to date in May.: 3.42

Average Precip to date: 7.25

Precip Year to Date: 6.05

Sunset Tonight: 9:14:41 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:45:07 am



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Today in Weather History

May 31st, 1960: A late evening thunderstorm cut a path of destruction, principally from high winds from Beadle County, northeast to Roberts and Grant Counties. Twelve heads of cattle were electrocuted for a downed tension wire that occurred at Wolsey. Winds with 65 to 75 mph gusts were observed at Huron and Watertown. A grain elevator tipped over, and a windmill was destroyed near Willow Lake. The winds at Hayti blew over a steel corn crib and damaged other farm buildings and implements.

1889 - The Johnstown disaster occurred, the worst flood tragedy in U.S. history. Heavy rains collapsed the South Fork Dam sending a thirty foot wall of water rushing down the already flooded Conemaugh Valley. The wall of water, traveling as fast as twenty-two feet per second, swept away all structures, objects and people. 2100 persons perished in the flood. (David Ludlum)

1941 - Thunderstorms deluged Burlington KS with 12.59 inches of rain to establish a 24 hour rainfall record for the state. (The Weather Channel)

1985 - Severe thunderstorms spawned forty-one tornadoes across the Lower Great Lakes Region and southeastern Ontario which killed 74 persons. (Storm Data)

1987 - Thunderstorms in New England produced wind gusts up to 90 mph at Worcester, MA, and Northboro, MA, and hail an inch and a half in diameter at Williston, VT. Unseasonably hot weather prevailed in the northeastern U.S. The afternoon high of 94 degrees at Portland, ME, was a record for the month of May. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Hot and humid weather prevailed in the eastern U.S. Thirteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date. Cape Hatteras, NC, reported their first ninety degree day in May in 115 years of records. "Dust buster" thunderstorms in northwest Texas drenched Amarillo with more than three inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather and torrential rains in northern Indiana, northern Ohio and southern Lower Michigan. Saint John IND was drenched with four inches of rain in two hours, and Woodland MI was deluged with two inches in twenty minutes. Pittsburgh PA reported a record 6.55 inches of rain for the month of May, with measurable rain reported on twenty-five days during the month. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms developing along a warm front produced severe weather from northwest Texas to southeastern Louisiana. The thunderstorms spawned sixteen tornadoes, including thirteen in northwest Texas. One tornado hit the town of Spearman, TX, causing more than a million dollars damage, and seven other tornadoes were reported within twenty-five miles of Spearman. Thunderstorms over northwest Texas also produced baseball size hail at Monahans, and wind gusts to 80 mph at Paducah. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Right choices are sometimes obvious, occasionally hidden, perhaps difficult, unfortunately painful, and every now and then, when least expected, pleasant and rewarding.

However, one fact never changes: with every choice we make there is a consequence that comes with it. Sometimes when we make a choice, the results may surprise us or others. Nevertheless, there are always consequences that can be enjoyable or exciting, painful and perplexing.

Frequently the consequence of a choice is known at the time we make our decision. Other times it is "wait and see." But we all know that "payday" will come someday.

In the ninth chapter of Proverbs, Solomon carefully compares and contrasts the differences between a woman who is wise, and a woman who is foolish or "wicked."

Both offer an invitation to a feast they have prepared. Both are inviting people to enjoy their company. Both are sitting in a place of prominence where they can be seen and heard, recognized and rewarded.

Wisdom, on the one hand, lacks nothing—it is complete, perfect, and readily available. Yet, wisdom must be pursued with lifelong diligence. It is a never-ending quest that eventually brings insight, will add joy, satisfaction, and ultimately, peace to life. Folly, or wickedness, on the other hand, appeals to the senses, and even a moment of ecstasy following a time of excitement. It is temporary, though enjoyable, and seems to gratify some basic need.

Folly has no future and is short lived. It brings no lasting satisfaction. It will provide an interlude of "escape," but ends in destruction and death.

Choices determine the outcome of life. Choose wisely. Choose God's wisdom.

Prayer: Father, our choices are eternal. May we choose wisely. May we choose life. May we choose You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Scripture:

"Wisdom has built her house; she has set up its seven pillars. She has sent out her servants, and she calls from the highest point of the city."

— Proverbs 9:1 and 3

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: 05.30.25

2 28 37 38 58 13

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$202,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.28.25

4 6 8 33 35 5

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$37,220,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 2 Mins 20 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.30.25

13 17 30 35 48 9

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 17 Mins 20 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.28.25

5 16 17 19 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 17 Mins 20 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.28.25

14 30 41 48 69 12

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 46 Mins 19 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.28.25

23 27 32 35 59 11

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$207,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 46 Mins 20 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

Death toll reaches 151 in north-central Nigerian town submerged in floods, thousands displaced

By TAIWO ADEBAYO and CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — The death toll from devastating flooding in a market town in Nigeria's north-central state of Niger rose to at least 151 on Saturday, the local emergency service said, amid efforts to find more victims.

Torrents of predawn rainfall early Thursday unleashed the devastating flood on Mokwa, nearly 380 kilometers (236 miles) west of Abuja and a major trading and transportation hub where northern Nigerian farmers sell beans, onions and other food to traders from the south.

The spokesperson for the Niger State emergency service, Ibrahim Audu Hussein, confirmed the updated fatality count to The Associated Press on Saturday. In addition to the rising death toll, 11 people were injured and more than 3,000 people were displaced, the official added.

At least 500 households across three communities were affected by the sudden and intense flood that built rapidly in about five hours, leaving roofs barely visible and surviving residents waist-deep in water, trying to salvage what they could and rescue others.

Hussein added that two roads were washed away and two bridges collapsed.

In a statement on Friday night, President Bola Tinubu expressed condolences and said he had directed the activation of an emergency response to support victims and "accelerate" recovery.

He said that security agencies have also been asked to assist in emergency operations, which remain underway amid concerns that more bodies could be recovered in remote areas.

"Relief materials and temporary shelter assistance are being deployed without delay," the president said, promising "no Nigerian affected will be left behind or unheard of."

Flooding is common during Nigeria's wet season. Communities in northern Nigeria have been experiencing prolonged dry spells worsened by climate change and excessive rainfall that leads to severe flooding during the brief wet season. But this flood has been particularly deadly in Mokwa, a farming region near the banks of the River Niger.

Mokwa community leader Aliko Musa told the AP the villagers are not used to such flooding.

The chairman of the Mokwa local government area, Jibril Muregi, told local news website Premium Times that construction of flood-control works was long overdue.

Iran has amassed even more near weapons-grade uranium, UN watchdog says

By STEPHANIE LIECHTENSTEIN Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — Iran has further increased its stockpile of uranium enriched to near weapons-grade levels, a confidential report by the U.N. nuclear watchdog said Saturday and called on Tehran to urgently change course and comply with the agency's probe.

The report comes at a sensitive time as Tehran and Washington have been holding several rounds of talks in the past weeks over a possible nuclear deal that U.S. President Donald Trump is trying to reach.

The report by the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency — which was seen by The Associated Press — says that as of May 17, Iran has amassed 408.6 kilograms (900.8 pounds) of uranium enriched up to 60%.

That's an increase of 133.8 kilograms (294.9 pounds) — or almost 50% — since the IAEA's last report in February. The 60% enriched material is a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%. A report in February put this stockpile level at 274.8 kilograms (605.8 pounds).

There was no immediate comment from Tehran on the new IAEA report.

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What does the report say?

The IAEA report raised a stern warning, saying that Iran is now “the only non-nuclear-weapon state to produce such material” — something the agency said was of “serious concern.”

Approximately 42 kilograms of 60% enriched uranium is theoretically enough to produce one atomic bomb, if enriched further to 90%, according to the watchdog.

The IAEA report, a quarterly, also estimated that as of May 17, Iran’s overall stockpile of enriched uranium — which includes uranium enriched to lower levels — stood at 9,247.6 kilograms (20,387.4 pounds). That’s an increase of 953.2 kilograms (2,101.4 pounds) since February’s report.

Iran has maintained its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only, but the IAEA chief, Rafael Mariano Grossi, has warned that Tehran has enough uranium enriched to near-weapons-grade levels to make “several” nuclear bombs if it chose to do so.

Iranian officials have increasingly suggested that Tehran could pursue an atomic bomb.

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

Israel’s swift reaction

Israel said Saturday’s report was a clear warning sign that “Iran is totally determined to complete its nuclear weapons program,” according to a statement from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office.

It said IAEA’s report “strongly reinforces what Israel has been saying for years — the purpose of Iran’s nuclear program is not peaceful.”

It also added that Iran’s level of enrichment “has no civilian justification whatsoever” and appealed on the international community to “act now to stop Iran.”

Call for cooperation

Grossi said Saturday that he “reiterates his urgent call upon Iran to cooperate fully and effectively” with the IAEA’s years long investigation into uranium traces discovered at several sites in Iran.

The IAEA also circulated to member states on Saturday a second, 22-page confidential report, also seen by the AP, that Grossi requested following a resolution passed by the 35-member IAEA Board of Governors last November.

In this so-called “comprehensive report,” the IAEA said that Iran’s cooperation with the agency has “been less than satisfactory” when it comes to uranium traces discovered by IAEA inspectors at several locations in Iran that Tehran has failed to declare as nuclear sites.

Western officials suspect that the uranium traces discovered by the IAEA could provide evidence that Iran had a secret military nuclear program until 2003.

One of the sites became known publicly in 2018 after Netanyahu revealed it at the United Nations and called it a clandestine nuclear warehouse hidden at a rug-cleaning plant.

Iran denied this but in 2019 IAEA inspectors detected the presence of manmade uranium particles there.

What is the IAEA inspecting in Iran?

After initially blocking IAEA access, inspectors were able to collect samples in 2020 from two other locations where they also detected the presence of manmade uranium particles.

The three locations became known as Turqezabad, Varamin, and Marivan.

A fourth undeclared location named as Lavisian-Shian is also part of the IAEA probe but IAEA inspectors never visited the site because it was razed and demolished by Iran after 2003.

In Saturday’s comprehensive report, the IAEA says that the “lack of answers and clarifications provided by Iran” to questions the watchdog had regarding Lavisian-Shian, Varamin and Marivan “has led the agency to conclude that these three locations, and other possible related locations, were part of an undeclared structured nuclear program carried out by Iran until the early 2000s and that some activities used undeclared nuclear material.”

What’s next?

Saturday’s comprehensive report could be a basis for possible further steps by European nations, leading to a potential escalation in tensions between Iran and the West.

European countries could move to trigger snap-back sanctions against Iran that were lifted under the

original 2015 nuclear deal ahead of October, when the deal formally expires.

On Thursday, senior Iranian officials dismissed speculation about an imminent nuclear deal with the United States, emphasizing that any agreement must fully lift sanctions and allow the country's nuclear program to continue.

The comments came a day after Trump said he has told Netanyahu to hold off on striking Iran to give the U.S. administration more time to push for a new deal with Tehran.

Trump said on Friday that he still thinks a deal could be completed in the "not too distant future."

"They don't want to be blown up. They would rather make a deal," Trump said of Iran. He added, "That would be a great thing that we could have a deal without bombs being dropped all over the Middle East."

US defense secretary warns Indo-Pacific allies of 'imminent' threat from China

By TARA COPP and DAVID RISING Associated Press

SINGAPORE (AP) — U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth reassured allies in the Indo-Pacific on Saturday that they will not be left alone to face increasing military and economic pressure from China, while insisting that they also contribute more to their own defense.

He said Washington will bolster its defenses overseas to counter what the Pentagon sees as rapidly developing threats by Beijing, particularly in its aggressive stance toward Taiwan. China has conducted numerous exercises to test what a blockade would look like of the self-governing island, which Beijing claims as its own and the U.S. has pledged to defend.

China's army "is rehearsing for the real deal," Hegseth said in a keynote speech at a security conference in Singapore. "We are not going to sugarcoat it — the threat China poses is real. And it could be imminent."

The head of China's delegation accused Hegseth of making "groundless accusations."

"Some of the claims are completely fabricated, some distort facts and some are cases of a thief crying 'stop thief,'" said Rear Adm. Hu Gangfeng, vice president of China's National Defense University. He did not offer specific objections.

"These actions are nothing more than attempts to provoke trouble, incite division and stir up confrontation to destabilize the Asia-Pacific region," he said.

Hegseth says China is training to invade Taiwan

China has a stated goal of ensuring its military is capable of taking Taiwan by force if necessary by 2027, a deadline that is seen by experts as more of an aspirational goal than a hard war deadline.

China also has built sophisticated, artificial islands in the South China Sea to support new military outposts and developed highly advanced hypersonic and space capabilities, which are driving the United States to create its own space-based "Golden Dome" missile defenses.

Speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue, a global security conference hosted by the International Institute for Security Studies, Hegseth said China is no longer just building up its military forces to take Taiwan, it's "actively training for it, every day."

Hegseth also called out China for its ambitions in Latin America, particularly its efforts to increase its influence over the Panama Canal.

He urged Indo-Pacific countries to increase defense spending to levels similar to the 5% of their gross domestic product European nations are now pressed to contribute.

"We must all do our part," Hegseth said.

Following the speech, the European Union's top diplomat Kaja Kallas pushed back at Hegseth's comment that European countries should focus their defense efforts in their own region and leave the Indo-Pacific more to the U.S. She said that with North Korean troops fighting for Russia and China supporting Moscow, European and Asian security were "very much interlinked."

Questions about US commitment to Indo-Pacific

He also repeated a pledge made by previous administrations to bolster the U.S. military in the Indo-Pacific to provide a more robust deterrent. While both the Obama and Biden administrations had also committed

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to pivoting to the Pacific and established new military agreements throughout the region, a full shift has never been realized.

Instead, U.S. military resources from the Indo-Pacific have been regularly pulled to support military needs in the Middle East and Europe, especially since the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. In the first few months of President Donald Trump's second term, that's also been the case.

In the last few months, the Trump administration has taken a Patriot missile defense battalion out of the Indo-Pacific in order to send it to the Middle East, a massive logistical operation that required 73 military cargo aircraft flights, and sent Coast Guard ships back to the U.S. to help defend the U.S.-Mexico border.

Hegseth was asked why the U.S. pulled those resources if the Indo-Pacific is the priority theater. He did not directly answer but said the shift of resources was necessary to defend against Houthi missile attacks launched from Yemen, and to bolster protections against illegal immigration into the U.S.

At the same time, he stressed the need for American allies and partners to step up their own defense spending and preparations, saying the U.S. was not interested in going it alone.

"Ultimately a strong, resolute and capable network of allies and partners is our key strategic advantage," he said. "China envies what we have together, and it sees what we can collectively bring to bear on defense, but it's up to all of us to ensure that we live up to that potential by investing."

The Indo-Pacific nations caught in between have tried to balance relations with both the U.S. and China over the years. Beijing is the primary trading partner for many, but is also feared as a regional bully, in part due to its increasingly aggressive claims on natural resources such as critical fisheries.

Hegseth cautioned that playing both sides, seeking U.S. military support and Chinese economic support, carries risk.

"Economic dependence on China only deepens their malign influence and complicates our defense decision space during times of tension," Hegseth said.

Asked how he would reconcile that statement with Trump's threat of steep tariffs on most in the region, Hegseth he was "in the business of tanks, not trade."

But Illinois Democrat Sen. Tammy Duckworth, who is part of a congressional delegation attending Shangri-La, objected to pressuring regional allies.

"The United States is not asking people to choose between us and the PRC," Duckworth said, in reference to the People's Republic of China.

Australia's Defense Minister Richard Marles welcomed Hegseth's assurance that the Indo-Pacific was an American strategic priority and agreed that Australia and other nations needed to do their part.

"Reality is that there is no effective balance of power in this region absent the United States, but we cannot leave it to the United States alone," he said.

Still, Marles suggested the Trump administration's aggressive trade policies were counterproductive. "The shock and disruption from the high tariffs has been costly and destabilizing."

China sends lower-level delegation

China usually sends its own defense minister to the conference, but Dong Jun did not attend this year in a snub to the U.S. over Trump's erratic tariffs war. His absence was something the U.S. delegation said it intended to capitalize on.

"We are here this morning. And somebody else isn't," Hegseth said.

Asked by a member of the Chinese delegation how committed the U.S. would remain if Asian alliances like ASEAN had differences with Washington, Hegseth said the U.S. would not be constrained by "the confines of how previous administrations looked at this region."

"We're opening our arms to countries across the spectrum — traditional allies, non-traditional allies," he said.

He said U.S. support would not require local governments to align with the West on cultural or climate issues.

2 killed in Russian attacks on Ukraine as prospects for talks remain uncertain

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia's drone and missile attacks on Ukraine on Saturday killed at least two people, including a 9-year-old girl, officials said, as uncertainty remains whether Kyiv diplomats will attend a new round of peace talks proposed by Moscow for early next week in Istanbul.

Russian troops launched some 109 drones and five missiles across Ukraine overnight and into Saturday, the Ukrainian air force said. Three of the missiles and 42 drones were destroyed and another 30 drones failed to reach their targets without causing damage, it said.

A 9-year-old girl was killed in a strike on the front-line village of Dolynka in the Zaporizhzhia region, and a 16-year-old was injured, Zaporizhzhia's Gov. Ivan Fedorov said.

"One house was destroyed. The shockwave from the blast also damaged several other houses, cars, and outbuildings," Fedorov wrote on Telegram.

Another man was killed by Russian shelling in Ukraine's Kherson region, Gov. Oleksandr Prokudin wrote on Telegram.

Moscow did not comment on either attack.

Russia's Ministry of Defense said Saturday that it had gained control of the Ukrainian village of Novopil in the Donetsk region, and took the village of Vodolahi in the northern Sumy region. Ukrainian authorities in Sumy ordered mandatory evacuations in 11 more settlements as Russian forces make steady gains in the area.

The new additions bring the total number of settlements under evacuation orders in Sumy, which borders Russia's Kursk region, to 213.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said some 50,000 Russian troops had amassed in the area with the intention of launching an offensive to carve out a buffer zone inside Ukrainian territory.

Elsewhere, 14 people were injured including four children after Ukrainian drones struck apartment buildings Saturday in the Russian town of Rylsk and the village of Artakovo in the western Kursk region, local acting Gov. Alexander Khinshtein said.

Andrii Yermak, a top adviser to Zelenskyy, said Friday that Kyiv was ready to resume direct peace talks with Russia in Istanbul on Monday but that the Kremlin should first provide a promised memorandum setting out its position on ending the more than three-year war.

Zelenskyy said Friday that Russia was "undermining diplomacy" by withholding the document.

"For some reason, the Russians are concealing this document. This is an absolutely bizarre position. There is no clarity about the format," Zelenskyy wrote on Telegram.

Moscow previously said it would share its memorandum during the talks.

Trump and Putin want to talk business once the Ukraine war ends. Here's why it won't be easy

By DAVID McHUGH, DARIA LITVINOVA and KATIE MARIE DAVIES Associated Press

Hundreds of foreign companies left Russia after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, including major U.S. firms like Coca-Cola, Nike, Starbucks, ExxonMobil and Ford Motor Co.

But after more than three years of war, President Donald Trump has held out the prospect of restoring U.S.-Russia trade if there's ever a peace settlement. And Russian President Vladimir Putin has said foreign companies could come back under some circumstances.

"Russia wants to do largescale TRADE with the United States when this catastrophic 'bloodbath' is over, and I agree," Trump said in a statement after a phone call with Putin. "There is a tremendous opportunity for Russia to create massive amounts of jobs and wealth. Its potential is UNLIMITED."

The president then shifted his tone toward Putin after heavy drone and missile attacks on Kyiv, saying Putin "has gone absolutely crazy" and threatening new sanctions. That and recent comments from Putin warning Western companies against reclaiming their former stakes seemed to reflect reality more accu-

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rately — that it's not going to be a smooth process for businesses going back into Russia.

That's because Russia's business environment has massively changed since 2022. And not in ways that favor foreign companies.

And with Putin escalating attacks and holding on to territory demands Ukraine likely isn't going to accept, a peace deal seems distant indeed.

Here are factors that could deter U.S. companies from ever going back:

Risk of losing it all

Russian law classifies Ukraine's allies as "unfriendly states" and imposes severe restrictions on businesses from more than 50 countries. Those include limits on withdrawing money and equipment as well as allowing the Russian government to take control of companies deemed important. Foreign owners' votes on boards of directors can be legally disregarded.

Companies that left were required to sell their businesses for 50% or less of their assessed worth, or simply wrote them off while Kremlin-friendly business groups snapped up their assets on the cheap. Under a 2023 presidential decree the Russian government took control of Finnish energy company Fortum, German power company Unipro, France's dairy company Danone and Danish brewer Carlsberg.

Even if a peace deal removed the U.S. from the list of unfriendlies, and if the massive Western sanctions restricting business in Russia were dropped, the track record of losses would remain vivid. And there's little sign any of that is going to happen.

While the Russian government has talked in general about companies coming back, "there's no specific evidence of any one company saying that they are ready to come back," said Chris Weafer, CEO of Macro-Advisory Ltd. consultancy. "It's all at the political narrative level."

Russia's actions and legal changes have left "long-lasting damage" to its business environment, says Elina Ribakova, non-resident senior fellow at the Bruegel research institute in Brussels.

She said a return of U.S. businesses is "not very likely."

'We need to strangle them'

In a meeting at the Kremlin on May 26 to mark Russian Entrepreneurs Day, Putin said that Russia needed to throttle large tech firms such as Zoom and Microsoft, which had restricted their services in Russia after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, so that domestic tech companies could thrive instead.

"We need to strangle them," Putin said. "After all, they are trying to strangle us: we need to reciprocate. We didn't kick anyone out; we didn't interfere with anyone. We provided the most favorable conditions possible for their work here, in our market, and they are trying to strangle us."

He reassured a representative from Vkusno-i Tochka (Tasty-period) — the Russian-owned company that took over McDonald's restaurants in the country — that Moscow would aid them if the U.S. fast food giant tried to buy back its former stores. Asked for comment, McDonald's referred to their 2022 statement that "ownership of the business in Russia is no longer tenable."

Not much upside

On top of Russia's difficult business environment, the economy is likely to stagnate due to lack of investment in sectors other than the military, economists say.

"Russia has one of the lowest projected long-term growth rates and one of the highest levels of country risk in the world," says Heli Simola, senior economist at the Bank of Finland in a blog post. "Only Belarus offers an equally lousy combination of growth and risk."

Most of the opportunity to make money is related to military production, and it's unlikely U.S. companies would work with the Russian military-industrial complex, said Ribakova. "It's not clear where exactly one could plug in and expect outside returns that would compensate for this negative investment environment."

Repurchase agreements

Some companies, including Renault and Ford Motor Co., left with repurchase agreements letting them buy back their stakes years later if conditions change. But given Russia's unsteady legal environment, that's tough to count on.

The Russian purchasers may try to change the terms, look for more money, or ignore the agreements, said Weafer. "There's a lot of uncertainty as to how those buyback auctions will be enforced."

But what about the oil and gas?

Multinational oil companies were among those who suffered losses leaving Russia, so it's an open question whether they would want to try again even given Russia's vast oil and gas reserves. U.S. major ExxonMobil saw its stake in the Sakhalin oil project unilaterally terminated and wrote off \$3.4 billion.

Russia's major oil companies have less need of foreign partners than they did in the immediate post-Soviet era, though smaller oil field services might want to return given the size of Russia's oil industry. But they would have to face new requirements on establishing local presence and investment, Weafer said.

Some never left

According to the Kyiv School of Economics, 2,329 foreign companies are still doing business in Russia, many from China or other countries that aren't allied with Ukraine, while 1,344 are in the process of leaving and 494 have exited completely. The Yale School of Management's Chief Executive Leadership Institute lists some two dozen U.S. companies still doing business in Russia, while some 100 more have cut back by halting new investments.

EU sanctions could remain even if US open

U.S. sanctions are considered the toughest, because they carry the threat of being cut off from the U.S. banking and financial system. But the EU is still slapping new rounds of sanctions on Russia. Even if U.S. sanctions are dropped, EU sanctions would continue to present compliance headaches for any company that also wants to do business in Europe.

Poland holds a pivotal presidential runoff influenced by Trump, the far right and the war in Ukraine

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Poland is set to hold a presidential runoff election on Sunday between two candidates offering starkly different visions for the country's future.

The winner will succeed President Andrzej Duda, a conservative who is finishing his second and final term. The outcome will determine whether Poland embraces a nationalist populist trajectory or pivots more fully toward liberal, pro-European policies. An exit poll by Ipsos will be released when polls close on Sunday at 9 p.m. local time, with a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points. Final results are expected Monday.

Whoever wins can be expected to either help or hinder the agenda of the centrist government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk thanks to the presidential power to veto laws.

An unpredictable vote at a time of tensions

The vote comes amid heightened regional tensions driven by Russia's war in neighboring Ukraine, security concerns across Europe and internal debates about the rule of law.

It follows a first round on May 18, in which Warsaw Mayor Rafał Trzaskowski won more than 31% of the vote and Karol Nawrocki, a conservative historian, earned nearly 30%. Eleven other candidates were eliminated.

Opinion polls show the two men running neck and neck. Other factors add to the unpredictability. Nawrocki did much better in the first round than surveys had predicted, indicating that his strength was underestimated. On the other hand, large numbers of Poles abroad have registered to vote in the second round, which could help Trzaskowski.

The candidates

Nawrocki is a 42-year-old historian who was tapped as by the national conservative Law and Justice party despite a lack of political experience or party membership. But this is seen as acting in his favor, as the party, which governed for 2015-2023, seeks to refresh its image before a parliamentary election in 2027.

Nawrocki's supporters describe him as the embodiment of traditional, patriotic Polish values. They believe U.S. President Donald Trump's support for him will strengthen Poland's ties with the United States and make the country safer.

Trzaskowski, 53, is Warsaw's mayor and a close ally of Tusk. A deputy leader of Civic Platform, a pro-

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European Union party, he has been prominent in national politics for years. This is his second presidential bid after narrowly losing to Duda in 2020.

Supporters credit him with modernizing Warsaw through infrastructure, public transit expansion and cultural investments. He is widely seen as pragmatic and focused on strengthening ties with other European nations.

A global ideological war

Nawrocki recently received a boost from Trump and other U.S. conservatives, who see the Polish election as part of a global battle between liberal and populist right-wing forces.

His campaign has echoed themes popular on the American right, including skepticism toward EU bureaucracy and emphasis on Christian identity. His supporters feel that Trzaskowski, with his pro-EU views, would hand over control of key Polish issues to Paris and Berlin.

Nawrocki also has been endorsed by the Trump administration and conservative Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

Many European centrists are rooting for Trzaskowski, seeing in him someone who would defend democracy as it faces pressure from authoritarian forces across the globe. He has received the support of new centrist Romanian President Nicusor Dan — who recently defeated a far-right nationalist.

Nawrocki's scandals

Nawrocki has faced a number of scandals over the past months, but it's not clear that they are hurting him. In fact, they might have the opposite effect. Many right-wing voters don't believe the allegations and accuse the media of using its power to hurt him, creating what appears to be a rallying effect around him.

Nawrocki himself has acknowledged that he took part in an organized brawl including football hooligans in 2009. A former boxer, he said he has taken part in various forms of "noble male battle" in his life.

Polish media have also reported on his connections to gangsters and the world of prostitution.

Tusk accused Law and Justice party leader Jarosław Kaczyński of tapping Nawrocki despite questions about his past.

"You knew about everything, Jarosław. About the connections with the gangsters, about 'fixing girls,'" Tusk wrote on X. "The entire responsibility for this catastrophe falls on you!"

The key issues at stake

1. Security and war in Ukraine: With Russia's war in Ukraine in its fourth year, Polish voters are acutely attuned to issues of regional security. Both candidates support continued backing for Ukraine, but to different degrees. Nawrocki believes that Ukraine should never join NATO, while Trzaskowski believes Ukraine should be allowed to join one day when the current war is over.

2. Rule of law and democracy: Trzaskowski has pledged to support the restoration of judicial independence and repair relations with the EU, which viewed changes by Law and Justice as anti-democratic. Tusk has tried to change some legislation, but has faced resistance from the outgoing president, Duda. Nawrocki, while less outspoken than his party patrons, is seen as likely to preserve Law and Justice's changes that politicized the courts.

3. Women's rights: Abortion remains a divisive issue in Poland, especially after a near-total ban was imposed under Law and Justice. Trzaskowski supports loosening restrictions and has backed proposals to legalize abortion up to 12 weeks. Nawrocki opposes any liberalization and has campaigned as a defender of traditional conservative values.

Alf Clausen, Emmy-winning composer who wrote music for 'The Simpsons' for 27 years, dies at 84

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Alf Clausen, the Emmy-winning composer whose music provided essential accompaniment for the animated antics of "The Simpsons" for 27 years, has died.

His daughter Kaarin Clausen told The Associated Press that Alf Clausen died Thursday at his home in Los Angeles after struggling with Parkinson's Disease for about a decade. He was 84.

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Clausen, who also scored TV series including "Moonlighting" and "Alf" ("no relation," he used to joke) was nominated for 30 Emmy Awards, 21 of them for "The Simpsons," winning twice.

Al Jean, an early "Simpsons" writer who was one of the key creative figures on the show in the 1990s, said in a post on X Friday that "Clausen was an incredibly talented man who did so much for The Simpsons."

While Danny Elfman wrote the show's theme song, Clausen joined the Fox animated series created by Matt Groening in 1990 and provided essentially all of its music until 2017, composing nearly 600 scores and conducting the 35-piece orchestra that played it in the studio.

His colleagues said his music was a key component of the show's comedy, but Clausen believed the best way to back up the gags of Homer, Marge Bart and Lisa was by making the music as straight as possible.

"This is a dream job for a composer," Clausen told Variety, which first reported his death, in 1998. "Matt Groening said to me very early on, 'We're not a cartoon. We're a drama where the characters are drawn. I want you to score it like a drama.' I score the emotions of the characters as opposed to specific action hits on the screen."

Groening, in a 1996 interview, called him "one of the unacknowledged treasures of the show."

Clausen was born in Minneapolis and raised in Jamestown, North Dakota. He graduated from the Berklee College of Music in 1966, and moved to Los Angeles seeking a career in music.

In the 1970s he was a musical director on several TV variety shows including "Donny & Marie."

Clausen worked as an orchestrator for composer Lee Holdridge in his scores for 1980s films including "Splash" and "The Beastmaster."

It was Holdridge who first got the composing job on "Moonlighting," the late-80s ABC rom-com detective series starring Bruce Willis and Cybil Shepherd, but he handed the gig off to Clausen, who would get six Emmy nominations for his music on it.

Clausen won his Emmys for "The Simpsons" in 1997 and 1998 and also won five Annie Awards, which honor work in animation in film and television.

He was fired from "The Simpsons" in a cost-cutting move in 2017, to the outrage of his collaborators and fans. He sued over his dismissal.

Clausen is survived by his wife Sally, children Kaarin, Scott and Kyle, stepchildren Josh and Emily, and 11 grandchildren.

The country that made smoking sexy is breaking up with cigarettes

By THOMAS ADAMSON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Brigitte Bardot lounged barefoot on a Saint-Tropez beach, drawing languorous puffs from her cigarette. Another actor, Jean-Paul Belmondo, swaggered down the Champs-Élysées with smoke curling from his defiant lips, capturing a generation's restless rebellion.

In France, cigarettes were never just cigarettes — they were cinematic statements, flirtations and rebellions wrapped in rolling paper.

Yet beginning July 1, if Bardot and Belmondo's iconic film scenes were repeated in real life, they would be subject to up to €135 (\$153) in fines.

After glamorizing tobacco for decades, France is preparing for its most sweeping smoking ban yet. The new restrictions, announced by Health Minister Catherine Vautrin, will outlaw smoking in virtually all outdoor public areas where children may gather, including beaches, parks, gardens, playgrounds, sports venues, school entrances and bus stops.

"Tobacco must disappear where there are children," Vautrin told French media. The freedom to smoke "stops where children's right to breathe clean air starts."

If Vautrin's law reflects public health priorities, it also signals a deeper cultural shift. Smoking has defined identity, fashion and cinema here for so long that the new measure feels like a quiet French revolution in a country whose relationship with tobacco is famously complex.

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According to France's League Against Cancer, over 90 percent of French films from 2015 to 2019 featured smoking scenes — more than double the rate in Hollywood productions. Each French movie averaged nearly three minutes of on-screen smoking, effectively the same exposure as six 30-second television ads.

Cinema has been particularly influential. Belmondo's rebellious smoker in Jean-Luc Godard's "Breathless" became shorthand for youthful defiance worldwide. Bardot's cigarette smoke wafted through "And God Created Woman," symbolizing unbridled sensuality.

Yet this glamorization has consequences. According to France's public health authorities, around 75,000 people die from tobacco-related illnesses each year. Although smoking rates have dipped recently — fewer than 25% of French adults now smoke daily, a historic low — the habit remains stubbornly embedded, especially among young people and the urban chic.

France's relationship with tobacco has long been fraught with contradiction. Air France did not ban smoking on all its flights until 2000, years after major U.S. carriers began phasing it out in the late 1980s and early '90s. The delay reflected a country slower to sever its cultural romance with cigarettes, even at 35,000 feet.

Strolling through the stylish streets of Le Marais, the trendiest neighborhood in Paris, reactions to the smoking ban ranged from pragmatic acceptance to nostalgic defiance.

"It's about time. I don't want my kids growing up thinking smoke is romantic," said Clémence Laurent, a 34-year-old fashion buyer, sipping espresso at a crowded café terrace. "Sure, Bardot made cigarettes seem glamorous. But Bardot didn't worry about today's warnings on lung cancer."

At a nearby boutique, vintage dealer Luc Baudry, 53, saw the ban as an attack on something essentially French. "Smoking has always been part of our culture. Take away cigarettes and what do we have left? Kale smoothies?" he scoffed.

Across from him, 72-year-old Jeanne Lévy chuckled throatily, her voice deeply etched — she said — by decades of Gauloises. "I smoked my first cigarette watching Jeanne Moreau," she confessed, eyes twinkling behind vintage sunglasses. "It was her voice — smoky, sexy, lived-in. Who didn't want that voice?"

Indeed, Jeanne Moreau's gravelly, nicotine-scraped voice transformed tobacco into poetry itself, immortalized in classics such as François Truffaut's "Jules et Jim." Smoking acquired an existential glamour that made quitting unimaginable for generations of French smokers.

France's new law mirrors broader European trends. Britain, Spain and Sweden have all implemented significant smoking bans in public spaces. Sweden outlawed smoking in outdoor restaurant terraces, bus stops and schoolyards back in 2019. Spain extended its bans to café terraces, spaces still exempt in France—at least for now.

In the Paris park Place des Vosges, literature student Thomas Bouchard clutched an electronic cigarette that is still exempt from the new ban and shrugged.

"Maybe vaping's our compromise," he said, exhaling gently. "A little less sexy, perhaps. But fewer wrinkles too."

Key moments from the third week of Sean 'Diddy' Combs' sex trafficking trial

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Some of Sean "Diddy" Combs' ex-employees took a central role in the third week of his sex trafficking trial, including personal assistants who testified that the hip-hop mogul was capricious, controlling and violent.

The week began with Capricorn Clark, a personal assistant who was later a global brand director for Combs' company. She recalled witnessing Combs beating his longtime girlfriend, the R&B singer Cassie, and said he raged about wanting to kill rapper and romantic rival Kid Cudi.

It ended with another ex-assistant, testifying under the pseudonym "Mia," who alleges Combs raped her during a torturous eight-year tenure working for the rap star. She is the second of three women expected to testify that he sexually assaulted them. Combs has pleaded not guilty.

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The trial resumes Monday in federal court in Manhattan.

Here are key moments from Week 3:

Ex-Combs aide says fear stopped her from calling police

Former employees of Combs' Bad Boy Entertainment described repeatedly witnessing him beat Cassie, whose real name is Casandra Ventura, but said they didn't report the abuse to law enforcement because they feared Combs would harm them.

Clark testified that the day she started as Combs' personal assistant in 2004, he threatened he would kill her if her previous work for rival rappers interfered with her work for him.

Then, she testified, she watched in shock as Combs viciously assaulted Cassie, his on-again, off-again girlfriend for more than a decade, in 2011 after learning she was dating Cudi. Clark said her "heart was breaking from seeing her get hit like that," and neither she nor Combs' bodyguard intervened.

She said she called Cassie's mother and told her: "Please help her. I can't call the police, but you can."

Weeks later, Clark said, she reported what happened to Cassie to the president of Bad Boy Records.

She also testified about her own run-ins with Combs, telling jurors that he kidnapped her at gunpoint and took her to Cudi's house as he fumed that he was going to kill the rapper. Cudi testified that he believed Cassie and Combs had broken up. He said his relationship with Cassie only lasted a few weeks.

Clark said she stayed in Combs' SUV while he broke into the home. She said she was fired weeks later for what she contends was a trumped-up reason.

Cassie delivers her third child after testifying for four days

One of the week's biggest developments came outside the courtroom. Cassie, 38, delivered her third child less than two weeks after testifying for four days as the prosecution's prize witness.

The news of her son's birth Tuesday reached the jury the next day when Cassie's longtime stylist, Deonte Nash, testified that he was still close to Cassie and had sent her well wishes after the birth.

Cassie, known for the platinum-selling 2006 hit single "Me & U," married personal trainer Alex Fine in September 2019 — about a year after breaking up with Combs for good. Their first daughter, Frankie Stone Fine, was born in 2019. They welcomed a second daughter, Sunny Cinco Fine, in 2021.

Attacks on Kid Cudi's property put law enforcement on the stand

Jurors heard from a Los Angeles police officer who responded to the December 2011 break-in at Cudi's home and an arson investigator who spoke about his efforts to solve the firebombing of Cudi's Porsche 911 weeks later.

Officer Chris Ignacio said he found Christmas gifts, some opened, with luxury watches and purses. Cudi has testified that his dog was traumatized after being locked in a bathroom by intruders.

Ignacio said he saw a car with tinted windows registered to Bad Boy outside the house but didn't approach it because he had no proof a crime had occurred.

Prosecutors are trying to prove that Combs was behind the break-in and the subsequent firebombing, which involved a Molotov cocktail dropped through a hole sliced in the convertible's fabric roof.

Lance Jimenez, a Los Angeles Fire Department arson investigator, said the explosive was made from a 40-ounce Olde English 800 malt liquor bottle and a silky designer handkerchief.

"I personally felt it was targeted," he said of the Jan. 9, 2012, attack.

A stylist delivers answers from the witness stand like nobody else

Celebrity stylist Deonte Nash was a witness like no other, adding flair and humor within seconds of taking the stand on Wednesday. Asked if he wanted to testify, he declared: "Absolutely not!"

Nash said he knew Combs as "Puff" and Cassie as "Cass." He said he responded to a Craigslist ad and started working at Bad Boy Entertainment as an intern and then a stylist from 2008 to 2018.

Prosecutor Maurene Comey put a picture of Nash in front of him and asked, "Is it a glamour shot of you?"

"Yes. I look amazing," Nash responded, drawing laughs.

Asked what he had heard Combs call Cassie over the years, Nash answered "Um, Baby Girl, CC, Cass" and then listed a number of slurs against women. Asked how often Combs used one particular slur, Nash said: "Um, quite a bit. That was his fave."

Nash later testified that Cassie had confided in him that she didn't always want to go along with Combs' demands that she have sex with other men during his drug-fueled "freak-off" marathons.

A second woman testifies she was raped by Combs

Mia testified that Combs sexually assaulted her on multiple occasions: forcibly kissing her and putting his hand up her dress at his 40th birthday party, forcing her to perform oral sex as they packed for a trip, and raping her after he climbed into her bed at his Los Angeles home.

Mia said she thought her sexual abuse was sporadic enough that each time it occurred, she thought it would never happen again. She said she put on a brave face and continued to work for Combs, in part because she felt shame, blamed herself and feared what would happen if she reported him to authorities.

Cassie testified previously that Combs raped her after she broke up with him in 2018.

Mia said she witnessed Combs physically attacking Cassie "all the time" at his houses, her apartments, hotels, events and while traveling. She said Combs also turned his wrath on her, throwing her into a swimming pool, dumping a bucket of ice on her and hurling a bowl of spaghetti in her direction.

As prosecution's case shrinks, defense's may expand

Prosecutors insisted all week that they are ahead of schedule in presenting their case and said they could be done calling witnesses by mid-June.

But Combs lawyer Marc Agnifilo said the defense's presentation might take longer than expected — particularly after prosecutors revealed they were making "fairly substantial changes" to their plan.

"It may be that because of witnesses the government is not calling, we might have more on the defense case," he said.

As a result, he added, the trial might run to the start of July.

A growing number of New Orleans fugitives' friends and family arrested for aiding in jail escape

By JACK BROOK Associated Press/Report for America

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The 10 men who escaped from a New Orleans jail more than two weeks ago by cutting out a hole behind a toilet received help from at least 14 people, many of them friends and family who provided food, cash, transport and shelter according to court documents.

Records reviewed by The Associated Press show how some of the fugitives received aid before and after their escape — including from a number of people named in police reports but not yet facing charges.

A former jail employee is accused of driving escapee Lenton Vanburen to a relative's home and helping him FaceTime family the day of the escape, while another friend later offered him a hiding place in a vacant apartment he had been hired to repaint.

Others sent money via apps, lied to authorities during interrogation and messaged or called the fugitives, police say. Some are now held on bonds \$1 million or higher and most face the felony charge of accessory after the fact.

In a city with an entrenched mistrust of the criminal justice system, authorities on Thursday raised the reward to \$50,000 per fugitive. They stressed that friends and family are key to capturing the two remaining escapees, convicted murderer Derrick Groves and Antoine Massey, who faces kidnapping and rape charges.

"We understand that some of you might be reporting a friend, a loved one, a relative and albeit not easy, it is critical to your safety and the safety of the public that you report them," Jonathan Tapp, special agent in charge of FBI New Orleans, said Thursday.

Former jail employee appears linked to escape

After the audacious escape in the early hours of May 16, a woman who police described as "associated" with Groves "picked up" and transported escapee Vanburen to a relative's residence, the documents show.

She then video-called Vanburen's sisters, who came to meet him.

This woman — who has not been charged with aiding in the escape — shares the same name as a former Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office employee, according to court records. In 2023, that employee was arrested for bringing a folding knife and a bag of Cheetos containing tobacco and marijuana into the jail.

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The charges were dropped in part due to the woman's lack of criminal history and she "successfully completed" a pretrial diversion program, the Orleans Parish District Attorney's office told The Associated Press. The Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office did not respond to request for comment.

In a text message to an AP reporter, the woman denied bringing in contraband or aiding fugitives.

Separately, authorities arrested a jail plumber they say helped the men escape, but his attorney maintains he was just trying to unclog a toilet.

Phone records aid in arrests

Several escapees, including Massey, relied on internet phone services to communicate with accomplices and "avoid detection" by not leaving a trail of cellular signals, police reports say.

Escapee Corey Boyd used an internet phone service to message several contacts seeking money and access to their iCloud accounts, threatening to kill one person if they did not comply, court records show.

The FBI reviewed months of calls from Boyd's "top caller" while incarcerated. They then found a brief call from a new phone number the night after the escape and used that to help track down Boyd. They discovered that Boyd's aunt was messaging him on Instagram to help him get food as hid in the apartment where a SWAT team captured him May 20.

A victim of abuse arrested as accomplice

One of the women accused of helping Massey suffered from years of physical abuse from him, court records show.

The woman, who had previously filed a protective order against Massey after he attempted to strangle her, was aware of his planned escape and later misled authorities, police say.

She exchanged messages with Massey's 31-year-old sister saying they hoped he "never gets caught."

Authorities staked out the New Orleans home of Massey's sister but a search six days after the escape turned up empty-handed. Police learned Massey had been inside the home before the raid and altered and deleted evidence on his sister's phone.

Court records show police accuse Massey's sister of lying to them, slowing down the manhunt and forcing them to lose "critical days and hours" in the search.

Authorities appeal to public for help

At least seven of the people facing felony charges for aiding the fugitives have ties to Lenton Vanburen, Jr. according to authorities.

After alerting two of his sisters by prison phone in the hours before his escape, he instructed they contact "my girl" and provide her with a "clean phone" so the two could communicate.

The woman identified by police as Vanburen's love interest told The Associated Press she never received the phone and denied involvement in the escape plans.

Vanburen's sisters met up with him the night of his escape at a family member's residence where he was able to shower, change clothes and was given toiletries. Another family member later reportedly took him to a relative's home in Mississippi.

Vanburen was ultimately captured in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on Monday and two men arrested this week were accused of helping him find shelter in a hotel — paid for in cash — and an apartment undergoing renovation. The Baton Rouge court system had no record of their legal representation.

In another case, a 59-year-old Louisiana woman is accused of sending cash to fugitive Jermaine Donald, a family friend, according to her attorney.

Lindsey Hortenstine, communications director for the Orleans Parish Public Defenders' office, said that most of the people arrested in connection with helping the fugitives have not yet secured attorneys.

Louisiana State Police Superintendent Colonel Robert Hodges said tips from friends and family remain essential to locating the remaining fugitives.

"They're tired, they're looking over their shoulder, looking for resources," Hodges said. "I think the advantage goes to law enforcement and we need the public's help to ensure that we keep that advantage."

States are rolling out red carpets for data centers. But some lawmakers are pushing back

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — The explosive growth of the data centers needed to power America's fast-rising demand for artificial intelligence and cloud computing platforms has spurred states to dangle incentives in hopes of landing an economic bonanza, but it's also eliciting pushback from lawmakers and communities.

Activity in state legislatures — and competition for data centers — has been brisk in recent months, amid an intensifying buildout of the energy-hungry data centers and a search for new sites that was ignited by the late 2022 debut of OpenAI's ChatGPT.

Many states are offering financial incentives worth tens of millions of dollars. In some cases, those incentives are winning approval, but only after a fight or efforts to require data centers to pay for their own electricity or meet energy efficiency standards.

Some state lawmakers have contested the incentives in places where a heavy influx of massive data centers has caused friction with neighboring communities. In large part, the fights revolve around the things that tech companies and data center developers seem to most want: large tracts of land, tax breaks and huge volumes of electricity and water.

And their needs are exploding in size: from dozens of megawatts to hundreds of megawatts and from dozens of acres up to hundreds of acres for large-scale data centers sometimes called a hyperscaler.

While critics say data centers employ relatively few people and pack little long-term job-creation punch, their advocates say they require a huge number of construction jobs to build, spend enormous sums on goods and local vendors and generate strong tax revenues for local governments.

In Pennsylvania, lawmakers are writing legislation to fast-track permitting for data centers. The state is viewed as an up-and-coming data center destination, but there is also a sense that Pennsylvania is missing out on billions of dollars in investment that's landing in other states.

"Pennsylvania has companies that are interested, we have a labor force that is capable and we have a lot of water and natural gas," said state Rep. Eric Nelson. "That's the winning combination. We just have a bureaucratic process that won't open its doors."

It's been a big year for data centers

Kansas approved a new sales tax exemption on goods to build and equip data centers, while Kentucky and Arkansas expanded pre-existing exemptions so that more projects will qualify.

Michigan approved one that carries some protections, including requirements to use municipal utility water and clean energy, meet energy-efficiency measures and ensure that it pays for its own electricity.

Such tax exemptions are now so widespread — about three dozen states have some version of it — that it is viewed as a must-have for a state to compete.

"It's often a nonstarter if you don't have them, for at least the hyperscalers," said Andy Cvenegros, who helps lead the data center practice at commercial real estate giant JLL. "It's just such a massive impact on the overall spend of the data center."

Zoning, energy fights often frustrate developers

In West Virginia, lawmakers approved a bill to create "microgrid" districts free from local zoning and electric rate regulations where data centers can procure power from standalone power plants.

Gov. Patrick Morrisey, a Republican, called the bill his "landmark policy proposal" for 2025 to put West Virginia "in a class of its own to attract new data centers and information technology companies."

Utah and Oklahoma passed laws to make it easier for data center developers to procure their own power supply without going through the grid while Mississippi rolled out tens of millions of dollars in incentives last year to land a pair of Amazon data centers.

In South Carolina, Gov. Henry McMaster signed legislation earlier this month that eased regulations to speed up power plant construction to meet demand from data centers, including a massive Facebook facility.

The final bill was fought by some lawmakers who say they worried about data centers using disproportional

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tionate amounts of water, taking up large tracts of land and forcing regular ratepayers to finance the cost of new power plants.

"I do not like that we're making customers pay for two power plants when they only need one," Senate Majority Leader Shane Massey told colleagues during floor debate.

Still, state Sen. Russell Ott suggested that data centers should be viewed like any other electricity customer because they reflect a society that is "addicted" to electricity and are "filling that need and that desire of what we all want. And we're all guilty of it. We're all responsible for it."

Some lawmakers are hesitant

In data center hotspots, some lawmakers are pushing back.

Lawmakers in Oregon are advancing legislation to order utility regulators to ensure data centers pay the cost of power plants and power lines necessary to serve them.

Georgia lawmakers are debating a similar bill.

In Virginia, the most heavily developed data center zone in the U.S., Gov. Glenn Youngkin vetoed a bill that would have forced more disclosures from data center developers about their site's noise pollution and water use.

In Texas, which endured a deadly winter blackout in 2021, lawmakers are wrestling with how to protect the state's electric grid from fast-growing data center demand.

Lawmakers still want to attract data centers, but a bill that would speed up direct hookups between data centers and power plants has provisions that are drawing protests from business groups.

Those provisions would give utility regulators new authority to approve those agreements and order big electric users such as data centers to switch to backup generators in a power emergency.

Walt Baum, the CEO of Powering Texans, which represents competitive power plant owners, warned lawmakers that those provisions might be making data center developers hesitant to do business in Texas.

"You've seen a lot of new announcements in other states and over the last several months and not as much here in Texas," Baum told House members during a May 7 committee hearing. "I think everybody right now is in a waiting pattern and I worry that we could be losing to other states while that waiting pattern is happening."

Loretta Swit, Emmy-winner who played Maj. Houlihan on pioneering series 'M.A.S.H.,' has died at 87

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Loretta Swit, who won two Emmy Awards playing Maj. Margaret Houlihan, the demanding head nurse of a behind-the-lines surgical unit during the Korean War on the pioneering hit TV series "M.A.S.H.," has died. She was 87.

Publicist Harlan Boll says Swit died Friday at her home in New York City, likely from natural causes.

Swit and Alan Alda were the longest-serving cast members on "M.A.S.H.," which was based on Robert Altman's 1970 film, which was itself based on a novel by Richard Hooker, the pseudonym of H. Richard Hornberger.

The CBS show aired for 11 years from 1972 to 1983, revolving around life at the 4077th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, which gave the show its name. The two-and-a-half-hour finale on Feb. 28, 1983, lured over 100 million viewers, the most-watched episode of any scripted series ever.

Rolling Stone magazine put "M.A.S.H." at No. 25 of the best TV shows of all time, while Time Out put it at No. 34. It won the Impact Award at the 2009 TV Land annual awards. It won a Peabody Award in 1975 "for the depth of its humor and the manner in which comedy is used to lift the spirit and, as well, to offer a profound statement on the nature of war."

Swit transforms the character of Houlihan

In Altman's 1970 film, Houlihan was a one-dimensional character — a prickly, rules-bound head nurse who was regularly tormented by male colleagues, who gave her the nickname "Hot Lips." Her intimate moments were broadcast to the entire camp after somebody planted a microphone under her bed.

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Sally Kellerman played Houlihan in the movie version and Swit took it over for TV, eventually deepening and creating her into a much fuller character. Her sexuality was played down and she wasn't even called "Hot Lips" in the later years.

The growing awareness of feminism in the '70s spurred Houlihan's transformation from caricature to real person, but a lot of the change was due to Swit's influence on the scriptwriters.

"Around the second or third year I decided to try to play her as a real person, in an intelligent fashion, even if it meant hurting the jokes," Swit told Suzy Kalter, author of "The Complete Book of 'M.A.S.H.'"

"To oversimplify it, I took each traumatic change that happened in her life and kept it. I didn't go into the next episode as if it were a different character in a different play. She was a character in constant flux; she never stopped developing."

Alda praised Swit as a "supremely talented actor" in a post on X. "She worked hard in showing the writing staff how they could turn the character from a one joke sexist stereotype into a real person — with real feelings and ambitions. We celebrated the day the script came out listing her character not as Hot Lips, but as Margaret. Loretta made the most of her time here."

"M.A.S.H." wasn't an instant hit. It finished its first season in 46th place, out of 75 network TV series, but it nabbed nine Emmy nominations. It was rewarded with a better time slot for its sophomore season, paired on Saturday nights with "All in the Family," then TV's highest-rated show. At the 1974 Emmys, it was crowned best comedy, with Alda winning as best comedy actor.

The series also survived despite cast churn. In addition to Swit and Alda, the first season featured Wayne Rogers, McLean Stevenson, Larry Linville and Gary Burghoff. Harry Morgan, Mike Farrell and David Ogden Stiers would later be added, while Jamie Farr and William Christopher had expanded roles.

"Loretta Swit's portrayal of Margaret 'Hot Lips' Houlihan was groundbreaking — bringing heart, humor, and strength to one of television comedy's most enduring roles. Her talent extended well beyond that iconic character, with acclaimed work on both stage and screen that showcased her intelligence, versatility, and passion," National Comedy Center Executive Director Journey Gunderson said in a statement.

'More of a real person'

Swit appeared in all but 11 episodes of the series, nearly four times longer than the Korean War itself, exploring issues like PTSD, sexism and racism. Swit pushed for a better representation for women.

"One of the things I liked, with Loretta's prodding, was every time I had a chance to write for her character, we'd get away from the Hot Lips angle and find out more about who Margaret was. She became more of a real person," Alda told The Hollywood Reporter in 2018.

The series ended on a happy note for Houlihan, who spends much of the finale debating whether she wants to head to Tokyo or Belgium for her next overseas post. Ultimately she opts to return to America and work at a hospital, citing her father — a career Army man.

Swit didn't personally agree that was the correct decision for a military-minded official: "I didn't think that was correct for my Margaret," she told Yahoo Entertainment in 2023. "I think her next move was Vietnam. So I didn't agree with that, but that's what they wanted her to do."

But the actor did get to write the speech that Houlihan delivers to her fellow nurses on their final night together, in which she says: "It's been an honor and privilege to have worked with you. And I'm very, very proud to have known you."

"I was consumed with writing that. And I still get letters from women all over the world who became nurses because of Margaret Houlihan. To have contributed to someone's life like that is remarkable," she told Yahoo Entertainment.

During her run, Houlihan had an affair with Hawkeye's foil, the bumbling Frank Burns, played by Linville in the TV version, and in Season 5, Houlihan returns from a stay in Tokyo engaged to a handsome lieutenant colonel, a storyline that Swit says she advocated for with the writers.

"I told them: 'Can you imagine what fun you're going to have with Larry when I come back to town and I tell him I'm engaged? He'll rip the doors off of the mess tent!' And that's exactly what they had him do. So we were all of the same mind."

Toward the end, Swit was tempted to leave the show. She played the role of Chris Cagney in a 1981

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television movie, "Cagney & Lacey," and was offered the part when it was picked up as a midseason series for the spring of 1982. But producers insisted she stay with "M.A.S.H." for its last two seasons.

Swit told The Florida Times-Union in 2010 she might have stayed with "M.A.S.H." anyway. "You can't help but get better as an actor working with scripts like that," she said. "If you're in something that literate, well, we got spoiled."

In 2022, James Poniewozik, The New York Times's chief television critic, looked back on the show and said it held up well: "Its blend of madcap comedy and pitch-dark drama — the laughs amplifying the serious stakes, and vice versa — is recognizable in today's dramedies, from 'Better Things' to 'Barry,' that work in the DMZ between laughter and sadness."

After the TV series, Swit became a vocal animal welfare activist, selling SwitHeart perfume and her memoir through her official website, with proceeds benefiting various animal-related nonprofit groups.

In 1983, she married actor Dennis Holahan, whom she'd met when he was a guest star on "M.A.S.H." They divorced in 1995.

Swit was born in New Jersey

Born in Passaic, New Jersey, the daughter of Polish immigrants, Swit enrolled in the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, then paid her dues for years in touring productions.

In 1969, she arrived in Hollywood and was soon seen in series such as "Gunsmoke," "Hawaii Five-O," "Mission Impossible" and "Bonanza." Then in 1972, she got her big break when she was asked to audition for the role of "Hot Lips."

She would regularly return to theater, starring on Broadway in 1975 in "Same Time, Next Year" and "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" in 1986. She was in "Amorous Crossing," a romantic comedy, at Alhambra Theatre & Dining in 2010 and in North Carolina Theatre's production of "Mame" in 2003.

Hamas says it is still reviewing a US proposal for a Gaza ceasefire

By ABDEL KAREEM HANA and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Hamas said Friday it was still reviewing a U.S. proposal for a temporary ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, where 27 people were killed in new Israeli airstrikes, according to hospital officials.

The ceasefire plan, which has been approved by Israeli officials, won a cool initial reaction Thursday from the militant group. But President Donald Trump said Friday negotiators were nearing a deal.

"They're very close to an agreement on Gaza, and we'll let you know about it during the day or maybe tomorrow," Trump told reporters in Washington. Late in the evening, asked if he was confident Hamas would approve the deal, he told reporters: "They're in a big mess. I think they want to get out of it."

U.S. negotiators have not publicized the terms of the proposal. But a Hamas official and an Egyptian official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive talks, said Thursday that it called for a 60-day pause in fighting, guarantees of serious negotiations leading to a long-term truce and assurances that Israel will not resume hostilities after the release of hostages, as it did in March.

In a terse statement issued a few hours before Trump spoke, Hamas said it is holding consultations with Palestinian factions over the proposal it had received from U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff.

A United Nations spokesperson, Stephane Dujarric, urged the parties to "find the political courage" to secure an agreement.

While changes may have been made to the proposal, the version confirmed earlier called for Israeli forces to pull back to the positions they held before it ended the last ceasefire. Hamas would release 10 living hostages and a number of bodies during the 60-day pause in exchange for more than 1,100 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, including 100 serving long sentences after being convicted of deadly attacks.

Each day, hundreds of trucks carrying food and humanitarian aid would be allowed to enter Gaza, where experts say a nearly three-month Israeli blockade — slightly eased in recent days — has pushed the population to the brink of famine.

"Negotiations are ongoing on the current proposal," Qatar's ambassador to the United Nations, Alya

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Ahmed Saif Al-Thani said Friday, referring to talks between her country, the United States and Egypt. "We are very determined to find an ending to this horrific situation in Gaza."

On Thursday, a top Hamas official, Bassem Naim, said the U.S. proposal "does not respond to any of our people's demands, foremost among which is stopping the war and famine."

The uncertainty over the new proposal came as hospital officials said that 27 people had been killed Friday in separate airstrikes. A strike that hit a tent in the southern city of Khan Younis killed 13, including eight children, hospital officials said. The Israeli military did not immediately comment.

Meanwhile, the bodies of 12 people, including three women, were brought to Shifa Hospital on Friday from the nearby Jabaliya refugee camp. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society said the bodies of two others were brought to a hospital in Gaza City.

Hospital officials also said Friday that at least 72 had been killed in Gaza during the previous day. That figure does not include some hospitals in the north, which are largely cut off due to the fighting.

Since the war began, more than 54,000 Gaza residents, mostly women and children, have been killed according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its tally.

The war began when Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023, killing around 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and taking 250 hostages. Of those taken captive, 58 remain in Gaza, but Israel believes 35 are dead and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said there are "doubts" about the fate of several others.

Some Gaza residents said their hope for a ceasefire is tempered by repeated disappointment over negotiations that failed to deliver a lasting deal.

"This is the war of starvation, death, siege and long lines for food and toilets," Mohammed Abed told The Associated Press in the central Gaza city of Deir al-Balah. "This war is the 2025 nightmare, 2024 nightmare and 2023 nightmare."

Abed said he and his family struggle to find food, waiting three hours to get a small amount of rice and eating only one meal daily.

"It's heartbreaking that people are being starved because of politics. Food and water should not be used for political purposes," he said.

Another Gaza resident, Mohammed Mreil, said about the possibility of a truce that: "We want to live and we want them (Israelis) to live. God did not create us to die."

Trump tells US steelworkers he's going to double tariffs on foreign steel to 50%

By MICHELLE L. PRICE, MARC LEVY and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WEST MIFFLIN, Pa. (AP) — President Donald Trump on Friday told Pennsylvania steelworkers he's doubling the tariff on steel imports to 50% to protect their industry, a dramatic increase that could further push up prices for a metal used to make housing, autos and other goods.

In a post later on his Truth Social platform, he added that aluminum tariffs would also be doubled to 50%. He said both tariff hikes would go into effect Wednesday.

Trump spoke at U.S. Steel's Mon Valley Works-Irvin Plant in suburban Pittsburgh, where he also discussed a details-to-come deal under which Japan's Nippon Steel will invest in the iconic American steelmaker.

Trump told reporters after he arrived back in Washington that he still has to approve the deal.

"I have to approve the final deal with Nippon and we haven't seen that final deal yet, but they've made a very big commitment and it's a very big investment," he said.

Though Trump initially vowed to block the Japanese steelmaker's bid to buy Pittsburgh-based U.S. Steel, he reversed course and announced an agreement last week for "partial ownership" by Nippon.

It's unclear, though, if the deal his administration helped broker has been finalized or how ownership would be structured. Nippon Steel has never said it is backing off its bid to outright buy and control U.S. Steel as a wholly owned subsidiary, even as it increased the amount of money it promised to invest in

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U.S. Steel plants and gave guarantees that it wouldn't lay off workers or close plants as it sought federal approval of the acquisition.

"We're here today to celebrate a blockbuster agreement that will ensure this storied American company stays an American company," Trump said as he opened an event at one of U.S. Steel's warehouses. "You're going to stay an American company, you know that, right?"

As for the tariffs, Trump said doubling the levies on imported steel "will even further secure the steel industry in the U.S." But such a dramatic increase could push prices even higher.

Steel prices have climbed 16% since Trump became president in mid-January, according to the government's Producer Price Index.

As of March 2025, steel cost \$984 a metric ton in the United States, significantly more than the price in Europe (\$690) or China (\$392), according to the U.S. Commerce Department. The United States produced about three times as much steel as it imported last year, with Canada, Brazil, Mexico and South Korea being the largest sources of steel imports.

Analysts have credited tariffs going back to Trump's first term with helping strengthen the domestic steel industry, something that Nippon Steel wanted to capitalize on in its offer to buy U.S. Steel.

The United Steelworkers union remained skeptical.

Its president, David McCall, said in a statement that the union is most concerned "with the impact that this merger of U.S. Steel into a foreign competitor will have on national security, our members and the communities where we live and work."

Trump stressed the deal would maintain American control of the storied company, which is seen as both a political symbol and an important matter for the country's supply chain, industries like auto manufacturing and national security.

Trump, who has been eager to strike deals and announce new investments in the U.S. since retaking the White House, is also trying to satisfy voters, including blue-collar workers, who elected him as he called to protect U.S. manufacturing.

U.S. Steel has not publicly communicated any details of a revamped deal to investors. Nippon Steel issued a statement approving of the proposed "partnership" but also has not disclosed terms.

State and federal lawmakers who have been briefed on the matter describe a deal in which Nippon will buy U.S. Steel and spend billions on U.S. Steel facilities in Pennsylvania, Indiana, Alabama, Arkansas and Minnesota. The company would be overseen by an executive suite and board made up mostly of Americans and protected by the U.S. government's veto power in the form of a "golden share."

Unionized steelworkers said there is some split opinion in the ranks over Nippon Steel's acquisition, but that sentiment has shifted over time as they became more convinced that U.S. Steel would eventually shut down their Pittsburgh-area plants.

Clifford Hammonds, a line feeder at the plant where Trump spoke, said at the very least the deal will help upgrade the aging plant and help increase production.

"It's putting money back into the plant to help rebuild it, because this plant is old, it's falling apart. We ain't really producing as much as we should be because, like I said, this place is old. It's falling apart. We need some type of investment to fix the machines that we've got working," Hammonds said.

No matter the terms, the issue has outsized importance for Trump, who last year repeatedly said he would block the deal and foreign ownership of U.S. Steel, as did former President Joe Biden.

Trump promised during the campaign to make the revitalization of American manufacturing a priority of his second term in office. And the fate of U.S. Steel, once the world's largest corporation, could become a political liability in the midterm elections for his Republican Party in the swing state of Pennsylvania and other battleground states dependent on industrial manufacturing.

Trump said Sunday he wouldn't approve the deal if U.S. Steel did not remain under U.S. control. He said it will keep its headquarters in Pittsburgh.

The president closed his remarks Friday by thanking steelworkers.

"With the help of patriots like you, we're going to produce our own metal, unleash our own energy, secure our own future, build our country, control our destiny," he said. "We are once again going to put

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Pennsylvania steel into the backbone of America like never before.”

In recent days, Trump and other U.S. officials began promoting Nippon Steel’s new commitment to invest \$14 billion on top of its \$14.9 billion bid, including building a new electric arc furnace steel mill somewhere in the U.S.

He was joined onstage Friday by several U.S. Steel workers, including Jason Zugai, vice president of the United Steelworkers local union at the Irvin finishing plant that defied the international union in supporting Nippon Steel’s bid to buy U.S. Steel.

Zugai, whose father had lost his job in a steel mill years earlier, lobbied local officials and members of Congress to support the deal, believing that U.S. Steel would otherwise shut down its Pittsburgh-area plants eventually.

In his remarks, Zugai told Trump, “I knew you wouldn’t let us down” and called Nippon Steel’s proposed \$14 billion in investments into steel production in the U.S. “life-changing.”

New Orleans DA pulls out of jailbreak investigation amid conflict of interest allegation

By JACK BROOK Associated Press/Report for America

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Facing allegations of a conflict of interest, Orleans Parish District Attorney Jason Williams removed himself this week from a Louisiana Attorney General-led investigation into the massive jailbreak that saw 10 men escape a New Orleans jail earlier this month.

Gov. Jeff Landry ordered an investigation into the jailbreak several days after the inmates escaped on May 16. Williams had initially described the inquiry as a “joint effort” with the Attorney General Liz Murrill and toured the jail with her as part of the probe.

Orleans Parish Sheriff Susan Hutson accused Williams’ role in the investigation as being “fueled by personal animus and political campaigning” according to a court filing earlier this week reviewed by The Associated Press. Williams denied these allegations.

Earlier this year, Williams endorsed his employee Michelle Woodfork to replace Hutson as sheriff in 2026. Woodfork declined to comment.

In a statement, Williams said the recusal motion had not been granted because there were “no legal grounds to support it.”

Judge Nandi Campbell, who received the motion for recusal, declined to comment.

Williams and Hutson dispute the timeline and reasons for his withdrawal from the investigation.

Williams said he removed himself due to its “multi-jurisdictional nature” — citing a separate jailbreak that occurred earlier this month in another Louisiana parish — and has deferred to Murrill.

Williams said his office engaged in the investigation “to ensure that no evidence was lost or compromised” after the breakout.

He criticized Hutson for not “immediately” requesting an “independent forensic processing” of the facility, where inmates had yanked open a cell door and crawled through a hole cut from behind a toilet. Authorities have arrested a maintenance worker for allegedly aiding in the escape.

“It’s hard not to see this agency as anything but compromised until any bad actors have been identified and rooted out,” Williams said of the sheriff’s office.

At a press conference the day of the escape on May 16, Hutson said that she believed the timing of the jailbreak may have been politically motivated.

Hutson’s motion for recusal says that Williams’ investigation had given an “unfair advantage to his preferred candidate” and would be a “strain” on the resources of the sheriff’s office.

Hutson’s allegations against Williams come after local and state officials heaped criticism on Hutson’s management of the jail and her office’s hourslong delay in notifying authorities of the escape. While Hutson has sought to blame the escape on a lack of funding to help make urgent improvements to faulty locks and ailing jail infrastructure, city and state leaders have generally disputed this characterization.

Murrill said in a Thursday statement that she is heading the investigation to provide "accountability" and "recommendations" to the state and the city "to ensure that an escape like this never happens again."

Hutson said that she "welcomes the oversight of the Attorney General's Office and remains fully committed to cooperating with all relevant authorities."

The Orleans Parish jail system, long plagued by dysfunction, has been under federal oversight since 2013.

Supreme Court lets Trump end legal protections for 500,000 migrants, exposing more to deportation

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Friday again cleared the way for the Trump administration to strip temporary legal protections from hundreds of thousands of immigrants for now, pushing the total number of people who could be newly exposed to deportation to nearly 1 million.

The justices lifted a lower-court order that kept humanitarian parole protections in place for more than 500,000 migrants from four countries: Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela. The decision comes after the court allowed the administration to revoke temporary legal status from about 350,000 Venezuelan migrants in another case.

The court did not explain its reasoning in the brief order, as is typical on its emergency docket. Two justices publicly dissented.

The administration filed an emergency appeal to the Supreme Court after a federal judge in Boston blocked the administration's push to end the program. The Justice Department argues that the protections for people fleeing turmoil in their home countries were always meant to be temporary, and the Department of Homeland Security has the power to revoke them without court interference.

Abigail Jackson, a White House spokeswoman, said the Biden-era policies weren't in line with immigration law. "We are confident in the legality of our actions to protect the American people and look forward to further action from the Supreme Court to vindicate us," she said.

But Karen Tumlin, founder and director of Justice Action Center, said the decision has "effectively greenlit" deportation orders for a half-million people.

"I cannot overstate how devastating this is," she said. The court "allowed the Trump Administration to unleash widespread chaos, not just for our clients and class members, but for their families, their workplaces, and their communities."

Republican President Donald Trump promised on the campaign trail to deport millions of people, and in office has sought to dismantle Biden administration policies that expanded paths for migrants to live legally in the U.S. In a 2024 presidential debate, Trump amplified false rumors that Haitian immigrants in Ohio, including those with legal status under the humanitarian parole program, were abducting and eating pets, court documents note.

Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson wrote in dissent to Friday's ruling that the effect of the high court's order is "to have the lives of half a million migrants unravel all around us before the courts decide their legal claims." Justice Sonia Sotomayor joined the dissent.

Jackson echoed what U.S. District Judge Indira Talwani wrote in ruling that ending the legal protections early would leave people with a stark choice: flee the country or risk losing everything. Her ruling came in mid-April, shortly before permits were due to be canceled. An appeals court refused to lift it.

The Supreme Court's order is not a final ruling, but it means the protections will not be in place while the case proceeds. It now returns to the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston.

Talwani, an appointee of Democratic President Barack Obama, did allow the Trump administration to revoke parole, but on a case-by-case basis.

But the Trump administration argued the parole was granted en masse, and the law doesn't require ending it on an individual basis. Taking on each case individually would be a "gargantuan task," and slow the government's efforts to press for their removal, Solicitor General D. John Sauer argued.

The high court's decision could ultimately affect another ruling from Talwani this week in favor of other

people covered by humanitarian parole policies, including Afghans, Ukrainians and children from Central America.

Joe Biden used humanitarian parole more than any other president, employing a special presidential authority in effect since 1952.

Beneficiaries included the 532,000 people who have come to the United States with financial sponsors since late 2022, leaving home countries fraught with "instability, dangers and deprivations," as attorneys for the migrants said. They had to fly to the U.S. at their own expense and have a financial sponsor to qualify for the designation, which lasts for two years.

The Trump administration's decision was the first-ever mass revocation of humanitarian parole, attorneys for the migrants said. They called the Trump administration's moves "the largest mass illegalization event in modern American history."

The case is the latest in a string of emergency appeals the administration has made to the Supreme Court, many of them related to immigration.

The court has sided against Trump in other cases, including slowing his efforts to swiftly deport Venezuelans accused of being gang members to a prison in El Salvador under an 18th century wartime law called the Alien Enemies Act.

Floods kill at least 111 as northern Nigeria battles climate change, dry spells and heavy rainfall

By TAIWO ADEBAYO Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — Torrents of predawn rain unleashed flooding that killed at least 111 people in a market town where northern Nigerian farmers sell their wares to traders from the south, officials said Friday, predicting the death toll would grow.

The Nigerian Hydrological Services Agency did not immediately say how much rain fell after midnight Thursday in the town of Mokwa in the state of Niger more than 180 miles (300 kilometers) west of Abuja, the capital of Africa's most populous nation.

Communities in northern Nigeria have been experiencing prolonged dry spells worsened by climate change and excessive rainfall that leads to severe flooding during the brief wet season.

In videos and photos on social media, floodwaters covered neighborhoods and homes were submerged, with their roofs barely visible above the brown colored waters. Waist-deep in water, residents tried to salvage what they could, or rescue others.

"We lost many lives, and the properties, our farm produce. Those that have their storage have lost it," Kazeem Muhammed, a Mokwa resident, said.

Besides the 111 confirmed dead, "more bodies have just been brought and are yet to be counted," Niger state emergency agency spokesman Ibrahim Audu Hussein told The Associated Press by telephone Friday afternoon.

Mokwa, nearly 380 kilometers (236 miles) west of Abuja, is a major meeting point where traders from the south buy beans, onions and other food from farmers in the north.

Mokwa community leader Aliki Musa told the AP the villagers are not used to such flooding. "The water is like spiritual water which used to come but it's seasonal," said Musa. "It can come now (and) it will reach another twenty years before coming again."

The chairman of the Mokwa local government area, Jibril Muregi, told local news website Premium Times that construction of flood-control works was long overdue.

"This critical infrastructure is essential to mitigating future flood risks and protecting lives and property," he said.

In September, torrential rains and a dam collapse in the northeastern city of Maiduguri caused severe flooding that left at least 30 people dead and displaced millions, worsening the humanitarian crisis caused by the Boko Haram insurgency.

Smokey Robinson was investigated for sexual assault allegation in 2015 but no charges were filed

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Authorities investigated a previous sexual assault allegation against Smokey Robinson in 2015, but no charges were filed because of insufficient evidence, prosecutors said Friday.

The Los Angeles County District Attorney's office confirmed the decade-old investigation and its decision to decline charges in a statement on Friday. The office said no details could be provided because of the current investigation of Robinson.

Four former housekeepers of the singer-songwriter and Motown music luminary have alleged that he raped and sexually assaulted them between 2007 and 2024. The women filed a lawsuit on May 6, then the following week the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department revealed that its Special Victims Bureau was "actively investigating criminal allegations" against Robinson.

Robinson's attorney Christopher Frost said in a statement Friday that they are "pleased" that the district attorney "confirmed there was no basis to file charges a decade ago."

"One unfortunate aspect of celebrity is that it is not uncommon to be the target of spurious and unsubstantiated allegations," Frost said. "Mr. Robinson looks forward to the conclusion of the current investigation, and has no doubt that a similar determination will be reached here."

Frost previously called the housekeepers' allegations "vile" and "false."

The 2015 case was first reported by TMZ.

On Wednesday, Robinson and his wife, Frances, who was also named as a defendant in the lawsuit, sued the women for defamation, saying their allegations were "fabricated in an extortionate scheme."

A statement Friday from the housekeepers' lawyers, John Harris and Herbert Hayden, emphasized that there were no charges in the 2015 case "due to insufficient evidence — not because the claims lacked merit."

They said "this latest development further affirms that at least five women have now come forward with allegations of sexual assault against Mr. Robinson. Together, they are united in their pursuit of justice."

Robinson, a member of both the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Songwriters Hall of Fame, was a key figure in the Motown Records machine of the 1960s as both an artist and a writer, and was one of the biggest hitmakers of the era with songs including "Tears of a Clown" and "The Tracks of My Tears."

The housekeepers are seeking at least \$50 million in the lawsuit. They have not publicly revealed their names.

They allege Robinson raped and sexually assaulted them after isolating them, usually in his home. One woman said she was assaulted at least 20 times while working for Robinson from 2012 until 2024. Another said she worked for him from 2014 until 2020 and was assaulted at least 23 times.

They said Frances Robinson enabled him and created an abusive workplace.

The Robinsons' defamation lawsuit says the women "stayed with the Robinsons year after year," vacationed with them, celebrated holidays with them, exchanged gifts with them, asked for tickets to his concerts, and sought and received help from them including money for dental surgery, financial support for a disabled family member, and "even a car."

The court filing says that despite the couple's generosity, the women "secretly harbored resentment for the Robinsons and sought to enrich themselves through the Robinsons' wealth."

A Canadian prairie city virtually deserted as fires rage and thousands more evacuees expected

WINNIPEG, Manitoba (AP) — The Canadian prairie city of Flin Flon was virtually deserted and more evacuees were expected, Manitoba's premier said Friday, as wildfires raged in the province.

Premier Wab Kinew told a news conference that the mayor, councilors, health-care staff and other officials have had to depart Flin Flon, a city of 5,000 people.

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"The only folks remaining on the ground are firefighters and folks in the office of the fire commissioner and RCMP, who are there to battle the blaze," Kinew said.

"We do expect some very, very challenging conditions in Flin Flon and in the surrounding community." He added: "Pray for rain."

The evacuees are among 17,000 people reported so far to have left their homes due to a number of wildfires burning in remote regions from Manitoba's northwest to the southeast.

Kinew said as the fires grow, thousands more evacuees can be expected and that communities like Winnipeg, Thompson and The Pas have already stepped up to help provide food and shelter.

He said he spoke with some evacuees in Winnipeg.

"(It's) very scary, very tiring, long days for people who've been on the road and in the air to find their way to safety," he said.

Kinew said outside help has arrived, including 125 firefighters from the United States.

He said Canadian Armed Forces personnel are flying out evacuees from the Mathias Colomb Cree Nation, north of Flin Flon.

Kinew said the airport near Mathias Colomb, also known as Pukatawagan, has not been damaged by the fire.

Earlier on Friday, Flin Flon Mayor George Fontaine said fierce winds were threatening to breach the city limits and begin burning structures in the city located nearly 400 miles (645 kilometers) northwest of the provincial capital of Winnipeg.

All residents, along with 1,000 more in the surrounding area, have had to leave. "Unless we get one heck of a boost, (the fire) is projected to take chunks out of our town and surrounding areas," Fontaine said. "It's looking very ugly right now."

"We're begging for air support (to help douse the fire). It's really crucial," he said.

Winnipeg has opened up public buildings for evacuees as it deals with hotels already crammed with other fire refugees, vacationers, business people and conventiongoers. The province declared a province-wide state of emergency this week to help various levels of government coordinate a response.

The fire menacing Flin Flon began Monday near Creighton, Saskatchewan, and quickly jumped the boundary into Manitoba. Crews have struggled to contain it. Water bombers have been intermittently grounded due to heavy smoke and a drone incursion.

The 1,200 or so residents of Creighton have also been ordered out, many of whom have gone to nearby Nipawin, Saskatchewan. In total, more than 8,000 people have fled wildfires in Saskatchewan.

Steve Roberts from the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency told reporters Friday that winds have pushed wildfires significant distances.

Canada's wildfire season runs from May through September. Its worst-ever wildfire season was in 2023. It choked much of North America with dangerous smoke for months.

Wall Street glides to the end of its best month since 2023

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Wall Street closed its winning week and month with a quiet Friday following a mixed set of profit reports from Gap, Ulta Beauty and other companies navigating the challenges created by President Donald Trump's on-and-off tariffs.

The S&P 500 finished the day nearly unchanged after edging down by less than 0.1%. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 54 points, or 0.1%, and the Nasdaq composite slipped 0.3%.

Gap weighed on the market even though the retailer reported stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

The company behind Banana Republic and Old Navy fell 20.2% after saying tariffs on imports from China and other countries could add up to \$300 million to its costs this fiscal year. It has strategies set to mitigate up to half of that before it hits its profits.

This week and month on Wall Street have been dominated by questions about what will happen with

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Trump's tariffs, which investors worry could grind the economy into a recession, slash companies' profits and layer even more challenges on households already sick of inflation.

Hopes had largely been rising that the worst of such worries had passed, which in turn sent stocks rallying, after Trump paused his tariffs on both China and the European Union. A U.S. court then on Wednesday blocked many of Trump's sweeping tariffs. It all sent the S&P 500 in May to its first winning month in four and its best since November.

But the tariffs remain in place for now while the White House appeals the ruling by the U.S. Court of International Trade, and the ultimate outcome is still uncertain.

Trump also briefly shook markets shortly before Wall Street opened for trading Friday, when he accused China of not living up to its end of the agreement that paused their tariffs against each other.

"So much for being Mr. NICE GUY!" Trump said on his Truth Social platform.

The impact was limited though, and futures for U.S. stock indexes quickly pared their losses. Since Wednesday's ruling, analysts and investors have been saying Trump and his administration would likely look for new avenues to impose tariffs on trading partners.

Trump has said he's using tariffs to bring manufacturing jobs back to the United States and that U.S. households and businesses may feel some pain in the process.

Friday's most influential losses came from several Big Tech stocks. Nvidia fell 2.9% to give back some of its gain from earlier in the week after it topped analysts' expectations for profit in the latest quarter. It was the single heaviest weight by far on the S&P 500.

On the winning side of Wall Street was Ulta Beauty, which rose 11.8% after the retailer reported stronger sales and profit than analysts forecast. It also raised the top end of its forecasted range for revenue this fiscal year even though CEO Kecia Steelman called the operating environment "fluid."

Costco climbed 3.1% after the retailer's results and revenue for the latest quarter edged past analysts' expectations.

Red Robin Gourmet Burger soared 62.9% after reporting a profit for the latest quarter, when analysts expected a loss.

Shares of SharpLink Gaming fell 3.2% to trim their gain for the week to a still-whopping 1,041.4% after the marketing company said it would raise \$425 million to buy the cryptocurrency on the Ethereum blockchain. The company delivers leads to U.S. sportsbooks and global casino companies, and it has been expanding into the global crypto gaming market.

All told, the S&P 500 edged down 0.48 to 5,911.69 points. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 54.34 to 42,270.07, and the Nasdaq composite slipped 62.11 to 19,113.77.

In the bond market, Treasury yields eased after a report showed that the measure of inflation that the Federal Reserve likes to use was slightly lower in April than economists expected.

A separate report from the University of Michigan said that sentiment among U.S. consumers was better in May than economists expected. Sentiment improved in the back half of the month after Trump paused many of his tariffs on China.

"Overall, consumers see the outlook for the economy as no worse than last month, but they remained quite worried about the future," according to Survey of Consumers Director Joanne Hsu.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury eased to 4.39% from 4.43% late Thursday. The two-year Treasury yield, which more closely tracks expectations for what the Fed will do with overnight interest rates, slipped to 3.90% from 3.92%.

The Fed has left its benchmark borrowing rate steady so far this year after cutting it at the end of 2024 to give the economy more breathing room. Fed officials have said they want to wait longer to see how tariffs will affect inflation and the economy before making their next move. While lower interest rates can give the economy a boost, they can also fan inflation higher.

In stock markets abroad, European indexes were mixed, while Asian markets fell.

Dozens sickened in expanding salmonella outbreak linked to recalled cucumbers

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

Nearly four dozen people in 18 states have been sickened in an expanding outbreak of salmonella food poisoning tied to recalled cucumbers sent to restaurants, hospitals, cruise ships and grocery stores, including Target stores, federal health officials said Friday.

At least 16 people have been hospitalized after eating cucumbers produced by Florida-based Bedner Growers and distributed by Fresh Start Produce Sales, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported. The cucumbers were sold from April 29 through May 19.

The outbreak includes reports of illness from people aboard six different cruise ships that departed from U.S. ports between late March and mid-April, the CDC said. The true number of sick people is likely much higher and the outbreak could affect additional states, officials said.

Several companies have issued recalls for whole cucumbers and cucumbers used in a range of sandwiches, salsas and other foods linked to the outbreak. Target recalled dozens of products, including whole cucumbers, salads and vegetable rolls.

The outbreak was detected during 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.

As part of the new investigation, FDA officials found salmonella in a sample of Bedner Growers cucumbers at a distribution center in Pennsylvania. That sample matched the strain of salmonella that made people sick. In addition, "multiple other strains" of salmonella were detected that match samples in a government database. CDC officials are working to determine whether additional illnesses in people match those strains.

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.

Sean 'Diddy' Combs' lawyers say ex-assistant's social media posts undercut her rape allegation

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Sean "Diddy" Combs' lawyers confronted his rape-alleging former personal assistant on Friday with her social media posts praising the hip-hop mogul as a mentor, "my brother" and "friend for life" for years after she says he assaulted her.

Defense attorney Brian Steel quizzed the woman about some of the dozens of posts she made about Combs in the wake of the alleged rape, portraying the warm messages as contradictory to her claims that working for him was often toxic and terrifying.

The woman, testifying under the pseudonym "Mia" for a second day at Combs' federal sex trafficking trial, read some of the messages aloud as they were displayed for jurors.

Mia told the jury that the posts were a facade: "Instagram was a place to show how great your life was, even if it was not true."

Defense team takes on assistant's rape allegation

Steel highlighted a post from 2013 celebrating Combs' 44th birthday, showing a still image from a comedy video featuring Combs as a doctor helping Mia give birth to a fake baby. Below it, Mia wrote: "Shout out to my mentor. Thank you for always letting me give birth to my dreams."

"Here, you have posted on your personal account your rapist delivering the baby," Steel said.

Mia testified Thursday that, just months after Combs forcibly kissed her at his 40th birthday party in 2009, he woke her up then raped her in a bunk bed in his Los Angeles home.

The ex-assistant said sexual assault continued sporadically enough that she thought it wouldn't happen

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again. She is the second of three women expected to testify at the federal trial in Manhattan that they were sexually abused by Combs.

Combs, 55, has pleaded not guilty to sex trafficking and racketeering conspiracy charges that could put him in prison for life if he is convicted.

President Donald Trump on Friday didn't rule out pardoning him, if asked.

In other posts Steel presented, Mia praised Combs for "continuing to inspire me every day." She wrote "love you" and joked about the rapper and entrepreneur buying her a vanilla latte at Starbucks after he was named to a top spot on a Forbes list of wealthy individuals.

Steel also showed jurors a handwritten letter Mia gave Combs with the words "Happy 45th Birthday Puff Daddy" in large, red letters, along with her gift to him: a scrapbook of magazine articles that chronicled the early years of his rise to fame.

Throughout his cross-examination, the lawyer struck an incredulous refrain, asking: "Why would you promote the person who has stolen your happiness in life?"

Mia said it was only natural to post about the good times, and has previously testified that the "highs were really high and the lows were really low."

She acknowledged Friday that she referred to co-workers as "family" and used the word "love" in correspondence with Combs — even after she alleges he sexually assaulted her.

"That's how we all talked to each other," Mia said.

Former assistant says she can't work because of Combs trauma

Mia worked for Combs from 2009 to 2017, including a stretch as an executive at his film studio. However, she said she hasn't held a job since then because of post-traumatic stress.

Mia said she would misinterpret emails asking "where are you?" as scolding because of how Combs treated her. She said someone calling her name would cause her alarm, even if it was an innocent attempt to get her attention.

She recalled throwing her phone across a room in terror when Combs' number popped up as an incoming call days after his former girlfriend, the singer Cassie, sued him in November 2023.

"It was just so triggering," Mia said.

After leaving Combs' employment, Mia said, she received a little more than \$200,000 of a \$400,000 settlement to reimburse her for bonuses and overtime that weren't paid. The rest, she said, went to her lawyers, whom she never told about the alleged sexual assaults.

One phone call from Combs left a witness 'terrified'

Mia said one of Combs' former bodyguards also reached out to her in the days after Cassie filed her lawsuit.

At first, she said, she was elated to hear from D-Roc, whose real name is Damion Butler, until she realized he was at Combs' house and trying to reconnect her with her former boss.

Mia testified that she felt "terrified, threatened, scared, nervous" that Combs was using an intermediary to reach her. She said she "wanted to play dumb" and needed a gameplan to protect herself.

"I didn't want my life to be in danger," Mia said.

Combs settled with Cassie, whose real name is Casandra Ventura, within a day for \$20 million. However, a federal agent testified earlier in the trial that Cassie's lawsuit prompted a criminal investigation that eventually led to Combs' indictment.

Mia's testimony echoed concerns that prompted judges to deny Combs bail, keeping him jailed since his arrest last September. Prosecutors said Combs and his allies were contacting potential victims or witnesses to prevent them from cooperating or to get them to alter their recollection of events.

At a bail hearing last September, Assistant U.S. Attorney Emily Johnson said Combs contacted at least one victim in November 2023 and was in constant contact with witnesses, including as late as last July.

Trump gives Elon Musk an Oval Office sendoff, crediting him with 'colossal change'

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump bid farewell to Elon Musk in the Oval Office on Friday, providing a cordial conclusion to a tumultuous tenure for the billionaire entrepreneur.

Musk is leaving his position spearheading the Department of Government Efficiency, and he'll be re-dedicating himself to running his businesses, including electric automaker Tesla, rocket company SpaceX and social media platform X.

Trump credited Musk with "a colossal change in the old ways of doing business in Washington" and said some of his staff would remain in the administration. Musk, who wore all black, including a T-shirt that said "The Dogefather," nodded along as the president listed contracts that had been cut under his watch.

"I think the DOGE team is doing an incredible job," Musk said after accepting a ceremonial key from the president. "They're going to continue to be doing an incredible job."

He left a searing mark on the federal bureaucracy, including thousands of employees who were fired or pushed out. Some government functions were eviscerated, such as the U.S. Agency for International Development, which had provided a lifeline for impoverished people around the world. Boston University researchers estimate that hundreds of thousands of people have already died as a result of the cuts.

The State Department responded by saying most of USAID's programs on HIV, known as PEPFAR, remained operational. However, the statement did not address any of the other cuts while calling on "other nations to dramatically increase their humanitarian efforts."

Despite the upheaval, Musk also fell far short of his goals. After promising to cut \$1 trillion or even \$2 trillion in federal spending, he lowered expectations to only \$150 billion in the current fiscal year.

It's unclear whether that target has been hit. The DOGE website tallies \$175 billion in savings, but its information has been riddled with errors and embellishments.

Musk had a bruise next to his right eye in the Oval Office, which he explained by saying he had been "horsing around" with his young son.

"I said, go ahead punch me in the face," he said. "And he did."

Trump said Musk had led the "most sweeping and consequential government reform effort in generations." He suggested that Musk is "really not leaving" and "he's going to be back and forth" to keep tabs on what's happening in the administration.

There were signs, however, that attention was already shifting away from Musk, who once appeared omnipresent in Washington. He often stood quietly next to Trump as reporters peppered him with questions about the French president (he's great), Joe Biden's autopen (it's bad) and the potential for pardoning Sean "Diddy" Combs (he'll look at the facts).

When Musk was asked about the impact of tariffs on Tesla — something Musk has expressed concerns about in the past — Trump jumped in to answer.

Musk, the world's richest person, recently said he would reduce his political donations. He was Trump's top donor in last year's presidential campaign.

Trump appeared eager to end Musk's service on a high note.

"This will be his last day, but not really, because he will, always, be with us, helping all the way," Trump wrote on social media on Thursday evening. "Elon is terrific!"

As a special government employee, Musk's position was designed to be temporary. However, he had speculated about staying "indefinitely," working part time for the administration, if Trump still wanted his help.

Musk has brushed off questions about how DOGE would continue without him, even suggesting it could "gain momentum" in the future.

"DOGE is a way of life," he told reporters recently. "Like Buddhism."

Taylor Swift has regained control of her music, buys back first 6 albums

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Taylor Swift has regained control over her entire body of work.

In a lengthy note posted to her official website on Friday, Swift announced: "All of the music I've ever made now belongs to me."

The pop star said she purchased her catalog of recordings — originally released through Big Machine Records — from their most recent owner, the private equity firm Shamrock Capital. She did not disclose the amount.

In recent years, Swift has been rerecording and releasing her first six albums in an attempt to regain control of her music.

"I can't thank you enough for helping to reunite me with this art that I have dedicated my life to, but have never owned until now," Swift addressed fans in the post. "The best things that have ever been mine ... finally actually are."

"We are thrilled with this outcome and are so happy for Taylor," Shamrock Capital said in a statement.

Swift's rerecordings were instigated by Hybe America CEO Scooter Braun's purchase and sale of her early catalog and represents Swift's effort to control her own songs and how they're used. Previous "Taylor's Version" releases have been more than conventional re-recordings, arriving with new "from the vault" music, Easter eggs and visuals that deepen understanding of her work.

"I am happy for her," Braun said Friday.

She has also released new music, including last year's "The Tortured Poets Department," announced during the 2024 Grammys and released during her record-breaking tour.

So far, there have been four rerecorded albums, beginning with "Fearless (Taylor's Version)" and "Red (Taylor's Version)" in 2021. All four have been massive commercial and cultural successes, each one debuting at No. 1 on the Billboard 200.

Swift's last rerecording, "1989 (Taylor's Version)," arrived in October 2023, just four months after the release of "Speak Now (Taylor's Version)." That was the same year Swift claimed the record for the woman with the most No. 1 albums in history.

Fans have theorized that "Reputation (Taylor's Version)" would be next: On May 19, "Look What You Made Me Do (Taylor's Version)" aired nearly in full during the opening scene of a Season 6 episode of "The Handmaid's Tale." Prior to that, the song was teased in 2023's Prime Video limited-series thriller "Wilder-ness" and in Apple TV+'s "The Dynasty: New England Patriots" in 2024. Also in 2023, she contributed "Delicate (Taylor's Version)" to Prime Video's "The Summer I Turned Pretty."

But according to the note shared Friday, Swift says she hasn't "even rerecorded a quarter of it."

She did say, however, that she has completely rerecorded her self-titled debut album "and I really love how it sounds now."

Swift writes that both her self-titled debut and "Reputation (Taylor's Version)" "can still have their moments to reemerge when the time is right."

Representatives for Swift and HYBE did not immediately respond to request for comment.

US measles cases rise slightly as Colorado reports a new outbreak

By DEVNA BOSE AP Health Writer

Measles cases inched up slightly in the U.S. this past week, with a new county impacted in Texas and Colorado reporting a new outbreak.

There are 1,088 confirmed measles cases in the U.S., up 42 from last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Friday. Texas, where the nation's biggest outbreak raged during the late winter and spring, reported 10 additional cases this week for a total of 738.

There are three other major outbreaks in North America.

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One in Ontario, Canada, has resulted in 1,888 cases from mid-October through May 27. Another in Alberta, Canada, has sickened 628 as of Thursday. And the Mexican state of Chihuahua had 1,693 measles cases and three deaths as of Wednesday, according to data from the state health ministry.

Since the outbreak in Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma began, two elementary school-aged children in the epicenter in West Texas and an adult in New Mexico have died of measles. All were unvaccinated.

Other states with active outbreaks — which the CDC defines as three or more related cases — include Colorado, Kansas, Michigan, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Tennessee.

Measles is caused by a highly contagious virus that's airborne and spreads easily when an infected person breathes, sneezes or coughs. It is preventable through vaccines, and has been considered eliminated from the U.S. since 2000. Here's what else you need to know about measles in the U.S.

How many measles cases are there in Texas?

There are a total of 738 cases across 35 counties, most of them in West Texas, state health officials said Friday.

Throughout the outbreak, 94 people have been hospitalized. McLennan County, which includes the city of Waco, was added to the state's list of counties with active cases.

State health officials estimated less than 1% of cases — fewer than 10 — are actively infectious. Fifty-six percent of Texas' cases are in Gaines County, where the virus started spreading in a close-knit, undervaccinated Mennonite community. The county has had 409 cases since late January — just over 1.7% of the county's residents.

The April 3 death in Texas was an 8-year-old child, according to Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Local health officials said the child did not have underlying health conditions and died of "what the child's doctor described as measles pulmonary failure." A unvaccinated child with no underlying conditions died of measles in Texas in late February; Kennedy said the child was 6.

How many measles cases are there in New Mexico?

New Mexico added one new case on Friday for a total of 79.

Seven people have been hospitalized since the outbreak started. Most of the state's cases are in Lea County. Sandoval County near Albuquerque has six cases, Eddy County has three, Doña Ana County has two and Chaves and Curry counties have one each.

An unvaccinated adult died of measles-related illness March 6. The person did not seek medical care.

How many cases are there in Oklahoma?

Oklahoma held steady Friday with a total of 14 confirmed and three probable cases.

The state health department is not releasing which counties have cases.

How many cases are there in Colorado?

Colorado has seen a total of seven measles cases in 2025 and one outbreak with three related cases, which the state health department announced Thursday.

All three cases appear to stem from an international flight that landed at Denver International Airport in mid-May. Two people with confirmed cases live in Arapahoe County, near Denver — one unvaccinated child under the age of 5 and an unrelated vaccinated adult. The other person was an out-of-state traveler who was infectious on the flight and stayed at a hotel near the airport. State health officials said Thursday there is no evidence of further spread.

The other counties with cases in 2025 are Pueblo, Jefferson and Archuleta counties with one each and Denver with two.

How many cases are there in Kansas?

Kansas has a total of 64 cases across 11 counties in the southwestern part of the state, with two hospitalizations. All but five of the cases are connected, and most of the cases are in Gray County.

How many cases are there in Michigan?

Michigan has a steady eight confirmed cases of measles, with an outbreak of four connected cases in Montcalm County in the western part of the state that health officials say is tied to the Ontario outbreak.

How many cases are there in Montana?

Montana has 13 measles cases as of Thursday. Ten are in Gallatin County, which is where the first cases

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showed up — Montana's first in 35 years.

Flathead County has two cases and Hill County has one case.

Health officials said there is potential for community transmission in Hill County. There are outbreaks in neighboring North Dakota and the Canadian provinces of Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

How many cases are there in North Dakota?

North Dakota, which hadn't seen measles since 2011, is up to 29 cases as of Thursday. Two of the people have been hospitalized, and all of the people with confirmed cases were not vaccinated.

There are 13 cases in Williams County in western North Dakota on the Montana border. On the eastern side of the state on the Minnesota border, there are eight cases in Grand Forks County and seven cases in Cass County. Burke County, in northwest North Dakota on the border of Saskatchewan, Canada, has one case.

How many cases are there in Ohio?

Ohio remained steady for a second week at 34 measles cases and one hospitalization, according to the Ohio Department of Health. That count includes only Ohio residents.

The state has two outbreaks: Ashtabula County near Cleveland has 16 cases, and Knox County in east-central Ohio has 20 — 14 among Ohio residents and the rest among visitors.

Allen, Cuyahoga, Holmes and Defiance counties have one case each.

How many cases are there in Pennsylvania?

Pennsylvania remains steady at 15 cases overall in 2025 as of Thursday, including international travel-related cases in Montgomery County and one in Philadelphia.

An outbreak of eight measles cases in Erie County in far northwest Pennsylvania has remained steady since it began in mid-April.

How many cases are there in Tennessee?

Tennessee has had six measles cases since early May, but no change since. Health department spokesman Bill Christian said all cases are the middle part of the state, and that "at least three of these cases are linked to each other" but declined to specify further. The state also did not say whether the cases were linked to other outbreaks or when Tennessee's outbreak started.

Where else is measles showing up in the U.S.?

Measles cases also have been reported in Alaska, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia and Washington.

Cases and outbreaks in the U.S. are frequently traced to someone who caught the disease abroad. The CDC says more than twice as many measles have come from outside of the U.S. compared to May of last year, and most of those are in unvaccinated Americans returning home. In 2019, the U.S. saw 1,274 cases and almost lost its status of having eliminated measles.

What do you need to know about the MMR vaccine?

The best way to avoid measles is to get the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine. The first shot is recommended for children between 12 and 15 months old and the second between 4 and 6 years old.

Getting another MMR shot as an adult is harmless if there are concerns about waning immunity, the CDC says. People who have documentation of receiving a live measles vaccine in the 1960s don't need to be revaccinated, but people who were immunized before 1968 with an ineffective vaccine made from "killed" virus should be revaccinated with at least one dose, the agency said.

People who have documentation that they had measles are immune, and those born before 1957 generally don't need the shots because so many children got measles back then that they have "presumptive immunity."

Measles has a harder time spreading through communities with high vaccination rates — above 95% — due to "herd immunity." But childhood vaccination rates have declined nationwide since the pandemic and more parents are claiming religious or personal conscience waivers to exempt their kids from required shots.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles first infects the respiratory tract, then spreads throughout the body, causing a high fever, runny

nose, cough, red, watery eyes and a rash.

The rash generally appears three to five days after the first symptoms, beginning as flat red spots on the face and then spreading downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs and feet. When the rash appears, the fever may spike over 104 degrees Fahrenheit, according to the CDC.

Most kids will recover from measles, but infection can lead to dangerous complications such as pneumonia, blindness, brain swelling and death.

How can you treat measles?

There's no specific treatment for measles, so doctors generally try to alleviate symptoms, prevent complications and keep patients comfortable.

Bloodhounds hunting 'Devil in the Ozarks' fugitive are seen as key part of manhunt

By JEFF MARTIN, ANDREW DeMILLO and SAFIYAH RIDDLE Associated Press

A bloodhound picked up the scent shortly after the "Devil in the Ozarks" escaped from a lockup in northern Arkansas. The hound didn't have to go far to begin the hunt — it lives at the prison as part of a specialized unit that uses man's best friend to help track fugitives.

Although the scent of convicted killer Grant Hardin was lost because of heavy rain, experts say that even days after Sunday's escape, the animal's highly developed sense of smell can still pick up a fresh trail.

That's partly due to about 300 million cells in their nose that supercharges their sense of smell, said Terri Heck, a Bloodhound handler and trainer who works with the Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, District Attorney's Office.

They've got wide nostrils to scoop up smells, and their long ears often work to stir up scents as they drag along the ground. Even their drool plays a role, as that wetness wakes up scents, Heck said.

Bloodhounds are known for being tenacious trackers, said Brian Tierney, president of the National Police Bloodhound Association. They're playing a key role in the search for Hardin, now in its sixth day.

Bloodhounds are so precise that they can differentiate the smells of identical twins, said Stephanie White, who coordinates training seminars that draw dogs and handlers from around the U.S. to the Florida Public Safety Institute at Tallahassee State College. The dogs are faced with a variety of training scenarios, from wooded areas to pavement to water crossings, she said.

They also save lives, as one young bloodhound did just two weeks ago in Maine. Millie, a 10-month-old hound tracked a 5-year-old girl with autism who went missing from her home on May 16, Maine State Police said. The dog found the girl waist-deep in water in a swamp, the agency said. Authorities credited Millie's dedication and "incredible nose" for saving the girl.

Bloodhounds are also independent, a key trait for searches. "When it gets to be a difficult search they don't look to you for help, that they go forth themselves," Heck said.

Bad weather confounded the hunt for Hardin, who was serving a 30-year sentence for murder when he escaped from the prison in Calico Rock, Arkansas.

The hound found - then lost - Hardin's scent when heavy rains blew through the area, said state prison spokesman Rand Champion. Hardin was tracked for less than a quarter of a mile when the bloodhound lost the trail. He could have gone in any direction after that.

"That was one of the most frustrating things, that they were able to track him but then they lost him because of the rain," Champion said.

A tip that Hardin was sighted in southern Missouri has been ruled out, and searchers assume that he's still in the vicinity of the prison, Champion said Friday.

Hardin took very little with him and left behind plenty of clothes, bedsheets and other items that are used to familiarize the bloodhounds with his scent, Champion said. They are shared with the dogs to give them the initial scent of the person they're seeking, Tierney said.

Who is Grant Hardin?

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A former police chief in the small town of Gateway near the Arkansas-Missouri border, Hardin had been held at the Calico Rock prison since 2017 after pleading guilty to first-degree murder in a fatal shooting for which he was serving a 30-year sentence.

Hardin's DNA was matched to the 1997 rape of a teacher at an elementary school in Rogers, north of Fayetteville. He was sentenced to 50 years for that crime. Eventually, his notoriety led to a TV documentary, "Devil in the Ozarks."

Champion said that someone should have checked Hardin's identity before he was allowed to leave, describing the lack of verification as a "lapse" that's being investigated.

Bloodhounds live at Calico Rock prison

The Calico Rock prison is known for bloodhounds that live in a kennel on prison property. Its nearly one dozen dogs have helped many other agencies, including the FBI Federal Bureau of Investigation, track a variety of people over the years, according to a 2021 state audit report on the prison.

Southern prisons have a long history of keeping bloodhounds around in case of escapes, like the one featured in country artist Blake Shelton's song "Ol' Red," about a hound that hunts escaped inmates with "a nose that could smell a two-day trail."

Dogs in Arkansas' prison system have also been used to help other agencies find missing children, people with special needs or elderly people, Champion said.

The bloodhounds tend to raise a ruckus when they find their mark. But the prison system uses other types of dogs in searching for children and vulnerable people who go missing, and those dogs tend to lick people and make friends with them when they are found, Champion said.

Fugitives use spices, other means to foil bloodhounds

Fugitives have been known to take extreme steps to throw the dogs off their trail, Tierney said.

Two convicted killers who broke out of a maximum-security prison in upstate New York in 2015 collected dozens of containers of black and cayenne pepper before their escape. They intended to use the pepper "to interfere with tracking dogs they assumed would be part of a manhunt for them after the escape," a state investigation found. One of the men was shot and killed during the manhunt; another was also shot but survived and was captured.

Hardin has troubled past in law enforcement

In his first job as a police officer 35 years ago in the college town of Fayetteville, home of the University of Arkansas, Hardin struggled almost immediately, his supervisors said. He was dismissed by Fayetteville police, but kept getting hired for other law enforcement jobs in northwest Arkansas over the years.

By the time he was the police chief in the small town of Gateway in 2016, "he was out chasing cars for no reason," Cheryl Tillman, the town's current mayor, recalled in the documentary "Devil in the Ozarks."

Think your return to the office was rough? Musk faces some big challenges

By BERNARD CONDON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Elon Musk is leaving Washington after a short but turbulent stint in government and getting back to his numerous businesses, each with their own set of issues for the billionaire to address.

Start with his electric car company Tesla. While how much Musk accomplished in his role as President Donald Trump's chief cost-cutter is up for debate, it's clear his association with right-wing politics damaged Tesla's brand and tanked sales.

Musk's social media platform X, formerly Twitter, needs to rebuild its advertising base; his aerospace company SpaceX appears to be financially promising but has seen some recent setbacks; and it's unclear if his satellite business Starlink can keep striking deals without Trump nearby.

Here's a look at the state of some key Musk businesses.

Tesla trouble

Profits plunged 71% at Tesla in the first three months of the year right after a Chinese competitor claimed

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the mantle as the world's biggest electric car seller.

The big question now: Will Musk's leaving Washington help lure buyers back?

The answer is crucial to reviving profits because so much else is uncertain. Tesla's lineup of cars is aging and its foreign rivals have become much more competitive. They would be taking market share from Tesla even in the best of circumstances.

Tesla's decision to close down factories as it retooled its best-selling Model Y, among other temporary problems, contributed to its struggles in the first quarter. But the blowback from Musk's time in Washington has some analysts and investors worried.

In a note to clients, JP Morgan warned of "unprecedented brand damage." Wedbush Securities said at one point, "This is a full blown crisis." And a group of smaller investors just Wednesday wrote to Tesla's board demanding it require Musk to spend at least 40 hours a week repairing its "plummeting global reputation" among other problems.

News earlier this week from Europe doesn't bode well: Sales in April plunged by half.

Taxis with no driver

Another big test for Musk: Will Tesla's launch of its first ever driverless taxis prove successful?

Musk has been talking about robotaxis for more than a decade, but next month they may finally hit the road. He has promised to test 10 or 20 robotaxis in Austin, Texas, then ramp that up to hundreds of thousands by the end of next year.

"Can you go to sleep in our cars and wake up at your destination?" the billionaire asked investors in a conference call last month, then answered, "I'm confident that will be available in many cities in the U.S. by the end of this year."

Investors are convinced Musk will deliver, judging by the 50% jump in Tesla stock since he made that statement. But he faces many challenges, not least is whether technically the taxis will work without hitting things — or people.

Federal safety regulators last month requested data from Tesla on how the robotaxis will perform in low-visibility conditions. That request comes after an investigation into 2.4 million Teslas last year equipped with Full Self-Driving software after several accidents, including one in which a pedestrian was killed.

Even if the Austin test goes off without a hitch, Musk faces another challenge: Waymo.

The driverless taxi company owned by Google parent Alphabet just logged its ten-millionth trip and is now operating in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and several other cities.

Ad rebound at X?

After Musk bought Twitter in 2022 and opened it up to all manner of conspiracy theories, long-time advertisers began to flee. Then Musk made the situation worse when he threatened to "name and shame" them, and sued them.

Now advertisers are inching back, though maybe not for a good reason.

"Some big brands resumed spending on X in part to curry favor with the Trump administration, or to avoid potential retaliation by Musk," said e-marketer analyst Jasmine Enberg. "But fear is not a sustainable motivator, and most were spending less than they were previously."

She expects X's ad business will rebound this year, but still be smaller than it was before Musk bought the company.

Rockets red glare

It's not clear how well Musk's rocket company SpaceX is faring because the private company doesn't disclose its finances. That said, news headlines point to both troubles and triumphs.

First the bad development, which came just this week with a spinning explosion of one of the company's Starship mega rockets over the Indian Ocean. That followed explosions of two other Starships earlier this year that sprayed flaming debris across the Caribbean Ocean.

Undeterred, Musk is vowing several more tests soon but the stakes are high and the clock is ticking. NASA hopes to use Starship for future missions to the moon, including one next year that will attempt a lunar orbit and then send the four astronauts aboard back home.

The good news is that investors who have gotten a peek at SpaceX's finances apparently are excited.

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A private financing round for the company a few months ago followed by a private sale of shares recently have reportedly valued SpaceX at \$350 billion, a big jump from a \$210 billion estimated value just a year ago.

It's business, not politics — or is it?

A SpaceX satellite internet subsidiary called Starlink also has been striking deals to set up in foreign countries. But it's not clear how much is the result of cold business calculation and how much is due to politics, an advantage that could disappear as Musk leaves Washington.

Accompanying Trump on his trip to Saudi Arabia earlier this month, Musk announced that the country had approved Starlink service for aviation and maritime use. That followed a decision to grant approval for the service by regulators in Bangladesh, whose garment industry would be devastated by Trump's threatened 37% tariff, along with a string of other deals in India, Pakistan and Lesotho in recent months.

Next up: South Africa, maybe.

Earlier this month, following Trump's Oval Office dressing down of that country's president, regulators in the country loosened a rule in a way that could help Starlink win a foothold in the country. Musk had called the rule requiring Black partial ownership of any new foreign venture "openly racist."

The country denies that politics influenced its decision.

US inflation gauge cools with little sign of tariff impact, so far

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A key U.S. inflation gauge slowed last month as President Donald Trump's tariffs have yet to noticeably push up prices. Spending by Americans slowed despite rising incomes, potentially an early reaction to higher prices on some imported goods.

Friday's report from the Commerce Department showed that consumer prices rose just 2.1% in April compared with a year earlier, down from 2.3% in March and the lowest since September. Excluding the volatile food and energy categories, core prices rose 2.5% from a year earlier, below the March figure of 2.7%, and the lowest in more than four years. Economists track core prices because they typically provide a better read on where inflation is headed.

The figures show inflation is still declining from its post-pandemic spike, which reached the highest level in four decades in July 2022. Economists and some business executives have warned that prices will likely head higher as Trump's widespread tariffs take effect, though the timing and impact of those duties are now in doubt after they were struck down late Wednesday in court.

On a monthly basis, overall prices and core prices both increased just 0.1% from March to April. The cost of big-ticket manufactured goods rose a hefty 0.5%, though that increase was offset by a 0.1 decline in other goods, such as groceries. The cost of services rose just 0.1% from March to April.

The big increase in durable goods prices could reflect the early impact of tariffs. Americans also cut back their spending on longer-lasting factory goods in April, the report showed.

Overall consumer spending — which includes spending on services — rose 0.2% in April from March, the report said, but that's down from a big 0.7% rise in March.

The slowdown in spending could reflect some early caution on the part of consumers, economists said, in response to higher goods prices. It also suggests that some of the spending jump in March reflected consumers purchasing items like cars to get in front of the impact of tariffs.

"The pulling forward of consumer spending ahead of the tariff increases will continue to dampen household spending in the coming months, especially as they face higher prices and a softening labor market," Kathy Bostjancic, chief economist at Nationwide, said in an email. "We anticipate that the improved inflation trend will reverse in the second half of the year as companies are forced to begin passing along a portion of the increased tariffs in order to protect profit margins."

Walmart executives said earlier this month that the retail giant would increase prices for many products in May and June to account for the tariffs, while electronics chain Best Buy's CEO Corie Barry said Thursday the company is increasing some prices as well because of the duties, as a "last resort."

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Makeup company E.l.f. Beauty, which sources 75% of its products from China, said earlier this week it would raise its prices by \$1 a product starting Aug. 1 to offset the cost of tariffs.

And on Thursday, warehouse retailer Costco said it has already raised prices for some products, but has held the line on others. The company largely absorbed the duties on pineapples and bananas "because they are key staple items" and "we felt it was important to really eliminate the impact there," said Gary Millerchip, Costco's chief financial officer.

But the company did increase prices for flowers from Central and Source America, for example, "because we felt that was something that the member would be able to absorb," Millerchip added.

At the same time, incomes — before adjusting for inflation — rose a healthy 0.8% in April. Much of that gain reflected an increase in Social Security benefits for some retired teachers, fire fighters, and federal workers whose incomes previously weren't fully counted toward Social Security benefits.

The inflation-fighters at the Federal Reserve said at their most recent meeting May 6-7 that inflation is still elevated, compared to their target of 2%. Fed officials, who focus more on core prices, broadly support keeping their key interest rate steady while they evaluate the impact of the tariffs on inflation and jobs.

The court ruling last Wednesday said that most of Trump's tariffs were unlawful, including his duties on imports from Canada, Mexico, and China, as well as those on more than 50 other countries. Tariffs on steel, aluminum, and cars were implemented under different laws and remain in place.

But the duties were allowed to remain in effect while the Trump administration appeals the ruling against them. And administration officials say they will find other legal authorities, if needed, to implement the tariffs. As a result, what tariffs will end up in place and for how long remains highly uncertain.

China set to resume imports of Japanese seafood halted over Fukushima water discharge

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — China will resume Japanese seafood imports it banned in 2023 over worries about Japan's discharge of treated but slightly radioactive wastewater from the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the sea, a Japanese minister said Friday.

Agriculture Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said the agreement was reached after officials met in Beijing and the imports will resume once paperwork is complete.

China said talks this week made "substantial progress," but did not confirm an agreement with Japan on the issue that has been a significant political and diplomatic point of tension.

"Seafood is an important export item for Japan and a resumption of its export to China is a major milestone," Koizumi said.

Japan's Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya also welcomed the move, saying: "It will be a big first step that would help Japan and China to tackle a number of remaining issues between the two countries."

But officials said China's ban on farm and fisheries products from 10 Japanese prefectures, including Fukushima, is still in place and that they will keep pushing toward their lifting.

China's General Administration of Customs said in a statement Friday that the two sides had on Wednesday held "a new round of technical exchanges on the safety issues of Japanese aquatic products ... and achieved substantial progress," but did not mention an agreement.

Disagreement over seafood imports

China blocked imports of Japanese seafood because it said the release of the treated and diluted but still slightly radioactive wastewater would endanger the fishing industry and coastal communities in eastern China.

Japanese officials have said the wastewater will be safer than international standards and its environmental impact will be negligible. They say the wastewater must be released to make room for the nuclear plant's decommissioning and to prevent accidental leaks.

Tokyo and Beijing have held three rounds of talks since March on the issue before reaching the agreement this week on the "technical requirements" necessary for Japanese seafood exports to China to re-

start, Japan's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. It did not say how long it may take before the actual resumption.

Mainland China used to be the biggest overseas market for Japanese seafood, accounting for more than one-fifth of its seafood exports, followed by Hong Kong. The ban became a major blow to the fisheries industry, though the impact on overall trade was limited because seafood exports are a fraction of Japan's total exports.

Japan's government set up an emergency relief fund for its exporters, especially scallop growers, and has sought alternative overseas markets.

Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, which operates the Fukushima Daiichi plant, has said it would compensate Japanese business owners appropriately for damages from export bans.

'Mutual understanding'

The nuclear plant had meltdowns in three reactors after being heavily damaged in the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan. Water used to cool the reactor cores has been accumulating ever since, and officials say the massive stockpile is hampering the cleanup of the site.

The wastewater was treated and heavily diluted with seawater to reduce the radioactivity as much as possible before Japan began releasing it into the sea in August 2023.

Last September, then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said the two sides reached "a certain level of mutual understanding" that China would start working toward easing the import ban and join the International Atomic Energy Agency's expanded monitoring of wastewater discharges.

People inside and outside Japan protested the initial wastewater release. Japanese fishing groups said they feared it would further damage the reputation of their seafood. Groups in China and South Korea also raised concerns.

Former Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams wins libel case against BBC over claim he sanctioned killing

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Former Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams won his libel suit against the BBC on Friday over a claim that he authorized the killing of an informant inside the Irish republican movement.

A jury at the High Court in Dublin ruled in Adams' favor and awarded him 100,000 euros (\$113,000) in damages. Jurors deliberated for just under seven hours after the monthlong trial before reaching a verdict, rejecting the BBC's argument that it had acted in good faith and in a "fair and reasonable" way.

Adams sued Britain's public broadcaster over a claim in a decade-old television documentary and online article that he sanctioned the killing of Denis Donaldson, a long-serving Sinn Fein official who acknowledged in 2005 that he had worked for British intelligence. He was shot dead at his cottage in rural Ireland four months later.

In the BBC program, broadcast in September 2016, an anonymous source claimed the shooting was sanctioned by the political and military leadership of the IRA and that Adams gave "the final say."

Adams denies involvement and called the allegation a "grievous smear."

Adams' lawyer, Paul Tweed, said outside the court that his client was "relieved and satisfied" that jurors had reached "the unequivocal conclusion that the subject allegation was highly defamatory."

Adams, 76, is one of the most influential figures of Northern Ireland's decades of conflict, and its peace process. He led Sinn Fein, the party linked to the Irish Republican Army, between 1983 and 2018. He has always denied being an IRA member, though former colleagues have said he was one of its leaders.

Speaking after the ruling, Adams said: "I've always been satisfied with my reputation. Obviously, like yourself, we all have flaws in our character, but the jury made the decision and let's accept the outcome, and I think let's accept what the jury said."

Adams was able to sue in the Republic of Ireland because people there could watch the BBC Northern Ireland program.

Adam Smyth, director of BBC Northern Ireland, said the program had been made with "careful editorial

processes and journalistic diligence.” He said the implications of the jury’s verdict were “profound.”

“As our legal team made clear, if the BBC’s case cannot be won under existing Irish defamation law, it is hard to see how anyone’s could, and they warned how today’s decision would hinder freedom of expression,” Smyth said.

Around 3,600 people were killed in “the Troubles,” Northern Ireland’s three decades of violence involving Irish republican and British loyalist militants and U.K. soldiers. The IRA stopped fighting and disarmed after the 1998 Good Friday peace accord largely ended the violence, though small splinter groups opposed to the peace process continued to mount occasional attacks.

A splinter group known as the Real IRA claimed responsibility in 2009 for killing Donaldson. An Irish police investigation remains ongoing.

Lawyers for the BBC argued that the documentary didn’t claim that Adams had sanctioned murder, merely putting that forward as an allegation alongside Adams’ denial. They also argued the program didn’t harm Adams’ reputation, because he was widely considered to have been an IRA commander and so had little reputation to lose.

A controversial flag invited art gallery visitors to ‘please walk on me.’ It lasted 19 days

By CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-McLAY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — A New Zealand flag printed with the words “please walk on me” and laid on the floor of an art gallery has once again been packed away following public outcry, 30 years after protests forced the removal of the same artwork.

The Suter Art Gallery in the city of Nelson said Thursday it had taken down the work by Māori artist Diane Prince due to escalating tensions and safety fears. The episode mirrored an Auckland gallery’s removal of the work amid public backlash and complaints to law enforcement in 1995.

This time, the flag was meant to remain on display for five months. Instead, it lasted just 19 days, reigniting long-running debates in New Zealand over artistic expression, national symbols and the country’s colonial history.

Police told The Associated Press on Friday that officers were investigating “several” complaints about the exhibition.

What is the artwork?

The piece, titled *Flagging the Future*, is a cloth New Zealand flag displayed on the floor with the words “please walk on me” stenciled across it. The flag features the British Union Jack and red stars on a blue background.

The work was part of an exhibition, *Diane Prince: Activist Artist*, and was meant to provoke reflection on the Māori experience since New Zealand’s colonization by Britain in the 19th century. Prince created the piece in 1995 in response to a government policy that limited compensation to Māori tribes for historical land theft.

“I have no attachment to the New Zealand flag,” Prince told Radio New Zealand in 2024. “I don’t call myself a New Zealander. I call myself a Māori.”

Prince couldn’t be reached immediately for comment Friday.

New Zealand’s reckoning with its colonial past has gathered pace in recent decades. But there has been little appetite among successive governments to sever the country’s remaining constitutional ties to Britain or change the flag to a design that doesn’t feature the Union Jack.

Why did the art strike a nerve?

New Zealand is among countries where desecrating the national flag is considered taboo and prohibited by law. Damaging a flag in public with intent to dishonor it is punishable by a fine of up to 5,000 New Zealand dollars (\$2,984), but prosecutions are fleetingly rare.

As in the United States and elsewhere, the country’s flag is synonymous for some with military service. But for others, particularly some Māori, it’s a reminder of land dispossession, and loss of culture and identity.

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Protests of the artwork in the city of Nelson, population 55,000, included videos posted to social media by a local woman, Ruth Tipu, whose grandfather served in the army's Māori Battalion during World War II. In one clip, she is seen lifting the flag from the floor and draping it over another artwork, an action Tipu said she would repeat daily.

A veterans' group also denounced the piece as "shameful" and "offensive." City council member Tim Skinner said he was "horrified" by the work's inclusion.

But others welcomed it. Nelson's deputy mayor, Rohan O'Neill-Stevens, posted on social media "in strong defense of artistic expression and the right for us all to be challenged and confronted by art."

Why did the gallery remove it?

The work was perhaps expected to provoke controversy and in the exhibition's opening days, The Suter Gallery defended its inclusion. But a statement on its Facebook page late Thursday said a "sharp escalation in the tone and nature of the discourse, moving well beyond the bounds of respectful debate" had prompted the flag's removal.

"This should not be interpreted as a judgement on the artwork or the artist's intent," the statement said. The gallery didn't detail specific incidents of concern and a gallery spokesperson didn't respond to a request for an interview on Friday.

New Zealand's Police said in a statement Friday that while officers were investigating complaints, they weren't called to any disturbances at the exhibition. Prince said when she revived the work in 2024 that threats of prosecution by law enforcement had prompted its removal from the Auckland gallery in 1995.

The Nelson gallery didn't suggest in its statement that police involvement had influenced Thursday's decision.

Faizan Zaki overcomes a shocking, self-inflicted flub and wins the Scripps National Spelling Bee

By BEN NUCKOLS Associated Press

OXON HILL, Md. (AP) — Faizan Zaki's enthusiasm for spelling nearly got the better of him. Ultimately, his joyful approach made him the Scripps National Spelling Bee champion.

The favorite entering the bee after his runner-up finish last year — during which he never misspelled a word in a conventional spelling round, only to lose a lightning-round tiebreaker that he didn't practice for — the shaggy-haired Faizan wore the burden of expectations lightly, sauntering to the microphone in a black hoodie and spelling his words with casual glee.

Throughout Thursday night's finals, the 13-year-old from Allen, Texas, looked like a champion in waiting. Then he nearly threw it away. But even a shocking moment of overconfidence couldn't prevent him from seizing the title of best speller in the English language.

With the bee down to three spellers, Sarvadnya Kadam and Sarv Dharavane missed their words back-to-back, putting Faizan two words away from victory. The first was "commelina," but instead of asking the requisite questions — definition, language of origin — to make sure he knew it, Faizan let his showman's instincts take over.

"K-A-M," he said, then stopped himself. "OK, let me do this. Oh, shoot!"

"Just ring the bell," he told head judge Mary Brooks, who obliged.

"So now you know what happens," Brooks said, and the other two spellers returned to the stage.

Later, standing next to the trophy with confetti at his feet, Faizan said: "I'm definitely going to be having nightmares about that tonight."

Even pronouncer Jacques Bailly tried to slow Faizan down before his winning word, "eclaircissement," but Faizan didn't ask a single question before spelling it correctly, and he pumped his fists and collapsed to the stage after saying the final letter.

The bee celebrated its 100th anniversary this year, and Faizan may be the first champion who's remembered more for a word he got wrong than one he got right.

"I think he cared too much about his aura," said Bruhat Soma, Faizan's buddy who beat him in the

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“spell-off” tiebreaker last year.

Faizan had a more nuanced explanation: After not preparing for the spell-off last year, he overcorrected, emphasizing speed during his study sessions.

Although Bruhat was fast last year when he needed to be, he followed the familiar playbook for champion spellers: asking thorough questions, spelling slowly and metronomically, showing little emotion. Those are among the hallmarks of well-coached spellers, and Faizan had three coaches: Scott Remer, Sam Evans and Sohum Sukhantankar.

None of them could turn Faizan into a robot on stage.

“He’s crazy. He’s having a good time, and he’s doing what he loves, which is spelling,” Evans said.

Said Zaki Anwar, Faizan’s father: “He’s the GOAT. I actually believe that. He’s really good, man. He’s been doing it for so long, and he knows the dictionary in and out.”

A thrilling centennial

After last year’s bee had little drama before an abrupt move to the spell-off, Scripps tweaked the competition rules, giving judges more leeway to let the competition play out before going to the tiebreaker. The nine finalists delivered.

During one stretch, six spellers got 26 consecutive words right, and there were three perfect rounds during the finals. The last time there was a single perfect round was the infamous 2019 bee, which ended in an eight-way tie.

Sarv, an 11-year-old fifth-grader from Dunwoody, Georgia, who ultimately finished third, would have been the youngest champion since Nihar Janga in 2016. He has three years of eligibility remaining.

The most poised and mature of the final three, Sarvadnya — who’s from Visalia, California — ends his career as the runner-up. He’s 14 and in the eighth grade, which means he has aged out of the competition. It’s not a bad way to go out, considering that Faizan became just the fifth runner-up in a century to come back and win, and the first since Sean Conley in 2001.

Including Faizan, whose parents emigrated from southern India, 30 of the past 36 champions have been Indian American, a run that began with Nupur Lala’s victory in 1999, which was later featured in the documentary “Spellbound.” In honor of the centennial, dozens of past champions attended this year and signed autographs for spellers, families and bee fans.

With the winner’s haul of \$52,500 added to his second-place prize of \$25,000, Faizan increased his bee earnings to \$77,500. His big splurge with his winnings last year? A \$1,500 Rubik’s cube with 21 squares on each side. This time, he said he’d donate a large portion of his winnings to charity.

The bee began in 1925 when the Louisville Courier-Journal invited other newspapers to host spelling bees and send their champions to Washington. For the past 14 years, Scripps has hosted the competition at a convention center just outside the nation’s capital, but the bee returns downtown next year to Constitution Hall, a nearly century-old concert venue near the White House.

A passionate champion

Faizan has been spelling for more than half his life. He competed in the 2019 bee as a 7-year-old, getting in through a wild-card program that has since been discontinued. He qualified again in 2023 and made the semifinals before last year’s second-place finish.

“One thing that differentiates him is he really has a passion for this. In his free time, when he’s not studying for the bee, he’s literally looking up archaic, obsolete words that have no chance of being asked,” Bruhat said. “I don’t think he cares as much about the title as his passion for language and words.”

Faizan had no regrets about showing that enthusiasm, even though it nearly cost him.

“No offense to Bruhat, but I think he really took the bee a little too seriously,” Faizan said. “I decided to have fun with this bee, and I did well, and here I am.”

Ukraine says it's ready to resume talks with Russia but needs clarity on Kremlin's terms

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine is ready to resume direct peace talks with Russia in Istanbul on Monday, a top adviser to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, following days of uncertainty over whether Kyiv would attend a further meeting proposed by Moscow.

But Ukrainian officials have insisted that the Kremlin provide a promised memorandum setting out its position on ending the more than three-year war, before the two delegations sit down to negotiate.

"Ukraine is ready to attend the next meeting, but we want to engage in a constructive discussion," Andrii Yermak said in a statement on the website of Ukraine's Presidential Office late Thursday.

"This means it is important to receive Russia's draft. There is enough time — four days are sufficient for preparing and sending the documents," Yermak said.

Ukraine and its European allies have repeatedly accused the Kremlin of dragging its feet in peace efforts, while it tries to press its bigger army's battlefield initiative and capture more Ukrainian land.

Kyiv's Western partners, including the U.S., are urging Moscow to agree to an unconditional ceasefire, something Kyiv has embraced while the Kremlin has held out for terms more to its liking.

Ukraine's top diplomat, Andrii Sybiha, also told reporters on Friday that Kyiv is waiting for Russia to clarify its proposals ahead of a next round of talks.

"We want to end this war this year. We are interested in establishing a ceasefire, whether it is for 30 days, 50 days, or 100 days. Ukraine is open to discussing this directly with Russia," Sybiha said at a joint news conference in Kyiv with his Turkish counterpart, Hakan Fidan.

Sybiha and Fidan also held the door open to a future meeting between Presidents Zelenskyy and Vladimir Putin of Russia, possibly also including U.S. President Donald Trump. Fidan said the ongoing peace push in Istanbul could be "crowned with" such a meeting.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Friday told reporters that a Russian delegation will head to Istanbul and stand ready to take part in the second round of talks on June 2.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday publicly invited Ukraine to hold direct negotiations with Moscow on that date. In a video statement, Lavrov said Russia would use Monday's meeting to deliver an outline of Moscow's position on "reliably overcoming" what it calls the root causes of the war. Russian officials have said for weeks that such a document is forthcoming.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov on Wednesday said that Ukraine isn't opposed to further direct talks with Russia, but that they would be "empty" if Moscow were to fail to clarify its terms. Umerov said he had personally handed a document setting out Ukraine's position to the Russian side.

Low-level delegations from Russia and Ukraine held their first direct peace talks in three years in Istanbul on May 16. The talks, which lasted two hours, brought no significant breakthrough, although both sides agreed to the largest prisoner exchange of the war. It was carried out last weekend and freed 1,000 captives on each side.

Fidan on Friday voiced a belief that the successful swap has "proved that negotiations can yield concrete results."

"There are two paths in front of us. Either we will turn a blind eye to the continuation of the war, or we will reach a lasting peace within the end of the year," he told reporters in Kyiv.

French Open tennis players say nasal strips aren't just for snoring

By TOM NOUVIAN Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — If more tennis players find themselves breathing easier, it might just be thanks to Carlos Alcaraz.

The four-time Grand Slam champion, whose bid for a second consecutive French Open title was scheduled to continue with a third-round match Friday night, has often worn a nasal strip in matches since last season — although not during his first two contests at Roland-Garros this week — and the sport's other

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athletes took note.

After all, if Alcaraz finds something useful on the court, their thinking goes, maybe it makes sense to give the adhesive bands a shot.

"I saw Carlos playing in it," said 18-year-old Mirra Andreeva, a semifinalist in Paris last year and the No. 6 women's seed this time. "I'd be pretty interested to try and see if there is really a difference. If he plays matches in it, then probably there is."

At the 2024 season-ending ATP Finals last November, Alcaraz said: "It is something that I'm going to wear more often. I could recover better between points."

Once associated with Pro Football Hall of Famer Jerry Rice and soccer stars like Cristiano Ronaldo and Neymar, the bands, which essentially look like a Band-Aid worn across the bridge of the nose, are popping up on tennis courts — sometimes out of necessity, sometimes out of curiosity.

They are designed to open the nostrils slightly, making it easier to breathe through the nose. Originally marketed to reduce snoring, they're being embraced to enhance air intake during physical exertion.

The idea is simple: Better breathing could mean better oxygen intake.

In practice, the science is less convincing.

In 2021, Brazilian academic Ricardo Dinardi reviewed more than 600 studies on nasal strips and found they didn't make a real difference in how much air athletes took in, their heart rate or how strenuous exercise felt.

"The effect on athletic performance is mostly placebo," Dinardi said. "But in elite sports, even perceived benefits can count."

Three-time major finalist Casper Ruud, who wore the strips in matches earlier this year, knows the evidence is shaky. But he still liked using them — both on the court and while sleeping. Like Alcaraz, Ruud did not wear one in Paris before his second-round exit.

But he has been testing a prototype of a different version.

"I tried out a device that's very early in development. It will be a bit more comfortable to wear, because it's inside the nose and it looks like I have this bullring under," said Ruud, who was the runner-up at Roland-Garros to Rafael Nadal in 2022 and Novak Djokovic in 2023. "It will return, don't worry."

For other players, like Nicolás Jarry, the strips are more than a trend — they're a necessity. After nasal surgery in 2020, the Chilean still needed help to draw air into his nose, so he puts them on for every practice and every match he plays.

"Without it, I cannot breathe. My nostrils shut when I try," he said, inhaling to demonstrate for a reporter. "Others don't have that issue and still use them."

Jarry definitely has noticed a recent spike in interest among players. He said that even though he's worn the strips for years, including at this French Open, other competitors on tour never asked about them — until Alcaraz started wearing one last year, sometimes in black, sometimes in pink.

"Others have asked me, and many are trying it," said Jarry, who sported a beige-colored strip in Paris. "But before him? Nothing."

There are those, like 2024 US Open runner-up Jessica Pegula, who are tempted to try.

"I have a horrible deviated septum. I can't really breathe out of one side of my nose," said Pegula, who will play 2023 Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova in the third round Saturday. "Maybe I should start wearing one."

She admits, though, that the aesthetic aspect might be a deal-breaker.

"I don't know," Pegula said with a smile, "if I have the confidence to rock one."

Russell Brand pleads not guilty to charges of rape and sexual assault in London court

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Actor and comedian Russell Brand pleaded not guilty in a London court Friday to rape and sexual assault charges involving four women dating back more than 25 years.

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Brand, who turns 50 next week, denied two counts of rape, two counts of sexual assault and one count of indecent assault. He said "not guilty" after each charge was read in Southwark Crown Court.

His trial was scheduled for June 3, 2026 and is expected to last four to five weeks.

Prosecutors said that the offenses took place between 1999 and 2005 — one in the English seaside town of Bournemouth and the other three in London.

Brand didn't speak to reporters as he arrived at court wearing dark sunglasses, a suit jacket, a black collared shirt open below his chest and black jeans. In his right hand, he clutched a copy of the "The Valley of Vision," a collection of Puritan prayers.

The "Get Him To The Greek" actor known for risqué stand-up routines, battles with drugs and alcohol, has dropped out of the mainstream media in recent years and built a large following online with videos mixing wellness and conspiracy theories, as well as discussing religion.

On a five-minute prayer video he posted Monday on social media, Brand wrote: "Jesus, thank you for saving my life."

When the charges were announced last month, he said that he welcomed the opportunity to prove his innocence.

"I was a fool before I lived in the light of the Lord," he said in a social media video. "I was a drug addict, a sex addict and an imbecile. But what I never was was a rapist. I've never engaged in nonconsensual activity. I pray that you can see that by looking in my eyes."

Brand is accused of raping a woman at a hotel room in Bournemouth when she attended a 1999 Labour Party conference and met him at an event where he was performing. The woman alleged that Brand stripped while she was in the bathroom and when she returned to the room he pushed her on the bed, removed her underwear and raped her.

A second woman said that Brand grabbed her forearm and attempted to drag her into a men's toilet at a television station in London in 2001.

The third accuser was a television employee who met Brand at a birthday party in a bar in 2004, where he allegedly grabbed her breasts before pulling her into a toilet and forcing her to perform oral sex.

The final accuser worked at a radio station and met Brand while he was working on a spin-off of the "Big Brother" reality television program between 2004 and 2005. She said Brand grabbed her by the face with both hands, pushed her against a wall and kissed her before groping her breasts and buttocks.

The Associated Press doesn't name victims of alleged sexual violence, and British law protects their identity from the media for life.

Trump has long warned of a government 'deep state.' Now in power, he's under pressure to expose it

By ALI SWENSON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — As he crisscrossed the country in 2024, Donald Trump pledged to supporters that voting him back into the presidency would be "our final battle."

"With you at my side, we will demolish the deep state," he said repeatedly on the campaign trail. "We will liberate our country from these tyrants and villains once and for all."

Four months into his second term, Trump has continued to stoke dark theories involving his predecessors and other powerful politicians and attorneys — most recently raising the specter of nefarious intent behind former President Joe Biden's use of an autopen to sign papers. The administration has pledged to reopen investigations and has taken steps to declassify certain documents, including releasing more than 63,000 pages of records related to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Yet many of Trump's supporters say it's not enough.

Some who take him at his word are beginning to get restless as they ask why his administration, which holds the keys to chasing down these alleged government secrets, is denying them the evidence and retribution they expected.

His Justice Department has not yet arrested hordes of "deep state" actors as some of his supporters

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had hoped it would, even as the president has been posting cryptic videos and memes about Democratic politicians.

"People are tired of not knowing," conservative commentator Damani Felder said on podcaster Tim Pool's show last week. "We actually demand answers and real transparency. It's not that hard to deliver."

A promise to reveal and dismantle the 'deep state'

Trump has long promised to dismantle the "deep state" — a supposed secret network of powerful people manipulating government decisions behind the scenes — to build his base of support, said Yotam Ophir, a communications professor at the University at Buffalo.

"He built part of this universe, which at the end of the day is a fictional universe," he said.

Now that Trump is in power and has stocked loyalists throughout his administration, his supporters expect all to be revealed. Delivering on that is difficult when many of the conspiracies he alleged aren't real, said Joseph Uscinski, a political scientist who studies conspiracy theories at the University of Miami.

To be sure, the president has prioritized retribution in his second administration. He has fired federal workers and targeted law firms he disfavors in executive orders. He has ordered the revocation of government security clearances for political rivals and former employees who dissented during his first term. His Justice Department has fired prosecutors who investigated him and scrutinized career FBI agents who investigated the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Even so, Trump's administration hasn't gone as far as many of his supporters would like. They want to see steps taken against people he has long claimed were involved in sinister plots against him, such as former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and former FBI Director James Comey. The administration also hasn't offered proof of the "egregious crimes" that Trump claims have corrupted the federal government for years.

Conspiracy theorists focus on Epstein and Trump's assassination attempt

Tensions erupted this month when FBI Director Kash Patel and his deputy, Dan Bongino, dismissed two of the unsubstantiated conspiracy theories that have animated Trump's base the most — that financier and sexual abuser Jeffrey Epstein was murdered in a cover-up, and that Trump's attempted assassination in Butler, Pennsylvania, was a government plot.

"You know a suicide when you see one, and that's what that was," Patel said about Epstein's death in a Fox News interview.

"I have seen the whole file," Bongino added. "He killed himself."

Conservatives online demanded to see the evidence, pointing to Bongino's past statements as a podcast host, when he suggested the government was hiding information about Epstein.

"No matter who gets elected, you get the same foreign policy, you get the same economic policy, and the Epstein videos remain secret," right-wing podcaster and former Fox News host Tucker Carlson said on his show.

"They told us for months leading up to the Election that it wasn't suicide," Newsmax host Todd Starnes wrote on X.. "But now they tell us it was suicide." He added: "Pardon me, but what the heck is going on at DOJ?"

Attorney General Pam Bondi said this month that FBI officials were poring through "tens of thousands" of videos related to Epstein and would make more materials public once they took steps to protect the victims.

In the same Fox News interview, Bongino and Patel said they had been briefed on the attempted assassination of Trump during a rally in July and there was no explosive conspiracy to be revealed.

"In some of these cases, the 'there' you're looking for is not there," Bongino said.

Skepticism among 'deep state' believers

Bongino appeared to try to throw a bone to Trump's base this week when he announced the agency would reopen some prominent cases that have attracted public interest. He said the FBI would investigate the planting of pipe bombs found near the Democratic and Republican National Committee headquarters in Washington the day of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack, the leak of the Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson* draft opinion in 2022 that overturned the constitutional right to abortion and the discovery of cocaine in the

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White House in 2023.

But it wasn't enough for everyone who weighed in on his X account.

"Anything to distract from the Epstein files," one user replied to his announcement. "No results," wrote another.

In an interview Thursday on "Fox & Friends," Bongino teased that the FBI would soon release video captured outside Epstein's jail cell and materials related to Trump's attempted assassination.

He said he understands the public's demands for transparency but called for patience and noted not all information is the FBI's to declassify. That didn't satisfy everyone who wants answers to the conspiracy theories.

"I am convinced that the deep state can only be defeated by God at this point," Philip Anderson, a right-wing influencer who participated in the riot at the Capitol, wrote Thursday on X. "Kash Patel, Dan Bongino, and Pam Bondi are completely useless."

Promoting conspiracy theories as a tactic to distract

All the while, Trump has continued promoting conspiracy theories on his Truth Social platform and elsewhere.

He shared a video this month about mysterious deaths allegedly being linked to the Clinton family and shared someone's image of himself with former President Barack Obama with the text, "ALL ROADS LEAD TO OBAMA, RETRUTH IF YOU WANT MILITARY TRIBUNALS."

Ophir, the University at Buffalo professor, said it's a tactic that distracts Trump's base and helps inoculate him from criticism.

"When something good happens, it's because Trump is great and his agenda is brilliant," Ophir said. "When something bad happens, it's because of the Obamas or the Clintons or whatever forces are undermining him from within Washington."

Trump this week fueled newer theories, without sharing evidence, that Biden's use of a mechanical device called an autopen during his presidency meant he didn't sign his executive orders willingly or that aides profited from controlling it. He has called for people who operated it to be charged with "TREASON."

The narrative has gained momentum on the right because of allegations that Biden's aides covered up his mental and physical decline. Presidents have used autopens for years to sign certain documents.

"Whoever used it was usurping the power of the Presidency, and it should be very easy to find out who that person (or persons) is," Trump wrote on Truth Social.

At least one user of his platform was unimpressed and questioned why Trump and his allies, holding all the power, still didn't have any answers.

"IF IT'S EASY," the commenter posted. "WHY HASN'T YOUR ADMINISTRATION FOUND THESE CRIMINALS ALREADY."

Islamic State group claims first attack on Syrian government forces since Assad's fall

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for two attacks in southern Syria, including one on government forces that an opposition war monitor described as the first on the Syrian army to be carried out by the extremists since the fall of Bashar Assad.

IS said in a statement on Thursday that in one attack, a bomb targeting a "vehicle of the apostate regime" detonated, leaving seven soldiers dead or wounded. It said the attack occurred "last Thursday," or May 22, in the al-Safa area in the desert of the southern province of Sweida.

In a separate statement, the group said another bomb attack occurred this week in a nearby area, targeting members of the U.S.-backed Free Syrian Army. It claimed that it killed one fighter and wounded three.

There was no comment from the government on the claims. A spokesperson for the Free Syrian Army didn't immediately respond to a request for comment by The Associated Press.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the attack on government forces killed one civilian and wounded three soldiers, describing it as the first such attack to be claimed by IS against Syrian forces since the 54-year rule by the Assad family ended in December.

IS, which once controlled large parts of Syria and Iraq, is opposed to the new authority in Damascus led by President Ahmad al-Sharaa, who was once the head of al-Qaida's branch in Syria and fought battles against IS.

Over the past several months, IS has claimed responsibility for attacks against the U.S.-backed and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces in the northeast.

IS was defeated in Syria in March 2019 when SDF fighters captured the last sliver of land that the extremists controlled. Since then, its sleeper cells have carried out deadly attacks, mainly in eastern and northeast Syria.

In January, state media reported that intelligence officials in Syria's post-Assad government thwarted a plan by IS to set off a bomb at a Shiite Muslim shrine south of Damascus.

Al-Sharaa met with U.S. President Donald Trump in Saudi Arabia earlier this month, when the American leader said that Washington would work on lifting crippling economic sanctions imposed on Damascus since the days of Assad.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a statement after the meeting that Trump urged al-Sharaa to diplomatically recognize Israel, "tell all foreign terrorists to leave Syria" and help the U.S. stop any resurgence of the Islamic State group.

Officials say at least 10 people are dead and 6 are missing after stone quarry collapse in Indonesia

By NINIEK KARMINI and ADI MARSIELA Associated Press

BANDUNG, Indonesia (AP) — A natural stone quarry in Indonesia's West Java province collapsed on several people who were working in it on Friday, killing at least 10 people and leaving six workers missing, officials said.

More than two dozen people were trapped in the rubble when the mine in Cirebon district collapsed, local police chief Sumarni said, and rescuers were able to pull a dozen injured people from the debris during a grueling search effort.

"Authorities are still investigating the cause of the collapse, and we have been questioning the owner and workers of the quarry," said Sumarni, who like many Indonesians uses a single name.

She said police, emergency personnel, soldiers and volunteers were trying to locate any remaining workers, supported by five excavators, but were hampered by unstable soil that risked further slides.

The search was suspended Friday as darkness fell and will be resumed early Saturday for those reported still buried under the rubble along with three excavators and six trucks, said the National Disaster Management Agency's spokesperson Abdul Muhari in a statement.

He said as of Friday afternoon rescuers have retrieved 10 bodies, while six people were hospitalized with serious injuries.

West Java Governor Dedi Mulyadi said in a video statement on Instagram that he had visited and identified the vulnerability of collapse at the mine, located at Gunung Kuda mining site in Cipanas village before he was elected.

"I saw that C-grade mining was very dangerous, it did not meet the safety standard elements for its workers," Mulyadi said, adding that at that time, "I didn't have any capacity to stop it."

On Friday, Mulyadi said that he had taken firm action to close the mine and four other similar mines in West Java that are considered to be endangering the environment and lives.

A video showed rescuers struggling to bring out a body bag from a devastated area.

Illegal or informal mining operations are commonplace in Indonesia, providing a tenuous livelihood to those who labor in conditions with a high risk of injury or death.

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Landslides, flooding and collapses of tunnels are just some of the hazards in such mining. Much of the processing of sand, rocks or gold ore involves the use of highly toxic mercury and cyanide by workers using little or no protection.

Last year, a landslide triggered by torrential rains struck an unauthorized gold mining operation on Indonesia's Sumatra island, killing at least 15 people.

Today in History: May 31, the Tulsa Race Massacre begins

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, May 31, the 151st day of 2025. There are 214 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On May 31, 1921, a two-day massacre erupted in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as white mobs began looting and burning the affluent Black district of Greenwood over reports a Black man had assaulted a white woman in an elevator; though the exact number remains unknown, as many as 300 Black Tulsans were killed during the riot.

Also on this date:

In 1790, President George Washington signed into law the first U.S. copyright act.

In 1889, over 2,200 people in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, died when the South Fork Dam collapsed, sending 20 million tons of water rushing through the town.

In 1949, former State Department official and accused spy Alger Hiss went on trial in New York, charged with perjury (the trial ended with a hung jury, but Hiss was convicted in a second trial.)

In 1970, a magnitude 7.9 earthquake struck the Ancash region of Peru; the quake, combined with the landslide it triggered, killed an estimated 67,000 people.

In 1977, the 800-mile-long Trans-Alaska oil pipeline was completed after three years of construction.

In 2005, Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein confirmed a Vanity Fair magazine report naming former FBI official W. Mark Felt as the Watergate scandal informant previously known only as "Deep Throat."

In 2009, Millvina Dean, the last survivor of the 1912 sinking of the RMS Titanic, died in Hampshire, England at 97.

In 2014, Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, the only American soldier held prisoner in Afghanistan, was freed by the Taliban in exchange for five Afghan detainees from the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. (Bergdahl, who'd gone missing in June 2009, later pleaded guilty to endangering his comrades by walking away from his post in Afghanistan; his sentence included a dishonorable discharge, a reduction in rank and a fine, but no prison time.)

In 2019, a longtime city employee opened fire in a municipal building in Virginia Beach, Virginia, killing 12 people on three floors before police shot and killed him; officials said DeWayne Craddock had resigned by email hours before the shooting.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-filmmaker Clint Eastwood is 95. Football Hall of Famer Joe Namath is 82. Actor Tom Berenger is 76. Actor-comedian Chris Elliott is 65. Actor Lea Thompson is 64. Musician Corey Hart is 63. Rapper Darryl "DMC" McDaniels is 61. Actor Brooke Shields is 60. TV host Phil Keoghan is 58. Jazz musician Christian McBride is 53. Actor Archie Panjabi is 53. Actor Colin Farrell is 49. Singer Normani is 29. Tennis player Iga Świątek is 24.