

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Wednesday, June 4:

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, corn, oranges, whole wheat bread.

Emmanuel Lutheran Sara Circle, 5 p.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Groton Chamber Board Meeting, Noon, City Hall

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

Softball Groton hosts Ipswich (U8B at 5:30, U10B at 5:30, U12 at 6:30)

## Thursday, June 5:

Senior Menu: Cheeseburger casserole, carrots, apple sauce, whole wheat bread.

Emmanuel Lutheran Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

Legion at Watertown, 5 p.m. (DH)

Jr. Legion at Miller 5:30 p.m. (DH)

Jr. Teeners at Lake Norden, 5 p.m. (DH)

## Groton Daily Independent

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# Good Morning

WHO'S  
GRATEFUL TO  
BE ALIVE  
AND WELL  
THIS  
WEDNESDAY  
MORNING?

*We are!*



U10 B&W at Sisseton, 5:30 p.m. (DH); U8 W&R hosts Britton, 5:30 p.m.

T-Ball practice at 6 p.m.

## Friday, June 6

Senior Menu: Cold turkey sub, lettuce/cheese/tomato, macaroni salad, five cup salad.

## Saturday, June 7

Day of Play at Groton Baseball Complex

Amateurs host Northville, 7 p.m.

Legion hosts W.I.N., 5 p.m.

Jr. Teeners hosts W.I.N., 1 p.m.

U12 ALL hosts Britton, 1 p.m. (DH); U10 ALL hosts Webster, 11 a.m. (DH); U8 ALL hosts Britton, 9 a.m. (DH)

Softball in Groton: U8B vs. Britton, 9 a.m.; U8G vs. Britton, 10 a.m.; U10B vs. U10G DH, 11 a.m.; U12/U14 Intersquad Scrimmage DH, 1 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.**

## Dutch Government Collapses

The Dutch government collapsed yesterday after far-right populist leader Geert Wilders withdrew his Party for Freedom from the four-party coalition, ending the administration less than a year after it was formed. Wilders blamed the split on his partners' refusal to back new immigration proposals that included suspending all asylum applications and tightening border controls.

Prime Minister Dick Schoof, an independent, said he would submit his resignation to the king while continuing in the caretaker role. Coalition leaders said they didn't oppose Wilders' plans outright but wanted to debate them in the House of Representatives—an approach that would have delayed any action and offered no guarantee of passage, though the coalition holds a majority with 88 out of 150 seats.

The collapse leaves the Netherlands under a caretaker government just weeks before a NATO summit June 24–25, where key defense decisions are expected. While the remaining coalition parties could try to continue in a different form, that's seen as unlikely, and new elections are expected this fall.

## Panthers vs. Oilers

The Florida Panthers and the Edmonton Oilers meet tonight in Game 1 of the Stanley Cup Final (8 pm ET, TNT). The matchup is a repeat of last year's finals, in which the Panthers topped the Oilers in seven games to capture their first-ever title.

Florida is led by captain Aleksander Barkov, who was named the league's best defensive forward for the third time in his career and beat the Oilers in both of their head-to-head regular-season games. Edmonton enters as a slight favorite and is led by star Connor McDavid. Scoring three goals and adding eight assists in last year's finals, McDavid won the Conn Smythe Trophy as the series MVP despite the Oilers losing to the Panthers.

Along with the Tampa Bay Lightning, at least one team from Florida has been in the last six finals, while a Canadian team hasn't won the Stanley Cup since 1993.

## Meta's Nuclear Deal

Meta—the parent of Facebook and Instagram—has signed a 20-year agreement to buy nuclear power from Constellation Energy's Illinois facility starting in June 2027. The deal is the first of its kind in the US. Its financial details were not disclosed.

The move follows a growing trend among tech giants like Amazon, Google, and Microsoft, which are partnering with energy companies to secure reliable, low-carbon electricity for their data centers and AI initiatives. Artificial intelligence systems demand large amounts of energy, much of which currently comes from fossil fuels contributing to climate change. Nuclear power accounts for roughly 19% of US electricity generation.

Under the deal, Meta will purchase the full output—roughly 1.1 gigawatts—of electricity generated by the Illinois plant's single nuclear reactor. The power will feed into the regional grid rather than directly to Meta's facilities. The deal will expand the plant's clean energy output by 30 megawatts, preserve around 1,100 local jobs, and generate \$13.5M in annual tax revenue.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Women's College World Series kicks off tonight (8 pm ET, ESPN) with Texas Tech taking on Texas in a best-of-three matchup for the NCAA softball national title.

Shigeo Nagashima, Japanese baseball legend, dies at age 89.

Washington, DC's Kennedy Center denies report of seeing a 36% drop in subscription sales compared to 2024.

President Donald Trump threatens hefty fines against California after state allowed a transgender female athlete to compete in track and field championships.

New York Knicks head coach Tom Thibodeau fired after five seasons despite team reaching Eastern Conference Finals for first time in 25 years.

## Science & Technology

China's DeepSeek may have trained its latest AI chatbot in part on Google's Gemini, new research suggests; the company made waves earlier this year for its low-cost model.

Scientists make most precise measurement to date of the magnetic properties of the muon, a subatomic particle created by cosmic rays hitting the atmosphere; results confirm anomalous properties not explained by theory.

New simulation reveals second-by-second details of what happens when a black hole consumes a neutron star; results let astrophysicists know what signals to look for to identify the events.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.6%, Dow +0.5%, Nasdaq +0.8%); Nvidia overtakes Microsoft as world's most valuable company.

US tariffson steel and aluminum imports to double starting today.

Ford reports 16% year-over-year US sales increase in May amid tariffs.

US job openings rose to 7.4 million in April, up 191,000 from March and higher than expected, per Labor Department data.

Dollar General sets quarterly sales record of over \$10B as Americans spend more at bargain stores.

Walmart, Amazon, and UnitedHealth top Fortune 500 annual list of largest US companies by revenue.

Number of women CEOs leading Fortune 500 companies hits new record of 55.

## Politics & World Affairs

White House proposes package to Congress to reclaim \$9.4B in approved spending, mostly targeting foreign aid.

US immigration authorities detain family of suspect in Colorado attack.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth orders removal of gay rights activist Harvey Milk's name from a Navy oil ship.

Liberal Lee Jae-myung wins South Korean presidency, ending months of political instability after the ousting of former conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol.

Mexico's ruling Morena party appears likely to control the Supreme Court in the country's first judicial election.

Crimea bridge reopens after Ukraine carried out underwater explosion; bridge connects the Russian-occupied peninsula to Russia.

Gunfire near Gaza aid site kills at least 27 people; Israeli military says it fired near people who strayed from a designated route to the site and who did not respond to warning shots.

## City Council discusses pricey projects

By Elizabeth Varin

The Groton City Council tackled a trio of significant financial discussions, including plans for a new electric metering system, a major road improvement project with an estimated cost of \$900,000 to \$1 million, and potential strategies for investing municipal reserves.

The council continued discussion on a new electric metering system, reviewing a proposal from Irby Utilities to provide the electric utility meters. The metering system has been on many agendas since October 2024, though replacing the system has been discussed during council meetings since at least 2023.

Electric Utility Supervisor Todd Gay presented a quote to replace the city's current electric metering system with a new one for a Landis+Gyr system.

Gay told the council he wants to replace the current system with one that other city workers can understand when he and Technology Specialist Paul Kosel retire.

"The system we have now is in one guy's brain," Gay said. "None of us can figure it out. None of us can run it.

"This system I propose is user friendly. I know two cities in South Dakota that have put it in in the last four years," Gay continued. "They're extremely happy with it."

The city currently works with Eaton, a power management company. However, there have been issues cropping up, Gay said.

"Paul can't read roughly 90 meters a month. They can't figure out why," he said. "I'm not placing the blame on Paul or the vendor or whatever it is, but they haven't been able to figure it out in over two years. I can't recommend going back to that same vendor."

Gay advised the city to get new quotes for the meters as prices have jumped within the last year or so. Council members asked Gay to get specifications for the meters to be able to compare the two types of meters more easily.

## Substantial price tag placed on road work

Roadwork on a six-block area of town west of Highway 37 could have a hefty price tag.

Councilman Brian Bahr told the council that Ken Hier with IMEG Corporation called him to give an estimated cost for road improvement and paving of some streets including portions of North Washington Street, North Lincoln Street and West Fourth Avenue.

According to Bahr, Hier estimated the cost could be between \$900,000 to \$1 million. That would be for work on about six blocks.

"It's a lot of money," Bahr said.

"Yeah, but it's just going to get worse if we don't do it," Mayor Scott Hanlon replied. "It will probably go up five percent every year. ...The longer we wait, the more it will cost."

Bahr told the council he and city staff would look into it and get bids on it.

## Investments up for debate

City Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich reported about recent discussions he had dealing with investing the city's reserves.

The council asked Heinrich to look into whether the city would get more interest if it were to put some of its money in a South Dakota Public Fund Investment Trust, which has a higher interest rate than the city's current savings account.

After discussions with the city's current bank, Dacotah Bank, there seems to be options to keep the money in a Dacotah Bank savings account but still get a higher interest rate. Heinrich told the board he still has some more research to do, but he will bring the information back to the council.

- The council reviewed and approved a plat of land on the west side of Groton. The Frohling Sixth Addition Plat adds about 50 feet of land to the west of his property, said Groton resident Ray Brandlee. The

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plat had been approved last month by the Planning and Zoning Commission.

- The council approved a special event alcoholic beverage license for two of four Groton Amateur baseball games. The approved dates are June 7 and 8 at the Groton Baseball Complex with the stipulation that beer will not be allowed if little league or softball is present. The council held off on approving two other dates as city ordinance requires separate special event alcoholic beverage license applications for each date.

- The Groton Swimming Pool is expected to be busy this summer. Pool co-managers Kami Lipp and Tricia Keith presented a report about the first few weeks at the pool. So far, there have been 114 family passes and 52 youth passes purchased for the summer.

- The council authorized the purchase of a used dump truck on the stipulation that the truck costs do not exceed \$25,000.

- The council authorized city staff to declare a 2017 Ford Interceptor SUV as surplus, which will allow the city to sell the vehicle. When the item was presented, Councilman Kevin Nehls quickly said, "I will make the first motion to get rid of that." The Groton Police Department vehicle has been through multiple repairs within the last couple of years, and the vehicle has been sitting idle since being replaced with a Chevrolet Tahoe.



## T.C Schuster's Clutch Hitting Propels Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion To Victory Over Britton U17 Teeners

By GameChanger Media

T.C Schuster drove in four runs on three hits to lead Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion past Britton U17 Teeners 18-7 on Tuesday. Schuster doubled in the second scoring two, singled in the first scoring one, and doubled in the third scoring one.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion jumped out to the lead in the top of the first inning after Alex Abeln singled, scoring one run, Schuster singled, scoring one run, and Isaiah Scepaniak doubled, scoring two runs.

Britton U17 Teeners scored three runs in the bottom of the first on a home run to center field by Ben Suther.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion extended their early lead with five runs in the top of the second thanks to RBI doubles by Schuster, Jordan Schwan, and Scepaniak.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion scored five runs on five hits in the top of the third inning. Ethan Kroll singled, scoring two runs, Lincoln Krause singled, scoring one run, Abeln singled, scoring one run, and Schuster doubled, scoring one run.

Kason Oswald earned the win for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. The starter allowed seven hits and seven runs (six earned) over four and two-thirds innings, striking out three and walking six. Mitch Burger took the loss for Britton U17 Teeners. The pitcher went one and two-thirds innings, allowing nine runs (six earned) on six hits, striking out four and walking three.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion tallied 15 hits in the game. Scepaniak, Ryder Schelle, and Abeln each collected multiple hits for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. Tristin McGannon led Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion with three walks. Overall, the team had a strong eye at the plate, accumulating seven walks for the game. Krause and McGannon each stole multiple bases for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion stole 11 bases in the game. Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion turned one double play in the game.

Suther drove the middle of the lineup, leading Britton U17 Teeners with three runs batted in. The cleanup hitter went 2-for-3 on the day. Suther and Lofton Heer each collected two hits for Britton U17 Teeners. Britton U17 Teeners had a strong eye at the plate, accumulating six walks for the game. Nathan Folkman and Burger led the team with two walks each.

Next up for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion is a game at Britton U17 Teeners on Tuesday.

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## Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion 18 - 7 Britton U17 Teeners

📍 Away 📅 Tuesday June 03, 2025

	1	2	3	4	5	R	H	E
GRTN	4	5	5	2	2	18	15	3
BRTT	3	3	0	0	1	7	7	3

### BATTING

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
L Krause #2 (C)	3	3	1	1	1	0
A Abeln #5 (2B)	3	2	2	2	1	0
R Schelle #8 (3B)	4	2	2	0	0	2
N Groebl... #13 (1B)	3	2	1	0	1	1
T Schuster #3 (SS)	3	3	3	4	0	0
J Schwan #11 (CF)	4	1	1	2	0	1
I Scepa... #20 (DH)	3	0	2	2	1	0
T McGan... #22 (LF)	1	2	0	0	3	1
B Fliehs #19 (P)	2	2	1	0	0	1
E Kroll #14 (RF)	4	1	2	4	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>

**2B:** T Schuster 2, J Schwan, I Scepaniak 2, **TB:** N Groeblinghoff, B Fliehs, T Schuster 5, L Krause, R Schelle 2, E Kroll 2, J Schwan 2, I Scepaniak 4, A Abeln 2, **HBP:** B Fliehs, T Schuster, **SB:** B Fliehs, T Schuster, T McGannon 3, L Krause 4, R Schelle, A Abeln, **LOB:** 6

### PITCHING

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion	IP	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
K Oswald #12	4.2	7	7	6	6	3
B Fliehs #19	0.0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>

**W:** K Oswald, **P-S:** B Fliehs 2-2, K Oswald 106-54, **WP:** K Oswald, **HBP:** K Oswald 2, **BF:** K Oswald 29

Britton U17 Teeners	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
W Richter (SS)	1	2	1	0	1	0
M Burger #9 (P)	0	1	0	0	2	0
B Hawki... #36 (RF)	3	0	0	1	0	0
B Suther #30 (3B)	3	2	2	3	0	0
D Redler (LF)	2	0	1	1	0	0
C Chapin #10 (C)	1	0	0	0	1	0
L Kilker #1 (2B)	3	0	0	0	0	1
L Heer #15 (CF)	3	1	2	0	0	1
N Folkman #20 (1B)	1	1	0	0	2	1
E Symens #3 (P)	2	0	1	0	0	0
K Mills #11 (P)	2	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>

**2B:** W Richter, B Suther, **HR:** B Suther, **TB:** W Richter 2, L Heer 2, D Redler, E Symens, B Suther 6, **HBP:** M Burger, C Chapin, **SB:** L Heer, **LOB:** 5

Britton U17 Teeners	IP	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
M Burger #9	1.2	6	9	6	3	4
D Redler	0.2	5	5	5	1	0
K Mills #11	1.0	3	2	2	1	0
B Hawk... #36	0.2	0	0	0	0	0
L Heer #15	0.1	1	2	1	2	1
E Symens #3	0.2	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>

## Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion Come Back To Defeat Britton U17 Teeners

By GameChanger Media

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion trailed by as many as four, but came back to top Britton U17 Teeners on Tuesday, 6-5.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion didn't take the lead until later in the game. The game was tied at five in the top of the fifth when T.C Schuster singled, scoring one run.

Britton U17 Teeners were the first to get on the board in the first when Ben Suther singled, scoring one run.

Britton U17 Teeners added to their early lead in the bottom of the second inning when an error scored two runs, and Emmett Symens grounded out, scoring one run.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion flipped the game on its head in the top of the third, scoring five runs on three hits to take the lead, 5-4. The biggest blow in the inning was a double by Alex Abeln that drove in two.

Bryce Hawkinson hit a sacrifice fly, which helped Britton U17 Teeners tie the game at five in the bottom of the third.

Braeden Fliehs earned the win for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. The pitcher surrendered two hits and five runs (one earned) over five innings, striking out six and walking three. Suther took the loss for Britton U17 Teeners. The reliever went one inning, allowing zero runs on one hit, striking out two and walking one. Lincoln Kilker stepped on the mound first for Britton U17 Teeners. The starting pitcher surrendered three hits and five runs (two earned) over three innings, striking out two and walking two.

Schuster, Jordan Schwan, Abeln, and Noah Scepaniack each collected one hit for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. Abeln went 1-for-1 at the plate and led the team with two runs batted in. Abeln stole two bases.

Suther and Mitch Burger each collected one hit for Britton U17 Teeners. Suther, Symens, and Hawkinson each drove in one run for Britton U17 Teeners. Burger stole two bases.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion play at home on Thursday against Miller in their next game.

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## Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion 6 - 5 Britton U17 Teeners

📍 Away 📅 Tuesday June 03, 2025

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

### BATTING

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
L Krause #2	1	2	0	0	2	0
A Abeln #5 (SS)	1	1	1	2	1	0
N Groebl... #13 (1B)	3	0	0	0	0	1
T Schuster #3 (2B)	3	0	1	1	0	1
I Scepan... #20 (3B)	2	0	0	0	0	0
E Kroll #14 (3B)	1	1	0	0	0	1
R Schelle #8 (DH)	3	0	0	0	0	0
T McGan... #22 (LF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
J Bisbee #15 (C)	0	0	0	0	2	0
N Scepa... #13 (RF)	2	1	1	0	0	0
J Schwan #11 (CF)	2	1	1	1	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>

**2B:** A Abeln, **TB:** N Scepaniack, A Abeln 2, J Schwan, T Schuster, **SAC:** A Abeln, **HBP:** T McGannon, **SB:** T McGannon, A Abeln 2, L Krause, **LOB:** 5

### PITCHING

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion	IP	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
B Fliehs #19	5.0	2	5	1	3	6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>

**W:** B Fliehs, **P-S:** B Fliehs 94-55, **WP:** B Fliehs, **HBP:** B Fliehs, **BF:** B Fliehs 22

Britton U17 Teeners	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
W Richter (SS)	2	0	0	0	1	0
M Burger #9 (2B)	2	2	1	0	1	0
B Hawki... #36 (CF)	1	0	0	1	0	1
B Suther #30 (C)	2	0	1	1	0	0
D Redler (LF)	2	0	0	0	0	1
K Mills #11 (1B)	1	1	0	0	1	0
C Chapin #10 (P)	1	1	0	0	0	0
L Kilker #1 (P)	2	1	0	0	0	1
N Folkm... #20 (3B)	1	0	0	0	0	1
##14	1	0	0	0	0	1
E Symens #3 (RF)	2	0	0	1	0	1
CR: J Rein	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>

**TB:** B Suther, M Burger, **SF:** B Hawkinson, **HBP:** C Chapin, **SB:** K Mills, B Suther, W Richter, M Burger 2, **LOB:** 2

Britton U17 Teeners	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
L Kilker #1	3.0	3	5	2	2	2	0
C Chapin #10	1.0	0	1	1	2	0	0
B Suther #30	1.0	1	0	0	1	2	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>

**L:** B Suther, **P-S:** B Suther 25-14, C Chapin 24-15, L Kilker 41-27, **WP:** B Suther, **HBP:** C Chapin, **BF:** B Suther 5, C Chapin 6, L Kilker 15

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## Groton Robotics at the VEX World Championships

Team Gladiators, consisting of Garrett Schultz, Team Lead, along with Jameson Penning & Haden Harder, participated at the VEX World Championships on May 6th-8th at the Kay Bailey Hutchinson Convention Center located in Dallas, Texas.

The excitement in the air, the drive of these students, it was a site to behold! There were over 800 teams from over 75 countries that participated in this event. The Gladiators competed well and won 5 out of 10 games they participated in. They finished 53rd out of 83 in their division. Language barriers was a new obstacle that they had to overcome, one Team from Mexico they played knew very little English so they had to work together to communicate their strategy. A mid tournament robot mechanical issue held the Gladiators back a bit, but they continued to play hard to the end and the cheering squad of 11 from Groton was there cheering them on!



**Pictured are Haden Harder, Team Lead Garrett Schultz and Jameson Brunette.** (Courtesy Photo)

Some other highlights of the tournament, the boys got to see some of the sites in Downtown Dallas, such as the JFK assassination site. They were able to speak with kids from around the world... Garrett Schultz commented his favorite team to talk with were a team from Bolivia, South America. They were able to see and cheer on the other 2 Robotics teams from South Dakota that attended, both from Harrisburg, SD. Lastly, the opening and closing ceremonies had more energy than you can imagine. And in the closing ceremonies... the 2025-2026 game reveal was made - Pushback! Next years VEX Worlds Championships will be held in St. Louis Missouri.



Thank you to the Groton Community and everyone that has supported Groton Robotics.





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **Prison task force rejects original Lincoln County site, tightens budget for new facility**

**Mitchell, Worthing, Sioux Falls make the cut for further study**

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JUNE 3, 2025 10:09 PM**

PIERRE – After years of political upheaval, court battles and legislative tugs-of-war, the plan to build a new men's prison in Lincoln County south of Harrisburg is dead.

Members of the Project Prison Reset work group spent more than eight hours at the Capitol on Tuesday running through possible site locations, building designs, budget needs and public comments before voting unanimously to scratch the original site from its list of replacement options for the aging state penitentiary in Sioux Falls.

Also gone? The former Citibank site in Sioux Falls, a patch of land outside of Huron, a former cheese plant in Grant County – and more than \$50 million in cash, spent to prepare the Lincoln County site for a prison that now won't be built.

The members set a \$600 million cap on a penitentiary replacement, budgeting for between 1,500 and 1,700 beds – about the same capacity as the original Lincoln County site, but \$125 million under that version's guaranteed maximum price.

The legislature spent three years dumping money into an incarceration construction fund in the run up to February, the month lawmakers balked at the Lincoln County project's location and price tag. The project needed but couldn't secure two-thirds majority support. The failure spurred the creation of the prison reset group by Gov. Larry Rhoden, who'd pushed for the Lincoln County prison.

Now, the task force has asked the state's contractor, JE Dunn, to study a site in Mitchell, another near Worthing, and state-owned land on the grounds of the Mike Durfee Prison in Springfield and at the penitentiary in Sioux Falls.

House Speaker and task force member Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, said the new parameters are a "departure" from the original plan, but a "necessary step" to find consensus.

"The Legislature has already said we don't need that big of a prison, we don't want to spend that much money all in one big shot," Hansen said.

### **'You need to build beds now'**

In a report presented to the group Tuesday, consultants with Phoenix-based Arrington Watkins Architects projected that the state's total prison population will grow by 31.7% by 2036 — from 3,926 in 2025 to 5,172 in 2036. That's largely driven by the state's truth in sentencing law, which requires people convicted of violent offenses to serve between 85% and 100% of their sentences, depending on the category of their crime.

Even without considering projected growth in prison population, the consultants said, every correctional facility in South Dakota is beyond its capacity now. The state needs more than 1,500 beds to deal with current capacity issues at Durfee and the penitentiary are needed immediately.

"You need to build beds now," said Mike Quinn, managing principal at Arrington Watkins.

The parameters set Tuesday significantly restrict the project's scope, said Vance McMillan, senior vice president of JE Dunn. That includes additions to existing facilities or building cheaper, steel-celled options that'll last 50 years. The original campus-style prison was meant to stand for 100 years.

"A hundred years is out the door with the new budget challenge, in my opinion," McMillan said.

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That “not really” a responsible use of taxpayer funds, Senate Majority Leader Jim Mehlhaff, R-Pierre, told South Dakota Searchlight. But it’s politically necessary.

The \$600 million cap is more “palatable,” he said, since it’s roughly the amount of money the state has on hand to fund the project already.

“We have nearly 800 inmates living in a medieval setting,” Mehlhaff said, referencing the penitentiary in Sioux Falls, which opened in 1881 and predates statehood. “We have to do something to correct that as soon as possible.”

## Lawmakers prefer building on existing Corrections land

The state engineer and contractors are expected to present designs that meet the new parameters by the task force’s July 8 meeting. Legislators will convene for a special session at the state Capitol on July 22.

JE Dunn will present options, but McMillan said they might not be able to pull together many details in five weeks.

Members of the task force, especially the lawmakers, want to build on or expand upon existing prison sites. Increasing capacity on land the state already uses for prisons avoids the public’s general distaste for a new location, said Rep. Karla Lems, R-Canton. Lems was an outspoken opponent of the original Lincoln County site.

“You take some of the heartburn away,” she said. “Then you just deal with the money.”

JE Dunn representatives said the state could expand capacity at Springfield with new dorms or barracks facilities for around \$55 million. A barracks would fit another 420 minimum security beds in an open space filled with bunkbeds.

Members also considered building a compact facility on unused acres at the state penitentiary and adding a second floor to the Jameson Annex in Sioux Falls.

Options to build on existing DOC land is limited and more costly, because it would limit a construction workforce to non-felons, take more time to get in and out of the site, and impact operational hours, said Sen. Ernie Otten, R-Tea. JE Dunn representatives estimated it’d cost more than \$130 million to build 192 beds on top of the facility.

“Modifying Jameson is a no-go,” Otten said.

## Mitchell leaders pitch site as leading contender

Business and local government leaders from Mitchell enthusiastically pitched their site to the task force. The city brought letters and resolutions of support and said a prison would drive economic growth.

The site got a tepid recommendation from consultants because it’s about an hour’s drive from Sioux Falls. It’s also located next to several possible escape routes: the interstate, the James River and a railroad.

The Mitchell City Council unanimously approved a resolution supporting the prison being built in Davison County.

But division is already surfacing in the community. Mitchell residents voiced concerns at its Monday city council meeting. According to reporting from the Mitchell Republic, some residents are concerned about the prison’s location, parolees released in the city, property taxes and a lack of a citywide vote on the matter.

Sen. Joy Hohn, R-Hartford, said she listened to the city council meeting and said residents are “just becoming aware of the proposal.”

City officials plan to hold community forums to increase awareness, educate residents about the impacts, and listen to concerns from community members.

The DOC plans to survey its staff to determine if they’re willing to commute to Mitchell or Worthing.

The Worthing site in Lincoln County received a slightly more positive response from consultants, but the only speaker during public testimony who spoke to the location raised concerns about drainage and flooding at the site.

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Members remain skeptical of budget restraints, administrative oversight

Several members said they'd vote for the budget restrictions and new plan, but added they might not be able to support a decision next month.

Rep. Tim Reisch, R-Howard, is a former Department of Corrections secretary. He aired "serious operational concerns" about the current administration's handling of the prison in recent months and years due to recent suicides, overdoses, attacks on correctional officers and gang activity.

Reisch recalled walking through the minimum custody unit during a penitentiary tour and observing that of 230 inmates in the unit, "only nine of them had jobs, and the rest of them were sitting around watching Oprah Winfrey every day."

"These are inmates that are getting ready to go out and rejoin society," Reisch said, "and we are failing them."

Venhuizen told reporters after the meeting he believes it would be easier to manage such issues in a more modern facility.

Sioux Falls Democrats Sen. Jamie Smith and Erin Healy both expressed hesitancy. The budget could limit space needed for rehabilitation and education efforts, they both said.

Healy emphasized that her "number one goal" is to build a safe prison with proper rehabilitation space.

"We absolutely need to ensure that our responsibility for taking care of people is of our greatest concern," Healy said.

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

## South Dakota records best pheasant season in 13 years, state parks department says

**BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - JUNE 3, 2025 7:46 PM**

Hunters bagged more pheasants last fall in South Dakota than they have for 13 years, the state department of Game, Fish and Parks said Thursday.

More than 1.3 million roosters were harvested during the 2024 pheasant hunting season, the department said, with another 380,000 harvested within defined shooting preserves.

"The 2024 South Dakota pheasant season was absolutely spectacular," South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden said in a press release.

South Dakota, the governor said, is "truly the greatest state to pheasant hunt." The state saw more roosters harvested in two weeks of October 2024 than any other state during their entire season, the release says.

South Dakota's postseason pheasant harvest figures come from 15,000 random surveys of resident hunters and 13,000 nonresident hunters, the Mitchell Daily Republic reported Tuesday. Questions include the number of days hunted, areas hunted and how many birds were harvested are all part of the survey.

More than a million birds have been harvested in each of the past five years in South Dakota, but Upland Game Biologist Alex Solem of the parks department told the Republic that 2024 stood out.

"Our over-winter survival was absolutely phenomenal," Solem told the Mitchell publication. "It was certainly evident just driving around this spring, tons of roosters crowing everywhere, lots of hens selecting those roosters for mating purposes.

Pheasant hunting is an economic engine for South Dakota. Pheasants Forever, a private conservation organization, put the financial impact of the 2023 pheasant season on the state's economy at \$281 million.

The release from Game, Fish and Parks on Tuesday did not include a financial impact estimate of the 2024 pheasant season, instead focusing on bird harvest numbers. Hunters averaged approximately nine birds per hunter, said Kevin Robling, secretary for the parks department.



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"Habitat and access have been a top priority for the department, and that has played a key role in both abundant bird numbers and ample locations for hunters to target them," Robling said in the press release.

Landowners and farmers partner through habitat programs to open conservation land, using programs offered by the State of South Dakota, the federal government, and multiple conservation groups.

Pheasants Forever partnered with the state in 2023 to pay landowners additional stipends for enrolling land in conservation programs, with the goal of adding 10,000 acres a year.

In the press release on the 2024 pheasant harvest, Robling pointed specifically to the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) on the James River and Big Sioux River valleys, which provides the benefits of the long-standing Conservation Reserve Program, but also ensures access for hunters.

"These CREP lands are directly in the primary pheasant range and provide high quality grassland habitat and access as well," added Robling.

The 2025 pheasant season in South Dakota will take place Oct. 18 to Jan. 31, 2026.

## **GOP cuts to food assistance would hit rural America especially hard**

**More people struggle to buy food, and advocates fear SNAP cuts would only make things worse**

**BY: KEVIN HARDY, STATELINE - JUNE 3, 2025 7:13 AM**

People in Marsha Keene's community are already struggling to cover the basics.

Most of the clients Keene serves at the Susanna Wesley Family Learning Center in southeast Missouri are working but still rely on federal food assistance to keep up with ever-increasing costs.

The center provides a domestic violence shelter, parenting education and summer camps to struggling families stretched thin by living expenses. Keene, the center's CEO, worries about how her clients can absorb significant cuts to food stamps, officially called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

"I don't see communities just being able to absorb that need," she said. "I don't know what the impact is going to be yet, but I cannot imagine that it's going to be good."

Billions in cuts to federal food assistance are looming as part of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, a major tax and spending package that would slash federal spending on domestic programs to extend tax cuts passed during President Donald Trump's first term. U.S. House Republicans passed the package in a 215-214 vote, and it's now before the Senate.

Cuts to SNAP would affect residents of every state in all types of communities, but advocates fear the fallout could especially hit rural people, who are more dependent on food stamps, the largest anti-hunger program in the nation.

The legislation that passed the House would cut food assistance by an estimated \$300 billion, according to the left-leaning Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. One key provision of the bill would expand work requirements to include people between 55 and 64 years old and those with children aged 7 or older. It would also tighten rules for counties with high unemployment rates.

Together, the changes would remove more than 3 million Americans from the program in an average month, reducing spending by more than \$92 billion over 10 years, according to an analysis by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office.

The legislation will likely face changes in Senate negotiations. The measure was endorsed in a letter signed by 20 of the nation's 27 Republican governors.

A greater share of rural residents currently rely on SNAP than those in metropolitan areas, according to the Food Research & Action Center, a nonprofit focusing on hunger and health among the impoverished. Rural hunger is already on the rise and grocery stores face an uphill battle to keep going in the most isolated parts of the country.

In her corner of Missouri, Keene said, limited job opportunities leave many workers struggling to cover

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housing and grocery bills. Nearly a quarter of residents live below the poverty line in Mississippi County — almost double the state and national averages.

She recalled her own recent trip to the grocery store, where high prices caused her to forgo items on her list such as orange juice and meat. "And I have a pretty good job," she said.

"The SNAP cuts are definitely going to make an impact because we already have hungry kids."

## 'I'd probably close the doors'

The National Grocers Association has opposed the potential cuts, saying SNAP provides not only critical food, but also meaningful boosts to local employment and economies. The organization, which represents retail and wholesale grocers, said cuts will particularly hurt independent and rural stores.

"Cutting SNAP would harm the most vulnerable Americans and threaten the viability of community grocery stores that are depended upon by their local economies and neighborhoods," the association said in a May statement.

Facing competitive pressures from online retailers and big-box stores with lower prices, rural grocery stores are already struggling to remain viable.

But deep cuts to SNAP would have an uneven impact on rural stores.

For Kay Voss, the cuts would be catastrophic at her Stratton Country Market in southwest Nebraska. She estimates 40% of sales are paid for with SNAP.

"I'd probably close the doors," she said.

That's a possibility with or without federal changes: Struggling to turn a profit in the town of about 340 people, Voss said the market likely won't last much longer.

"There's nothing to be made on the grocery side," she said.

Several grocery store operators interviewed by Stateline were more optimistic. Some said they believed locals were using their federal benefits at chains in nearby cities for cheaper prices or anonymity.

Tasha Malay, one of the owners of Malay's Market in western Kansas, said SNAP made up less than 2% of the store's sales last year.

While she believes cuts to the federal program are "a terrible idea" broadly, she said it won't make a huge difference for her store.

"I think the people that qualify are utilizing it, but I think that they're spending the dollars elsewhere," she said.

Profit margins are famously slight in the grocery industry, especially for rural stores facing an onslaught of competition from dollar stores whose bulk purchasing allows them to offer much lower prices.

"When they're operating on such thin margins anyways, that could have a huge impact on whether or not the store can remain open," said Carlie Jonas, a policy associate at the nonprofit Center for Rural Affairs.

The center has worked with lawmakers to preserve rural grocery stores, which provide locals with social connections in addition to fresh meat and produce. Proposed legislation to fund \$2 million in rural grocery assistance did not win approval from the Nebraska legislature because of the state's challenging budget cycle, Jonas said.

That figure, though, pales in comparison to new costs Nebraska could face if the proposed SNAP changes are enacted.

One component of the federal legislation would shift billions of costs from the federal government to states to administer SNAP.

A Nebraska-based think tank estimates the state would have to spend at least \$39 million a year to make up for the lost federal funds.

"Every single state is going to have to make some really difficult decisions," Jonas said.

In Wisconsin, state officials estimate the changes would cost the state \$314 million per year.

"This is over a quarter billion dollars each year that Wisconsin couldn't use for our health care, our roads, our schools, or our economy," Wisconsin Medicaid Director Bill Hanna said in a May statement.

U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, downplayed the impacts of the changes.

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"We are not cutting SNAP," he said May 25 on CBS News' political show "Face the Nation." "We're working in the elements of fraud, waste and abuse. SNAP for example, listen to the statistics, in 2024, over \$11 billion in SNAP payments were erroneous."

A PolitiFact breakdown published May 29 disputed Johnson's remarks, concluding that three independent analyses show millions of people could lose SNAP benefits.

## 'It's time to sound the alarm'

Food insecurity is already on the rise in rural America.

Even in heartland areas where farming is central to the local economy, many have trouble accessing fresh and affordable food.

"We're seeing food insecurity across the entire state rise, but really disproportionately in our more rural areas," said Tim Williams, government affairs and advocacy officer at Food Bank for the Heartland, an Omaha, Neb.-based nonprofit serving 93 counties across Nebraska and Iowa.

Williams said cuts to the SNAP program will drive up demand on food banks, especially in rural areas that have long struggled with access and transportation to secure fresh foods. In sparsely populated areas such as western Nebraska, it's difficult to get to grocery stores — if they exist at all.

"There are counties in the state where there are more cows than people, and so things are very spread out," he said. "They can be very difficult to get to. Sometimes there's only one pantry or one grocery store in a county."

The federal food program works in tandem with food banks to keep people from going hungry, Williams said. And cuts to federal aid will unquestionably affect nonprofits.

"It will put a disproportionate burden on the charitable food system that they can't sustain because they're already seeing too many people," he said.

Susie Boelter, executive director of the North Country Food Bank, said it's time to expand food assistance — not cut it. She told the North Dakota Monitor her nonprofit has experienced "staggering increases" in need over the past three years.

For every meal the food bank provides across its 21-county service area in North Dakota, SNAP provides nine, she said.

"Any additional cuts will put a ton of pressure on our emergency food system," Boelter said. "Food banks are good at getting food into the hands of people who need it, but it's time to sound the alarm."

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

## Elon Musk fumes tax and spending bill is a 'disgusting abomination'; GOP senators shrug

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JUNE 3, 2025 5:21 PM

WASHINGTON — Billionaire and former Trump administration official Elon Musk published a flurry of social media posts Tuesday slamming the "big, beautiful bill" in Congress, but his criticisms were mostly ignored or brushed aside by Republican senators.

Musk wrote that the "massive, outrageous, pork-filled Congressional spending bill is a disgusting abomination" and told the GOP lawmakers who voted for it in the House that they "did wrong."

"In November next year, we fire all politicians who betrayed the American people," he wrote in a later post. But Musk's frustrations largely fell flat.

White House press Secretary Karoline Leavitt dismissed Musk's opposition, saying that President Donald Trump is well aware of his views on the legislation and will be moving forward anyway.

Musk last week said he will continue to advise Trump despite stepping away from his official role as a special government employee who oversaw dramatic spending cuts as head of the U.S. DOGE Service.

The tax and spending package would cut about \$1.5 trillion in federal funding for several programs during

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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 Wednesday, including how changes made just before the bill went to the floor will impact state budgets and people's access to safety net programs.

## **'We have a job to do'**

Leavitt's comments came just before Republican senators were peppered with questions about Musk's statements following a closed-door working lunch on Capitol Hill.

Many disregarded Musk's lobbying efforts during brief interviews, saying they don't expect his opposition to affect Senate debate on the sweeping tax and spending cuts package that the House passed last month.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said that he and Musk clearly held differing opinions about the package, which he said was possibly based on Musk's reading of analysis from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

Thune said that he expects the tax and spending cuts policies included in the package would "lead to significant growth" and that would lead to a reduction in the annual deficit.

"My hope is that as he has an opportunity to further assess what this bill actually does, that he'll come to a different conclusion," Thune said. "But nevertheless, we have a job to do, the American people elected us to do. We have an agenda that everybody campaigned on, most notably the president of the United States, and we're going to deliver on that agenda."

Thune added he expects the legislation "can be strengthened in the Senate in a number of ways," though he didn't detail exactly what those would be.

## **'We'll see what President Trump does'**

West Virginia Sen. Shelley Moore Capito said that Musk is "entitled to his opinion" and that GOP lawmakers are well aware that he's "frank," but that likely won't sway them in the weeks ahead.

"President Trump is the one that's going to be the biggest advocate, biggest influencer, in terms of how the Senate deals with this vote," Capito said. "So no matter what Elon Musk or anybody else says — and I don't want to diminish him, because I don't think that's fair — it's still going to be second fiddle to President Trump. So we'll see what President Trump does."

Arkansas Sen. John Boozman said he doesn't expect Musk's tweets will have much of an impact on internal GOP debates about the bill.

"He's entitled to his opinion. I don't think it will make any difference," Boozman said, adding efforts to cut spending are already a central part of the GOP's goals for the package.

North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis said the tweets won't have any influence on which amendments GOP senators propose to the legislation.

"No," Tillis said, when asked about Musk's overall sway.

Ohio Sen. Bernie Moreno said people raising concerns with the legislation need to give that chamber time to review what the House passed and figure out what they're going to keep and what they're going to change.

"We have to refocus and remember that this bill, all along, wasn't supposed to solve every problem on Earth," Moreno said. "This bill was about making certain that President Trump had the resources to secure our border, that was the biggest part of the election; to avoid a \$4 trillion tax increase, that is something that Americans care a lot about; and to start a process of reducing government spending. So that's what we're doing."

## **'Donald Trump is our president, not Elon Musk'**

Missouri Sen. Josh Hawley said he didn't have much of a reaction to the social media posts, while laughing, other than to say that Musk is "entitled to his opinion."

Hawley said he doesn't expect Musk's lobbying efforts would have any impact on how GOP senators



amend the bill, before sending it back to the House.

West Virginia Sen. Jim Justice noted that Musk isn't the president, when asked how the tweets might impact his deliberations on the legislation.

"Y'all may like this or not like this, but you know, Donald Trump is our president, not Elon Musk," Justice said.

"And really and truly, I don't know of the disagreement that they may have with one another or what they have going on," Justice added. "I really respect Elon Musk, and I think he did a great job and I'm very, very pleased with all the things that he uncovered. But with all that being said, I think we all should stand by our president."

### **'All of us are a little frustrated'**

Alabama Sen. Tommy Tuberville said he hopes Musk's attempts to influence lawmaking will yield more spending cuts than the \$1.5 trillion in the House bill, though he didn't say he'd oppose the measure if that doesn't happen.

"Well, I think all of us are a little frustrated. We're not getting as much cuts as we thought we would, but we could in the long run, because we're not done with it," Tuberville said. "So I think that was a little bit of an encouragement."

Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul said he shares Musk's skepticism about the legislation's impact on the annual federal deficit and the rising national debt.

But when asked how influential Musk has been at swaying Republican senators to oppose the package, Paul noted that anyone standing against the bill risks "the ire of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue," referring to the White House's address.

Paul said that if he and Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson, who has also raised concerns about the way the package is written, can get the support of two more GOP senators, then they believe they can begin direct talks with Trump.

"The president will negotiate if he needs to," Paul said. He won't if he doesn't need to."

*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.*

## **Students eligible for deportation protections caught in Trump immigration crackdown**

**BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JUNE 3, 2025 3:42 PM**

WASHINGTON — Ximena Arias-Cristobal knows the risks that can come with driving as a person living in the U.S. without legal authorization, where a simple traffic stop could lead to being deported.

That fear materialized last month when she was pulled over by local police in Dalton, Georgia, for making an improper turn at a red light, but instead of a traffic ticket, the 19-year-old was detained at Stewart Detention Center for nearly three weeks, she said at a virtual event Tuesday.

"Even though my time there was short ... the emotional weight is overwhelming," Arias-Cristobal said during a panel conversation organized by advocacy groups opposing the Trump administration's immigration crackdown on students without legal authorization and international students.

"This isn't just an immigration issue, it's a human rights issue," Arias-Cristobal said.

She and her parents arrived in the United States without legal authorization from Mexico when Arias-Cristobal was 4 years old. Her father was in the car with her last month and was also detained at the Stewart Detention Center, she said. He has since been released.

"What affected me the most was the transfer itself, being shackled at the waist and ankles," Arias-Cristobal said of being transferred by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents to Stewart Detention Center.

Arias-Cristobal is eligible to apply for deportation protections under the Deferred Action for Childhood



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Arrivals, or DACA, policy. DACA allows some people who were brought into the country as children without legal authorization to obtain a drivers license and work permits and remain in the country, under certain conditions.

But the agency that issues such protections, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, stopped accepting applications in 2021 as part of a court case from Republican state officials challenging DACA's legality. The case remains pending and is likely to head to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Arias-Cristobal now faces deportation to Mexico as she tries to complete her higher education at Dalton State College, where she is studying economics and finance.

## Impact on higher education

Gaby Pacheco, president and CEO of advocacy group TheDream.US, said that cases like Arias-Cristobal's are becoming more common under the second Trump administration and that "Dreamers are under attack."

Pacheco's group provides scholarships to young immigrants without legal status, including Arias-Cristobal, to pursue higher education.

She said that while DACA recipients have not been caught in deportations, "we have heard of people (being) held and questioned" by ICE agents.

"The level of cruelty, inhumanity and lawlessness that we're seeing from the Department of Homeland Security... is completely alarming," Pacheco said.

That type of immigration enforcement has impacted higher education, said Miriam Feldblum, the president of the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, which advocates for international students and students without proper legal authority to attend college.

The Department of Homeland Security informed Harvard University last month that it was revoking the Ivy League school's ability to accept international students. A federal court has temporarily blocked the move while the case is pending.

"This will directly harm our enrollment at U.S. institutions," she said of the Trump administration's stance on limiting how many international students can attend higher education.

Feldblum said that because international students pay full tuition, those costs often subsidize scholarships for U.S. students.

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

## Trump wants Congress to slash \$9.4B in spending now, defund NPR and PBS

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JUNE 3, 2025 2:41 PM

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration sent its first spending cuts request to Congress on Tuesday, asking lawmakers to swiftly eliminate \$9.4 billion in funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and various foreign aid programs.

The request for what are called rescissions allows the White House budget office to legally freeze spending on those accounts for 45 days while the Republican-controlled Congress debates whether to approve the recommendation in full or in part, or to ignore it.

The proposal calls on lawmakers to eliminate \$1.1 billion from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which provides funding for National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting Service. That means NPR and PBS would lose their already approved federal allocations, if the request is approved by Congress.

President Donald Trump issued an executive order in May seeking to block the Corporation for Public Broadcasting from providing funding for NPR and PBS, leading to two separate lawsuits citing First Amendment concerns.

In the rescissions request, Trump wants to cut \$8.3 billion from foreign aid programs, including the U.S.

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President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR, a global initiative to combat HIV/AIDS, and the African Development Foundation.

The proposal is the first of several that will seek to codify efforts undertaken by U.S. DOGE Service and billionaire Elon Musk before he left his official role as a special government employee.

White House budget director Russ Vought wrote in a letter accompanying the request that it "emphasizes the need to cut wasteful foreign assistance spending at the Department of State and USAID and through other international assistance programs."

"These rescissions would eliminate programs that are antithetical to American interests, such as funding the World Health Organization, LGBTQI+ activities, 'equity' programs, radical Green New Deal-type policies, and color revolutions in hostile places around the world," Vought wrote. "In addition, Federal spending on CPB subsidizes a public media system that is politically biased and is an unnecessary expense to the taxpayer."

GOP leaders in Congress appear likely to hold floor votes on the request, which only needs a simple majority to pass the Senate, avoiding the need for Democratic support to get past the 60-vote legislative filibuster.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., wrote in a statement the House "will act quickly on this request."

"This rescissions package reflects many of DOGE's findings and is one of the many legislative tools Republicans are using to restore fiscal sanity," Johnson wrote. "Congress will continue working closely with the White House to codify these recommendations, and the House will bring the package to the floor as quickly as possible."

But Republican leaders could run into problems with centrist Republicans in each chamber, especially those on the Appropriations committees, which approved the funding in the first place.

The GOP holds especially narrow majorities in Congress, requiring the support of nearly every one of the 220 Republicans in the House and the party's 53 senators.

Republican leaders may need to negotiate what exactly gets written into the rescissions bill if too many moderate Republicans raise objections to cutting off the funding.

Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Susan Collins, R-Maine, wrote in a statement the committee "will carefully review the rescissions package and examine the potential consequences of these rescissions on global health, national security, emergency communications in rural communities, and public radio and television stations."

## Foreign aid, public media take hits

The request calls for lawmakers to make cuts to dozens of foreign aid programs, including \$500 million out of \$4 billion for certain global health programs at the U.S. Agency for International Development.

"This proposal would not reduce treatment but would eliminate programs that are antithetical to American interests and worsen the lives of women and children, like 'family planning' and 'reproductive health,' LGBTQI+ activities, and 'equity' programs," the request states. "This rescission proposal aligns with the Administration's efforts to eliminate wasteful USAID foreign assistance programs."

The rescissions request proposes Congress eliminate \$400 million of the \$6 billion for global health programs that seek to control HIV/AIDS, which OMB writes "would eliminate only those programs that neither provide life-saving treatment nor support American interests."

The request asks lawmakers to eliminate \$2.5 billion of the \$3.9 billion they approved for development assistance, which "is intended to fund programs that work to end extreme poverty and promote resilient, democratic societies, but in practice, many of the DA programs conflict with American values, interfere with the sovereignty of other countries, and bankroll corrupt leaders' evasion of their responsibilities to their citizens, all while providing no clear benefit to Americans."

The proposal calls on lawmakers to eliminate more than \$1 billion in funding across two fiscal years for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which the administration wrote "would be used to subsidize a public media system that is politically biased and an unnecessary expense to the taxpayer."

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President and CEO of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting Patricia Harrison wrote in a statement the organization "is firmly committed to ensuring that funding for public media provides local communities with accurate, unbiased, and nonpartisan news and information, and we take seriously concerns about bias that have been raised.

"The path to better public media is achievable only if funding is maintained. Otherwise, a vital lifeline that operates reliable emergency communications, supports early learning, and keeps local communities connected and informed will be cut off with regrettable and lasting consequences."

President and CEO of PBS Paula Kerger wrote in a separate statement that the "proposed rescissions would have a devastating impact on PBS member stations and the essential role they play in communities, particularly smaller and rural stations that rely on federal funding for a larger portion of their budgets.

"Without PBS member stations, Americans will lose unique local programming and emergency services in times of crisis."

Kerger wrote that PBS would seek to keep its funding by demonstrating "our value to Congress, as we have over the last 50 years, in providing educational, enriching programs and critical services to all Americans every day for free."

NPR CEO Katherine Maher wrote that Congress enacting the rescissions "would irreparably harm communities across America who count on public media for 24/7 news, music, cultural and educational programming, and emergency alerting services."

"Public safety in every community across the nation could also be affected. NPR, as the entity chosen by public radio stations to operate the nationwide Public Radio Satellite System (PRSS), receives Presidential-level emergency alerts and distributes them across the country within minutes," Maher wrote. "In the event of a national attack or emergency, communities no longer served by a station would not receive this lifesaving, early warning and civil defense alert."

## More details

A summary of the proposal shared with States Newsroom by the White House budget office ahead of its official release later in the day says the funding cuts would affect programs that sought to reduce xenophobia in Venezuela; support electoral reforms and voter education in Kenya; fund voter identification in Haiti; provide electric buses in Rwanda; broadcast the longtime PBS children's show "Sesame Street" in Iraq; and strengthen the resilience of LGBTQ global movements.

The proposal would also cut off funding to Harvard University to conduct research models for peace and to New York University to analyze democracy field experiments in South Sudan, according to the OMB summary.

PEPFAR would no longer have funding for circumcision, vasectomies, and condoms in Zambia, or for services for "transgender people, sex workers and their clients and sexual networks" in Nepal, according to the OMB summary.

Louisiana Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy, a vocal supporter of PEPFAR, said during a brief interview that he was told "that PEPFAR had some cuts, but that the basic core mission was continued."

Cassidy — chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee — said his staff was carefully reviewing the request and knows he cares "about this deeply."

The rescissions request, which asks lawmakers to claw back already approved funding, is different from the president's budget request, which proposes spending levels for thousands of federal programs for the upcoming fiscal year.

Both are merely proposals, since the Constitution grants Congress the power of the purse in Article I, Section 9, Clause 7.

## Timing on Senate floor vote unclear

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said Monday that lawmakers in that chamber will begin reviewing the rescissions request this month, but didn't detail exactly when he'd hold a floor vote.

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"Another item high on our list to begin work on in June is a rescissions package the White House intends to send Congress this week," Thune said. "The administration has identified a number of wasteful uses of taxpayer dollars and we will be taking up this package and eliminating this waste. We'll make that a priority."

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and Appropriations Committee ranking member Patty Murray, D-Wash., wrote in a statement released Monday that "Trump is looking to go after PBS and NPR to settle political scores and muzzle the free press, while undermining foreign assistance programs that push back on China's malign influence, save lives, and address other bipartisan priorities."

"If Republicans choose to go along with this rescission package, they will follow Trump at their peril," Schumer and Murray wrote. "The power of the purse is one of Congress's most fundamental Constitutional responsibilities. Democrats will not allow Republicans to play games with the budget."

Louisiana Republican Sen. John Kennedy said during a brief interview Tuesday that he plans to "carefully" evaluate the rescissions request.

West Virginia GOP Sen. Shelley Moore Capito said Tuesday that she would go over the proposals once it officially arrives from the White House to determine whether she can support moving it across the floor.

"It could be a fight. It could not be a fight," Capito said. "We just don't know."

The House Freedom Caucus, a group of far-right members led by Maryland Rep. Andy Harris, posted Monday its members hope the administration sends additional rescissions requests as quickly as possible.

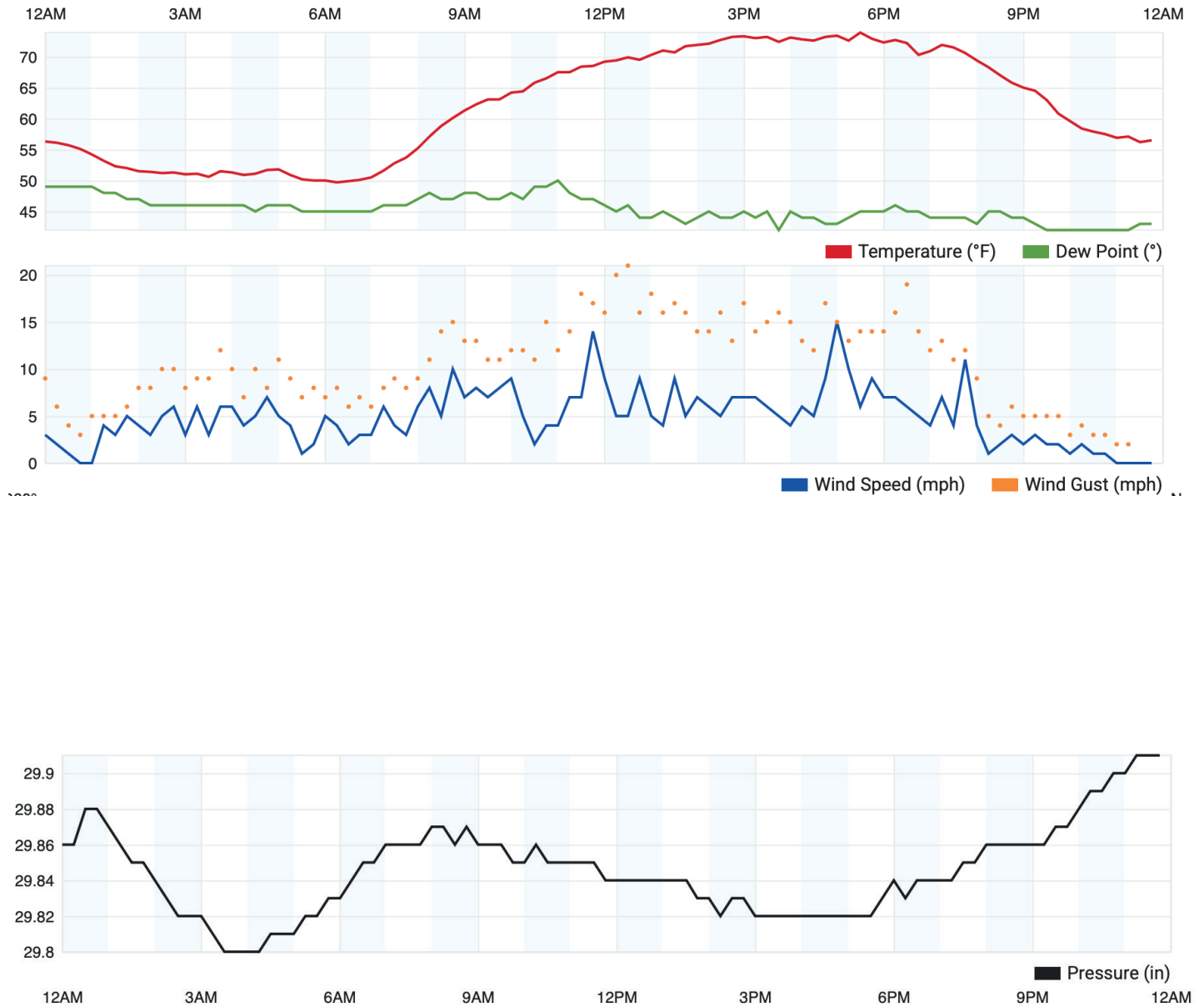
"Passing this rescissions package will be an important demonstration of Congress's willingness to deliver on DOGE and the Trump agenda," the Freedom Caucus statement said. "While the Swamp will inevitably attempt to slow and kill these cuts, there is no excuse for a Republican House not to advance the first DOGE rescissions package the same week it is presented to Congress then quickly send it for passage in the Republican Senate so President Trump can sign it into law."

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

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





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Today



High: 75 °F

Increasing  
Clouds

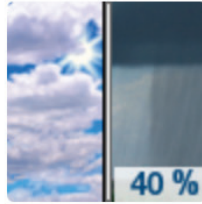
Tonight



Low: 46 °F

Partly Cloudy

Thursday



High: 73 °F

Partly Sunny  
then Chance  
Showers

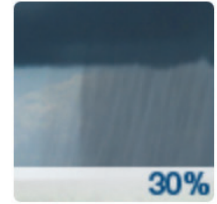
Thursday  
Night



Low: 50 °F

Chance  
Showers

Friday



High: 74 °F

Chance  
Showers

## Precipitation chances increasing Thursday afternoon & Thursday evening



Today



Increasing  
clouds with a  
30% chance of  
afternoon  
showers, mainly  
west of the  
Missouri River

Highs: 70s

Tonight



Partly cloudy and  
mainly rain-free

Lows: upper 40s

Thursday



A 60% chance of  
mainly afternoon  
showers, highest  
chance over south  
central South  
Dakota

Highs: 65 to  
75°

Thursday  
Night



A 60% chance of  
showers and  
thunderstorms,  
highest chances  
south of Highway  
12

Lows: 48 to 55°

[weather.gov/aberndeen](http://weather.gov/aberndeen)

Highs will remain in the mid 60s and 70s through Friday. Expect increasing clouds with a 30 percent chance of spotty afternoon showers today, mainly west of the Missouri River. After mainly dry weather tonight, the chances for precipitation will be on the increase Thursday into Thursday night. There is a 60 percent chance of mainly afternoon showers Thursday afternoon, with showers and thunderstorms Thursday night. The highest chances of precipitation will be south of U.S. Highway 12.

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## May 2025 Weather in Review

June 3, 2025  
2:15 PM

Wet May with near-normal temperatures across Central and Northeast South Dakota.

	Aberdeen (Since 1898)	Sisseton (Since 1935)	Mobridge (Since 1927)	Pierre (Since 1934)	Watertown (Since 1898)
<b>Average Temperature</b>	57.0°	58.4°	57.4°	57.9°	56.7°
Departure from Normal	-0.3° 65th warmest	+1.1° 35th warmest	-0.2° 41st warmest	+0.7° 48th warmest	+1.0° 49th warmest
Warmest Year	1934 (69.0°)	1934 (70.3°)	1934 (71.8°)	1934 (70.9°)	1934 (68.5°)
Coldest Year	1907 (46.1°)	1945 (50.7°)	1927 (51.1°)	1967 (51.4°)	1907 (44.9°)
Warmest of the month	93° (5/11, 5/12)	93° (3 Days)	96° (5/12)	95° (5/12)	88° (5/11, 5/12)
Coldest of the month	29° (5/3)	34° (5/3)	35° (5/18)	33° (5/3)	32° (5/3)
<b>Precipitation</b>	3.70"	3.11"	5.24"	4.10"	3.45"
Normal	3.28"	2.79"	2.94"	3.25"	2.87"
Departure from Normal	+0.42"	+0.32"	+2.30"	+0.85"	+0.58"



National Oceanic and  
Atmospheric Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD



## 2025 Meteorological Spring Summary

June 3, 2025  
2:15 PM

March Through May 2025 Relative to 1991-2020 Normals

	Aberdeen (Since 1898)	Sisseton (Since 1935)	Mobridge (Since 1927)	Pierre (Since 1934)	Watertown (Since 1898)
<b>Average Temperature</b>	45.9°	46.5°	47.7°	48.5°	45.7°
Normal	44.1°	43.7°	45.6°	45.8°	42.5°
Departure	+1.8°	+2.8°	+2.1°	+2.7°	+3.2°
<b>Precipitation</b>	7.05"	5.45"	7.37"	7.33"	7.29"
Normal	6.08"	5.99"	5.23"	6.14"	5.93"
Departure	+0.97"	-0.54"	+2.14"	+1.19"	+1.36"
# of Days with Precipitation (out of 92)	19	24	18	25	20



National Oceanic and  
Atmospheric Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 74 °F at 4:38 PM**

**Low Temp: 50 °F at 6:07 AM**

**Wind: 23 mph at 1:01 PM**

**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 15 hours, 34 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 101 in 1933

Record Low: 34 in 1954

Average High: 77

Average Low: 52

Average Precip in June.: 0.44

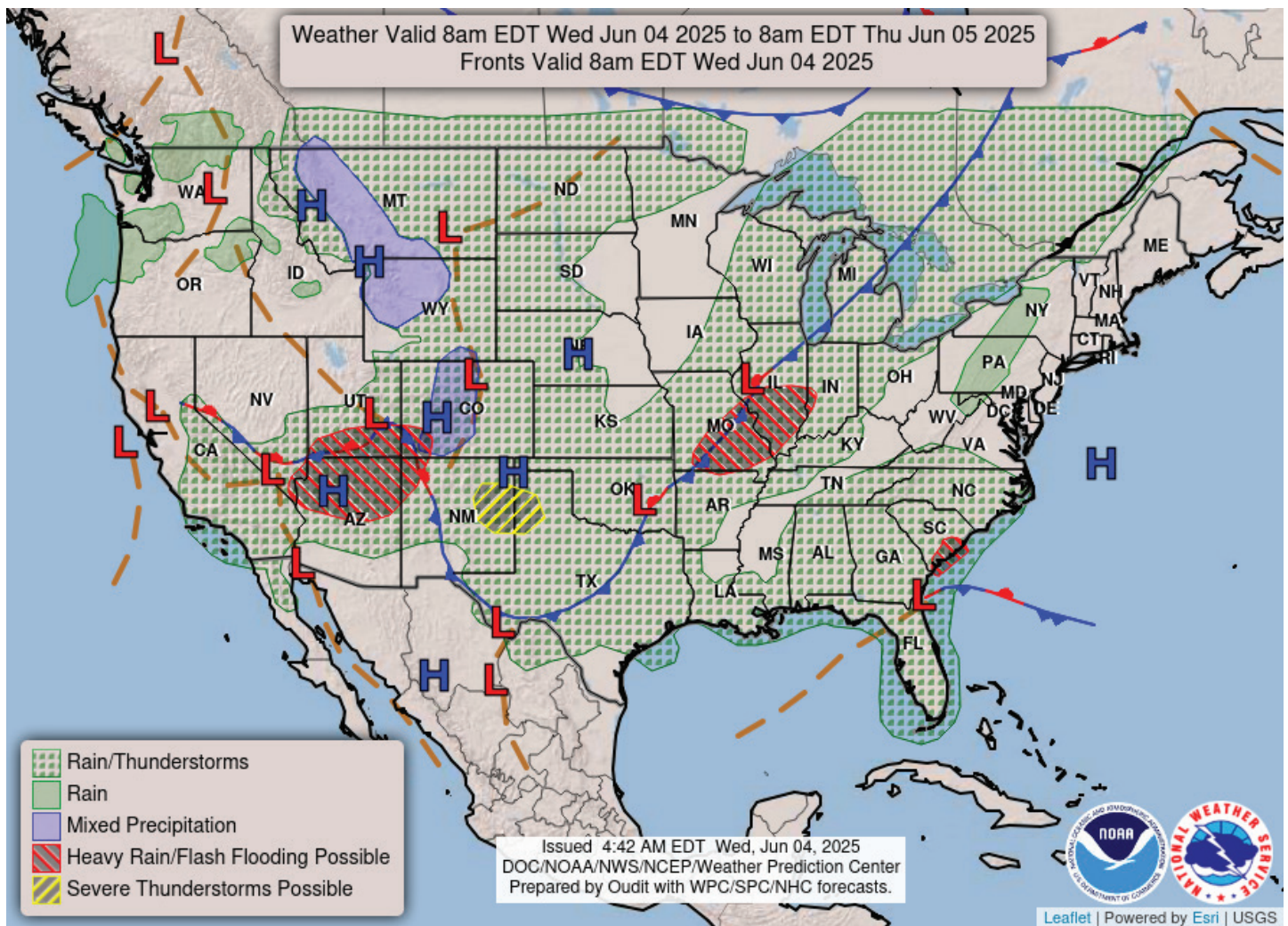
Precip to date in June: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 7.69

Precip Year to Date: 6.05

Sunset Tonight: 9:18:00 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:43:16 am



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## Today in Weather History

June 4th, 1984: Heavy rains of up to seven inches caused the Bad River to rise over 23 feet in six hours at Fort Pierre. Flash flooding resulted as a dam 17 miles west of Fort Pierre gave way, and an irrigation dam near town was damaged. Water covered some roads and bridges, and many homes had water damage. Strong thunderstorm winds gusting up to 60 mph downed numerous branches and signs in Faulk, Edmunds, McPherson, and Brown Counties.

June 4th, 1991: Heavy rains of 2 to 5 inches caused street flooding in Harrold. Several county roads in Stanley, Sully, Hughes, and Lyman Counties were closed due to flooding. Some rainfall amounts include 1.83 inches at Oahe Dam, 1.96 inches 12 miles SSW of Harrold, and 3.20 inches two miles North of Onaka.

June 4th, 1993: An earthquake measuring 4.1 on the Richter scale shook a portion of northeast South Dakota but caused no real damage or injuries. The epicenter was 22 miles northwest of Morris, Minnesota, or 38 miles east of Sisseton, and it was felt in most of Roberts, Grant, and Deuel Counties. The quake was the first in the area since 1975.

1825 - A hurricane struck Long Island NY leveling trees and causing damage to ships. The early season hurricane, which originated around Cuba, caused major damage along the Atlantic coast from Charleston SC to New York City. Many were lost at sea. (David Ludlum)

1860 - Iowa's Commanche Tornado, with wind speeds estimated in excess of 300 mph, was unquestionably one of the worst experienced by early settlers, with nearly a million dollars damage. (The Weather Channel)

1982 - A four day storm began over New England which produced up to 14 inches of rain in southern Connecticut breaching twenty-three dams and breaking two others. Damage was estimated at more than 276 million dollars. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Early morning thunderstorms in south Texas produced 6.5 inches of rain at Hockheim, and five inches at Hallettsville, in just a few hours. Afternoon thunderstorms in Virginia deluged northern Halifax County with 5.5 inches of rain in two hours. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 76 mph at Dusty WA, and wind gusts to 88 mph at Swanquarter NC. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A dozen cities in the eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Atlantic City NJ with a reading of 40 degrees. Fifteen cities in the north central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Glasgow MT and Havre MT with readings of 102 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Southern Plains Region and the Lower Mississippi Valley to the Southern Atlantic Coast Region during the day and into the night. Just four tornadoes were reported, but there were 87 reports of large hail and damaging winds. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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"Do you know what today is?" Mary, my wife, asked.

"Of course. It's Tuesday," I replied.

"Well, is it anything more than Tuesday? Does it have a number and is there a month that goes with that particular number?" she asked with a faint smile.

Looking at my watch, I said, "It's October 24. Almost time for Halloween." And that did it.

First, came tears. Then, a few more words about forgetting important things – like birthdays. Then more tears.

Not only was I embarrassed, but I was also humiliated that I forgot such an important date and event.

"But, I do love you. And that should make up for it," I said, thinking of the words of Solomon: "Love covers all wrong." But does it?

Love—God's love—is the center of every relationship, beginning with loving Him.

When we learn to love Him as He loves us, it will have a preeminent place in our lives. It will be visible to all who know us—especially those in our lives that are special to us. They will be more than a name or number: they will be blest because we love them.

The love Solomon describes is a love that "draws in and unites."

It invites people into our hearts and bonds them to us as closely as two pieces of Velcro.

We cannot use the word love as a "cover" when we do something wrong—hoping the other person will feel guilty.

True love—God's love—anticipates a need before it surfaces.

It remembers the needs of others—because we all have them.

And it reaches out, just as God reaches out to each of us.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to be sincere and honest and pure when we say, "I love you!" May our love match Yours, in our deeds as well as words. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Scripture:

"Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs." Proverbs 10:12

*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: 06.03.25

16 24 29 36 45 13

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$223,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 36 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.02.25

5 7 20 28 35 3

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$37,320,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 51 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.03.25

1 21 32 34 48 1

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 6 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.31.25

1 25 27 28 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$20,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 6 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.02.25

4 25 43 44 63 4

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 35 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.02.25

1 7 44 57 61 21

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$30,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 35 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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## Upcoming Groton Events

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

## News from the **AP** Associated Press

### **Ukraine's backers meet to drum up arms and ammo. The Pentagon chief is absent for the first time**

BRUSSELS (AP) — Senior officials from almost 50 nations gathered Wednesday to drum up more weapons and ammunition for Ukraine, with the Pentagon's chief absent for the first time since the group organizing the military aid was set up three years ago.

The Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting at NATO headquarters is going to be chaired by the United Kingdom and Germany. U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth would only arrive in Brussels after it's over. He will participate in a meeting of NATO defense ministers on Thursday.

His absence is the latest in a series of steps that Washington has taken to distance itself from Ukraine's efforts to repel Russia's full-scale invasion, which began on Feb. 24, 2022.

More than 12,000 Ukrainian civilians have been killed, according to U.N. estimates, as well as tens of thousands of soldiers on both sides.

Before Wednesday's meeting, the U.K. said that it plans a tenfold increase in drone production to help Ukraine. Drones have become a decisive factor in the war, now in its fourth year.

U.K. Defense Secretary John Healey said that British companies are using lessons learned from the battlefield "to develop advanced new drones to help protect Ukraine's civilians and also strengthen our own national security."

Hegseth's predecessor, Lloyd Austin, created the group after Russia launched all-out war on Ukraine in 2022. Since then, Ukraine's backers have collectively provided around \$126 billion in weapons and military assistance, including more than \$66.5 billion from the U.S.

The United States hasn't chaired a meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group since the Trump administration took office in January.

European NATO allies are concerned that the U.S. might withdraw troops from Europe to focus on the Indo-Pacific. French President Emmanuel Macron has warned that abandoning Ukraine would erode U.S. credibility in deterring any conflict with China over Taiwan.

### **South Korea's new President Lee vows to pursue talks with North and bolster ties with US and Japan**

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's new President Lee Jae-myung vowed Wednesday to restart dormant talks with North Korea and bolster a trilateral partnership with the U.S. and Japan, as he laid out key policy goals for his single, five-year term.

Lee, who rose from childhood poverty to become South Korea's leading liberal politician vowing to fight inequality and corruption, formally began his term earlier Wednesday, hours after winning a snap election that was triggered in April by the removal of then-President Yoon Suk Yeol over his ill-fated imposition of martial law late last year.

In his inaugural address at the National Assembly, Lee said that his government will deal with North Korean nuclear threats and its potential military aggressions with "strong deterrence" based on the South Korea-U.S. military alliance. But he said he would "open a communication channel with North Korea and establish peace on the Korean Peninsula through talks and cooperation."

He said he'll pursue pragmatic diplomacy with neighboring countries and boost trilateral Seoul-Washington-Tokyo cooperation.

"Through pragmatic diplomacy based on national interests, we will turn the crisis posed by the major shift in global economic and security landscapes into an opportunity to maximize our national interests," Lee said.

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Security and economic challenges lie ahead

It was unclear whether Lee's election would cause any major, immediate shift in South Korea's foreign policy. Lee, previously accused by critics of tilting toward China and North Korea and away from the U.S. and Japan, has recently repeatedly stressed South Korea's alliance with the U.S. as the foundation of its foreign policy and avoided any contentious remarks that would raise questions on his views on the U.S. and Japan.

"We'll have to now see if the pressures of office will cause Lee Jae-myung to govern from the center — at least when it comes to matters of national security and the alliance with the United States," said Ankit Panda, an expert with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The toughest external challenges awaiting Lee are U.S. President Donald Trump's tariff policy and North Korea's expanding military partnerships with Russia. But experts earlier said whoever becomes president can't do much to secure major progress in South Korea's favor on those issues.

During his inauguration speech, Lee didn't directly mention trade issues with the U.S.

US and Japan react

The U.S. and Japan said they congratulated Lee's election and expressed their commitments to developing three-way cooperation.

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said he wants to hold summit talks with Lee "as early as possible," saying he hopes to further promote bilateral ties, both public and commercial. The U.S. State Department said that Seoul and Washington share "an ironclad commitment" to the alliance grounded in their mutual defense treaty, shared values and deep economic ties.

It's unclear how North Korea would react to Lee's speech, as it has shunned any talks with South Korea since 2019. North Korea in recent years has supplied weapons and troops to support Russia's war against Ukraine, and South Korea, the U.S. and their partners suspect Russia might in return transfer high-tech technologies to North Korea to help it perfect its nuclear weapons program.

Russia's Tass news agency said Wednesday that one of President Vladimir Putin's top security officials, Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu, has arrived in Pyongyang for a meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, in the latest sign of the countries' alignment over Putin's war in Ukraine.

Later Wednesday, Lee nominated former Unification Minister Lee Jong-seok, a dove who favors greater rapprochement with North Korea, as his spy chief. The nomination is likely related to Lee Jae-myung's hopes to reopen talks, as the National Intelligence Service previously played a behind-the-scenes role to promote ties with North Korea, observers say.

Lee Jae-myung also nominated his key political ally and veteran lawmaker Kim Min-seok as prime minister, the government's No. 2 job. Lee is expected to nominate other top Cabinet members in coming days.

South Korea still faces political divide

Lee called for unity to address the country's stark political divide deepened after Yoon's martial law debacle, saying that he will "answer the people's solemn call to let hope bloom over deep and painful wounds." Lee still promised a thorough investigation into the circumstances surrounding Yoon's martial law imposition, describing it as a "rebellion that seized people's sovereignty with arms."

Yoon and some of his top military and police officers already stand trial on high-stakes rebellion charges in connection with martial law. Lee's push to bring those involved in Yoon's martial law stunt accountable has subsequently caused speculations among his opponents that he would launch political revenge against Yoon associates and senior prosecutors whom he previously accused of fabricating evidence to initiate criminal charges against him.

Lee faces five trials on corruption and other allegations, but experts say those trials will likely stop during his term because the South Korean constitution gives a sitting president immunity from most criminal prosecutions.

Lee said revitalizing a slowing domestic economy would be his top priority and that his government would immediately launch an emergency task force to wage a "head-on battle" against the threats of recession. He also promised more aggressive government spending to help spur economic activity.

South Korea's central bank last week cut its key interest rate and sharply lowered its growth outlook



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for 2025 to 0.8%, as it moved to counter Trump's tariff hikes and weak domestic demand worsened by recent political turmoil.

Lee also reiterated his campaign vows to reduce inequality and pledged to address the imbalance between the greater Seoul capital area and less developed regions. He said that "the polarization fueled by inequality is now hindering further growth."

Lee's term began immediately without the usual two-month transition period after the National Election Commission formally confirmed his election victory. Before his inauguration, Lee visited the national cemetery in Seoul to pay his respects to late Korean leaders, patriots and war dead who are buried there, and he had a telephone call with Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Kim Myung-soo to call for military readiness against possible North Korean aggression.

## No kids, excess heat and payment plans. What to know about Hajj 2025

By RIAZAT BUTT Associated Press

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP) — Muslims from around the world are in the Saudi city of Mecca for the Hajj, one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

In the coming days, people will immerse themselves in religious rituals and acts of worship that originated more than 1,400 years ago.

They also have to contend with excess heat and other earthly factors, like a ban on children under the age of 12 and a crackdown on unauthorized entry.

Here's what to know about this year's Hajj:

Beating the heat in the Saudi desert

Last year's pilgrims struggled through burning sun and suffocating hot weather, with the mercury hitting 47 degrees Celsius (117 degrees Fahrenheit). More than 1,300 people died.

This year, Saudi authorities are advising caution in direct sunlight, telling pilgrims to avoid going out during the day and uncovering their heads, except for rituals, unless necessary.

An official safety kit emphasizes the importance of light-colored clothing and umbrellas. It also has details on recognizing and treating the symptoms of dehydration and heat exhaustion.

But it's tough to avoid the heat and crowds when the Hajj is outdoors. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for many, elevating the personal stakes further, and temperatures in Mecca are already 41 degrees Celsius (about 106 Fahrenheit).

Although the desert kingdom spends billions of dollars on crowd control and cooling, the sheer number of pilgrims and climatic conditions make it difficult to guarantee people's safety.

A ban on children under 12 at the Hajj

Saudi Arabia has banned children under 12 from this year's Hajj — one of the biggest policy changes in recent years.

Riyadh reportedly introduced the ban as a precautionary measure to ensure children's safety during the pilgrimage, which could be a dangerous environment for them because of the huge crowds.

Children are exempt from doing the Hajj and are not required to fulfill other Islamic obligations, like prayer and fasting, until they reach puberty.

But that doesn't stop some parents from wanting to take their children to experience the Hajj and see the holiest site in Islam, the Kaaba, the black, cube-shaped structure that is the focal point for daily prayers.

Father of five Talha Ayub, from the Pakistani city of Lahore, said his kids were staying with their grandparents while he and his wife performed the Hajj in a "more relaxed way."

"Even if children were allowed, we probably wouldn't have taken them because the weather is extremely harsh this year," said Ayub, whose children are aged 1 to 13. "I have mixed feelings about leaving them behind. I'll miss them."

There's no official age breakdown for pilgrims, but most are between 35 and 64.

Layaways and lowering the price tag

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The price of a Hajj ranges from \$4,000 to \$20,000, depending on the length of stay, level of comfort, and country of departure. Depreciating currencies, high inflation, and tax hikes in Saudi Arabia also have an impact on how much Muslims end up paying.

The countries that typically send the most pilgrims are developing nations. Some have trimmed the price of government-backed Hajj programs to make them more affordable. But this step isn't always enough.

Farid Ahmed Majumder, secretary general of the Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh, said the country was allowed to send some 127,000 pilgrims this year but failed to meet this quota, mainly because of higher costs.

Pakistan has reduced the price of the state-run Hajj program. It has also debuted a flexible payment system.

Farmer and small business owner Zaheer Ahmad said he didn't have enough money to pay for his Hajj up-front, 1.2 million rupees or about \$4,255.

He paid in three installments, applying for the Hajj in December with an advance and finishing his payments in February. "Otherwise, I might not have been able to go for Hajj at all," he said.

In Saudi Arabia, which has also introduced flexible payments, domestic pilgrims pay 20% within 72 hours of booking, another 40% during Ramadan and the final 40% the following month.

Managing wait times and overcrowding

Although the Hajj is at least a once-in-a-lifetime obligation — for every Muslim who can afford it and is physically able to make it — people don't want to wait a lifetime to fulfill it.

But the Hajj has limited capacity, countries have set quotas, and there is only one time each year to do it. Patience really is a virtue and everything needs to align: availability, health, and finances.

Muslim-majority countries like Indonesia and Malaysia have decades-long waiting lists for the Hajj. Indonesia has 5.4 million people awaiting their turn, with the number increasing each year.

While there is nothing to stop people from performing the Hajj more than once, some governments believe this practice deprives others of the opportunity, especially in countries where demand is high.

India has a ban on "repeaters" and excludes applications from anyone who has previously performed the pilgrimage through the national Hajj committee, although there are exceptions from those accompanying certain categories of people like the elderly.

With a restricted supply of Hajj spaces, it's inevitable that people will try to find ways to get to the holy city and stay there.

In April, to curb unauthorized Hajj pilgrimages and control inbound travel, Saudi Arabia suspended the issue of short-term visas for 14 countries: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Nigeria, Jordan, Algeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Yemen, and Morocco.

People have in the past traveled to Saudi Arabia on short-term visas and entered Mecca without official permission for the Hajj. Authorities said that many of those who died in the heat during last year's Hajj were unregistered and unable to access air-conditioned pilgrim amenities.

The Interior Ministry warned in May that a fine of up to 20,000 riyals, or about \$5,330, would be imposed on anyone attempting to enter Mecca during the Hajj without the correct visa.

## **Wilders throws Dutch politics into turmoil with new elections now on the horizon**

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Populist far-right lawmaker Geert Wilders plunged Dutch politics into turmoil Tuesday by withdrawing his party's ministers from the ruling coalition in a dispute over a crack-down on migration. The remaining ministers will run a caretaker administration until new elections can be organized.

The decision means the Netherlands will have a caretaker government when it hosts a summit of NATO leaders in three weeks.

Prime Minister Dick Schoof held an emergency Cabinet meeting to discuss the crisis and then visited

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King Willem-Alexander to offer him the resignations of ministers from Wilders' Party for Freedom.

Schoof, a career civil servant who was handpicked by Wilders a year ago to lead the government, said he had repeatedly told coalition leaders in recent days that bringing down the government would be "unnecessary and irresponsible."

"We are facing major challenges nationally and internationally and, more than ever, decisiveness is required for the safety of our resilience and the economy in a rapidly changing world," Schoof said.

No date for a new election has been set, but it is unlikely before the fall.

Schoof's 11-month-old administration goes down in history as one of the shortest-lived governments in Dutch political history.

Wilders announced his decision early Tuesday in a message on X after a brief meeting in parliament of leaders of the four parties that make up the fractious administration.

Wilders blames inaction on migration.

Wilders told reporters that he was withdrawing his support for the coalition and pulling his ministers out of the Cabinet over its failure to act on his desire for a clampdown on migration.

"I signed up for the toughest asylum policy and not the downfall of the Netherlands," said Wilders, whose Party for Freedom is still riding high in Dutch opinion polls, though the gap with the center-left opposition is negligible.

Coalition partners rejected that argument, saying they all support cracking down on migration.

Prime minister appealed for leaders to act responsibly.

Dilan Yesilgöz, leader of the right-wing People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, said before the meeting that Schoof urged the leaders to act responsibly.

"The prime minister who appealed to us this morning said that we are facing enormous international challenges, we have a war on our continent, an economic crisis may be coming our way," Yesilgöz told reporters in parliament.

But just minutes later, the meeting was over and so was Wilders' involvement in the government.

"I'm shocked," Yesilgöz said, calling Wilders' decision "super-irresponsible."

After years in opposition, Wilders' party won the last election on pledges to slash migration. He has grown increasingly frustrated at what he sees as the slow pace of the coalition's efforts to implement his plans.

Last week, Wilders demanded coalition partners sign on to a 10-point plan that aims to radically slash migration, including using the army to guard land borders and turning away all asylum-seekers. He said at the time that if immigration policy is not toughened up, his party "is out of the Cabinet."

He made good on that pledge Tuesday.

Wilders' decision comes days after conservative Karol Nawrocki was announced the winner of Poland's weekend presidential runoff election, a victory that suggests that Poland will likely take a more populist and nationalist path under its new president, who was backed by U.S. President Donald Trump.

It is not the first time Wilders has turned his back on power. He pledged his support to a minority government led by former Prime Minister Mark Rutte in 2010, but walked away less than two years later after a dispute about government austerity measures.

"You know that if you work with Wilders in a coalition ... it won't go well," Rob Jetten, leader of the opposition D66 party, told Dutch broadcaster NOS.

Other coalition leaders look to uncertain political future.

Caroline van der Plas, leader of the pro-agriculture populist Farmers Citizens Movement that is part of the coalition, said she was angry at Wilders' decision.

"He is not putting the Netherlands first, he is putting Geert Wilders first," she told Dutch broadcaster NOS.

Nicolien van Vroonhoven, leader of the New Social Contract party that has taken a battering in polls since joining the coalition and the departure of its talismanic leader Pieter Omtzigt, said the government could continue without Wilders, saying a minority Cabinet "is definitely an option." Schoof's statement appeared to put an end to such a course of events.

Opposition welcomes Wilders' departure.

Frans Timmermans, the former European Commission climate chief who now leads the main opposition bloc in parliament, welcomed Wilders' decision. He said he would not support a minority government and called for fresh elections as soon as possible.

"Well, I think it's an opportunity for all democratic parties to rid ourselves of the extremes because it's clear that with the extremes you can't govern. When things get difficult, they run away," he told The Associated Press.

## What we know about the shootings near Gaza aid distribution sites

By SAM MEDNICK and LEE KEATH Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Shootings have erupted nearly daily this week in the Gaza Strip in the vicinity of new hubs where desperate Palestinians are being directed to collect food. Witnesses say nearby Israeli troops have opened fire. Hospital officials say at least 80 people have been killed and hundreds wounded.

The Israeli military has said it fired warning shots in several instances, and has also fired directly at a few "suspects" who ignored warnings and approached its forces. It has denied opening fire on civilians, and has not claimed Hamas fired in the area of the hubs, though it says it is still investigating.

What we know about the shootings that have occurred as crowds walked toward aid distribution hubs:

Crowds pass close to Israeli forces

Three aid distribution hubs are being run by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, a newly formed group of mainly American contractors. Israel wants GHF to replace humanitarian groups in Gaza that distribute aid in coordination with the U.N.

Israel accuses Hamas of siphoning off aid under the U.N.-led system. But the U.N. and aid groups deny there is a significant diversion of aid to militants, and say the new system — which they have rejected — allows Israel to use food as a weapon, violates humanitarian principles and won't be effective.

GHF started distributing aid on May 26, following a nearly three-month Israeli blockade that has pushed Gaza's population of more than 2 million people to the brink of famine. The GHF system limits food distribution to hubs guarded by armed contractors. Of the three hubs that are open, one is in central Gaza and two are in the far south on the outskirts of the mostly uninhabited southern city of Rafah; not all have operated every day.

On Wednesday, GHF paused aid distribution, saying that it was discussing measures to improve civilian safety with the Israeli military, including changes to traffic management and troop training.

All the hubs are located in Israeli military zones, where journalists have no access.

To reach the sites in Rafah, Palestinians must walk for miles along a designated route where GHF says the Israeli military keeps security. In statements to the public, GHF has warned people to stay on the road, saying leaving it "represents a great danger."

Distribution usually starts at 5 a.m. each day. But thousands of Palestinians start walking hours earlier, desperate not to miss out on food. That means large crowds passing by Israeli troops in the dark.

Heaviest fire has erupted at a nearby roundabout

While shootings have been reported near all three hubs, the heaviest occurred Sunday and Tuesday at the Flag Roundabout. The traffic circle is located on the designated route about a kilometer (1,000 yards) northwest of GHF's distribution hub in the Tel al-Sultan district of Rafah. The hub is a few hundred meters from an Israeli army base.

Witnesses said that in the early hours Sunday, as crowds made their way down the coastal road toward the hub, Israeli troops fired warning shots and made announcements through drones flying overhead, telling them to turn back and return when the hub opened at 5 a.m.

By 3 a.m., thousands were massed at the Flag Roundabout, waiting for the hub to open. That was when Israeli troops started firing, with guns, tanks and drones, three Palestinian witnesses said. They said they saw people falling dead or wounded as the crowd scattered for cover.

Mohammed Ahmed, one man in the crowd, said he saw no provocative acts before the shooting. He said troops "may have opened fire because they felt threatened by the thousands of people in the area."



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Witnesses gave similar accounts of Tuesday's shooting, around 4 a.m. at the same roundabout.

Israel says it fires warning shots to control crowds

The Israeli military said it fired warning shots Sunday at "several suspects" approaching them. On Tuesday it said it "fired to drive away suspects." In a statement, army spokesman Effie Defrin said "the numbers of casualties published by Hamas were exaggerated" but that the incident was being investigated.

He accused Hamas of "trying to disrupt the arrival of aid" to Palestinians and pointed to drone footage that the military says shows armed men firing at civilians trying to collect aid in the nearby city of Khan Younis, where there are no GHF sites.

The Associated Press could not independently verify the video, and it was not clear who was being targeted. In its statements on the incidents near the GHF sites, the military has not reported the presence of armed Palestinians.

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation says there has been no violence in or around their distribution centers and that its personnel have not opened fire.

On Tuesday, GHF acknowledged that the Israeli military was investigating whether civilians were wounded "after moving beyond the designated safe corridor and into a closed military zone" in an area that was "well beyond our secure distribution site."

A spokesperson said GHF was "saddened to learn that a number of civilians were injured and killed after moving beyond the designated safe corridor."

Hospitals overwhelmed by casualties

Officials at the Red Cross field hospital in Rafah and at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis have reported being overwhelmed by casualties. The casualties include women and children brought from areas close to the distribution sites. They have said most are suffering from gunshot wounds.

An aid worker at one hospital said the morgue was overflowing and that wounded filled every bed, or were on the floor, many with gunshots to the buttocks and legs. The worker spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media.

Aid workers in Gaza say there is still a lot of uncertainty about what is happening and why so many people are being shot, injured and killed. The aid workers are unable to operate at the sites because they are in military zones.

Humanitarian groups had warned for weeks that having people collect aid in areas with a military presence would expose them to violence.

"This was a ludicrous and ineffective distribution mechanism that was going to end up deadly, which is, tragically, exactly what we are seeing," said Arwa Damon, founder of the International Network for Aid, Relief and Assistance.

The UN-run system operates differently

The existing U.N.-run system operates differently, with workers taking aid to Palestinians wherever they are.

"It is appalling that the humanitarian sector that knows how to do their job is being prevented from doing it because of the false narrative that Hamas controls the aid," Damon said.

Deadly encounters around aid distribution aren't entirely new. In February 2024, Israeli troops guarding an aid convoy heading to northern Gaza opened fire as a crowd of desperate Palestinians stripped supplies off the trucks. More than 100 people were killed, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which is led by medical professionals but reports to the Hamas-run government.

After investigating the incident, Israel said its troops fired on a "number of suspects" who ignored warning shots and advanced toward its forces. It said a stampede around the trucks caused "significant harm to civilians." EU and U.N. officials at the time said most of the casualties were from Israeli fire.

A race for food boxes

Palestinians have described a frenzied free-for-all to get food once they reach the GHF's distribution sites.

Boxes of food are left piled up on pallets in an area surrounded by fences and earth berms. Once the sites' gates are opened, the crowds rush in, with everyone grabbing what they can. Witnesses say some

people take multiple boxes, which quickly run out, and that many leave empty-handed.

GHF issued a video at the Tel al-Sultan hub showing Palestinians racing furiously toward the boxes.

Aid workers say the supplies are far from enough. GHF says each box contains enough food for a family of five to eat for three to four days. Most boxes contain flour, sugar, cooking oil, pasta and tuna cans, among other items.

"Our team on the ground reports these boxes are woefully insufficient for ensuring children's well-being," said Tess Ingram of UNICEF. "It doesn't have to be this way."

## **Boulder community to come together for vigil after firebombing attack that injured 12**

By COLLEEN SLEVIN, JESSE BEDAYN and REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. (AP) — As members of the Boulder community reeled from a firebombing attack that injured 12 people demonstrating for the release of Israeli hostages, residents prepared to come together for a vigil Wednesday.

Mohamed Sabry Soliman had planned to kill all of the roughly 20 participants in Sunday's demonstration at the popular Pearl Street pedestrian mall, but he threw just two of his 18 Molotov cocktails while yelling "Free Palestine," police said. Soliman, an Egyptian man who federal authorities say has been living in the U.S. illegally, didn't carry out his full plan "because he got scared and had never hurt anyone before," police wrote in an affidavit.

His wife and five children were taken into custody Tuesday by U.S. immigration officials, and the White House said they could be swiftly deported. It's rare that family members of a person accused of a crime are detained and threatened with deportation in this way.

Soliman told authorities that no one, including his family, knew about his plans for the attack, according to court documents that, at times, spelled his name as "Mohammed."

According to an FBI affidavit, Soliman told police he was driven by a desire "to kill all Zionist people" — a reference to the movement to establish and protect a Jewish state in Israel. Authorities said he expressed no remorse about the attack.

A vigil was scheduled for Wednesday evening at the local Jewish community center to support those impacted by the attack.

### **Defendant's immigration status**

Soliman was born in el-Motamedia, an Egyptian farming village in the Nile Delta province of Gharbia that's located about 120 kilometers (75 miles) north of Cairo, according to an Egyptian security official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to talk to the media.

Before moving to Colorado Springs three years ago, he spent 17 years in Kuwait, according to court documents.

He has been living in the U.S. illegally, having arrived in August 2022 on a tourist visa that expired in February 2023, Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said in a post on X. She said Soliman filed for asylum in September 2022 and was granted a work authorization in March 2023, but that it also expired.

DHS did not respond to requests for additional information about the immigration status of his wife and children and the U.S. State Department said that visa records are confidential. The New York Times, citing McLaughlin, said his family's visas have since been revoked and they were arrested Tuesday by ICE.

Hundreds of thousands of people overstay their visas each year in the United States, according to Homeland Security Department reports.

### **The case against Soliman**

Soliman told authorities that he had been planning the attack for a year and was waiting for his daughter to graduate before carrying it out, the affidavit said.

A newspaper in Colorado Springs that profiled one of Soliman's children in April noted the family's journey from Egypt to Kuwait and then to the U.S. It said after initially struggling in school, she landed academic

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honors and volunteered at a local hospital.

Soliman currently faces federal hate crime charges and attempted murder charges at the state level, but authorities say additional charges could be brought. He's being held in a county jail on a \$10 million bond.

His attorney, Kathryn Herold, declined to comment after a state court hearing Monday.

Witnesses and police have said Soliman threw two incendiary devices, catching himself on fire as he hurled the second. Authorities said they believe Soliman acted alone. Although they did not elaborate on the nature of his injuries, a booking photo showed him with a large bandage over one ear.

The attack unfolded against the backdrop of the Israel-Hamas war, which continues to inflame global tensions and has contributed to a spike in antisemitic violence in the United States. The attack happened at the beginning of the Jewish holiday of Shavuot and barely a week after a man who also yelled "Free Palestine" was charged with fatally shooting two Israeli Embassy staffers outside a Jewish museum in Washington.

Six victims hospitalized

The victims ranged in age from 52 to 88, and their injuries spanned from serious to minor, officials said. They were members of the volunteer group called Run For Their Lives who were holding their weekly demonstration.

Three victims were still hospitalized Tuesday at the UCHHealth University of Colorado Hospital, spokesperson Kelli Christensen said.

One of the 12 victims was a child when her family fled the Nazis during the Holocaust, said Ginger Delgado of the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office, who is acting as a spokesperson for the family of the woman, who doesn't want her name used.

## **Gaza officials say Israeli forces killed 27 heading to aid site. Israel says it fired near suspects**

By MOHAMMAD JAHJOUH, SAMY MAGDY and FATMA KHALED Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli forces fired on people as they headed toward an aid distribution site in Gaza on Tuesday, killing at least 27, Palestinian health officials and witnesses said, in the third such shooting in three days. The army said it fired "near a few individual suspects" who left the designated route, approached its forces and ignored warning shots.

The near-daily shootings have occurred after an Israeli and U.S.-backed foundation established aid distribution points inside Israeli military zones, a system it says is designed to circumvent Hamas. The United Nations has rejected the new system, saying it doesn't address Gaza's mounting hunger crisis and allows Israel to use aid as a weapon.

The Israeli military said it "fired to drive away suspects." In a statement, army spokesperson Effie Defrin said "the numbers of casualties published by Hamas were exaggerated" but that the incident was being investigated. He said the army is not preventing Palestinians in Gaza from reaching aid in the distribution areas, but rather allowing it.

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, which operates the sites, says there has been no violence in or around them. On Tuesday, it acknowledged that the Israeli military was investigating whether civilians were wounded "after moving beyond the designated safe corridor and into a closed military zone," in an area that was "well beyond our secure distribution site."

A spokesperson for the group said it was "saddened to learn that a number of civilians were injured and killed after moving beyond the designated safe corridor."

Gaza's roughly 2 million people are almost completely reliant on international aid because Israel's offensive has destroyed nearly all of Gaza's food production capabilities. Israel imposed a blockade on supplies into Gaza in March, and limited aid began to enter again late last month after pressure from allies and warnings of famine.

'Either way we will die'

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Witnesses have said the shootings all occurred at the Flag Roundabout, around a kilometer (half-mile) from one of the GHF's distribution sites in the now mostly uninhabited southern city of Rafah. The entire area is an Israeli military zone where journalists have no access outside of army-approved embeds.

Yasser Abu Lubda, a 50-year-old displaced person from Rafah, said the shooting started around 4 a.m. Tuesday and he saw several people killed or wounded.

Neima al-Aaraj, a woman from Khan Younis, said the Israeli fire was "indiscriminate." She added that when she managed to reach the distribution site, there was no aid left.

"After the martyrs and wounded, I won't return," she said. "Either way we will die."

Rasha al-Nahal, another witness, said that "there was gunfire from all directions." She said she counted more than a dozen dead and several wounded along the road.

When she reached the distribution site, she found there was no aid left, she said. She gathered pasta from the ground and salvaged rice from a bag that had been dropped and trampled upon.

"We'd rather die than deal with this," she said. "Death is more dignified than what's happening to us."

UN human rights official condemns shootings

At least 27 people were killed early Tuesday, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

Hisham Mhanna, a spokesperson for the International Committee of the Red Cross, confirmed the toll, saying its field hospital in Rafah received 184 wounded people, 19 of them declared dead on arrival, with eight others later dying of their wounds.

The dead were transferred to Nasser Hospital in the city of Khan Younis. Three children and two women were among the dead, according to Mohammed Saqr, head of nursing at the hospital.

Hospital director Atef al-Hout said most of the patients had gunshot wounds.

An Associated Press reporter who arrived at the Red Cross field hospital at around 6 a.m. saw wounded people being transferred to other hospitals by ambulance. Outside, people were returning from the aid hub, mostly empty-handed, while empty flour bags stained with blood lay on the ground.

Jeremy Laurence, a spokesman for the U.N. human rights office, told reporters it also had information indicating that 27 people were killed.

"Palestinians have been presented the grimmest of choices: die from starvation or risk being killed while trying to access the meager food that is being made available through Israel's militarized humanitarian assistance mechanism," Volker Türk, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in a statement.

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation said it distributed 21 truckloads of food at the Rafah site on Tuesday, while its other two operational sites were closed.

During a ceasefire earlier this year, around 600 aid trucks entered Gaza daily.

3 Israeli soldiers killed in northern Gaza

The Israeli military, meanwhile, said three of its soldiers were killed in northern Gaza, in what appeared to be the deadliest attack on Israel's forces since it ended a ceasefire with Hamas in March.

The military said the soldiers, all in their early 20s, died during combat on Monday, without providing details. Israeli media reported they were killed in an explosion in the Jabaliya area.

Israel ended the latest ceasefire after Hamas refused to change the agreement to release more hostages sooner. Israeli strikes have killed thousands of Palestinians since then, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

Israel says the new aid distribution system is designed to prevent Hamas from stealing aid. The U.N. says its own ability to deliver aid across Gaza has been hindered by Israeli restrictions, the breakdown of law and order and widespread looting, but that there's no evidence of systematic diversion of aid by Hamas.

Hamas-led militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took 251 people hostage in the Oct. 7, 2023, attack into southern Israel that ignited the war. They are still holding 58 hostages, a third of them believed to be alive, after most of the rest were released in ceasefire agreements or other deals.

Israel's military campaign has killed more than 54,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't say how many of the dead were civilians or combatants. The ministry is led by medical professionals but reports to the Hamas-run government. Its toll is seen as generally reliable by U.N. agencies and independent experts, though Israel has challenged its numbers.

Israel says it has killed around 20,000 militants, without providing evidence. Around 860 Israeli soldiers



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have been killed since the Oct. 7 attack, including more than 400 during the fighting inside Gaza.

Rockets fired from Syria

Sirens sounded across Israel late Tuesday night.

Israel's army said that two rockets were fired from Syria into open areas in the Israel-annexed Golan Heights, marking the first time a strike's been launched toward Israel from Syrian territory since the fall of former Syrian President Bashar Assad. A group calling itself the Mohammed Deif Brigades claimed the attack in a post on Telegram. Little is known about the group, which first surfaced on social media last month.

Israel has been suspicious of the Islamist former insurgents who formed the new Syrian government and has launched hundreds of airstrikes on Syria and seized a U.N.-patrolled buffer zone on Syrian territory since Assad's fall.

Syrian state TV reported Israeli shelling hit the western countryside of Syria's Daraa province after the rocket launch.

Israel's defense minister said it holds Syria's president responsible for every threat and firing towards Israel, and that a "full response" will come as soon as possible.

## Trump urges senators to get his big tax bill done by July 4th

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump wants his "big, beautiful" bill of tax breaks and spending cuts on his desk to be signed into law by the Fourth of July, and he's pushing the slow-rolling Senate to make it happen sooner rather than later.

Trump met with Senate Majority Leader John Thune at the White House earlier this week and has been dialing senators for one-on-one chats, using both the carrot and stick to nudge, badger and encourage them to act. But it's still a long road ahead for the 1,000-page-plus package.

"His question to me was, How do you think the bill's going to go in the Senate?" Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., said about his call with Trump. "Do you think there's going to be problems?"

It's a potentially tumultuous three-week sprint for senators preparing to put their own imprint on the massive Republican package that cleared the House late last month by a single vote. The senators have been meeting for weeks behind closed doors, including as they returned to Washington late Monday, to revise the package ahead of what is expected to be a similarly narrow vote in the Senate.

"Passing THE ONE, BIG, BEAUTIFUL BILL is a Historic Opportunity to turn our Country around," Trump posted on social media. He urged senators Monday "to work as fast as they can to get this Bill to MY DESK before the Fourth of JULY."

But Trump's high-octane ally, billionaire Elon Musk, lambasted the package — and those voting for it.

"This massive, outrageous, pork-filled Congressional spending bill is a disgusting abomination," Musk posted on his site X, as some lawmakers have expressed reservations about the details. "Shame on those who voted for it: you know you did wrong. You know it."

A test for Thune

Thune, like House Speaker Mike Johnson, has few votes to spare from the Senate's slim, 53-seat GOP majority. Democrats are waging an all-out political assault on GOP proposals to cut Medicaid, food stamps and green energy investments to help pay for more than \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts — with many lawmakers being hammered at boisterous town halls back home.

"It'd be nice if we could have everybody on board to do it, but, you know, individual members are going to stake out their positions," Thune said Tuesday. "But in the end, we have to succeed. Failure's not an option."

Johnson called Musk's harsh criticism of the bill "very disappointing."

"With all due respect," said Johnson, who said he spoke with Musk for more than 20 minutes, "my friend Elon is terribly wrong about the one big beautiful bill."

At its core, the package seeks to extend the tax cuts approved in 2017, during Trump's first term at the White House, and add new ones the president campaigned on, including no taxes on tips. It also includes

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a massive buildup of \$350 billion for border security, deportations and national security.

To defray the lost tax revenue to the government and avoid piling onto the nation's \$36 trillion debt load, Republicans want reduce federal spending by imposing work requirements for some Americans who rely on government safety net services. Estimates are 8.6 million people would no longer have health care and nearly 4 million would lose Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program benefits, known as SNAP.

The package also would raise the nation's debt limit by \$4 trillion to allow more borrowing to pay the bills. Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said Trump's bill "is ugly to its very core."

Schumer said Tuesday that senators should listen to Musk. "Behind the smoke and mirrors lies a cruel and draconian truth: tax breaks for the ultra-wealthy paid for by gutting health care for millions of Americans," said the New York senator.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office is expected to soon provide an overall analysis of the package's impacts on the government balance sheets. But Republicans are ready to blast those findings from the congressional scorekeeper as flawed.

The GOP holdouts

Trump switched to tougher tactics Tuesday, deriding the holdout Republican senators.

The president laid into Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, the libertarian-leaning deficit hawk who has made a career of arguing against government spending. Paul wants the package's \$4 trillion increase to the debt ceiling out of the bill.

"Rand votes NO on everything, but never has any practical or constructive ideas. His ideas are actually crazy (losers!)," Trump posted.

Paul seemed unfazed. "I like the president, supported the president," the senator said. "But I can't in good conscience give up every principle that I stand for and every principle that I was elected upon."

The July 4th deadline is not only aspirational for the president, it's all but mandatory for Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, who has warned Congress that the nation will run out of money to pay its bills if the debt ceiling, now at \$36 trillion, is not lifted by mid-July or early August to allow more borrowing. Bessent has also been meeting behind closed doors with senators and GOP leadership.

To make most of the tax cuts permanent — particularly the business tax breaks that are the Senate priorities — senators may shave some of Trump's proposed new tax breaks on automobile loans or overtime pay, which are less prized by some senators.

There are also discussions about altering the \$40,000 cap that the House proposed for state and local deductions, known as SALT, which are important to lawmakers in high-tax New York, California and other states, but less so among GOP senators.

"We're having all those discussions," said Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., another key voice in the debate.

Hawley is among a group of senators, including Maine Sen. Susan Collins and Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, who have raised concerns about the Medicaid changes that could boot people from health insurance.

A potential copay of up to \$35 for Medicaid services that was part of the House package, as well as a termination of a provider tax that many states rely on to help fund rural hospitals, have also raised concerns.

"The best way to not be accused of cutting Medicaid is to not cut Medicaid," Hawley said. Collins said she is reviewing the details.

## US immigration authorities detain the family of the man charged in the Colorado attack

By COLLEEN SLEVIN, JESSE BEDAYN and REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. (AP) — The wife and five children of an Egyptian man accused of firebombing an event in Colorado in support of Israeli hostages were taken into custody Tuesday by U.S. immigration officials and threatened with a swift deportation.

The family of Mohamed Sabry Soliman, 45, could be deported as early as Tuesday night, the White House said in a post on X. It's rare that family members of a person accused of a crime are detained and threatened with deportation in this way.

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Soliman, disguised as a gardener, had planned to kill all of the roughly 20 participants in Sunday's demonstration and had 18 Molotov cocktails, but he threw just two while yelling "Free Palestine," police said. Soliman, who federal authorities say has been living in the U.S. illegally, didn't carry out his full plan "because he got scared and had never hurt anyone before," police wrote in an affidavit.

The two incendiary devices he threw were enough to injure 12 of the participants in the weekly demonstration held at the popular Pearl Street pedestrian mall in downtown Boulder, authorities said, noting that he expressed no remorse about the attack.

Soliman told authorities that no one, including his family, knew about his plans for the attack, according to court documents that, at times, spelled his name as "Mohammed."

According to an FBI affidavit, Soliman told police he was driven by a desire "to kill all Zionist people" — a reference to the movement to establish and protect a Jewish state in Israel.

Soliman left an iPhone hidden in a desk drawer at his Colorado Springs home that contained messages to his family, according to an FBI affidavit. After his arrest, his wife gave his phone to police, saying it was his but was also used by other family members.

**Defendant's immigration status**

Soliman was born in el-Motamedia, an Egyptian farming village in the Nile Delta province of Gharbia that's located about 120 kilometers (75 miles) north of Cairo, according to an Egyptian security official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to talk to the media. Soliman was also a handball player for a club in Cairo, the club's former chairman wrote on Facebook.

Before moving to Colorado Springs three years ago, he spent 17 years in Kuwait, according to court documents.

He has been living in the U.S. illegally, having arrived in August 2022 on a tourist visa that expired in February 2023, Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said in a post on X. She said Soliman filed for asylum in September 2022 and was granted a work authorization in March 2023, but that it also expired. The immigration status of his wife and children is not clear, and DHS did not respond to requests for additional information.

Hundreds of thousands of people overstay their visas each year in the United States, according to the Homeland Security Department reports.

The overstay rate for Egyptians on business or tourist visas is low compared to many other countries.

**The case against Soliman**

Soliman told authorities that he had been planning the attack for a year and was waiting for his daughter to graduate before carrying it out, the affidavit said.

A newspaper in Colorado Springs that profiled one of Soliman's children in April notes the family's journey from Egypt to Kuwait and then to the U.S. It said after initially struggling in school, she landed academic honors, founded an Arabic club and volunteered at a local hospital as part of her plan to attend medical school.

Soliman currently faces federal hate crime charges and attempted murder charges at the state level, but authorities say additional charges could be brought. He's being held in a county jail on a \$10 million bond.

His attorney, Kathryn Herold, declined to comment after a state court hearing Monday.

The attack unfolded against the backdrop of the Israel-Hamas war, which continues to inflame global tensions and has contributed to a spike in antisemitic violence in the United States. The attack happened at the beginning of the Jewish holiday of Shavuot and barely a week after a man who also yelled "Free Palestine" was charged with fatally shooting two Israeli Embassy staffers outside a Jewish museum in Washington.

**Six victims hospitalized**

The victims ranged in age from 52 to 88, and their injuries spanned from serious to minor, officials said. They were members of the volunteer group called Run For Their Lives who were holding their weekly demonstration.

Three victims remained hospitalized Tuesday at the UCHHealth University of Colorado Hospital, spokes-

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person Kelli Christensen said.

One of the 12 victims was a child when her family fled the Nazis during the Holocaust, said Ginger Delgado of the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office, who is acting as a spokesperson for the family of the woman, who doesn't want her name used.

Molotov cocktails found

Witnesses and police have said Soliman threw two incendiary devices, catching himself on fire as he hurled the second. Soliman took off his shirt and what appeared to be a bulletproof vest before police arrived and arrested him, said witness Alex Osante of San Diego.

Soliman told authorities he had gas in a backpack sprayer but didn't spray it on anyone but himself because "he had planned on dying," officials said.

Soliman also told investigators that he took a concealed-carry class and tried to buy a gun but was denied because he isn't a U.S. citizen.

Soliman attempted to purchase a handgun in Colorado Springs about seven months ago but was denied the gun after a background check, Rob Low, a spokesperson for the Colorado Bureau of Investigation, said in a statement. A month later, he was denied a concealed carry handgun permit.

Low said that CBI cannot specify why someone was denied, though Soliman told investigators that it was because he isn't a U.S. citizen. If Soliman's immigration status caused his rejection, CBI would have sent ICE a notification, Low said.

Authorities said they believe Soliman acted alone. Although they did not elaborate on the nature of his injuries, a booking photo showed him with a large bandage over one ear.

## **Musk calls Trump's big tax break bill a 'disgusting abomination,' testing his influence over the GOP**

By JONATHAN J. COOPER and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Elon Musk blasted President Donald Trump's "big, beautiful bill" of tax breaks and spending cuts as a "disgusting abomination" on Tuesday, testing the limits of his political influence as he targeted the centerpiece of Republicans' legislative agenda.

The broadside, which Musk issued on his social media platform X, came just days after the president gave him a celebratory Oval Office farewell that marked the end of his work for the administration, where he spearheaded the Department of Government Efficiency.

"I'm sorry, but I just can't stand it anymore," Musk posted on X. "This massive, outrageous, pork-filled Congressional spending bill is a disgusting abomination. Shame on those who voted for it: you know you did wrong. You know it."

The legislation, which has passed the House and is currently under debate in the Senate, would curtail subsidies that benefit Tesla, Musk's electric automaker.

The tech billionaire followed his criticism with a threat aimed at Republicans.

"In November next year, we fire all politicians who betrayed the American people," he wrote in another X post.

It's a sharp shift for Musk, the world's richest person, who spent at least \$250 million supporting Trump's campaign last year. He previously pledged to help defeat Republican lawmakers deemed insufficiently loyal to Trump, but now he's suggesting voting them out if they advance the president's legislative priority.

However, it's unclear how Musk will follow through on his criticism. He recently said he would spend "a lot less" on political campaigns, though he left the door open to political involvement "if I see a reason."

The tech titan's missives could cause headaches for Republicans on Capitol Hill, who face conflicting demands from Trump and their party's wealthiest benefactor.

Alex Conant, a Republican strategist, said "it's not helpful" to have Musk criticizing the legislation, but he doesn't expect lawmakers to side with Musk over Trump.

"Senate Republicans are not going to let the tax cuts expire," Conant said. "It just makes leadership's



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job that much harder to wrangle the holdouts.”

Trump can change the outcome in Republican primaries with his endorsements, but Musk doesn’t wield that level of influence, Conant said.

“No matter what Elon Musk or anybody else says — and I don’t want to diminish him because I don’t think that’s fair — it’s still going to be second fiddle to President Trump,” said Republican West Virginia Sen. Shelley Moore Capito.

Musk’s business interests stand to take a hit if lawmakers approve Trump’s bill, which would slash funding for electric vehicles and related technologies. Musk is the chief executive of Tesla, the nation’s largest electric vehicle manufacturer, and SpaceX, which has massive defense contracts.

Last month, Musk said he was “disappointed” by the spending bill, a much milder criticism than the broadside he leveled Tuesday.

The budget package seeks to extend tax cuts approved in 2017, during Trump’s first term at the White House, and add new ones he campaigned on. It also includes a massive buildup of \$350 billion for border security, deportations and national security.

To defray some of the lost tax revenue to the government and limit piling onto the nation’s \$36 trillion debt load, Republicans want to reduce federal spending by imposing work requirements for some Americans who rely on government safety net services.

Musk’s post threw another hurdle in front of Senate Majority Leader John Thune’s already complex task to pass a bill in time for Trump to achieve his goal of signing it by July 4. The South Dakota Republican has few votes to spare in the GOP’s slim 53-seat majority.

Two of the Senate’s most fiscally hawkish Republicans quickly backed Musk.

“We can and must do better,” Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul wrote on X. Utah Sen. Mike Lee said “federal spending has become excessive,” adding that it causes inflation and “weaponizes government.”

Still, Trump enjoys fierce loyalty among the GOP base, and in the end, his opinion may be the only one that matters.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt played down Musk’s criticism.

“The president already knows where Elon Musk stood on this bill,” Leavitt said, and Musk’s post “doesn’t change the president’s opinion.”

The tension in the GOP delighted Democrats, who found themselves in the unlikely position of siding with Musk. Democrats are waging an all-out political assault on GOP proposals to cut Medicaid, food stamps and green energy investments to help pay for more than \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts — with many lawmakers being hammered at boisterous town halls back home.

“We’re in complete agreement,” House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries said of Musk. The New York Democratic lawmaker stood alongside a poster-sized printout of Musk’s post during a Capitol news conference.

The last time Musk weighed in significantly on legislation, the scenario was far different. His power was ascendant after the election, with Trump joining him for a rocket test in Texas and appointing him to spearhead DOGE.

During the transition period, Musk started whipping up opposition to legislation that would prevent a government shutdown, posting about it repeatedly on X. Trump soon weighed in, encouraging Republicans to back out of a bipartisan deal. Lawmakers eventually patched together a new agreement.

## Knicks fire coach Tom Thibodeau after first Eastern Conference finals berth in 25 years

By BRIAN MAHONEY AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Tom Thibodeau just took the New York Knicks to the Eastern Conference finals, the deepest playoff march in 25 years for a franchise that reemerged as a contender after he became their coach.

For that, he was fired.

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The Knicks made what they called a "difficult decision" to move on from Thibodeau on Tuesday, believing it was a necessary step in their chase for a championship.

"We can't thank Tom enough for pouring his heart and soul into each and every day of being the New York Knicks head coach. He led us not only with class and professionalism for the past five seasons, but also to tremendous success on the court with four playoff berths and four playoff series victories," team president Leon Rose said in a statement.

"Ultimately we made the decision we feel is best for our organization moving forward. Tom will always be a part of our Knicks family and we truly wish him nothing but the best in the future."

The Knicks were eliminated by the Indiana Pacers with a loss in Game 6 on Saturday night, falling two games short of their first NBA Finals appearance since 1999. Thibodeau was then asked what the Knicks needed to do this summer to go further.

"Like you would do after every season, you take a step back, I think decompress," Thibodeau said. "You do a deep dive on the team and then you analyze what you think you need to improve upon."

The Knicks decided it was the coach.

The move was made by Rose with approval from owner Jim Dolan, according to a person who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because that detail was not included in the announcement. The firing was first reported by ESPN.

It's a strange decision by the Knicks, who had been one of the league's worst franchises for most of the 2000s until Thibodeau was hired in 2020. He promptly led the Knicks to the playoffs in his first season, winning his second NBA Coach of the Year award, and they have been a solid contender in the East in recent seasons. They gave Thibodeau a three-year contract extension last summer.

Their big breakthrough came in 2024-25, when they knocked off defending champion Boston in the second round to reach the conference finals for the first time since 2000 — when Thibodeau was an assistant under Jeff Van Gundy.

After they were eliminated Saturday, captain Jalen Brunson expressed his support for Thibodeau, bristling at a question about whether he believed the coach was right for the team.

"Is that a real question right now?" Brunson said. "You just asked me if I believe that he's the right guy? Yes. Come on."

Three days later, Thibodeau was gone despite a 226-174 record in New York. He has the fourth-most wins by a Knicks coach.

Thibodeau faced criticisms that his hard-driving style and overreliance on his starters wore down his players, the same ones that have followed him since the beginning of his head coaching career in Chicago. But his ways seemed to be working in New York.

And even among the celebrities that filled Madison Square Garden, Thibodeau's gruff style was a natural fit for fans who longed for the defense-driven success of the 1990s.

"I am a Tom Thibodeau fan. He brought this team back," actor Ben Stiller, who watched the postseason run from his courtside seat, wrote on X. "I felt he gave every bit of himself and was always looking to improve. I will always be grateful for how far he brought the Knicks. They are relevant again. They are championship contenders again. The Knicks became winners again with him."

The Knicks hadn't won a playoff series since 2013 but now have done it in three straight seasons. They went 50-32 in 2023-24 and followed that with a 51-31 record this season, having loaded up in the offseason by trading for All-Star Karl-Anthony Towns and Mikal Bridges.

But the person said the organization felt there was a need for a new voice when the Knicks try again to end their lengthy championship drought. They won their second and last title in 1973.

Thibodeau is well aware of their history, having grown up as a Knicks fan in Connecticut before joining the organization as an assistant coach in 1996.

He went on to help the Boston Celtics win the 2008 NBA title as an assistant, earning a reputation as one of the league's top defensive minds, before finally getting a chance as a head coach with the Bulls in 2010-11. He went 62-20 in his first season, earning his first Coach of the Year award.

Thibodeau, who spent five seasons with the Bulls and also coached Minnesota, is 578-420 as a head

coach.

## Arkansas authorities release photo rendering of 'Devil in the Ozarks' as manhunt continues

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Arkansas authorities on Tuesday released a photo rendering of a convicted murderer and former police chief known as the "Devil in the Ozarks" as the search for the escaped inmate entered its second week.

The new image was released as state legislators raised concerns about Hardin's escape and said they planned to conduct a review of how it occurred.

The Arkansas Department of Corrections said the photo rendering of Grant Hardin, 56, depicts how he may look after he escaped May 25 from the Calico Rock prison. The rendering shows Hardin with some hair on his head and face.

Authorities have said Hardin escaped by donning an outfit designed to look like a law enforcement uniform.

Rand Champion, a department spokesperson, said officials are focusing their search on the north-central Arkansas region where the prison is located. Tips from elsewhere about potential Hardin sightings have come in, but so far none have panned out, Champion said.

Hardin, a former police chief in the small town of Gateway near the Arkansas-Missouri border, was serving lengthy sentences for murder and rape. He was the subject of the TV documentary "Devil in the Ozarks."

Hardin was housed in a maximum-security wing of the primarily medium security prison, formally known as the North Central Unit. Officials are investigating whether a job Hardin held in the kitchen aided in his escape, including whether it gave him access to materials he could have used to fashion his makeshift uniform.

The co-chairs of a legislative subcommittee overseeing the prison system told the head of the state Board of Corrections that they planned to conduct a review of any "inadequacies or deviations" from security protocols that allowed Hardin to escape.

Area legislators have raised questions about why Hardin was being held at the Calico Rock facility.

The letter was sent Monday by Republican Rep. Howard Beaty and Sen. Matt McKee to Benny Magness, who heads the state board.

"Given Hardin's background as a former law enforcement officer and his history of working for multiple law enforcement agencies, it is evident that he possesses knowledge and skills that enabled him to exploit weaknesses in our security protocols," the lawmakers wrote. "His manipulation of the system by wearing a disguise resembling a uniform is disturbing and speaks to a broader system failure."

## Weinstein retrial nears end as lawyers argue: sexual predator or #MeToo 'poster boy'?

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Harvey Weinstein's lawyer portrayed him as the falsely accused "original sinner" of the #MeToo era, while a prosecutor told jurors at his sex crimes retrial Tuesday that the former movie mogul preyed on less-powerful women he thought would never speak up.

The two sides took very different tones in their closing arguments, which are due to conclude Wednesday. Weinstein's lawyer, Arthur Aidala, veered into folksy jokes and theatricality — sometimes re-enacting witnesses' behavior — as he contended that his client engaged in a "courting game," not crimes. Prosecutor Nicole Blumberg, as direct as Aidala was discursive, urged jurors to focus on Weinstein's accusers and their days of grueling testimony.

"This was not a 'courting game,' as Mr. Aidala wants you to believe. This was not a 'transaction,'" she told jurors. "This was never about 'fooling around.' It was about rape."

The majority-female jury is expected to start deliberations at some point Wednesday, inheriting a case

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that was seen as a #MeToo watershed when Weinstein was convicted five years ago. It ended up being retried, and reshaped, because an appeals court overturned the 2020 verdict.

Weinstein, the former Hollywood honcho-turned-#MeToo outcast, has pleaded not guilty to raping a woman in 2013 and forcing oral sex on two others, separately, in 2006.

Aidala argued that everything that happened between the ex-producer and his accusers was a consensual, if "transactional," exchange of favors. The attorney accused prosecutors of "trying to police the bedroom" and zeroing in on the man seen as "the poster boy, the original sinner, for the #MeToo movement."

"They tried to do it five years ago, and now there's a redo, and they're trying to do it again," he told jurors. His hours-long summation touched on matters from the acclaimed, Weinstein-co-produced 1994 film "Pulp Fiction" to his own marriage and his grandmother's Italian gravy, at times playing for — and getting — laughs from jurors and Weinstein.

Aidala depicted the former studio boss as a self-made New Yorker, while painting Weinstein's accusers as troubled and canny "women with broken dreams" who plied him for movie opportunities and other perks, kept engaging with him for years and then turned on him to cash in on his #MeToo undoing. All three received compensation through legal processes separate from the criminal trial.

Blumberg countered that Weinstein interpreted a sexual "no" as a cue to "push a little bit more, and if they still say no, just take it anyway."

She argued that his accusers stayed in friendly contact with Weinstein because they were trying to work in entertainment, and they feared their careers would be squashed if they crossed him.

"He chose people who he thought would be the perfect victims, who he could rape and keep silent," the prosecutor said. "He underestimated them."

Weinstein had a decades-long run as one of the movie industry's most influential people. In 2017, allegations of sexual assault and harassment tanked his career and catalyzed the #MeToo movement, which seeks accountability for sexual misconduct.

He was subsequently convicted of sex crimes and sentenced to prison in New York and California. His California appeal hasn't been decided.

Since the New York retrial opened April 23, prosecutors have brought in more than two dozen witnesses. The prosecution centered on Weinstein's three accusers, who each faced days of questions.

In often graphic and sometimes tearful testimony, the women said the Oscar-winning producer used his showbiz stature as a hook to prey on them.

Jessica Mann, who accused Weinstein of rape, was a hairstylist hoping to make it as an actor when she met him. The sexual assault accusers also were trying to build careers in entertainment: Miriam Haley was a production assistant and producer, and Kaja Sokola was a teenage model who wanted to get into acting.

Prosecutors added Sokola's allegations to the case for the retrial. But some other accusers from the first trial weren't part of the second. The appeals court said it was prejudicial to include their accusations, which never resulted in charges.

Weinstein, 73, decided not to testify. His attorneys presented a few witnesses to cast doubts on certain aspects of the accusers' accounts. But Weinstein's defense also relied heavily on questioning prosecution witnesses — even surprising Sokola with her own private journal — to try to undermine their credibility.

The Associated Press generally does not identify people without their permission if they say they have been sexually assaulted. Sokola, Mann and Haley have agreed to be named.

## New Orleans jail escapee releases videos, prompting search of home where they were made, source says

By JIM MUSTIAN and JACK BROOK Associated Press/Report for America

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A man who identified himself as a New Orleans jail escapee released videos on social media while still on the run, leading to a police raid that failed to recapture him, an Associated Press source says.

Authorities were so convinced about the authenticity of the videos that they searched a home a little



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over 2 miles (3.7 kilometers) from the jail late Monday where they believe the recordings were made by escapee Antoine Massey, according to a senior law enforcement official who spoke to The AP on condition of anonymity. The official said he wasn't authorized to publicly discuss the ongoing investigation into the May 16 escape by 10 inmates.

Massey was not at the New Orleans home on the edge of the Fairgrounds and Gentilly neighborhoods, the official said, but authorities did locate clothing they believe he wore during filming.

The owner of the home, Shedrick Burnell, said it was being rented and declined to name the tenant. He told AP by phone that he had never seen or heard of Massey before the jailbreak and the videos circulated online, but he appeared unfazed that a fugitive had likely used his property as a hideout.

"I'm 76, I've seen a helluva lot worse than this," said the Louisiana native. "As long as my tenant is safe, there's nothing I can do."

When an AP reporter knocked at the home Tuesday afternoon, no one answered.

Next door, a house under construction had been kicked in and the backdoor, gate and windows were open — likely due to the police search, said Tariq Aldahir, an electrician who had been working on that property, adjacent to where Massey had allegedly been hiding.

"It's a little scary -- if he is as dangerous a criminal as they say he is, what is he capable of doing?" Aldahir said. "He's desperate -- any human being who is desperate, there's no limit to what they can do."

Authorities were tipped to the videos, posted online Sunday, by relatives who recognized the residence.

Authorities are racing to recapture Massey and convicted murderer Derrick Groves, more than two weeks since the audacious breakout. Eight other escapees have since been recaptured.

State Police Superintendent Col. Robert Hodges said that despite the agency's confidence in its investigations, "things change at a moment's notice and it's usually because someone has helped them." He encouraged people to keep offering tips. Authorities are offering a \$50,000 reward per escapee.

Louisiana State Police, the agency leading the search, declined to comment on whether it had verified Massey's identity in the videos. The agency carried out the search related to the videos — since removed from Instagram — which seemingly show a man with the same facial tattoos as Massey sitting near a kitchen.

"Please, I'm asking for help," said Massey, appealing to President Donald Trump and several rappers including New Orleans native Lil Wayne in one video. "When I get back in custody I'm asking y'all please to come and help."

Orleans Parish Sheriff Susan Hutson urged Massey to surrender, adding in a statement: "Cooperating with law enforcement is in his best interest and may help avoid additional charges."

Massey, 32, faced charges of rape, kidnapping, domestic violence involving strangulation and violation of a protective order all stemming from a November 2024 incident, authorities in nearby St. Tammany Parish say. In Orleans Parish he faced charges of motor vehicle theft and domestic battery.

Massey said he's innocent and also claimed on video that he'd been "let out" of jail.

A woman police identified as being in an on-again, off-again relationship with Massey — and who suffered from domestic abuse at his hands, police reports indicate — was arrested and charged with obstruction of justice and as a principal to aggravated escape, court records show. Authorities said the woman knew of Massey's escape plans beforehand, communicated with him afterward and misled authorities.

During a Tuesday press conference, Gov. Jeff Landry, a tough-on-crime Republican, urged the two escapees "quit the hide-and-seek game" and turn themselves in.

Video and images from the breakout show inmates had yanked open a faulty cell door, removed a toilet and crawled through a hole where steel bars had been cut before using blanks to get over a barbed wire fence.

A maintenance worker charged with helping the incarcerated men escape has denied knowingly aiding them, via his lawyer.

## Things to know about the retrial of Karen Read in the killing of her police officer boyfriend

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI and PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

A doctor testifying as a dog bite expert was cross-examined by prosecutors Tuesday in Karen Read's second murder trial, as the defense argues she was framed for killing her boyfriend, Boston Police Officer John O'Keefe, and that wounds on his arms came from an animal.

Read, 45, is accused of fatally striking O'Keefe with her SUV and leaving him to die in the snow outside another officer's home when she dropped him off at a party in January 2022 after the two had been drinking. She's charged with second-degree murder, manslaughter and leaving the scene outside Boston.

Her lawyers say O'Keefe, 46, was beaten inside the home, bitten by a family dog and then left outside as part of a conspiracy by the police that included planting evidence against Read.

A mistrial was declared last year and so far, Read's second trial has followed similar contours to the first.

A dog bite expert is quizzed

The jury has repeatedly been shown photos of the gashes and scrapes on O'Keefe's arms, and saw them again on Tuesday.

Prosecutors challenged an assessment by Dr. Marie Russell, a retired emergency medicine physician, who said the wounds on O'Keefe's arms were the result of a dog attack.

Russell testified Monday she has treated hundreds of dog attacks and bites over nearly 30 years and became interested in the Read case after seeing a news report about questions over whether O'Keefe was attacked by a dog before he died.

"These multiple groupings are patterns and they are, in my opinion, by the teeth and claws of a dog," Russell said, pointing to a photo of O'Keefe's arm. She described the wounds as linear and going in a similar direction.

Upon leaving court at the end of the day, Read briefly addressed reporters and said she thought Russell was "fantastic" on the stand.

Prosecutors ask what makes someone a dog bite expert

The prosecution had earlier sought to block Russell from testifying, questioning her credibility. Although the judge allowed her to take the stand, the prosecution renewed their scrutiny and noted Russell never testified before as a dog bite expert and hasn't taken a dog bite forensics course — however she said she was unsure any such certification or training existed.

Prosecutor Hank Brennan asked Russell on Tuesday if there was any universally accepted standard for identifying dog bites. Russell said there was not.

Brennan also pressed Russell about changing her testimony from saying the wounds were caused by "teeth or nails" to specifically naming "canines."

"When you testified, December 2024, you didn't say nails could have caused these wounds, you didn't say generally teeth, you said canines," Brennan said.

"I believe that is true," Russell responded, saying she "became more certain" the wounds were from canine teeth.

Defense calls for a mistrial — again

The defense team leapt on a chance to ask for a mistrial Tuesday after the prosecution pointed out that no dog DNA was found on O'Keefe. The defense said there had been no mention in the trial about DNA and the dog bite, and argued that raising the subject while questioning Russell had prejudiced the jury.

"That cannot be reversed. That cannot be cured. That cannot be ameliorated with a jury instruction," defense attorney Robert Alessi said while the jury was outside the courtroom.

Prosecutors waved away the accusation, with Brennan saying, "The defense does not get to pick and choose what words the Commonwealth can or cannot use."

After a brief pause, Superior Court Judge Beverly Cannone said the trial could proceed.

A testy exchange with a former police officer

An exchange on Monday between former Canton police officer Kelly Dever and defense attorney Alan

Jackson quickly turned tense after he asked if she wanted to be in the courtroom. Dever said she had “no idea why I’m here,” and later remarked about the defense mispronouncing her name.

Dever testified that while working dispatch on the night O’Keefe died, she could see a video feed from a garage area attached to police department, called a sally port. Read’s team has long argued a police cover-up including possibly moving Read’s vehicle that was brought into the sally port garage.

Dever said she told federal agents “in good faith” in August 2023 that she saw ATF agent Brian Higgins and former Canton Police Chief Kenneth Berkowitz inside the garage.

However, on the stand she said she realized this wasn’t possible because they entered the garage after her shift ended. She attributed the error to “false memory” influenced by media coverage, and said she had retracted her statement.

## Trump fast-tracks Utah uranium mine, but industry revival may wait for higher prices

By MEAD GRUVER and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — In the southeastern Utah desert famous for red rock arches and canyon labyrinths, the long-dormant uranium mining industry is looking to revive under President Donald Trump.

Hundreds of abandoned uranium mines dot the West’s arid landscapes, hazardous reminders of the promise and peril of nuclear power during the Cold War. Now, one mine that the Trump administration fast-tracked for regulatory approval could reopen for the first time since the 1980s.

Normally it would have taken months, if not years, for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to review plans to reopen a project like Anfield Energy’s Velvet-Wood mine 35 miles (56 kilometers) south of Moab. But the bureau’s regulators green-lit the project in just 11 days under a “national energy emergency” Trump has declared that allows expedited environmental reviews for energy projects.

More permits and approvals will be needed, plus site work to get the mine operating again. And the price of uranium would have to rise enough to make domestic production financially sustainable. If that happens, it would mean revival — and jobs — to an industry that locally has been moribund since the Ronald Reagan era.

“President Trump has made it clear that our energy security is national security,” Interior Secretary Doug Burgum said in announcing the fast-tracking policy in April. “These emergency procedures reflect our unwavering commitment to protecting both.”

More fast approvals appear likely. Trump’s order also applies to oil, gas, coal, biofuel and hydropower projects — but not renewable energy — on federal lands.

Conditions are ripe for more U.S. uranium mining

Global uranium prices are double what they were at a low point seven years ago and, for the past year, the U.S. has banned uranium imports from Russia due to that country’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

More domestic mining would address a major imbalance. The U.S. imports about 98% of the uranium it uses to generate 30% of the world’s nuclear energy. More than two-thirds of U.S. imports come from the world’s top three uranium-mining countries: Canada, Australia and Kazakhstan.

Less government regulation won’t spur more U.S. uranium mining by itself. The market matters. And while spot-market prices are up from several years ago, they’re down about a third from their recent high in early 2024.

While some new uranium mining and processing projects have been announced, their number falls far short of a surge. That suggests prices need to rise — and stay there — for a true industry revival, said John Uhrie, a former uranium executive who now works in the cement industry.

“Until the price goes up dramatically, you’re not going to be able to actually put these places into operation,” Uhrie said. “You need significant capital on the ground.”

Still, the industry is showing new life in the Southwest.

Anfield Energy, a Canadian company, also looks to reopen the Shootaring Canyon uranium mill in southern Utah near Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. It closed in the early 1980s. A uranium mill turns raw

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ore into yellowcake, a powdery substance later processed elsewhere into nuclear fuel.

Anfield officials did not return messages seeking comment on plans to reopen the mill and the Velvet-Wood mine.

Energy Fuels, another Canadian company which ranks as the top U.S. uranium miner, opened the Pinyon Plain mine about 10 miles (16 kilometers) from the Grand Canyon in late 2023.

And just off U.S. 191 in southeastern Utah is a hub of the industry, Energy Fuels' White Mesa mill, the country's only uranium mill still in operation.

In Moab, uranium has a long — and mixed — legacy

These days, Moab is a desert tourism hot spot bustling with outdoor enthusiasts. But the town of 5,200 has a deeper history with uranium. Nods to Moab's post-World War II mining heyday can be spotted around town — the Atomic Hair Salon isn't just named for its blowout hairstyles.

The biggest reminder is the Moab Uranium Mill Tailings Remedial Action project, a 480-acre (194-hectare) site just outside town. The decades-long, \$1 billion U.S. Department of Energy effort to haul off toxic tailings that were leaching into the Colorado River upstream from the Grand Canyon and Lake Mead should wrap up within five more years.

That mill's polluting legacy makes some Moab residents wary of restarting uranium mining and processing, especially after the Trump administration cut short their ability to weigh in on the Velvet-Wood mine plans.

"This was a process I would have been involved in," said Sarah Fields, director of the local group Uranium Watch. "They provided no opportunity for the public to say, 'You need to look at this, you need to look at that.'"

Grand Canyon Trust, a group critical of the Pinyon Plain mine as a danger to groundwater, points out that the U.S. nuclear industry isn't at risk of losing access to uranium.

"This is all being done under the assumption there is some energy emergency and that is just not true," said Amber Reimondo, the group's energy director.

Supply and demand will decide uranium mining's future

Hundreds of miles to the north, other nuclear energy projects point to the U.S. industry's future.

With Bill Gates' support, TerraPower is building a 345-megawatt sodium-cooled fast reactor outside Kemmerer in western Wyoming that could, in theory, meet demand for carbon-free power at lower costs and with less construction time than conventional reactor units.

Meanwhile, about 40% of uranium mined in the U.S. in 2024 came from four Wyoming "in-situ" mines that use wells to dissolve uranium in underground deposits and pump it to the surface without having to dig big holes or send miners underground. Similar mines in Texas and Nebraska and stockpiled ore processed at White Mesa accounted for the rest.

None — as yet — came from mines in Utah.

Powering electric cars and computing technology will require more electricity in the years ahead. Nuclear power offers a zero-carbon, round-the-clock option.

Meeting the demand for nuclear fuel domestically is another matter. With prices higher, almost 700,000 pounds of yellowcake was produced in the U.S. in 2024 — up more than a dozen-fold from the year before but still far short of the 32 million pounds imported into the U.S.

Even if mining increases, it's not clear that U.S. capacity to turn the ore into fuel would keep pace, said Uhrie, the former uranium mining executive.

"Re-establishing a viable uranium industry from soup to nuts — meaning from mining through processing to yellow cake production, to conversion, to enrichment to produce nuclear fuel — remains a huge lift," Uhrie said.



## Snack Wrap unwrapped: Here's why McDonald's is bringing back a fan favorite on July 10

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

If McDonald's ever doubted it needed to bring back the Snack Wrap, consider this: Nine years after the fast-food powerhouse discontinued the item in the U.S., customers have continued to order it at drive-thrus.

Those customers won't have to leave empty-handed for long. On Tuesday, McDonald's announced that a new version of the Snack Wrap will go on sale July 10.

McDonald's invented the Snack Wrap — a tortilla full of chicken, lettuce, shredded cheese and sauce — almost two decades ago to make it easier to eat its chicken on the go. But it was too complicated for its kitchens to prepare, so the burger giant abandoned the Snack Wrap in the U.S. in 2016.

The decision devastated fans like Alicia Force, a musician and administrative assistant at a high school in Missouri. Force tried to make Snack Wraps at home and sampled alternatives from Arby's and other restaurants, but nothing was the same. So she started a Facebook group with 86 members urging McDonald's to resurrect the Snack Wrap.

Other loyal nosers weighed in too. A Change.org petition asking McDonald's to bring back the Snack Wrap has nearly 19,000 signatures. A TikTok video showing a U.S. food reviewer eating Snack Wraps in Ireland — where they're still sold — racked up more than 1.4 million views.

It had an impact. McDonald's began teasing a Snack Wrap reappearance earlier this year.

"We listen to our fans, and the Snack Wrap's return is a testament to that," McDonald's U.S. President Joe Erlinger told The Associated Press.

But McDonald's has other reasons for the reboot. The Snack Wrap's lower price point could lure back inflation-weary customers, who have been eating fewer fast-food meals in recent months. The wraps' smaller size and tortilla casing also appeal to the health-conscious.

Steve Davis, a mental health counselor in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, used to buy six grilled chicken Snack Wraps at a time and keep them in his fridge as a grab-and-go snack.

"I'm not actually a fast-food fan, but Snack Wraps felt different, like I was eating an actual 'wrap.' I felt like I was being healthier," Davis said.

Snack Wraps will also help McDonald's compete with a growing number of rivals. Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen introduced its own chicken wraps on Monday, while Burger King and Wendy's have sold them since 2023. Even the convenience store chain Wawa sells a chicken wrap.

"There's so much opportunity in the chicken category," Erlinger said. Fast-food chicken sales are nearly twice the size of beef and are growing more quickly across the globe, Erlinger said.

Reviving the Snack Wrap was a years-long process, Erlinger said. First, McDonald's wanted to develop a better fried chicken strip. After several years of testing, the Chicago-based company debuted its peppery McCrispy Strips in early May.

McDonald's also had to update its Snack Wrap tools, simplify the preparation process and train workers at its 13,500 U.S. restaurants, Erlinger said.

"With this being one of our most highly anticipated menu items, we knew we had one chance to knock it out of the park. It had to be easy for crew to execute," Erlinger said.

For the U.S. comeback, McDonald's is offering fewer kinds of Snack Wraps to ensure faster service. It used to have both grilled and fried chicken options, but it's only offering fried chicken in the U.S. for now. And the relaunched Snack Wraps will only come in two flavors: Ranch or Spicy. The company used to offer additional sauces like honey mustard and sweet chili.

That could disappoint some fans. Force was partial to a Snack Wrap with honey mustard sauce, for example. Davis always got grilled chicken on his Snack Wraps, and he rarely went to McDonald's after they disappeared.

McDonald's continues to have a wider range of options in some other markets where Snack Wraps never went away. Canada still offers grilled or fried chicken in its Snack Wraps, for example, as well as chicken, fish and breakfast versions of full-sized wraps. McDonald's wouldn't say if it plans to add more

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Snack Wrap varieties in the U.S.

"We'll continue listening to our fans when it comes to menu innovations," the company said.

Snack Wraps are returning at a sluggish period for fast-food restaurants. From January through April, U.S. fast-food traffic was down 1% compared to the same period a year ago, said David Portalatin, a senior vice president and industry advisor for food service at market research firm Circana.

McDonald's same-store sales – or sales at locations open at least a year – were down 3.6% in the first quarter of the year compared to the same period last year. Its same-store sales grew less than 1% in 2024.

Inflation is the main culprit, Portalatin said. In the first quarter of this year, the average check at a U.S. fast-food restaurant was up 41% from the same period in 2019, he said. The higher prices have led many Americans – especially middle- to lower-income families – to eat at home instead of going out.

McDonald's has tried to counter that with a limited McValue menu and increased deals. But less expensive options like a Snack Wrap may also help.

The company won't say how much the Snack Wrap will cost in the U.S. because prices will vary by location. But Burger King's prices may give a clue. At a Michigan restaurant this week, Burger King charged \$2.99 for its Royal Crispy Wrap, the 310-calorie equivalent of a Snack Wrap. Burger King's Royal Crispy Chicken sandwich, with a bun, a larger chicken breast and nearly twice the calories, cost \$5.49.

Portalatin said snack-sized options from McDonald's and others also reflect Americans' changing dining habits. More people are choosing to eat smaller meals throughout the day instead of having breakfast, lunch and dinner at their traditional times.

"The consumer doesn't think about things in the neat buckets that we as marketers like to think about them," Portalatin said. "We like to say, 'This occasion is lunch and these are lunch foods.' The consumer simply says, 'I'm hungry. What time is it? Where am I?'"

That was certainly true for Force, who said she has fond memories of picking up a Snack Wrap after school as a teenager. She's looking forward to making that part of her routine once more.

"Hopefully, they come back and they taste the same, and they don't break my heart again, quite frankly," she said.

## Russian rockets kill 4 in a Ukrainian city as Kyiv claims it damaged a key bridge

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A Russian rocket attack targeted the northeastern Ukrainian city of Sumy on Tuesday, killing at least four people and wounding 25, officials said. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy denounced the assault, saying it underscored that Moscow has no intentions of halting the 3-year-old war.

The attack came a day after direct peace talks in Istanbul made no progress on ending the fighting. Local authorities said the barrage of rockets struck apartment buildings and a medical facility in the center of Sumy.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's secret services said they struck inside Russia again, two days after a spectacular Ukrainian drone attack on air bases deep inside the country.

A vital bridge to Crimea

The Ukrainian Security Service, known by its acronym SBU, claimed it damaged the foundations of the Kerch Bridge linking Russia and illegally annexed Crimea — a key artery for Russian military supplies in the war.

The SBU said it detonated 1,100 kilograms (2,400 pounds) of explosives on the seabed overnight, in an operation that took several months to set up. It was the third Ukrainian strike on the bridge since Russia's invasion of its neighbor in February 2022, the SBU said.

"The bridge is now effectively in an emergency condition," the SBU claimed.

The agency said no civilians were killed or injured in the operation. It was not possible to independently confirm those claims.

Traffic across the Kerch Bridge was halted for three hours early Tuesday, but it reopened at 9 a.m.,

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official Russian social media channels said. It closed for a second time at 3:20 p.m. and reopened again after two and a half hours.

Zelenskyy appeals for pressure on Moscow

The Ukrainian president called the attack on Sumy a "completely deliberate" strike on civilians.

"That's all you need to know about Russia's 'desire' to end this war," the Ukrainian president wrote on social media.

Zelenskyy appealed for global pressure and "decisive action from the United States, Europe and everyone in the world who holds power." Without it, he said, Russian President Vladimir Putin "will not agree even to a ceasefire."

The war has killed more than 12,000 Ukrainian civilians, according to the United Nations, as well as tens of thousands of soldiers on both sides along the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line where the fighting grinds on despite U.S.-led efforts to broker a peace deal.

A stunning Ukrainian drone attack

Though Russia has a bigger army and more economic resources than Ukraine, the Ukrainian drone attack over the weekend damaged or destroyed more than 40 warplanes at air bases deep inside Russia, Ukrainian officials said, touting it as a serious blow to the Kremlin's strategic arsenal and military prestige.

The Russian Defense Ministry acknowledged that the Ukrainian attack set several planes ablaze at two air bases but said the military repelled attempted attacks on three other air bases.

Both Zelenskyy and Putin have been eager to show U.S. President Donald Trump that they share his ambition to end the fighting — and avoid possible punitive measures from Washington. Ukraine has accepted a U.S.-proposed ceasefire, but the Kremlin effectively rejected it. Putin has made it clear that any peace settlement has to be on his terms.

Delegations from the warring sides agreed Monday to swap dead and wounded troops, but their conditions for ending the war remained far apart.

Dmitry Medvedev, a former Russian president who now serves as deputy head of the country's Security Council chaired by Putin, indicated on Tuesday that there would be no let-up in Russia's invasion.

"The Istanbul talks are not for striking a compromise peace on someone else's delusional terms but for ensuring our swift victory and the complete destruction" of Ukraine's government, he said.

In an apparent comment on the latest Ukrainian strikes, he declared that "retribution is inevitable."

A Putin-Zelenskyy-Trump meeting 'unlikely' soon, Moscow says

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov responded to suggestions that a face-to-face meeting between Putin, Trump and Zelenskyy could break the deadlock, saying the possibility was "unlikely in the near future."

Meanwhile, a senior Ukrainian delegation led by First Deputy Prime Minister and Economy Minister Yuliia Svyrydenko has traveled to Washington for talks about defense, sanctions and postwar recovery, said Andrii Yermak, the head of Ukraine's presidential office.

The delegation will meet with representatives from both major U.S. political parties, as well as with advisers to Trump, Yermak added.

Ukrainians in Kyiv welcomed the strikes on Russian air bases but were gloomy about prospects for a peace agreement.

"Russia has invested too many resources in this war to just ... stop for nothing," said serviceman Oleh Nikolenko, 43.

His wife, Anastasia Nikolenko, a 38-year-old designer, said diplomacy cannot stop the fighting. "We need to show by force, by physical force, that we cannot be defeated," she said.

Russia recently expanded its attacks on Sumy and the Kharkiv region following Putin's promise to create a buffer zone along the border that might prevent long-range Ukrainian attacks from hitting Russian soil. Sumy, about 25 kilometers (15 miles) from the border, had a prewar population of around 250,000.

The Russian Defense Ministry claimed its troops had taken the Ukrainian village of Andriivka, close to the border in the Sumy region. Ukraine made no immediate comment on the claim, which could not be independently verified.

Russia also fired rocket artillery at Chystovodivka village in the Kharkiv region, killing two people and injuring three others, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said.

## Meta becomes the latest big tech company turning to nuclear power for AI needs

By MATT OTT AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Meta has cut a 20-year deal to secure nuclear power to help meet surging demand for artificial intelligence and other computing needs at Facebook's parent company.

The investment with Meta will also expand the output of a Constellation Energy Illinois nuclear plant.

The agreement announced Tuesday is just the latest in a string of tech-nuclear partnerships as the use of AI expands. Financial details of the agreement were not disclosed.

Constellation's Clinton Clean Energy Center was actually slated to close in 2017 after years of financial losses but was saved by legislation in Illinois establishing a zero-emission credit program to support the plant into 2027. The agreement deal takes effect in June of 2027, when the state's taxpayer funded zero-emission credit program expires.

With the arrival of Meta, Clinton's clean energy output will expand by 30 megawatts, preserve 1,100 local jobs and bring in \$13.5 million in annual tax revenue, according to the companies. The plant currently powers the equivalent of about 800,000 U.S. homes. George Gross, professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of Illinois, estimates that 30 additional megawatts would be enough to power a city with about 30,00 residents for one year.

"Securing clean, reliable energy is necessary to continue advancing our AI ambitions," said Urvi Parekh, Meta's head of global energy.

Surging investments in small nuclear reactors comes at a time when large tech companies are facing two major demands: a need to increase their energy supply for AI and data centers, among other needs, while also trying to meet their long-term goals to significantly cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Constellation, the owner of the shuttered Three Mile Island nuclear power plant, said in September that it planned to restart the reactor so tech giant Microsoft could secure power to supply its data centers. Three Mile Island, located on the Susquehanna River just outside Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, was the site of the nation's worst commercial nuclear power accident in 1979.

Also last fall, Amazon said it was investing in small nuclear reactors, two days after a similar announcement by Google. Additionally, Google announced last month that it was investing in three advanced nuclear energy projects with Elementl Power.

U.S. states have been positioning themselves to meet the tech industry's power needs as policymakers consider expanding subsidies and gutting regulatory obstacles.

Last year, 25 states passed legislation to support advanced nuclear energy, and lawmakers this year have introduced over 200 bills supportive of nuclear energy, according to the trade association Nuclear Energy Institute.

Advanced reactor designs from competing firms are filling up the federal government's regulatory pipeline as the industry touts them as a reliable, climate-friendly way to meet electricity demands from tech giants desperate to power their fast-growing artificial intelligence platforms.

Still, it's unlikely the U.S. could quadruple its nuclear production within the next 25 years, like the White House wants. The United States lacks any next-generation reactors operating commercially and only two new large reactors have been built from scratch in nearly 50 years. Those two reactors, at a nuclear plant in Georgia, were completed years late and at least \$17 billion over budget.

Additionally, Gross recommends that the U.S. invest more in the transmission grid that moves that power around.

"That's my biggest concern," Gross said, adding that spending on the grid has actually fallen off in recent years, despite the voracious demand for energy.

Amazon, Google and Microsoft also have been investing in solar and wind technologies, which make



electricity without producing greenhouse gas emissions.

Shares of Constellation Energy Corp., based in Baltimore, were flat Tuesday.

## Outspoken liberal leader Lee elected South Korea's president, closing period of political tumult

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Lee Jae-myung, who rose from childhood poverty to become South Korea's leading liberal politician vowing to fight inequality and corruption, will become the country's next president on Wednesday after an election that closed one of the most turbulent chapters in the young democracy.

Lee, 60, the candidate of the liberal opposition Democratic Party, is taking office for a full, single five-year term, succeeding Yoon Suk Yeol, a conservative who was felled over his stunning yet brief imposition of martial law in December.

It was unclear whether Lee's election would cause any major, immediate shift in South Korea's foreign policy. Lee, previously accused by critics of tilting toward China and North Korea and away from the U.S. and Japan, has repeatedly stressed South Korea's alliance with the U.S. as the foundation of its foreign policy.

The toughest external challenges awaiting Lee are U.S. President Donald Trump's tariff policy and North Korea's advancing nuclear program. But experts earlier said whoever becomes president can't do much to secure major progress in South Korea's favor on those issues.

As of 3:45 a.m. Wednesday, with over 99% of the votes counted, Lee obtained 49.3% of the votes cast in Tuesday's early election, while main conservative contender Kim Moon Soo trailed with 41.3% — a gap that was impossible to overcome mathematically.

Preelection surveys have long suggested Lee appeared headed for an easy win, riding on deep public frustration over the conservatives in the wake of Yoon's martial law debacle.

Even before Lee's win was formally declared, Kim conceded, telling journalists that he "humbly accepts the people's choice," and congratulated Lee.

Earlier, Lee appeared before thousands of cheering supporters on Seoul's streets. He didn't formally claim victory, but reiterated his major policy goals, such as revitalizing the economy, promoting peace with North Korea and easing a domestic divide.

"Let us move forward with hope and make a fresh start from this moment on," he said. "Though we may have clashed for some time, even those who did not support us are still our fellow citizens of the Republic of Korea."

Pragmatic diplomacy

Lee, who served as governor of Gyeonggi province and mayor of Seongnam city, has been a highly divisive figure in politics for years.

As a former child laborer known for his inspirational rags-to-riches story, Lee came to fame through biting criticism of the country's conservative establishment and calls to build a more assertive South Korea in foreign policy. That rhetoric has given him an image as someone who can institute sweeping reforms and fix the country's deep-seated economic inequality and corruption.

His critics view him as a dangerous populist who relies on political division and backpedals on promises too easily.

On foreign policy, Lee has vowed to pursue pragmatic diplomacy. He has promised to develop the alliance with the U.S. and solidify a trilateral Seoul-Washington-Tokyo partnership, a stance that isn't much different from the position held by South Korea's conservatives.

"We'll have to now see if the pressures of office will cause Lee Jae-myung to govern from the center — at least when it comes to matters of national security and the alliance with the United States," said Ankit Panda, an expert with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Lee said that he would pursue better ties with North Korea, but acknowledged that it would be "very difficult" to hold a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un anytime soon. This signals Lee won't likely initiate any drastic steps meant to improve relations with North Korea.

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Experts say there aren't many diplomatic options for South Korea as it tries to address Trump's tariff hikes and calls for South Korea to pay more for the cost of the U.S. military presence, as well as North Korea's headlong pursuit of nuclear weapons. Experts say that has made both Lee and other candidates avoid unveiling ambitious foreign policy goals.

Paik Wooyeal, a professor at Seoul's Yonsei University, said that foreign policy strategists for Lee understand there isn't much South Korea can do to bring about a denuclearization of North Korea. Paik said Lee also doesn't share the Korean nationalistic zeal held by ex-liberal President Moon Jae-in, who met Kim Jong Un three times during his 2017-22 term.

There are still hopes that diplomacy between the U.S. and North Korea could resume, with Trump repeatedly expressing his intent to reach out to Kim Jong Un. Lee has said that he would support Trump's outreach.

"South Korea and the United States may be better aligned on engaging North Korea under the current constellation of leadership in both countries," Panda said. "The two sides should begin consultations soon to ensure they're aligned on their goals."

## Impact of tariff hikes

Lee's government still could become engaged in "a little bit of friction" with the Trump administration, said Chung Jin-young, a former dean of the Graduate School of Pan-Pacific International Studies at South Korea's Kyung Hee University.

Chung predicted Lee still won't be able to pursue overly drastic steps on foreign policy and security, given the country's foreign exchange and financial markets are vulnerable to such changes.

Lee has preached patience over Trump's tariff policy, arguing it would be a mistake to rush negotiations in pursuit of an early agreement with Washington.

On Monday, South Korean trade officials held an emergency meeting to discuss a response to Trump's announcement that the U.S. will raise tariffs on steel and aluminum products to 50% beginning Wednesday. South Korea's central bank last week sharply lowered its 2025 growth outlook to 0.8%, citing the potential impact of Trump's tariff hikes and weak domestic demand worsened by the political turmoil of past months.

## Healing domestic divide

The election serves as another defining moment in the country's resilient democracy, but observers worry a worsened domestic divide could pose a big political burden on the new president.

The past six months saw large crowds of people rallying to either denounce or support Yoon, while a leadership vacuum caused by Yoon's impeachment and ensuing formal dismissal rattled the country's high-level diplomatic activities and financial markets.

Lee has promised to heal the national split, but his vow to thoroughly hold those involved in Yoon's martial law stunt accountable has sparked concerns that he would use investigations to launch political retaliations against his opponents.

"The next question is just how Lee will represent and protect South Korea's democracy," said Soo Kim, a former CIA Korea analyst and geopolitical risk consultant.

"Will South Korea's politics still remain focused on retribution, or will Seoul finally look beyond this and work constructively and progressively for the country's best long-term democratic interests?" she said. "It's a tall order for Lee."

## Newark mayor sues New Jersey's top federal prosecutor after arrest at immigration detention site

By MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. (AP) — Newark Mayor Ras Baraka sued New Jersey's top federal prosecutor on Tuesday over his arrest on a trespassing charge at a federal immigration detention facility, saying the Trump-appointed attorney had pursued the case out of political spite.

Baraka, who leads New Jersey's biggest city, is a candidate in a crowded primary field for the Democratic nomination for governor next Tuesday. The lawsuit against interim U.S. Attorney for New Jersey Alina

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Habba coincided with the day early in-person voting began.

The lawsuit seeks damages for "false arrest and malicious prosecution," and also accuses Habba of defamation for comments she made about his case, which was later dropped.

Citing a post on X in which Habba said Baraka "committed trespass," the lawsuit says Habba issued a "defamatory statement" and authorized his "false arrest" despite "clear evidence that Mayor Baraka had not committed the petty offense of 'defiant trespass.'" The suit also names Ricky Patel, the Homeland Security Investigations agent in charge in Newark. Baraka's attorney, Nancy Erika Smith, said they also expect to sue President Donald Trump's administration but are required to wait six months.

"This is not about revenge," Baraka said during a news conference. "Ultimately, I think this is about them taking accountability for what has happened to me."

Emails seeking comment were left Tuesday with Habba's office and the Homeland Security Department, where Patel works.

Videos capture chaos outside the detention center

The episode outside the Delaney Hall federal immigration detention center has had dramatic fallout. It began on May 9 when Baraka tried to join three Democratic members of Congress — Rob Menendez, LaMonica McIver and Bonnie Watson Coleman — who went to the facility for an oversight tour, something authorized under federal law. Baraka, an outspoken critic of Trump's immigration crackdown and the detention center, was denied entry.

Video from the event showed him walking from the facility side of the fence to the street side, where other people had been protesting. Uniformed officials then came to arrest him. As they did, people could be heard urging the group to protect the mayor. The video shows a crowd forming and pushing as officials led off a handcuffed Baraka.

He was initially charged with trespass, but Habba dropped that charge last month and charged McIver with two counts of assaulting officers stemming from her role in the skirmish at the facility's gate.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Andre Espinosa rebuked Habba's office after moving to dismiss the charges. "The hasty arrest of Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, followed swiftly by the dismissal of these trespassing charges a mere 13 days later, suggests a worrisome misstep by your Office," he wrote.

McIver decried the charges and signaled she plans to fight them. A preliminary hearing is scheduled later this month.

Baraka said the aftermath of the withdrawn charge meant he had to explain it in the media and argue his case when he had done nothing wrong.

"I want somebody to apologize, write a letter, say this was wrong, come out and say, 'We shouldn't have done this,'" he said.

New Jersey targeted over its so-called sanctuary policies

Delaney Hall, a 1,000-bed facility, opened earlier this year as a federal immigration detention facility. Florida-based Geo Group Inc., which owns and operates the property, was awarded a 15-year contract valued at \$1 billion in February. The announcement was part of the president's plans to sharply increase detention beds nationwide from a budget of about 41,000 beds this year.

Baraka sued Geo soon after that deal was announced.

Then, on May 23, the Trump Justice Department filed a suit against Newark and three other New Jersey cities over their so-called sanctuary policies. There is no legal definition for sanctuary city policies, but they generally limit cooperation by local law enforcement with federal immigration officers.

New Jersey's attorney general has a statewide directive in place prohibiting local police from collaborating in federal civil immigration matters. The policies are aimed at barring cooperation on civil enforcement matters, not at blocking cooperation on criminal matters. They specifically carve out exceptions for when Immigration and Customs Enforcement supplies police with a judicial criminal warrant. The Justice Department said, though, the cities won't notify ICE when they've made criminal arrests, according to the suit.

It's unclear whether Baraka's role in these fights with the White House is affecting his campaign for governor. He's one of six candidates seeking the Democratic nomination in the June 10 election to succeed

term-limited Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy.

On Tuesday, Baraka explained the timing of the suit as an effort to get the case before the court before it was too late. He described the arrest and fallout as a distraction during the campaign.

"But I also think that us not responding is consent," he said.

In a video ad in the election's final weeks, Baraka has embraced a theme his rivals are also pushing: affordability. He says he'll cut taxes. While some of the images show him standing in front of what appears to be Delaney Hall, he doesn't mention immigration or the arrest specifically, saying: "I'll keep Trump out of your homes and out of your lives."

Trump has endorsed Jack Ciattarelli, one of several Republicans running in the gubernatorial primary. Ciattarelli has said if he's elected, his first executive order would be to end any sanctuary policies for immigrants in the country illegally.

## Sean 'Diddy' Combs paid to hide Cassie beating video because he feared career ruin, witness says

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Soon after viciously attacking his longtime girlfriend Cassie in a hotel hallway, Sean "Diddy" Combs sought out a security guard and predicted accurately that his iconic career would be ruined — his image as the affable, successful "Puff Daddy" destroyed — if video of the beating ever became public.

Eddy Garcia, 33, testified Thursday that the hip-hop mogul made the comment repeatedly before giving a brown paper bag stuffed with \$100,000 in cash to the then guard, in order to buy what he hoped was the only copy of surveillance footage of the March 2016 assault.

Prosecutors at Combs' sex trafficking trial in Manhattan have made the footage of Combs kicking, beating and dragging Cassie at the Intercontinental Hotel in Los Angeles a centerpiece of their federal case against him. They contend it supports the claims of three women, including Cassie, who allege the Bad Boy Records founder sexually and physically abused them over two decades.

Prosecutors say Combs' persistent efforts to hush up the episode fit into allegations he used threats and his fortune and fame to get what he wanted.

Combs, 55, has pleaded not guilty to sex trafficking and racketeering charges.

After the attack, Garcia said, he spoke several times to Combs' chief-of-staff, Kristina Khorram, telling her he couldn't show her the recording but "off the record, it's bad."

He said during one phone call she put a "very nervous"-sounding Combs on the phone, who "was just saying he had a little too much to drink" and that, as Garcia surely knows, "with women, one thing leads to another and if this got out it would ruin him."

Garcia added: "He was talking really fast, a lot of stuttering."

In the evening, Garcia said, he became nervous and scared when Khorram called him on his cell phone — the number for which he had not provided — and she put Combs on.

"He stated that I sounded like a good guy," Garcia testified, adding that Combs again said "something like this could ruin him."

When he told Combs he didn't have access to the server to obtain the video footage, Combs said he believed Garcia could make it happen and that "he would take care of me," which Garcia said he took "to mean financially."

Garcia said he checked with his boss and was told he'd sell it to Combs for \$50,000.

When he told Combs, he said the music producer "sounded excited."

"He referred to me as 'Eddy my angel,'" Garcia said, adding that Combs told him: "I knew you could help. I knew you could do it."

Within two days of the attack on Cassie, whose real name is Casandra Ventura, Garcia gave Combs a storage device containing the footage in exchange for \$100,000 in cash — with Combs feeding bills through a money counter and putting them in a brown paper bag.

Garcia signed a confidentiality and non-disclosure agreement, shown in court, that required he pay \$1



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million if he breached the deal. At the time, he said, he was making \$10.50 an hour working hotel security. Garcia said he signed a declaration swearing that there was no other copy of the video.

He said he signed the papers in an office building with Combs' bodyguard and Khorram present. Garcia said he didn't fully read the documents, explaining that he was nervous and "the goal was to get out of there as soon as possible."

After signing, he said, Combs asked him what he planned to do with the money and advised him not to make big purchases. Garcia said he took that to mean he shouldn't do anything that would draw attention.

Garcia said he gave \$50,000 to his boss and \$20,000 to another security officer. He pocketed \$30,000 and used some of it to buy a used car, he said.

He used cash and, avoiding a further paper trail, never put the money in the bank, he said.

A few weeks later, Garcia said, Combs called him and asked if anyone had inquired about the video. Garcia said no, recounting Combs' ebullient greeting: "Happy Easter. Eddy, my angel. God is good. God put you in my way for a reason."

Garcia said he asked Combs if the rapper might have future work for him, and Combs sounded receptive. But Combs never responded to his later inquiries, the witness said.

Last year, CNN aired footage of the security video. Another hotel guard has testified he recorded the footage on his phone so he could show it to his wife.

## **Federal prisons must keep providing hormone therapy to transgender inmates, a judge says**

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The federal Bureau of Prisons must continue providing hormone therapy and social accommodations to hundreds of transgender inmates following an executive order signed by President Donald Trump that led to a disruption in medical treatment, a federal judge ruled Tuesday.

U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth said in his ruling a federal law prohibits prison officials from arbitrarily depriving inmates of medications and other lifestyle accommodations that the bureau's own medical staff has deemed appropriate.

The judge said the transgender inmates who sued to block Trump's executive order are trying to lessen the personal anguish caused by their gender dysphoria, the distress that a person feels because their assigned gender and gender identity don't match.

"In light of the plaintiffs' largely personal motives for undergoing gender-affirming care, neither the BOP nor the Executive Order provides any serious explanation as to why the treatment modalities covered by the Executive Order or implementing memoranda should be handled differently than any other mental health intervention," the judge wrote.

The Bureau of Prisons is providing hormone therapy to more than 600 inmates diagnosed with gender dysphoria. The bureau doesn't dispute that gender dysphoria can cause severe side effects, including depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts, the judge said.

The Republican president's executive order required the bureau to revise its medical care policies so that federal funds aren't spent "for the purpose of conforming an inmate's appearance to that of the opposite sex."

Lamberth's ruling isn't limited to the plaintiffs named in the lawsuit. He agreed to certify a class of plaintiffs consisting of anyone who is or will be incarcerated in federal prisons.

The lawsuit's named plaintiffs include Alishea Kingdom, a transgender woman who was prescribed hormone therapy injections and approved to receive social accommodations, including women's undergarments and cosmetics. Kingdom was denied her hormone shot three times after Trump signed his order, but she had it restored roughly a week after she sued. Her access to feminine undergarments hasn't been restored, according to the judge's ruling.

"In Ms. Kingdom's case, there is no indication at all that the BOP means to leave her hormone therapy in place long-term; indeed, as noted above, she was informed by BOP personnel that the decision to resume

her treatment was a consequence of this litigation itself, raising the specter that her treatments might be discontinued as soon as the litigation has concluded," Lamberth wrote.

Trump's order also directed the Bureau of Prisons to ensure that "males are not detained in women's prisons." In February, however, Lamberth agreed to temporarily block prison officials from transferring three incarcerated transgender women to men's facilities and terminating their access to hormone therapy.

The judge said there's no evidence Trump or prison officials considered the harm the new policies could do to transgender inmates.

"The defendants argue that the plaintiffs have not alleged irreparable harm because they are all currently receiving hormone medications. But it suffices to say that all three plaintiffs' access to hormone therapy is, as best the Court can tell, tenuous," Lamberth wrote.

The plaintiffs are represented by attorneys from the Transgender Law Center and the American Civil Liberties Union.

Lamberth, a senior judge, was nominated to the bench by President Ronald Reagan, a Republican, in 1987.

## **An accidental discovery at a planetarium opens a window into the universe's inner workings**

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Scientists have unlocked one of the solar system's many secrets from an unexpected source: a planetarium show opening to the public on Monday.

At the American Museum of Natural History last fall, experts were hard at work preparing "Encounters in the Milky Way," a deep dive into our home galaxy shaped by the movements of stars and other celestial objects.

They were fine-tuning a scene featuring what's known as the Oort Cloud, a region far beyond Pluto filled with icy relics from the solar system's formation. Comets can hurtle toward Earth from the cloud, but scientists have never glimpsed its true shape.

One evening while watching the Oort Cloud scene, scientists noticed something strange projected onto the planetarium's dome.

"Why is there a spiral there?" said Jackie Faherty, an astrophysicist who leads the museum's educational programs and helped put together the planetarium show.

The inner section of the Oort Cloud, made of billions of comets, resembled a bar with two waving arms, similar to the shape of our Milky Way galaxy.

Scientists had long thought the Oort Cloud was shaped like a sphere or flattened shell, warped by the push and pull of other planets and the Milky Way itself. The planetarium show hinted that a more complex shape could lie inside.

The museum contacted the researcher who provided the Oort Cloud data for the show, who was also surprised to see the spiral.

"It's kind of a freak accident that it actually happened," said David Nesvorny with the Southwest Research Institute.

Realizing they'd stumbled on something new, the researchers published their findings earlier this year in *The Astrophysical Journal*.

The spiral is "a striking shift in our understanding of the outer solar system," planetary scientist Andre Izidoro with Rice University, who was not involved with the study, said in an email.

The discovery, relying on data on how celestial objects move and using simulations, will be difficult to confirm with observations. But knowing more about the orbits of distant comets could give scientists some clues, Izidoro said.

While putting together the planetarium show, the museum's experts weren't expecting a window into the universe's inner workings. The show, narrated by actor Pedro Pascal, features many vivid scenes that may capture audiences more than the Oort Cloud, said the museum's Jon Parker — including an ongoing

merge of the Sagittarius mini galaxy with the Milky Way.

No matter how striking and beautiful the visuals of the show, the museum was committed to making it scientifically accurate. That's what created the perfect conditions to stumble upon something new, said the museum's Carter Emmart.

"You just never know what you're going to find," Emmart said.

## Meta's nuclear deal signals AI's growing energy needs

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

Meta's deal to help revive an Illinois nuclear power plant was one way of signaling that the parent company of Facebook and Instagram is preparing for a future built with artificial intelligence.

Meta's 20-year deal with Constellation Energy follows similar maneuvers from Amazon, Google and Microsoft, but it will take years before nuclear energy can meet the tech industry's insatiable demand for new sources of electricity.

AI uses vast amounts of energy, much of which comes from burning fossil fuels, which causes climate change. The unexpected popularity of generative AI products over the past few years has disrupted many tech companies' carefully laid plans to supply their technology with energy sources that don't contribute to climate change.

Even as Meta anticipates more nuclear in the future, its more immediate plans rely on natural gas. Entergy, one of the nation's largest utility providers, has been fast-tracking plans to build gas-fired power plants in Louisiana to prepare for a massive Meta data center complex.

Is the U.S. ready for nuclear-powered AI?

France has touted its ample nuclear power — which produces about 75% of the nation's electricity, the highest level in the world — as a key element in its pitch to be an AI leader. Hosting an AI summit in Paris earlier this year, French President Emmanuel Macron cited President Donald Trump's "drill baby drill" slogan and offered another: "Here there's no need to drill, it's just plug baby plug."

In the U.S., however, most of the electricity consumed by data centers relies on fossil fuels — burning natural gas and sometimes coal — according to an April report from the International Energy Agency. As AI demand rises, the main source of new supply over the coming years is expected to be from gas-fired plants, a cheap and reliable source of power but one that produces planet-warming emissions.

Renewable energy sources such as solar and wind account for about 24% of data center power in the U.S., while nuclear comprises about 15%, according to the IEA. It will take years before enough climate-friendlier power sources, including nuclear, could start slowing the expansion of fossil fuel power generation.

A report released by the U.S. Department of Energy late last year estimated that the electricity needed for data centers in the U.S. tripled over the past decade and is projected to double or triple again by 2028 when it could consume up to 12% of the nation's electricity.

Why does AI need so much energy?

It takes a lot of computing power to make an AI chatbot and the systems they're built on, such as Meta's Llama. It starts with a process called training or pretraining — the "P" in ChatGPT — that involves AI systems "learning" from the patterns of huge troves of data. To do that, they need specialized computer chips — usually graphics processors, or GPUs — that can run many calculations at a time on a network of devices in communication with each other.

Once trained, a generative AI tool still needs electricity to do the work, such as when you ask a chatbot to compose a document or generate an image. That process is called inferencing. A trained AI model must take in new information and make inferences from what it already knows to produce a response.

All of that computing takes a lot of electricity and generates a lot of heat. To keep it cool enough to work properly, data centers need air conditioning. That can require even more electricity, so most data center operators look for other cooling techniques that usually involve pumping in water.

## Kennedy has ordered a review of baby formula. Here's what you should know

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

As federal health officials vow to overhaul the U.S. food supply, they're taking a new look at infant formula. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has directed the Food and Drug Administration to review the nutrients and other ingredients in infant formula, which fills the bottles of millions of American babies. The effort, dubbed "Operation Stork Speed," is the first deep look at the ingredients since 1998.

"The FDA will use all resources and authorities at its disposal to make sure infant formula products are safe and wholesome for the families and children who rely on them," Kennedy said.

About three-quarters of U.S. infants consume formula during the first six months of life, with about 40% receiving it as their only source of nutrition, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Formula has been widely used in the U.S. for roughly six decades, feeding generations of infants who have flourished, said Dr. Steven Abrams, a University of Texas infant nutrition expert.

The broader scientific community has been calling for a reevaluation of infant formula for years and is "fully supportive of this idea of a comprehensive look," he said.

Current formula products in the U.S. continue to be safe and nourishing, he said.

"But there's been a lot of science and we want the FDA rules to align with the most recent science from around the world," he said.

Here's what you need to know about Operation Stork Speed:

What is infant formula and why do so many babies consume it?

Infant formula is a manufactured product, usually made from cow's milk or soy, that is intended to mimic human breast milk for kids up age 12 months. It may be the sole source of nutrition or supplement breastfeeding.

FDA regulations require that infant formulas contain 30 specific nutrients, with minimum levels for all and maximum levels for 10 of them.

The ingredients vary, but all formulas must have a balance of calories from protein, carbohydrates and fat that mirrors what's found in human milk.

Federal guidelines recommend that babies be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life and that parents continue breastfeeding for the first year or more while adding new foods to the child's diet.

Parents use formula when a mother cannot or chooses not to breastfeed for a wide range of reasons, including medical conditions, work conflicts, to allow other family members to help with feedings and other situations.

Why is the government reviewing baby formula now?

Kennedy announced the review of infant formula in March as part of his "Make America Healthy Again" agenda for the U.S. food supply.

The FDA's review will include increased testing for heavy metals and other contaminants as well as a review of nutrients, the agencies said.

U.S. health officials will hold a two-hour roundtable discussion of infant formula on Wednesday.

What issues will that cover?

The FDA is asking for new scientific data and information about whether required ingredients in infant formula should be added, removed or changed. The deadline for comments is Sept. 11.

Scientists say a review is long overdue regarding the most recent data on the composition of human milk and how babies digest and absorb nutrients in breastmilk and formula.

In addition, they want the FDA to consider how U.S. formulas compare with those made elsewhere, said Bridget Young, who studies infant nutrition at the University of Rochester.

"How do our regulations differ?" she said. "Maybe it's time for them to relook at their regulations and consider potential international harmonization."

More international alignment might have eased the U.S. infant formula crisis in 2022, when contamination shut down an Abbott factory, leading to monthslong shortages for American parents, Young said.



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What about specific ingredients?

In recent years, some parents have sought out infant formula made in Europe with the belief that products made overseas are healthier options, experts said.

Formula regulations in the U.S. and Europe, including requirements for nutrients and testing, differ somewhat, but are generally similar, Abrams said.

"The differences between the U.S. and Europe should not be considered as 'higher' or 'better' or 'greater' in one vs. the other," he said.

Still, iron, for instance, is included at higher levels in U.S. formulas than in those in Europe — and Abrams suggested that U.S. officials may consider lowering iron targets.

Other components have been added to formula in recent years. They include docosahexaenoic acid, or DHA, an essential omega-3 fatty acid, and human milk oligosaccharides, complex sugars that are found breast milk but not in cow's milk. Although they may be beneficial, they are not required.

"These have been added to some formulas, but not to other formulas, so we want to take a look," Abrams explained.

Many parents have raised concerns over formula ingredients such as added sugars and seed oils, which are also being targeted by Kennedy as hazards in the wider food supply.

Recent research suggests that added sugars such as glucose and corn syrup solids in infant formula may be linked to weight gain in children. Young said that most experts agree that lactose, the primary type of sugar found in breast milk, is preferred.

Infant formulas in the U.S. do contain seed oils, Young said. But that's because there are a finite number of vegetable oils that provide the essential saturated and unsaturated fats that babies require.

"They need to provide the variety of fatty acids that you see in breast milk," she said.

What are the next steps?

Done properly, the FDA's infant formula review would take "at least a year," Abrams said. And it will require broad input from multiple government agencies, formula manufacturers and consumers.

"No shortcuts are possible and no one review, white paper or even committee report will suffice to do it right," he said.

## **SuperSonics fans feel no allegiance to the Thunder in these NBA Finals. Go Pacers, the scornful say**

By ANDREW DESTIN AP Sports Writer

SEATTLE (AP) — It's logical to think someone like Danny Ball is a fair representation of Seattle these days. Ball, a hoops fan who runs an Instagram account called "Iconic Sonics," is pulling for the Indiana Pacers over the Oklahoma City Thunder in the NBA Finals.

There are no deep ties between Seattle and Indianapolis. The Seahawks play the Colts this December, so the cities will be foes that weekend. Caitlin Clark and the Indiana Fever probably won't be warmly welcomed when they visit the Emerald City later this month to play the Seattle Storm.

But right now, Seattle may as well be an Indy suburb.

Seattle fans lost their NBA franchise, the SuperSonics, in 2008 when it was stolen from them and re-branded in Oklahoma City.

For the scornful, that means one thing: Go Pacers.

"I'd love to see the Pacers pull it off in six games," Ball said.

The NBA Finals begin Thursday night. For some in Seattle, it'll be a heaping helping of fresh salt on the wounds that opened when the Sonics were taken away. And people like Ball, who was born in Seattle and heard stories of Sonics legends Shawn Kemp and Gary Payton from his father, aren't exactly rooting for Oklahoma City right now.

The Thunder are heavy favorites to beat the Pacers. Should they pull it off, the Thunder would claim their first NBA title in Oklahoma City, but technically their second as a franchise after Seattle won the title

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in 1979.

It's no secret the city wants the league to come back. Expansion is on the NBA's to-do list, and it's likely that talks — the first of many, many steps in this process — could start in earnest with interested cities in the next few months. Commissioner Adam Silver, however, hasn't fully committed to adding new teams.

"The issue I would not have anticipated at the time I sort of began talking about the timeline is how much unknown there is about local media right now," Silver said earlier this year. "Having said that, though, I would just say again to our many fans in Seattle, and I hear from them often, and the legacy of the Sonics is still very strong and it's a fantastic basketball market, is that we are very focused on it. ... We don't take those fans for granted. We're thankful that the interest has remained over all these years."

Any mention of expansion sends fans into a tizzy. Steve Ballmer, the owner of the Los Angeles Clippers, spoke to the crowd before a preseason game in Seattle — his hometown — in 2023, and made a thinly veiled reference to how fans need to remind the league's New York office how much the city loves the game.

"All night long, it better be loud enough in this building to hear us all the way back in New York, if you get me," Ballmer told the crowd. "Let's make sure we're loud tonight."

And then came the Ballmer bellow: "Go Seattle," he screamed.

It's something Seattle takes seriously, as Mayor Bruce Harrell learned earlier this year in his address to the city.

"Right now, at this moment, I have an announcement to make," Harrell said, reaching into the lectern where he was standing and pulling out a basketball, spinning it in his hands as he displayed it to the crowd — which began roaring. "Ah, I'm just kidding."

The crowd wasn't amused. Harrell later was interviewed by Seattle's KOMO News and apologized for the attempt at humor, getting reminded that residents of the city aren't happy that the NBA hasn't returned yet.

"Count me among them," Harrell said.

A very real void has been left in the SuperSonics' absence. The NHL's Seattle Kraken entering the fold has helped, as has the success of the WNBA's Seattle Storm, both of whom play at Climate Pledge Arena, which sits on the site of the SuperSonics' former home.

That same arena received a significant remodel ahead of the Kraken arriving, which could make it suitable for NBA games. That would ultimately be up to the association to decide one day, but Ball hopes it would be the Sonics' former home in the Queen Anne neighborhood they get to triumphantly return to one day.

"A lot of Sonics fans that I know I'm sure never got over the wounds of what happened here 17 years ago with them leaving (for) Oklahoma City," SuperSonics fan Eric Phan said. "All of the Sonics fanbase (is) rooting for the Indiana Pacers."

Seattle seemed to have a chance at getting a team back in 2013 when the Maloof family put the Sacramento Kings up for sale. But investor Chris Hansen's bid to relocate the team to Seattle was rejected by the NBA's Board of Governors.

For fans like Ball and Phan, hope lives on. Ball recognizes that's partially because he is an inherently positive person, and he's hoping for a Hollywood ending.

"It would be poetic if the year that OKC wins the finals — if that occurs — is in the same summer that the league comes out and says, 'Hey, we're forming an expansion committee to start really exploring this process,'" Ball said. "I think that would help damper or therapize the feelings and emotions that would come along with seeing the Thunder hoist the Larry O'Brien."

Phan pointed out that just because the Sonics don't play in Seattle, it doesn't mean the team is truly gone.

"You can see people walking the sidewalks and streets of Seattle, and even the suburbs," Phan said. "People are wearing Sonics gear like they never really left."

## US job openings rose in April, signaling resilience in the American labor market

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. job openings rose unexpectedly in April, showing that the labor market remains resilient in the face of uncertainty arising from President Donald Trump's trade wars.

The Labor Department reported Tuesday that employers posted 7.4 million job vacancies in April, up from 7.2 million in March. Economists had expected openings to drift down to 7.1 million.

But the number of Americans quitting their jobs— a sign of confidence in their prospects — fell, and layoffs ticked higher. And in another sign the job market has cooled from the hiring boom of 2021-2023, the Labor Department reported one job every unemployed person. As recently as December 2022, there were two vacancies for every jobless American.

Openings remain high by historical standards but have dropped sharply since peaking at 12.1 million in March 2022, when the economy was still roaring back COVID-19 lockdowns.

The Labor Department's Job Openings and Labor Turnover Summary showed little evidence of cuts to the federal workforce by billionaire Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency. Openings for federal jobs rose to 134,000 in April from 121,000 in March. And federal layoffs fell to 4,000 from 8,000 in March and 19,000 in February.

Although it has decelerated, the American job market has remained resilient in the face of high interest rates engineered by the Federal Reserve in 2022 and 2023 to fight a resurgence of inflation.

The economic outlook is uncertain, largely because of Trump's economic policies — huge taxes on imports, purges of federal workers and the deportation of immigrants working in the United States illegally.

Carl Weinberg, chief economist at High Frequency Economics, said the JOLTS report shows that companies are waiting to see how Trump's policies play out. "Once companies are more certain that bad times are coming, they will start to shed workers," he wrote in a commentary. "However, the economy is still near full employment. We suspect companies are still hoarding workers until they are very, very sure about an economic downturn."

The Labor Department is expected to report Friday that employers added 130,000 jobs last month, down from 177,000 in April. The unemployment rate is expected to stay at a low 4.2%, according to a survey of forecasters by the data firm FactSet.

## Ex-Homeland Security official Taylor fights back against Trump's 'unprecedented' investigation order

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A former Homeland Security official during President Donald Trump's first administration who authored an anonymous op-ed sharply critical of the president is calling on independent government watchdogs to investigate after Trump ordered the department to look into his government service.

Miles Taylor, once chief of staff at the Department of Homeland Security, warned in an interview with The Associated Press of the far-reaching implications of Trump's April 9 memorandum, "Addressing Risks Associated with an Egregious Leaker and Disseminator of Falsehoods," when it comes to suppressing criticism of the president. That memo accused Taylor of concocting stories to sell his book and directed the secretary of Homeland Security and other government agencies to look into Taylor and strip him of any security clearances.

Taylor sent a letter via email to inspectors general at the departments of Justice and Homeland Security on Tuesday. Later in the day, the White House dismissed the complaint, calling Taylor a "bad-faith actor."

Coming on the same April day that Trump also ordered an investigation into Chris Krebs, a former top cybersecurity official, the dual memoranda illustrated how Trump has sought to use the powers of the presidency against his adversaries. Speaking to the AP, Taylor said the order targeting him sets a "scary

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precedent" and that's why he decided to call on the inspectors general to investigate.

"I didn't commit any crime, and that's what's extraordinary about this. I can't think of any case where someone knows they're being investigated but has absolutely no idea what crime they allegedly committed. And it's because I didn't," Taylor said. He called it a "really, really, really scary precedent to have set is that the president of the United States can now sign an order investigating any private citizen he wants, any critic, any foe, anyone."

Trump has targeted adversaries since he took office

Since taking office again in January, Trump has stripped security clearances from a number of his opponents. But Trump's order for an investigation into Taylor, as well as Krebs, marked an escalation of his campaign of retribution in his second term.

Trump fired Krebs, who directed the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, in November 2020 after Krebs disputed the Republican president's unsubstantiated claims of voting fraud and vouched for the integrity of the 2020 election, which Trump lost to Democrat Joe Biden.

Taylor left the first Trump administration in 2019. In the anonymous New York Times op-ed published in 2018, he described himself as part of a secret "resistance" to counter Trump's "misguided impulses." The op-ed's publication touched off a leak investigation in Trump's first White House.

Taylor later published a book by the same name as the op-ed and then another book under his own name called "Blowback," which warned about Trump's return to office.

After signing the memorandum April 9, Trump said Taylor was likely "guilty of treason."

In a statement Tuesday, White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson said Taylor betrayed the American people by "disclosing sensitive information through unauthorized methods" and didn't deserve a security clearance.

"Miles Taylor is a bad-faith actor who weaponized and abused his government position to prioritize his own ambition, personal notoriety, and monetary gain over keeping his constitutional oath," Jackson said.

The letter by Taylor's lawyer to the inspectors general calls Trump's actions "unprecedented in American history."

"The Memorandum does not identify any specific wrongdoing. Rather, it flagrantly targets Mr. Taylor for one reason alone: He dared to speak out to criticize the President," the letter reads.

Taylor's lawyer, Abbe Lowell, said the request to the inspectors general was an attempt to "get the administration to do the right thing." Lowell said that depending on the outcome of their complaint, they'll explore other options including a possible lawsuit. Lowell, a veteran Washington lawyer, announced earlier this year that he was opening his own legal practice and would represent targets of Trump's retribution.

Violation of First Amendment rights alleged

In the letter, Lowell calls on the inspectors general to do their jobs of "addressing and preventing abuses of power."

The letter says Trump's April 9 memo appears to violate Taylor's First Amendment rights by going after Taylor for his criticism of the president, calling it a "textbook definition of political retribution and vindictive prosecution." And, according to the letter, Trump's memo also appears to violate Taylor's Fifth Amendment due process rights.

The letter highlights Taylor's "honorable and exemplary" work service including receiving the Distinguished Service Medal upon leaving the department, and it details the toll that the April 9 memorandum has taken on Taylor's personal life. His family has been threatened and harassed, and former colleagues lost their government jobs because of their connection with him, according to the letter.

Taylor told the AP that since the order, there's been an "implosion in our lives." He said he started a fund to pay for legal fees, has had to step away from work and his wife has gone back to work to help pay the family's bills. Their home's location was published on the internet in a doxxing.

Taylor said that by filing these complaints with the inspectors general, he's anticipating that the pressure on him and his family will increase. He said they spent the last few weeks debating what to do after the April 9 memorandum and decided to fight back.

"The alternative is staying silent, cowering and capitulating and sending the message that, yes, there's



no consequences for this president and this administration in abusing their powers in ways that my legal team believes and a lot of legal scholars tell me is unconstitutional and illegal," Taylor said.

## **Tulsa's new Black mayor proposes \$100M trust to 'repair' impact of 1921 Race Massacre**

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — Tulsa's new mayor on Sunday proposed a \$100 million private trust as part of a reparations plan to give descendants of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre scholarships and housing help in a city-backed bid to make amends for one of the worst racial attacks in U.S. history.

The plan by Mayor Monroe Nichols, the first Black mayor of Oklahoma's second-largest city, would not provide direct cash payments to descendants or the last two centenarian survivors of the attack that killed as many as 300 Black people. He made the announcement at the Greenwood Cultural Center, located in the once-thriving district of North Tulsa that was destroyed by a white mob.

Nichols said he does not use the term reparations, which he calls politically charged, characterizing his sweeping plan instead as a "road to repair."

"For 104 years, the Tulsa Race Massacre has been a stain on our city's history," Nichols said Sunday after receiving a standing ovation from several hundred people. "The massacre was hidden from history books, only to be followed by the intentional acts of redlining, a highway built to choke off economic vitality and the perpetual underinvestment of local, state and federal governments.

"Now it's time to take the next big steps to restore."

Nichols said the proposal wouldn't require city council approval, although the council would need to authorize the transfer of any city property to the trust, something he said was highly likely.

The private charitable trust would be created with a goal to secure \$105 million in assets, with most of the funding either secured or committed by June 1, 2026. Although details would be developed over the next year by an executive director and a board of managers, the plan calls for the bulk of the funding, \$60 million, to go toward improving buildings and revitalizing the city's north side.

"The Greenwood District at its height was a center of commerce," Nichols said in a telephone interview. "So what was lost was not just something from North Tulsa or the Black community. It actually robbed Tulsa of an economic future that would have rivaled anywhere else in the world."

Nichols' proposal follows an executive order he signed earlier this year recognizing June 1 as Tulsa Race Massacre Observance Day, an official city holiday. Events Sunday in the Greenwood District included a picnic for families, worship services and an evening candlelight vigil.

Nichols also realizes the current national political climate, particularly President Trump's sweeping assault on diversity, equity and inclusion programs, poses challenging political crosswinds.

"The fact that this lines up with a broader national conversation is a tough environment," Nichols admitted, "but it doesn't change the work we have to do."

Jacqueline Weary, is a granddaughter of massacre survivor John R. Emerson, Sr., who owned a hotel and cab company in Greenwood that were destroyed. She acknowledged the political difficulty of giving cash payments to descendants. But at the same time, she wondered how much of her family's wealth was lost in the violence.

"If Greenwood was still there, my grandfather would still have his hotel," said Weary, 65. "It rightfully was our inheritance, and it was literally taken away."

Tulsa is not the first U.S. city to explore reparations. The Chicago suburb of Evanston, Illinois, was the first U.S. city to make reparations available to its Black residents for past discrimination, offering qualifying households \$25,000 for home repairs, down payments on property, and interest or late penalties on property in the city. The funding for the program came from taxes on the sale of recreational marijuana.

Other communities and organizations that have considered providing reparations range from the state of California to cities including Amherst, Massachusetts; Providence, Rhode Island; Asheville, North Carolina; and Iowa City, Iowa; religious denominations like the Episcopal Church; and prominent colleges like

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Georgetown University in Washington.

In Tulsa, there are only two living survivors of the Race Massacre: 110-year-old Lessie Benningfield Randle and Viola Fletcher, who is 111. The women, both of whom were in attendance on Sunday, received direct financial compensation from both a Tulsa-based nonprofit and a New York-based philanthropic organization, but have not received any recompense from the city or state.

Damario Solomon-Simmons, an attorney for the survivors and the founder of the Justice for Greenwood Foundation, said earlier this year that any reparations plan should include direct payments to Randle and Fletcher and a victims' compensation fund for outstanding claims.

A lawsuit filed by Solomon-Simmons on behalf of the survivors was rejected by the Oklahoma Supreme Court last year, dampening racial justice advocates' hopes that the city would ever make financial amends.

## Republican push for proof of citizenship to vote proves a tough sell in the states

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and NADIA LATHAN Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — President Donald Trump and congressional Republicans have made it a priority this year to require people to prove citizenship before they can register to vote. Turning that aspiration into reality has proved difficult.

Trump's executive order directing a documentary, proof-of-citizenship requirement for federal elections has been blocked by a judge, while federal legislation to accomplish it doesn't appear to have the votes to pass in the Senate. At the same time, state-level efforts have found little success, even in places where Republicans control the legislature and governor's office.

The most recent state effort to falter is in Texas, where a Senate bill failed to gain full legislative approval before lawmakers adjourned on Monday. The Texas bill was one of the nation's most sweeping proof-of-citizenship proposals because it would have applied not only to new registrants but also to the state's roughly 18.6 million registered voters.

"The bill authors failed spectacularly to explain how this bill would be implemented and how it would be able to be implemented without inconveniencing a ton of voters," said Anthony Gutierrez, director of the voting rights group Common Cause Texas.

Voting by noncitizens is rare

Voting by noncitizens is already illegal and punishable as a felony, potentially leading to deportation, but Trump and his allies have pressed for a proof-of-citizenship mandate by arguing it would improve public confidence in elections.

Before his win last year, Trump falsely claimed noncitizens might vote in large enough numbers to sway the outcome. Although noncitizen voting does occur, research and reviews of state cases has shown it to be rare and more often a mistake.

Voting rights groups say the various proposals seeking to require proof-of-citizenship are overly burdensome and threaten to disenfranchise millions of Americans. Many do not have easy access to their birth certificates, have not gotten a U.S. passport or have a name that no longer matches the one on their birth certificate — such as women who changed their last name when they married.

Married women who changed names are a particular concern

The number of states considering bills related to proof of citizenship for voting tripled from 2023 to this year, said Liz Avore, senior policy adviser with the Voting Rights Lab, an advocacy group that tracks election legislation in the states.

That hasn't resulted in many new laws, at least so far. Republicans in Wyoming passed their own proof-of-citizenship legislation, but similar measures have stalled or failed in multiple GOP-led states, including Florida, Missouri, Texas and Utah. A proposal remains active in Ohio, although Gov. Mike DeWine, a Republican, has said he doesn't want to sign any more bills that make it harder to vote.

In Texas, the legislation swiftly passed the state Senate after it was introduced in March but never made it to a floor vote in the House. It was unclear why legislation that was such a priority for Senate Republi-

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cans – every one of them co-authored the bill -- ended up faltering.

"I just think people realized, as flawed as this playbook has been in other states, Texas didn't need to make this mistake," said Rep. John Bucy, a Democrat who serves as vice chair of the House elections committee.

Bucy pointed to specific concerns about married women who changed their last name. This surfaced in local elections earlier this year in New Hampshire, which passed a proof-of-citizenship requirement last year.

Similar laws have created confusion

Other states that previously sought to add such a requirement have faced lawsuits and complications when trying to implement it.

In Arizona, a state audit found that problems with the way data was handled had affected the tracking and verification of residents' citizenship status. It came after officials had identified some 200,000 voters who were thought to have provided proof of their citizenship but had not.

A proof-of-citizenship requirement was in effect for three years in Kansas before it was overturned by federal courts. The state's own expert estimated that almost all of the roughly 30,000 people who were prevented from registering to vote while it was in effect were U.S. citizens who otherwise had been eligible.

In Missouri, legislation seeking to add a proof-of-citizenship requirement cleared a Senate committee but never came to a vote in the Republican-led chamber.

Republican state Sen. Ben Brown had promoted the legislation as a follow-up to a constitutional amendment stating that only U.S. citizens can vote, which Missouri voters overwhelmingly approved last November. He said there were several factors that led to the bill not advancing this year. Due to the session's limited schedule, he chose to prioritize another elections bill banning foreign contributions in state ballot measure campaigns.

"Our legislative session ending mid-May means a lot of things die at the finish line because you simply run out of time," Brown said, noting he also took time to research concerns raised by local election officials and plans to reintroduce the proof-of-citizenship bill next year.

Complications prompt states to focus on other issues

The Republican-controlled Legislature in Utah also prioritized other election changes, adding voter ID requirements and requiring people to opt in to receive their ballots in the mail. Before Gov. Spencer Cox signed the bill into law, Utah was the only Republican-controlled state that allowed all elections to be conducted by mail without a need to opt in.

Under the Florida bill that has failed to advance, voter registration applications wouldn't be considered valid until state officials had verified citizenship, either by confirming a previous voting history, checking the applicant's status in state and federal databases, or verifying documents they provided.

The bill would have required voters to prove their citizenship even when updating their registration to change their address or party affiliation.

Its sponsor, Republican state Rep. Jenna Persons-Mulicka, said it was meant to follow through on Trump's executive order: "This bill fully answers the president's call," she said.

## **Today in History: June 4, the Tiananmen Square Massacre**

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, June 4, the 155th day of 2025. There are 210 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On June 4, 1989, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of pro-democracy demonstrators and dozens of soldiers are estimated to have been killed when Chinese troops crushed a seven-week-long protest held by occupying demonstrators in Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

Also on this date:

In 1812, the U.S. House of Representatives passed its first war declaration, approving by a vote of 79-49 a declaration of war against Britain.

In 1919, Congress approved the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which said that the right of Americans to vote "shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of

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sex.” (The amendment was then sent to the states for ratification.)

In 1940, during World War II, the Allied military completed the evacuation of more than 338,000 troops from Dunkirk, France.

Also in 1940, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared in a speech to the House of Commons: “We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.”

In 1942, the World War II naval Battle of Midway began, which resulted in a decisive American victory against Japan and marked a turning point in the war in the Pacific.

In 1986, Jonathan Jay Pollard, a former U.S. Navy intelligence analyst, pleaded guilty in Washington to conspiring to deliver national defense information to Israel. (Sentenced to life in prison, Pollard would be released on parole in November 2015.)

In 1990, Dr. Jack Kevorkian carried out his first publicly assisted suicide, helping Janet Adkins, a 54-year-old Alzheimer’s patient from Portland, Oregon, end her life in Oakland County, Michigan.

In 1998, a federal judge sentenced Terry Nichols to life in prison without parole for his role in the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, which killed 168 people.

Today’s Birthdays: Actor Bruce Dern is 89. Golf Hall of Famer Sandra Haynie is 82. Singer-actor Michelle Phillips is 81. Jazz musician Paquito D’Rivera is 77. Actor Parker Stevenson is 73. Actor Keith David is 69. Singer El DeBarge is 64. Opera singer Cecilia Bartoli is 59. R&B singer Al B. Sure! is 57. Actor Scott Wolf is 57. Comedian Horatio Sanz is 56. Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, is 54. Actor Noah Wyle is 54. Actor Angelina Jolie is 50. Actor-comedian T.J. Miller is 44. Olympic figure skating gold medalist Evan Lysacek is 40.