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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.

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



Sunday, June 8

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion 11 a.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran worship with communion, 9 a.m.
United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.
Amateurs host Faulkton, 4 p.m.
Legion at Chamberlain, 1 p.m. (DH)
U12 ALL at Sisseton Tournament
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.
Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.

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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.

'The Final Chamber'

Legendary hip-hop group Wu-Tang Clan kicked off their final farewell tour from Baltimore yesterday. The tour, expected to span 27 dates across North America, marks the 10-person group's final time together and culminates their three-decade journey.

Formed in the early 1990s, the Staten Island-based Wu-Tang Clan revolutionized hip-hop and revitalized East Coast rap with their gritty sound and kung fu-inspired imagery, selling over 40 million albums globally. They debuted in 1993 with "Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)"—considered one of the greatest hip-hop albums of all time. Their follow-up in 1997, "Wu-Tang Forever," debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 and earned a Grammy nomination for best rap album in 1998.

The Wu-Tang Clan's name comes from 1983 martial arts film "Shaolin and Wu Tang," where Wu Tang is a sword technique and symbolizes the group's lyrical skill. In 2019, a New York City street corner was named after the group.

Russia strikes Ukraine in retaliation for surprise operation.

Russia launched one of its largest aerial assaults on Ukraine overnight Thursday, firing over 400 drones and more than 40 missiles at Kyiv and multiple other cities, killing at least four people and wounding dozens. Russia's attack came days after Ukraine launched its largest long-range drone strike on 41 Russian warplanes at four military bases.

US sanctions ICC judges, partly over Israeli war crimes probe.

The Trump administration imposed sanctions on four judges of the International Criminal Court in response to the court's investigations into alleged war crimes by Israel during its conflict with Hamas as well as previous inquiries into US military actions in Afghanistan. The sanctions freeze the judges' assets in US jurisdictions and restrict their financial operations. The EU threw its support behind the global war crimes court Friday.

Deported man from Maryland to return to US to face federal charges.

Kilmar Abrego Garcia was deported from Maryland to El Salvador in March and will return to the US to face criminal charges of transporting illegal immigrants. Garcia's deportation became a flashpoint in the Trump administration's crackdown on immigration due to a previous court order prohibiting the 29-year-old from being sent back to his home country. (Note: There are conflicting reports about his alleged membership in the MS-13 gang and his legal status in the US.)

David Beckham to be knighted by King Charles next week.

Beckham, 50, is set to receive a knighthood in King Charles' upcoming birthday honors list next week, recognizing his two-decade soccer career and contributions to British society. In 2003, Beckham was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire, a common starting point on the path to knighthood. Beckham's wife and former Spice Girls singer, Victoria, will be known as Lady Beckham.

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US jobs growth slows in May amid tariff uncertainty.

US employers added 139,000 nonfarm jobs last month, higher than the 125,000 jobs economists had estimated but lower than the downwardly revised 147,000 jobs in April. The unemployment rate held steady at 4.2%. Average hourly earnings rose 0.4% month over month in May and 3.9% year over year; both figures surpassed expectations of 0.3% and 3.7%, respectively.

Omada Health shares close up 21% Friday in Nasdaq debut.

Omada's stock rose \$150M, valuing the digital chronic care company at roughly \$1.3B. Omada is this year's second major digital health initial public offering, following Hinge Health, a digital physical therapy startup. Hinge Health debuted on the NYSE last month, achieving a valuation of roughly \$2.6B.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Ruby A. in San Leandro, California.

"My brother-in-law and myself were carrying a large nine drawer dresser out of the house to the street corner for what our Alameda County calls a free 'bulky pickup' of furniture. I was struggling because it was very heavy. We live a few blocks from San Leandro High School and as a young man was passing on his bicycle, he noticed me lifting the furniture and immediately jumped off his bike, left it on the ground, and rushed over to take my end and he finished moving it to the curb."

"I thanked him profusely and asked his name, which was Sebastian. I didn't get his last name and was unable to find out from the high school who he was to thank him with a small gift. He was so thoughtful and kind and had no way of knowing that I had shoulder surgery and, although fully recovered, I was feeling the strain of lifting the heavy item and he may have saved me from re-injuring my shoulder."

Public Health Notice: Measles Exposure Possible at Rapid City Locations

PIERRE, SD – The South Dakota Department of Health is notifying the public of potential measles exposure at two locations in Pennington County. The individual, who is South Dakota's second confirmed measles case, visited public places while infectious.

Any person visiting the locations at the times listed below might have been exposed to measles and are advised to self-monitor for symptoms of measles for 21 days after the exposure date. Individuals who are not immune to measles should contact their healthcare provider to discuss protective options, including vaccination or immune globulin, depending on eligibility and timing.

Sam's Club (925 Eglin St, Rapid City, SD)

June 1, 2025, from 12 pm to 6 pm MT

Dakota Premier Medical Clinic (2006 Mt Rushmore Rd, Rapid City, SD)

June 2, 2025, from 11:15 am to 3:45 pm MT

Measles symptoms appear in two stages. In the first stage, the individual may have a runny nose, cough, and a slight fever. The eyes may become reddened and sensitive to light while the fever consistently rises each day. The second stage begins on the third to seventh day of symptoms and consists of a temperature of 103-105°F, and a red blotchy rash lasting for four to seven days. The rash usually begins on the face and then spreads down to the trunk and out to the arms and legs.

"We are sharing this information to help individuals who may have been exposed take steps to protect their health," said Dr. Joshua Clayton, state epidemiologist. "Any South Dakotan who lack immunity from vaccination or past infection can get the MMR vaccine to prevent measles infection and its complications."

The measles vaccine offers the best protection against infection and avoids the risks that come with infection. The following people are considered immune to measles:

Born before 1957;

Received 1 dose of measles vaccine (MMR) for an adult or a child 12 months to pre-school age;

Received 2 doses of measles vaccine (MMR) for a school-aged child or an adult at higher risk of infection;

Presence of measles antibodies shown by a lab test; and

Previous measles infection shown by a lab test.

Measles vaccine (MMR) is typically given at 12-15 months of age. The second dose of MMR is given at 4-6 years of age. The vaccine is safe and highly effective at preventing measles infection, and two MMR doses usually produce lifelong immunity. If you are planning to travel internationally with children, MMR vaccines can be given to children starting at six months of age.

Learn more about measles on the Department of Health website where information can be found in the form of fact sheets, frequently asked questions, and a webinar for healthcare providers.

At the heart of the Department of Health's mission is a simple goal: to protect and improve the health of all South Dakotans. The department is entrusted with the vital task of promoting wellness, preventing disease, and ensuring access to quality healthcare for all South Dakotans.

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Gavin Englund and Aaron Severson, along with other ballfield workers, edged Nelson Field, removed the sod and put down fresh agrilime along the base lines.

Day of Play!

SATURDAY, JUNE 7TH

Little League Baseball

U8 vs Britton 9:00

U10 vs Webster 11:00

U12 vs Britton 1:00

Softball

U8 vs Britton 9:00 & 10:00

U10 Black vs Gold 11:00

U12/U14 Mix Scrimmage 1:00

Baseball vs W.I.N.

Jr Teeners 1:00

Jr Legion 3:00

Legion 5:00

Amateurs 7:00



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Q&A: Retiring library leader says the future is bright, despite recent criticism of librarians

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JUNE 6, 2025 4:30 PM

Her career is ending amid legislative attacks on her profession, but Jodi Fick still thinks “the sky’s the limit” for libraries.

Fick has been working in libraries since 1983 and has led Siouxland Libraries’ 13 branch locations in Sioux Falls and the surrounding area since 2017. She’s retiring on June 20.

South Dakota lawmakers nearly passed a bill earlier this year that would have subjected librarians to criminal prosecution for disseminating obscene books to children. The failed proposal was replaced with a requirement that school and public libraries allow appeals of their obscenity determinations.

State law says material is obscene if it “appeals to the prurient interest,” is patently offensive because it affronts contemporary community standards relating to the description or representation of sado-masochistic abuse or sexual conduct, and lacks serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value.

Fick expressed faith that libraries will survive the scrutiny. “The pressures on libraries ebb and flow, depending on what’s going on in society,” she said, adding that the public’s right to access a broad variety of information usually prevails.

Fick grew up in Mobridge. She earned a bachelor’s degree from Augustana University in Sioux Falls and a master’s in library science from Emporia State University in Kansas. Her library career began with a work-study position at Augustana’s Mikkelsen Library.

After completing her education, she joined the Minnehaha County Rural Public Library as assistant director in 1990, a role she held until a 1995 merger. That year, the Sioux Falls city library system merged with the county library system to form what is now Siouxland Libraries.

When Siouxland Libraries was created, Fick transitioned into the new system as a senior librarian. In 2007, she was promoted to assistant director, and in 2017, she was appointed as the director.

The area served by Siouxland Libraries grew in population from 124,915 in 1995 to 250,551 in 2024. The annual circulation — the number of times materials are checked out — rose from 1.1 million to 2.1 million over that period.

The following conversation with Fick has been edited for length and clarity.

How has the function of a library in a community changed since you started?

How our libraries function has evolved somewhat. Before the internet, we had huge reference collections. Just ranges and ranges of books that provided valuable information, but it wasn’t like something you’d take home and read. It was, you come, we help you find the information you need, and you go on. Well,



Jodi Fick stands in the children’s section of Siouxland Libraries’ downtown Sioux Falls location. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

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once we had the internet, that information became readily available. Of course, you still want to ensure the source can be trusted, and that's another skill we still provide – knowing how to know if the source is reliable. Is it vetted? Has it been edited? Libraries also have searchable databases of reliable information.

What is the future of libraries?

The sky's the limit. When I started, we barely had computers. I was hired originally to automate the library, and we were still using the old card catalog system. The ability for you to even know what books existed was next to nothing, which was a very different library from today. You would come to the library, browse the collection, and go home with things.

Now, you can sit at home on your phone, browse, and you can even check it out through your local library app and start consuming the information.

I think that books and knowledge will continue to be the core of what libraries are, because we are the gatherers of that knowledge, and make it available to our community to consume.

But I also see that we hold an important part in being that "third place."

So, you have places you're at where you can simply be: home, work or that "third place," where you're not required to buy a meal or pay for something. This is a spot where you can come to, and you can gather with others, you can use meeting room space, or you can just be, that is outside of your home and your workplace, because the community has created these branches that are a spot for you to come to. So, we're that "third place."

There's a sociologist who calls libraries "palaces for the people." And I like that image. Libraries are living, breathing things.

I think over the years, what I have seen is that librarians are staying in tune with the community, trying to understand what the needs are, and then adapting our services to what that community needs at that time. Of course, within our range. At one time, we were the spot to get your IRS tax warrants. Other times, we are helping people find jobs.

I think as long as libraries are reflective of what their community needs, they will continue to be successful. But that also means that what a public library is in South Dakota is, well, there are hundreds of different variations. The answer depends on what the community needs and is.

What did you make of the recent legislative proposal that would have criminalized librarians who check out obscene materials to minors?

What was interesting was that, as a library, we don't collect obscene materials. Why was this deemed necessary at all? I don't know. I wasn't asked about it. But we don't collect materials that fit the legal definition of obscenity.

Let's say we did have obscene materials – which, of course, we don't – that law would have said that if my job required me to check out this material upon request, and I did it, I would no longer have the protection of "I was just doing my job."

Now, the risk to us is slim, but I honestly don't understand where it was coming from.

My concern, as the director of the public library, is that it created a picture that library staff are here trying to cause harm to our children in our community, which is so far from what librarians are doing.

How do you approach the balance between community standards and the library's role in providing access to a wide range of information, particularly when facing pressures to restrict certain content?

We lean back on the policies that have been set by the library boards.

Since our inception, we've had policies that tell us what we are supposed to collect. So, everything that we do is based on policies that have been developed over the years, not just as practices, but how we provide collections for our communities. Specifically, we have a collection development policy. It defines who selects, who's responsible for it, what are the criteria we use when we're selecting, and both for

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adding and removing materials, or if we find that there's things in our collections that aren't appropriate for our collection. So that's all laid out.

For Siouxland Libraries, the policies are all set by the Siouxland Libraries Board of Trustees. And they are basing a lot of it on freedom of speech rights. So, the First Amendment rights for people to have access to a wide variety of thoughts.

When we're selecting, we also do a lot of analysis of what people are using. And we pay attention to the high-use items, low-use items, and also what people are asking us questions about and try to build a collection that's based on that.

And there are just certain subjects that are also going to be more sensitive. One in particular is human reproduction, especially when you get into children's non-fiction. We recognize that can be a very sensitive topic for people. But we have families who come to us wanting resources that can help them when they're trying to have those conversations with their children. And different families have different expectations for what types of information is appropriate, because parents know their own children best.

I'm a parent. I have two children. They're now adults, but I very much remember when it came time to "have the talk," and make sure that they understood their bodies, and what was going on.

What I did not want was children living their lives with a lack of knowledge, or misinformed, or ashamed. Most of our families who come in, they want to be able to present information to their children accurately. How that information is presented will vary. Some want details, others want the birds and the bees analogies. So, we have materials that present a variety of viewpoints.

Do you think it's important that libraries provide access to books that include sexual content that some find offensive? Why?

Look, there will be books that have difficult scenes. Is this obscenity or not obscenity? Well, the term has a pretty narrow legal definition.

But why are these books important? Often, you'll see this in teen books or "coming-of-age" books.

A coming-of-age book has a teen dealing with a specific issue, and they grow through the experience, and there's a resolution. The books are designed to help teens navigate something. Now, why are they navigating things that they're not going through? Because those things are happening within their communities. It might not be to them specifically, but how much more important is it that they've thought about a situation before they're in the middle of it – they see someone resolve through it? The person in the book may or may not have done what you'd want them to do, but they're learning from that experience.

Teens grow into adults. They go through difficult things, and those types of books help them learn about the environment around them. You learn how to deal with situations without actually experiencing that situation. You have a chance to consider things in your head before you're put into situations that you're not prepared to handle.

The pressures on libraries ebb and flow, depending on what's going on in society. I have files of other times when there have been similar things. In the late '90s, it was movies. Our library has movies that are G-rated to R-rated. A child might take that home and watch it.

Well, we have been very much supported by our community and by the parents in our community saying, "What a child checks out is to be regulated by the parent." A child can't get a library card without a parent's permission. A parent has full access to what their child is checking out. We very much encourage coming with your child to the library. We support parents' rights to be the parent.

What are you most proud of?

I'm most proud of how many people continue to use the library.

People are coming, and they're coming in more and more. The compliments that we receive, the numbers of people who say, "I love the library, I don't know what my life would be like without access to this."

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining

South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Appellate court upholds decisions favoring Summit over county pipeline ordinances

BY: CAMI KOONS, IOWA CAPITAL DISPATCH - JUNE 6, 2025 1:49 PM

A federal appeals court on Thursday upheld lower court decisions barring counties from imposing safety standards on a pipeline subject to federal safety standards.

The cases involved Summit Carbon Solutions, the company proposing to build a carbon sequestration pipeline through the state, and county supervisors from both Story and Shelby Counties in Iowa.

Summit sued the counties in 2022 for enacting ordinances that required county-specific setback requirements and other regulations the company argued were preempted by federal pipeline safety laws.

A federal judge ruled in favor of Summit in Dec. 2023 and issued permanent injunctions, stopping the counties from enforcing the regulations, which would have impacted the carbon sequestration pipeline and other pipelines.

The county supervisors appealed the decision and presented oral arguments in November 2024 to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. The counties argued that local land use and zoning regulations are not "preempted standards" under the Pipeline Safety Act.

Writing for the appeals court, U.S. Circuit Judge Duane Benton wrote that the county ordinances "focus" on safety and "repeatedly" mention safety risks associated with the pipeline, which "undermines" the Pipeline Safety Act's goal of preempting state regulations on safety.

"This holding does not prohibit local governments from considering safety, nor prevent them from enacting all zoning ordinances, as the counties suggest," Benton said in the opinion. "This court emphasizes the distinction between safety standards — which the PSA preempts — and safety considerations — which the PSA does not preempt."

The county ordinances also included emergency response requirements and abandonment provisions which the court ruled were also preempted by federal regulations.

Circuit Judge Jane Kelly, however, dissented on those elements and wrote she does not believe that PSA preempts setback and abandonment provisions. Kelly said that while the counties' setback requirements are "animated in part by safety considerations" they do not have the "direct and substantial" effect on safety that is reserved for federal regulation.

Kelly also wrote that per her understanding, the Pipeline Safety Act "does not cover pipelines that have been abandoned" and therefore the Shelby County abandonment provision is not "expressly preempted."

The court affirmed the lower court's decision in both cases, but ordered the federal court for the Southern District of Iowa to reconsider an additional ordinance that's at issue in the Story County case.



The Roman L. Hruska Federal Courthouse in Omaha, where the Eighth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals held its hearing on the pipeline cases on Nov. 20, 2024. (Photo by Aaron Sanderford/Nebraska Examiner)

Sabrina Zenor, on behalf of Summit Carbon Solutions, said the ruling “confirms” pipeline safety regulation set by the federal government and the Iowa Utilities Commission’s role in route and permit decisions.

“This supports a consistent, lawful permitting process for critical infrastructure projects like ours,” Zenor said in a statement.

A press release from Bold Alliance, a group representing landowners opposed to the pipeline project, called the order an “anti-local government ruling” and said the parties involved in the case are examining their “legal and legislative options” in response to the decision.

“The landowners, impacted community members, county and state elected officials who worked for months or years to develop ordinances and state regulations are witnessing their hard-won efforts to enact common sense protections for their communities stripped away by judicial fiat,” the statement read.

Cami Koons is an Iowa Capital Dispatch reporter covering agriculture and the environment. She previously worked at publications in Kansas and Missouri, covering rural affairs.

COMMENTARY

As Trump now knows and Doeden may learn, the governing is harder than the shake-up

by Dana Hess

And then there were two. In late May, Aberdeen businessman and political influencer Toby Doeden entered the race for the Republican nomination for governor of South Dakota. He joins state Speaker of the House Jon Hansen as the only announced candidates, so far, for the nomination.

Throughout his announcement speech, and sprinkled liberally through his campaign website, are references to Doeden’s support for President Donald Trump. It’s hard to miss the comparisons between the president and the gubernatorial candidate.

Doeden takes pride, as Trump did in his first campaign, at never having been elected to public office. Doeden, however, knows something about how to get other people elected. Through his Dakota First Action political action committee, he supported a bevy of anti-establishment Republicans who were able to unseat legislative incumbents in the last primary.

While Doeden sees his lack of electoral experience as a positive, voters always run a risk when they decide to put someone in a position of power who has never been there before. In his first term as president, Trump often seemed befuddled by the finer points of how the federal government works. For Doeden, promising to shake things up in Pierre is the easy part. Harder than the shaking is the governing.

While he’s shaking things up in Pierre, Doeden has promised to cut spending from a state government budget that he sees as bloated. That made it seem odd when among his first pronouncements as a candidate was the creation of not one but two new state agencies. He has proposed to create the South Dakota Department of External Revenue to find new revenue sources for the state and the South Dakota Department of Government Efficiency, which sounds eerily like Elon Musk’s DOGE.



Toby Doeden announces his candidacy for the Republican nomination for governor of South Dakota during an event on May 28, 2025, in Aberdeen. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

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We can only hope that Doeden's version of DOGE has a lighter touch than the Trump/Musk version, which is prone to cutting government by sending in a lumberjack to do work that was best suited for a surgeon. Much of DOGE's work and Trump's attempts to shrink the federal government have ended up in court battles that haven't been winners for the president.

Doeden's version of his personal history seems to play off the Trump-inspired myth that people who have made a fortune can relate to the problems and challenges faced by the rest of us. Doeden touts his hardscrabble youth, something that Trump never had, as a way to connect with voters.

Yet Doeden faces the same ironic set of circumstances as Trump, touting personal success that won't make him subservient to donors all the while that his website welcomes donations. That suggests that somehow candidates like Doeden and Trump are better suited to lead us because they're rich, yet their wealth doesn't keep them from asking for our money.

In his announcement, Doeden railed against career politicians, the likes of which have yet to enter the race for the Republican nomination. Widely speculated as potential candidates are Gov. Larry Rhoden, U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson and Attorney General Marty Jackley. Hansen hails from the same populist wing of the party as Doeden, which runs the risk of them splitting the primary vote from that group.

It will be Doeden's challenge to get Republican voters to choose his brand of populism over Hansen's. He'll need to do that while getting them to cast aside the established leaders who have devoted their lives to building up government. To be successful, Doeden will have to convince voters that it's in their best interest to let him tear it all down.

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

Wrongly deported Maryland man Abrego Garcia returned to U.S.

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JUNE 6, 2025 5:24 PM

WASHINGTON — Kilmar Abrego Garcia, a Maryland man wrongly deported to his native El Salvador three months ago, was brought back to the U.S. on Friday and will face federal charges, U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi said.

Abrego Garcia's case had become a flashpoint in a debate over what due process rights protect immigrants from deportation after federal officials conceded he was sent to a notorious El Salvador mega-prison because of an administrative error.

Still, President Donald Trump, El Salvador President Nayib Bukele, Bondi and other administration officials said for months Abrego Garcia could not be released because of criminal conduct they had not publicly produced evidence of.

In a gaggle with reporters on Air Force One Friday night, Trump declined to say whether it was his decision to bring Abrego Garcia back to the U.S., according to White House pool reports.

"He should have never had to be returned," Trump said. "It's a disaster."



A protester holds a photo of Maryland man Kilmar Abrego Garcia as demonstrators gather to protest against the deportation of immigrants to El Salvador outside the Permanent Mission of El Salvador to the United Nations on April 24, 2025.

(Photo by Michael M. Santiago/Getty Images)

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Bondi said Friday a federal warrant for Abrego Garcia's arrest on human trafficking charges compelled his release from the Salvadoran prison system.

"Abrego Garcia has landed in the United States to face justice," Bondi said at a Department of Justice news conference Friday afternoon. "He was a smuggler of humans and women and children."

The 10-page indictment filed in the Middle District of Tennessee comes after a federal grand jury indicted him on May 21 for allegedly transporting migrants in the U.S. without legal authorization within the country.

Chris Newman, an attorney representing the Abrego Garcia family said at a virtual press event Friday that he remained skeptical of the federal charges lodged at Abrego Garcia.

"I can tell you that we should all treat whatever charges that are being leveled against him with a high degree of suspicion," Newman said. "We should make sure that he gets a fair (trial) in court because he's clearly not getting a fair hearing in the court of public opinion."

Bondi did not detail when the investigation into Abrego Garcia began, but said the federal indictment charges contained "recently found facts."

"This is what American justice looks like upon completion of his sentence, we anticipate he will be returned to his home country of El Salvador," Bondi said.

WKRN in Nashville said Abrego Garcia's arraignment has been scheduled for 10 a.m. Friday.

Outcry over due process

Abrego Garcia's wrongful deportation to the notorious mega-prison Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo, or CECOT, drew national outcry as the Trump administration clashed with a federal court that ordered the return of the Beltsville man and resisted the U.S. Supreme Court's order to "facilitate" his return.

Despite the orders, Trump administration officials did not appear to take any public steps to secure Abrego Garcia's release, and at times seemed to relish their defiance of the courts.

Bondi thanked El Salvador's government Friday for releasing Abrego Garcia in compliance with the warrant.

The Trump administration has argued in federal court in Maryland for months that Abrego Garcia is in the custody of El Salvador and therefore cannot be returned, despite a \$15 million agreement between the U.S. and the Salvadoran government to keep roughly 300 men removed from the U.S. and detained at CECOT. Abrego Garcia had been moved to a different El Salvador prison prior to his release.

Abrego Garcia had deportation protections to his home country of El Salvador since 2019.

He was pulled over by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents in March and informed that his immigration status had changed. He was later placed on one of three deportation flights on March 15 to CECOT.

The Trump administration admitted his removal was an "administrative error" but has since alleged that Abrego Garcia was a leader in the MS-13 gang without producing evidence in the federal civil court overseeing the suit challenging his removal.

Maryland U.S. Sen. Chris Van Hollen, who traveled to El Salvador to press for Abrego Garcia's release and return to the U.S., welcomed the news as a victory for due process rights.

"As I have repeatedly said, this is not about the man, it's about his constitutional rights – and the rights of all," the Maryland Democrat said in a statement. "The Administration will now have to make its case in the court of law, as it should have all along."

William J. Ford contributed to this report.

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

Thune pledges that U.S. Senate will drag Trump's mega-bill across the finish line

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT, ARIANA FIGUEROA AND SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - JUNE 6, 2025
2:56 PM



U.S. Senate Majority Leader Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., left, listens as Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, center, speaks to reporters outside of the West Wing of the White House on June 4, 2025 in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images)

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Republican Leader John Thune will spend a crucial next few weeks working behind the scenes with other top GOP senators to reshape the party's "big beautiful bill" — a balancing test accompanied in recent days by incendiary exchanges between President Donald Trump and billionaire Elon Musk over whether the current proposals are so bad that Congress should just go back to the drawing board.

South Dakota's Thune will need to gain support from deficit hawks, who want to see the mega-bill cut at least \$2 trillion in spending, and moderates, who are closely monitoring how less federal funding for safety net programs like Medicaid and food assistance could harm their constituents and home-state institutions like rural hospitals.

Interviews by States Newsroom with Republican senators in early June showed many major elements of the package could change, including provisions that would put states on the hook for

unanticipated costs. Arkansas Sen. John Boozman, for example, indicated the Senate may rewrite a proposal in the House-passed bill that would shift some of the cost of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which provides food aid to low-income people, to state governments.

"We can do whatever we want to do," the Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee chairman said when asked by States Newsroom about amending that policy.

The final deal — intended to extend the 2017 tax cuts — cannot lose more than three GOP senators and still make it back across the Capitol to the House for final approval, since all Democrats are expected to oppose the bill. Thune only needs a majority vote in the Senate for the special process being used by Republicans.

Internal debates about just how to rework the Trump-backed tax and spending cuts measure began in the first week of June during meetings on Capitol Hill and at the White House, as GOP senators began critiquing the House-passed package line-by-line to ensure it complies with their strict rules for the complex reconciliation process and their policy goals.

Republicans said during interviews that several provisions in the House version likely won't comply with the chamber's Byrd rule, which could force lawmakers to toss out some provisions.

Complicating all of it was the very public back-and-forth between not just Trump but GOP leaders and former White House adviser Musk over the bill, which Musk on social media labeled "a disgusting abomination" and a "big, ugly spending bill" for its effect on the deficit and debt limit. "KILL the BILL," Musk said on X, the platform he owns. Senate leaders so far have dismissed Musk's criticisms.

Fragile House coalition

The talks, and whatever the legislation looks like after a marathon amendment voting session expected

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in late June, have already raised deep concerns among House GOP lawmakers, who will have to vote on the bill again in order to send it to Trump.

The extremely narrow majorities mean House Republican leaders cannot lose more than four of their own members if all the lawmakers in that chamber vote on the party-line bill.

Any changes the Senate makes could unbalance the fragile coalition of votes Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., cobbled together last month for a 215-214 vote. But GOP senators are adamant they will amend the legislation.

Complicating matters is a new report from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office that shows the proposed changes to tax law, Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and higher education aid wouldn't actually help to reduce deficits during the next decade but raise them by more than \$2.4 trillion.

The numbers are the exact opposite for what Republicans hoped their sweeping tax and spending cuts package would accomplish.

Scrutiny begins

The first stop for the House-passed reconciliation package in the Senate appears to be the parliamentarian's office, where staff have begun evaluating whether each provision in the current version of the bill complies with the upper chamber's strict rules.

Boozman said staff on his panel have already begun meeting with the parliamentarian to go over the House provisions within its jurisdiction.

He expects that section of the package will have to change to comply with the strict rules that govern the reconciliation process in the Senate and to better fit that chamber's policy goals.

"We can't really decide exactly what we want to use in the House version until we know what's eligible," Boozman said. "We've got some other ideas too that we asked them about. But we need to know, of the ideas that we have, what would be viable options as far as being Byrd eligible."

The Byrd rule, which is actually a law, requires reconciliation bills to address federal revenue, spending, or the debt limit. This generally bars lawmakers from using the special budget process to change policies that don't have a significant impact on those three areas.

Alabama Sen. Tommy Tuberville, who is campaigning to become his home state's next governor, said pushing some of the cost of the nutrition program to states may be problematic.

"We're trying to send more costs to the states. Most states can't afford that, so we want to take care of people, but we need people to go back to work," Tuberville said. "It's not a forever entitlement. It's for part-time, you know, take care of yourself until you get a job, go back to work and let people that need it really, really get it."

Rural hospitals on edge

Senate GOP leaders will have to navigate how best to reduce federal spending on Medicaid, the state-federal health program for lower-income people and some with disabilities, that is relied on by tens of millions of Americans, many of whom are loyal Republican voters.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office projects that 7.8 million people would lose access to Medicaid during the next decade if the House's policy changes are implemented as written.

There are also concerns among GOP lawmakers about how losing the revenue that comes with treating Medicaid patients would impact rural health care access and hospitals.

Missouri Sen. Josh Hawley said under no circumstances would he vote for a bill that cuts benefits to Medicaid recipients and is worried about how provisions in the House package would affect rural hospitals.

"They're very concerned about it, rightly so," Hawley said, referring to conversations he's had with health care systems in his home state.

"This is something that we need to work on. I don't know why we would penalize rural hospitals," he added. "If you want to reduce health care spending, then cap the price of prescription drugs. I mean, that's

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the way to do it. If you want to get major savings in the health care sector, don't close rural hospitals, don't take away benefits from working people. Cap the costs, cap the price that (the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services) is going to pay for prescription drugs."

West Virginia Sen. Shelley Moore Capito said she's not yet come to a decision about whether to keep, amend, or completely scrap some of the House changes to Medicaid.

"I talked to a lot of our hospitals when I was home to see what the impacts would be, because we have a very high Medicaid population," Capito said. "I want to see it work and be preserved, but I want it to be there for future generations. And it's just getting way out of control on the spend side. So right now, we're looking at everything."

Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy — chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee — said he doesn't expect all of the health care provisions in the House bill make it through the "Byrd bath" with the parliamentarian. But he declined to go into detail.

"Some of it is more regulatory, that's all I can say," Cassidy said.

West Virginia's Sen. Jim Justice said he is in favor of requiring some Medicaid enrollees to work, participate in community service, or attend an educational program at least 80 hours a month to stay on the program, a sentiment shared by many of his GOP colleagues.

"I'm good with every bit of that," he said.

But Justice expects the Senate will make its own changes to the package and that it will be "proud of their own pond."

"Any frog that's not proud of your own pond's not much of a frog," Justice said.

He did not go into detail on what those changes would entail.

SALT shakers

The state and local tax deduction, or SALT, represents another tightrope for Thune, who is no fan of the changes made in the House. But he has said repeatedly this week he understands altering that language too much could mean a Senate-amended version of the bill never makes it back through the House to actually become law.

Thune said outside the White House following a June 4 meeting with Trump and others that there will very likely be changes to SALT.

"There isn't a single Republican senator who cares much about the SALT issue," Thune said. "It's just not an issue that plays." States that are most affected generally don't elect Republicans to the Senate.

The House tax-writing panel originally proposed raising the SALT cap from \$10,000 to \$30,000, but Johnson had to raise that to \$40,000 in order to secure votes from House Republicans who represent higher tax states like California, New Jersey and New York. The revised cap would benefit more high-income taxpayers in their states.

"In 2017, that was one of the best reforms we had in the bill," Thune said. "But we understand it's about 51 and 218. So we will work with our House counterparts and with the White House to try to get that issue in a place where we can deliver the votes and get the bill across the finish line."

Republicans hold 53 seats in the Senate, but can rely on Vice President J.D. Vance to break a tied vote if necessary.

At least 218 House lawmakers must vote to pass bills when all 435 seats are filled. But with three vacancies at the moment, legislation can move through that chamber with 216 votes. The GOP has 220 seats at the moment, meaning Johnson can afford four defections on party-line bills.

North Dakota Sen. John Hoeven told reporters this week that he'd like to see GOP senators rework the SALT section of the bill, even if that causes challenges for Speaker Johnson's ability to pass a final version.

"Let's talk about SALT, for example. The House has a very large SALT number. The Senate is probably going to take a look at that," Hoeven said. "There'll be a lot of areas we can look at. There'll be other things we're going to look at. We'd like to get to \$2 trillion in savings."

Ohio Sen. Bernie Moreno joined in putting his House colleagues on notice that they likely won't get the

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agreement they struck with the speaker in the final version of the bill.

"I think we're going to make common-sense changes. For example, the SALT cap, by the way, something that definitely helps very wealthy people in blue states," Moreno said. "I think that cap, the 400% increase, is too much, so we're going to work on tweaking that."

Hawley, of Missouri, speaking more generally about the tax provisions, said he would like the Senate to make sure middle-class Americans benefit from the tax changes, just as much as companies.

"I want to be clear, I'm in favor of additional tax relief for working people. So my view is this corporate tax rate, which they lowered in 2017, they made that permanent back then. I know some workers that would like permanent tax relief," Hawley said. "So I think it's imperative that we do some addition to tax relief for workers. So I think that's important."

A new \$4 trillion debt limit

Deficit hawks in the Senate have also voiced objections to raising the nation's debt limit by \$4 trillion, arguing that GOP leaders haven't done enough to assuage their concerns about the nation's fiscal trajectory.

Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul argued that the debt limit increase is more about next year's midterm elections than good governance.

"This is really about avoiding having to talk about the debt during election times because people like to go home and talk to the Rotary or the Lions Club and tell them how they're fiscally conservative and they're against debt," Paul said. "It's embarrassing to them to have to vote to keep raising the debt. But they're unwilling to have the courage to actually look at all spending."

Paul suggested that House Republicans created problems by inflating some of the spending levels in their package, including to continue construction of a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Paul is chairman of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

"The \$46.5 billion for the wall is eight times higher than the current cost of the wall. If you're going to do 1,000 miles, you can actually do it for \$6.5 billion. They want \$46.5 billion," Paul said. "We can't be fiscally conservative until it comes to the border, and then we're no longer fiscally conservative."

The border wall has been a constant focus for Trump, who made it a central part of his 2016 presidential campaign, when he said repeatedly that the United States would build it and Mexico would pay for it.

South Carolina's Lindsey Graham, chairman of the Budget Committee, hinted during a brief interview that Congress can only cut so much spending without going near programs like Social Security, which accounted for \$1.5 trillion in expenditures last year, or Medicare, which spent \$865 billion. Both are normally considered untouchable.

"I think we're going to make some changes to try to find more spending reductions. I think that's a fair criticism of the bill, but you can't do Social Security by law," Graham said, referring to one of the many rules that govern the reconciliation process. "Nobody's proposed anything in the Medicare area."

Graham added that "trying to make the bill more fiscally responsible is a good thing, but we need to pass it."

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.

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

Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom's Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

Immigration surge cost state, local governments \$9 billion in 2023, nonpartisan CBO says

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JUNE 6, 2025 11:18 AM



Education was one of the primary areas of additional cost states and local governments that saw a surge in new immigration starting in 2021. (Photo by Phillippe Gerber/Getty Images)

WASHINGTON — The unprecedented increase in immigration starting in 2021 brought extra revenue to states and local governments, but the cost of services for those newly arrived migrants was greater, leading to a net cost of \$9.2 billion in 2023, according to a report the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office published Thursday.

The roughly 4.3 million immigrants who arrived from 2021 to 2023 paid about \$10.1 billion in state and local taxes in 2023, according to the report. Accounting for births and deaths, the net population gain from immigration in those years was about 4.4 million, CBO said.

Across the country, state and local governments spent about \$19.3 billion in goods and services for those immigrants, with costs concentrated on providing education and shelter, CBO estimated.

The \$9.2 billion direct net cost amounts to 0.3% of state and local spending, CBO said.

"State and local governments saw both their tax

revenues and their spending increase in 2023 as a result of the surge in immigration," the CBO report said. "In CBO's estimation, the increase in spending was greater than the increase in taxes."

In an alternative calculation, CBO estimated that when accounting for indirect effects — for example, increases in property taxes and economic activity, greater demand for government services — the surge led to a spending increase of \$28.6 billion and increased revenue of \$18.8 billion for state and local governments, netting a loss of roughly \$9.8 billion.

More than half of newly arrived immigrants resided in six states: California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York and Texas.

CBO estimated that in 2023, about 550,000 children in public schools, or 1.1% of students, were immigrants who'd arrived since 2021.

"In CBO's estimation, the surge in immigration directly increased spending for public primary and secondary education by \$5.7 billion, or 0.7 percent, in 2023," according to the report.

Those higher costs were "due to lower English proficiency among the surge population."

"Because recent immigrants are often English-language learners, they tend to need additional instructional and support services," according to the report. "CBO estimates that those services cost state and local governments \$1.2 billion in 2023."

Another high cost was shelter services, CBO found. Four states — New York, Massachusetts, Illinois, and Colorado — "spent a total of \$3.3 billion to provide shelter and related services, including food and legal support, to the surge population in 2023," according to the report.

In 2021, the Biden administration dealt with the highest levels of migration at the southern border in 20 years. In an effort to ease the increase at the U.S.-Mexico border, several programs were created to allow migrants to obtain work permits or enter the country while their asylum cases were pending before immigration court.

A nonpartisan New York think tank that studies domestic and international migration, the Center for Migration Studies, released a report that found the population of people in the United States without

permanent legal status increased to by 2 million to 12.2 million by 2023, using the most recent Census Bureau American Community Survey data.

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

Congressional Hispanic Caucus to keep pressure on immigration detention following arrests

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JUNE 6, 2025 11:13 AM

WASHINGTON — Members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus pledged Thursday to make more visits to immigration detention centers across the country to carry out oversight of the Trump administration's crackdown.

The members detailed their visits to various detention centers over last week's recess. Many people they visited in those centers were arrested while attending their court hearings or had no criminal record, they said.

"What we and our colleagues witnessed was the system being used to punish people simply for being an immigrant, and we all know that cruelty is the point with this president," said New York Democratic Rep. Nydia Velázquez.

Continued oversight of immigration detention centers will only become more important, members of the all-Democrat caucus said, if congressional Republicans succeed in passing a massive tax and spending bill that would increase immigration enforcement funding by billions, including for detention centers.

Republicans are moving ahead with a legislative procedure known as reconciliation to fulfill President Donald Trump's priorities without needing 60 votes in the U.S. Senate.

The vow to continue with oversight at detention centers comes after three congressional Democrats said they were accosted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials at a New Jersey detention center last month. That incident ended with the Newark Mayor Ras Baraka arrested, and Rep. LaMonica McIver facing federal charges. The charges against Baraka were dismissed about two weeks later.

"We will not succumb to any intimidation tactics," CHC Chair Rep. Adriano Espaillat of New York said. "We will continue to comply with our duty to have oversight of these detention centers, and we will visit them within the parameters of the law."

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



Delaney Hall in Newark, New Jersey, the largest immigrant detention center on the East Coast, was the sight of a May demonstration against the Trump administration's immigration policies. (Photo

by New Jersey Monitor)

Collateral arrests

Washington state Democratic Rep. Pramila Jayapal, a former chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, slammed the Trump administration's expansion of government contracts with private prison companies to detain migrants.

"It is critically important that we members of Congress continue to investigate what are supposed to be civil detention centers, but instead operate as private for-profit prisons with substandard medical care and

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they make billions of dollars ... in contracts from this administration detaining people of all legal statuses," Jayapal said.

The detention center in New Jersey reopened this year and ICE awarded GEO Group Inc. with a \$1 billion contract to run the facility.

Jayapal said when she conducted an oversight visit at the Tacoma, Washington, Northwest ICE Processing Center, which was formerly known as the Northwest Detention Center, over the recess, some of the people being detained were caught up in immigration enforcement raids targeting other people. Such immigration arrests are known as collateral arrests.

She said one woman she spoke to who was detained had been in the country for more than 20 years, but did not have a permanent legal status.

"She was swept up in a raid at the workplace, and she was detained less than a week before she was going to get married to a U.S. citizen," Jayapal said.

She said another person she talked to was a man who had been in the U.S. for 31 years and is a permanent legal resident.

"These are not the so-called worst of the worst that Trump kept saying he was going to go after," Jayapal said. "These are simply people who love this country, who have been in this country for decades, who are married to U.S. citizens and have U.S. citizen children, and do not understand why the country they love would be doing this to them."

Democratic Rep. Lou Correa of California, said that he's come across immigrants in detention centers who were arrested while attending their court hearings.

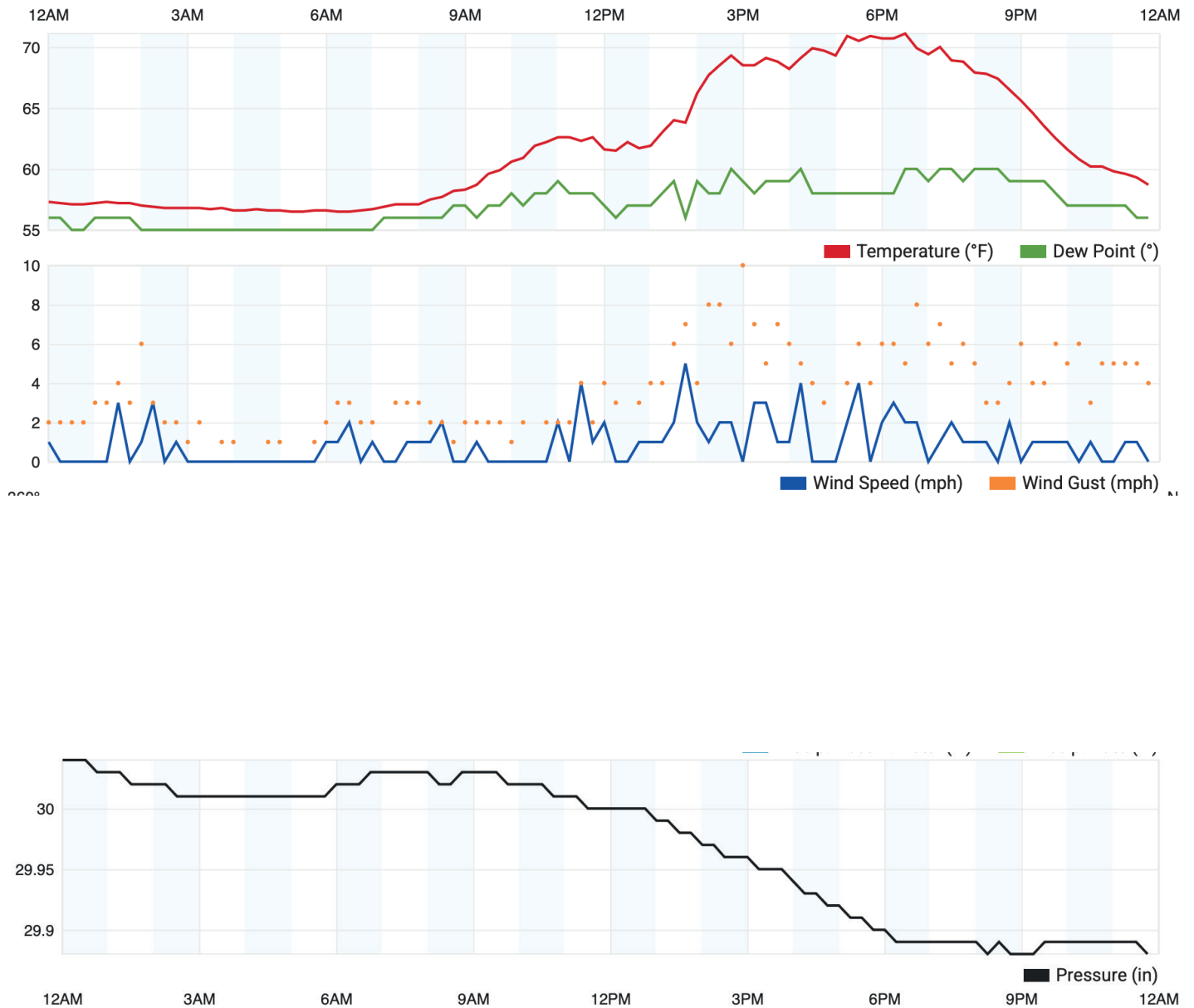
"These individuals are following the law, showing up ... to court hearings, and they're having their removal cases dismissed," he said. "Immediately as they walk out of that courtroom, they are rearrested and put into what is called an expedited removal process ... to quickly get them out of the country."

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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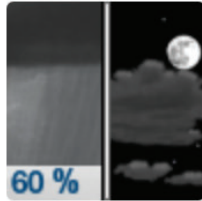
Today



High: 80 °F

Patchy Fog
then Partly
Sunny

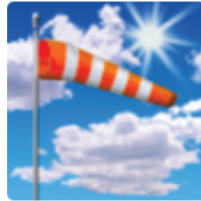
Tonight



Low: 49 °F

Showers
Likely then
Partly Cloudy

Sunday



High: 71 °F

Increasing
Clouds and
Breezy

Sunday Night



Low: 48 °F

Chance
Showers and
Breezy

Monday



High: 69 °F

Partly Sunny
and Breezy



Severe Weather Threat Overview

June 7, 2025
3:43 AM

This Afternoon and Evening

Timing/Location

Storms will mainly impact northern South Dakota beginning this afternoon and continuing through the evening.

Primary Threats for the GREEN areas.

Tornado Potential

Very Low Low Medium High

Max Hail Size

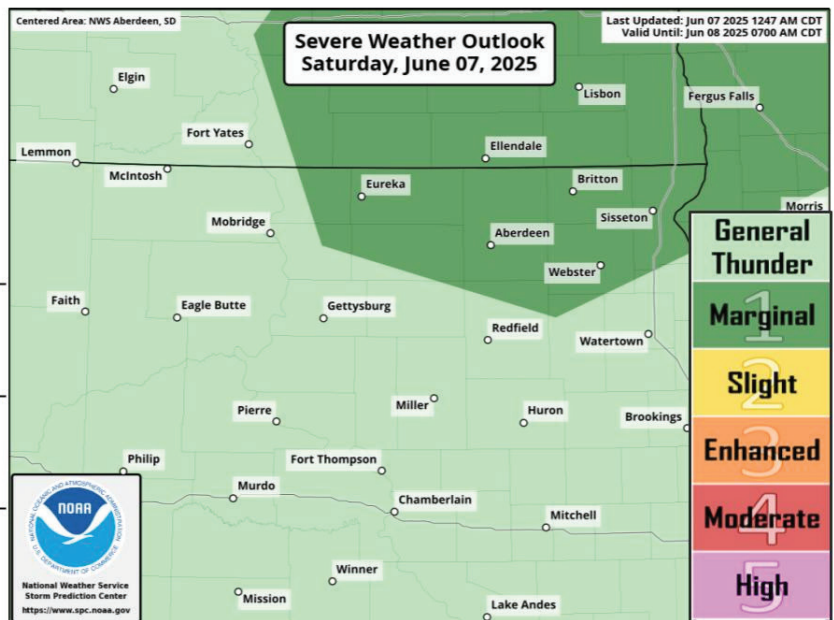
Dimes Quarters Golfball Baseball

Max Wind Speed

< 60 mph 60-70 mph 70-80 mph > 80mph

Heavy Rain/Flooding Potential

Very Low Low Medium High



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

There is a Marginal Risk (level 1 of 5) of severe weather in place for this afternoon and evening over north-central and northeastern SD ahead of a cold front. Main threats include damaging winds of up to 60-70 mph and small hail less than an inch in size.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 72 °F at 5:47 PM

Low Temp: 56 °F at 6:13 AM

Wind: 10 mph at 2:30 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 37 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 99 in 2021

Record Low: 28 in 1901

Average High: 78

Average Low: 53

Average Precip in June.: 0.78

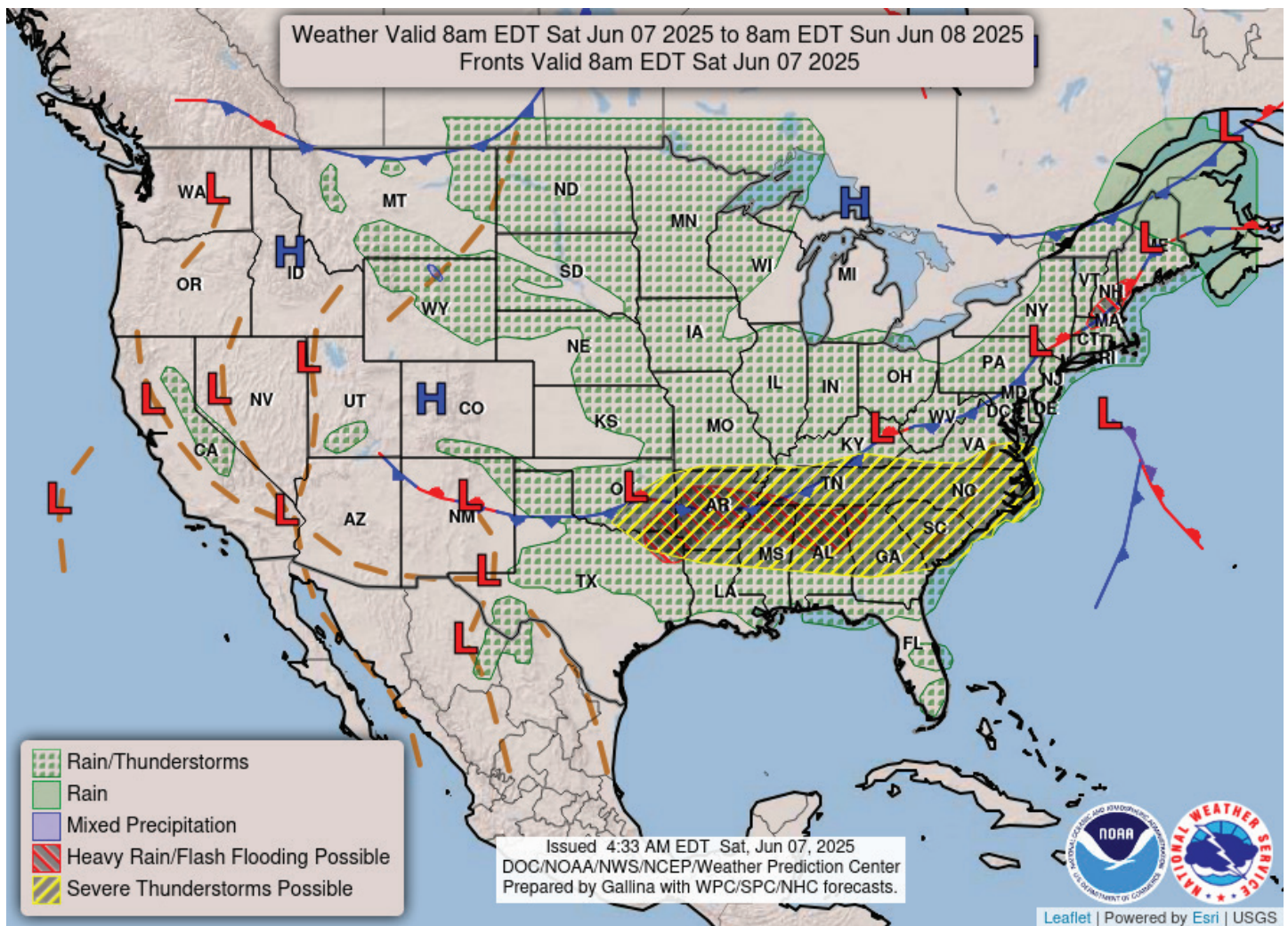
Precip to date in June: 0.36

Average Precip to date: 8.03

Precip Year to Date: 6.41

Sunset Tonight: 9:20:11 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:42:18 am



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Today in Weather History

June 7th, 1982: Lightning struck a house in Sunshine Acres, north of Pierre, and the ensuing fire destroyed the interior. One person received minor burns. Over two inches of rain fell in Pierre, raising Capital Lake four feet. Water and mud flooded the State Maintenance Building.

June 7th, 1993: A large F3 tornado destroyed a farmstead 9 miles southwest of Tulare. The tornado twisted the house on its foundation, virtually destroying it. This storm also destroyed a barn, three steel bins, three granaries, and two hog houses. The storm killed ten hogs.

At least three more tornadoes damaged several farms in the Tulare and Redfield areas. One tornado hit a farm northwest of Tulare, causing about 65,000 dollars in damage, and another damaged a farm five miles west of Redfield.

1816 - A famous June snow occurred in the northeastern U.S. Danville VT reported drifts of snow and sleet twenty inches deep. The Highlands were white all day, and flurries were observed as far south as Boston MA. (David Ludlum)

1972 - Richmond VA experienced its worst flood of record as rains from Hurricane Agnes pushed the water level at the city locks to a height of 36.5 feet, easily topping the previous record of thirty feet set in 1771. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms in the Laramie Mountains of eastern Wyoming produced golf ball size hail, and up to five inches of rain in just one hour. Half a dozen cities in the Upper Mississippi Valley reported record high temperatures for the date, including La Crosse, WI, with a reading of 97 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)(Storm Data)

1988 - Snow whitened some of the mountains of northern California and northwestern Nevada. Twenty-six cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Rapid City SD with a reading of 104 degrees, and Miles City, MT, with a high of 106 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from southern Oklahoma and eastern Texas to northwestern Florida through the day and night. Thunderstorms spawned 22 tornadoes, including a dozen in Louisiana, and there were 119 reports of large hail and damaging winds. A strong (F-2) tornado at Gross Tete LA killed two persons, injured thirty others, and another strong (F-2) tornado injured 60 persons at Lobdell LA. Softball size hail was reported at Hillsboro TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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"If it works, don't fix it!"

Most of the time our heart works well, and we rarely pause to think about it. Each day our hearts beat about 100,000 times. It sends 2,000 gallons of blood surging through the veins of our bodies, nourishing our organs and tissues.

Although it is no bigger than our fist, it keeps blood flowing through 60,000 miles of vessels that wind through our muscles and flesh, and is held together by our porous skin.

It is the controlling force of our lives. When it fails, life ends.

The heart, in the Bible, is recognized as the center of our emotions, rational and irrational thoughts, our wills and desires.

In the Bible, the heart is the "seat" of the entire personality.

And, the heart, as described in the Bible, can be our most fundamental problem.

What we store, keep or hide in our heart, is what we become and who we really are.

So, as long as we "keep our mouths shut" we can deceive others.

But, unfortunately, that does not seem to be possible.

In the blink of an eye or a moment in time, we "let our guard down" and our true "self" becomes exposed to the world.

We are "found out."

Solomon wrote that "The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value."

Jesus said, "How can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

We hear amazing stories about surgeons who are skilled at "heart transplants." But a heart transplant does not correct the problem of evil.

Only Christ can correct that problem. So, He does not transplant hearts. He transforms hearts. When that happens, lives change.

Prayer: Lord, come into and rule our hearts so others will know that Your Son, our Savior, rules our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Scripture: "The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value." Proverbs 10:20

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.06.25

16 40 54 56 57 3

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$243,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.04.25

1 6 26 41 51 8

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$37,400,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 46 Mins 58
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.06.25

10 15 38 41 45 18

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 1 Mins 58
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.04.25

4 12 16 22 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$21,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 1 Mins 58
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.04.25

13 33 35 36 56 2

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 30 Mins 57
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.04.25

5 17 23 35 45 24

Power Play: 10x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$44,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 30 Mins 57
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

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Upcoming Groton Events

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

News from the **AP** Associated Press

What it would take to convert a jet from Qatar into Air Force One to safely fly Trump

By TARA COPP and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump really wants to fly on an upgraded Air Force One — but making that happen could depend on whether he's willing to cut corners with security.

As government lawyers sort out the legal arrangement for accepting a luxury jet from the Qatari royal family, another crucial conversation is unfolding about modifying the plane so it's safe for the American president.

Installing capabilities equivalent to the decades-old 747s now used as Air Force One would almost certainly consign the project to a similar fate as Boeing's replacement initiative, which has been plagued by delays and cost overruns.

Air Force Secretary Troy Meink told lawmakers Thursday that those security modifications would cost less than \$400 million but provided no details.

Satisfying Trump's desire to use the new plane before the end of his term could require leaving out some of those precautions, however.

A White House official said Trump wants the Qatari jet ready as soon as possible while adhering to security standards. The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, did not provide details on equipment issues or the timeline.

Trump has survived two assassination attempts, and Iran allegedly also plotted to kill him, so he's well aware of the danger he faces. However, he seems willing to take some chances with security, particularly when it comes to communications. For example, he likes to keep his personal phone handy despite the threat of hacks.

He boasted this week that the government got the jet "for free," saying, "We need it as Air Force One until the other ones are done."

Here's a look at what it would take to make the Qatari plane into a presidential transport:

What makes a plane worthy of being Air Force One?

Air Force One is the call sign for any plane that's carrying the president. The first aircraft to get the designation was a propeller-powered C-54 Skymaster, which ferried Franklin D. Roosevelt to the Yalta Conference in 1945. It featured a conference room with a bulletproof window.

Things are a lot more complicated these days. Boeing has spent years stripping down and rebuilding two 747s to replace the versions that have carried presidents for more than three decades. The project is slated to cost more than \$5.3 billion and may not be finished before Trump leaves office.

A 2021 report made public through the Freedom of Information Act outlines the unclassified requirements for the replacement 747s under construction. At the top of the list — survivability and communications.

The government decided more than a decade ago that the new planes had to have four engines so they could remain airborne if one or two fail, said Deborah Lee James, who was Air Force secretary at the time. That creates a challenge because 747s are no longer manufactured, which could make spare parts harder to come by.

Air Force One also has to have the highest level of classified communications, anti-jamming capabilities and external protections against foreign surveillance, so the president can securely command military forces and nuclear weapons during a national emergency. It's an extremely sensitive and complex system, including video, voice and data transmissions.

James said there are anti-missile measures and shielding against radiation or an electromagnetic pulse that could be caused by a nuclear blast.

"The point is, it remains in flight no matter what," she said.

Will Trump want all the security bells and whistles?

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If the Qatari plane is retrofitted to presidential standards, it could cost \$1.5 billion and take years, according to a U.S. official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide details that aren't publicly available.

Testifying before Congress this week, Meink discounted such estimates, arguing that some of the costs associated with retrofitting the Qatari plane would have been spent anyway as the Air Force moves to build the long-delayed new presidential planes, including buying aircraft for training and to have spares available if needed.

In response, Rep. Joe Courtney, D-Conn., said that based on the contract costs for the planes that the Air Force is building, it would cost about \$1 billion to strip down the Qatar plane, install encrypted communications, harden its defenses and make other required upgrades.

James said simply redoing the wiring means "you'd have to break that whole thing wide open and almost start from scratch."

Trump, as commander in chief, could waive some of these requirements. He could decide to skip shielding systems from an electromagnetic pulse, leaving his communications more vulnerable in case of a disaster but shaving time off the project.

After all, Boeing has already scaled back its original plans for the new 747s. Their range was trimmed by 1,200 nautical miles, and the ability to refuel while airborne was scrapped.

Paul Eckloff, a former leader of protection details at the Secret Service, expects the president would get the final say.

"The Secret Service's job is to plan for and mitigate risk," he said. "It can never eliminate it."

If Trump does waive some requirements, James said that should be kept under wraps because "you don't want to advertise to your potential adversaries what the vulnerabilities of this new aircraft might be."

It's unlikely that Trump will want to skimp on the plane's appearance. He keeps a model of a new Air Force One in the Oval Office, complete with a darker color scheme that echoes his personal jet instead of the light blue design that's been used for decades.

What happens next?

Trump toured the Qatari plane in February when it was parked at an airport near Mar-a-Lago, his Florida resort. Air Force chief of staff Gen. David Allvin was there, too.

The U.S. official said the jet needs maintenance but not more than what would be expected of a four-engine plane of its complexity.

Sen. Tammy Duckworth, an Illinois Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said it would be irresponsible to put the president and national security equipment aboard the Qatari plane "without knowing that the aircraft is fully capable of withstanding a nuclear attack."

"It's a waste of taxpayer dollars," she said.

Meanwhile, Boeing's project has been hampered by stress corrosion cracks on the planes and excessive noise in the cabins from the decompression system, among other issues that have delayed delivery, according to a Government Accountability Office report released last year.

Boeing referred questions to the Air Force, which said in a statement that it's working with the aircraft manufacturer to find ways to accelerate the delivery of at least one of the 747s.

Even so, the aircraft will have to be tested and flown in real-world conditions to ensure no other issues.

James said it remains to be seen how Trump would handle any of those challenges.

"The normal course of business would say there could be delays in certifications," she said. "But things seem to get waived these days when the president wants it."

Russian drones and missiles target Ukraine's eastern city of Kharkiv, killing 3, officials say

By SAMYA KULLAB and VOLODYMYR YURCHUK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A large Russian drone-and-missile attack targeted Ukraine's eastern city of Kharkiv on Saturday, killing at least three people and injuring 21, local officials said. The barrage — the latest in near daily widescale attacks — included aerial glide bombs that have become part of a fierce Russian

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onslaught in the three-year war.

The intensity of the Russian attacks on Ukraine over the past weeks has further dampened hopes that the warring sides could reach a peace deal anytime soon — especially after Kyiv recently embarrassed the Kremlin with a surprising drone attack on military airfields deep inside Russia.

According to Ukraine's Air Force, Russia struck with 215 missiles and drones overnight, and Ukrainian air defenses shot down and neutralized 87 drones and seven missiles.

Several other areas in Ukraine were also hit, including the regions of Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Odesa, and the city of Ternopil, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said in a post on X.

"To put an end to Russia's killing and destruction, more pressure on Moscow is required, as are more steps to strengthen Ukraine," he said.

The Russian Defense Ministry on Saturday said its forces carried out a nighttime strike on Ukrainian military targets, including ammunition depots, drone assembly workshops, and weaponry repair stations. There was no comment from Moscow on the reports of casualties in Kharkiv.

Kharkiv's mayor, Ihor Terekhov, said the strikes also damaged 18 apartment buildings and 13 private homes. Terekhov said it was "the most powerful attack" on the city since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Kharkiv's regional governor Oleh Syniehubov said two districts in the city were struck with three missiles, five aerial glide bombs and 48 drones. Among the injured were two children, a baby boy and a 14-year old girl, he added.

In the Dnipropetrovsk province further south, two women aged 45 and 88 were injured, according to local Gov. Serhii Lysak.

Russian shelling also killed a couple in their 50s in the southern city of Kherson, close to the front lines, local Gov. Oleksandr Prokudin reported in a Facebook post.

Meanwhile, Russia's defense ministry said its forces shot down 36 Ukrainian drones overnight, over the country's south and west, including near the capital. Drone debris injured two civilians in the suburbs of Moscow, local Gov. Andrei Vorobyov reported.

On Friday, Russia struck six Ukrainian territories, killing at least six people and injuring about 80. Among the dead were three emergency responders in Kyiv, one person in Lutsk and two people in Chernihiv.

A U.S.-led diplomatic push for a settlement has brought two rounds of direct peace talks between delegations from Russia and Ukraine, though the negotiations delivered no significant breakthroughs. The sides remain far apart on their terms for an end to the fighting.

Ukraine has offered an unconditional 30-day ceasefire and a meeting between its President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian leader Vladimir Putin to break the deadlock. But the Kremlin has effectively rejected a truce and hasn't budged from its demands.

U.S. President Donald Trump said this week that Putin told him Moscow would respond to Ukraine's attack on Russian military airfields last Sunday.

Trump also said that it might be better to let Ukraine and Russia "fight for a while" before pulling them apart and pursuing peace. Trump's comments were a remarkable detour from his often-stated appeals to stop the war and signaled he may be giving up on recent peace efforts.

Wildfires force another 1,000 residents from their homes in the Canadian province of Manitoba

WINNIPEG, Manitoba (AP) — Wildfires forced a further 1,000 people to flee their homes in Manitoba, one of two Canadian provinces under a state of emergency that has led to thousands of evacuations.

The town of Snow Lake, Manitoba, issued a mandatory evacuation order for its residents Friday as a large wildfire threatens the area.

That fire, which has now grown to more than 3,000 square kilometers (1,058 square miles, or over twice the size of Los Angeles), has already forced out all 5,000 residents of the nearby city of Flin Flon and a thousand more in surrounding cottages and homes.

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When the Snow Lake evacuees are added in, Manitoba has about 19,000 displaced from their homes. There are 27 total fires in the province of Manitoba, eight of them out of control.

Smoke from the Canadian wildfires has worsened air quality in eastern Canada and the U.S. The fires have sent smoke as far as Europe.

Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew said evacuees have found a place to stay with friends or family, in hotels or in congregate shelters.

Scott Moe, premier of neighboring Saskatchewan province, said two people were charged with setting wildfires. He said one of them was charged in relation to a fire around La Ronge, Saskatchewan, which has forced 7,000 people to flee their homes.

There are 24 active wildfires burning in the province of Saskatchewan, forcing between 10,000 and 15,000 people from their homes.

"Many if not virtually all of the fires that we're dealing with in Saskatchewan ... are human-caused. Some of those have been intentionally human-caused," Moe said.

The province is also under a state of emergency, making it easier for different levels of government to coordinate a response.

Moe said they are in daily contact with the federal government but have not yet asked for the military to help airlift out evacuees as they have so far been able to get them out by road.

He said the Red Cross is also working to set up congregate shelters for evacuees in Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert.

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

A top Taliban official offers amnesty to Afghans who fled the country and urges them to return

The Associated Press undefined

A top Taliban official said on Saturday that all Afghans who fled the country after the collapse of the former Western-backed government are free to return home, promising they would not be harmed if they come back.

Taliban Prime Minister Mohammad Hassan Akhund made the amnesty offer in his message for the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Adha, also known as the "Feast of Sacrifice."

The offer comes days after U.S. President Donald Trump announced a sweeping travel ban on 12 countries, including Afghanistan. The measure largely bars Afghans hoping to resettle in the United States permanently as well as those hoping to go to the U.S. temporarily, such as for university study.

Trump also suspended a core refugee program in January, all but ending support for Afghans who had allied with the U.S. and leaving tens of thousands of them stranded.

Afghans in neighboring Pakistan who are awaiting resettlement are also dealing with a deportation drive by the Islamabad government to get them out of the country. Almost a million have left Pakistan since October 2023 to avoid arrest and expulsion.

Akhund's holiday message was posted on the social platform X.

"Afghans who have left the country should return to their homeland," he said. "Nobody will harm them."

"Come back to your ancestral land and live in an atmosphere of peace," he added, and instructed officials to properly manage services for returning refugees and to ensure they were given shelter and support.

He also used the occasion to criticize the media for making what he said were "false judgements" about Afghanistan's Taliban rulers and their policies.

"We must not allow the torch of the Islamic system to be extinguished," he said. "The media should avoid false judgments and should not minimize the accomplishments of the system. While challenges exist, we must remain vigilant."

The Taliban swept into the capital Kabul and seized most of Afghanistan in a blitz in mid-August 2021 as the U.S. and NATO forces were in the last weeks of their pullout from the country after 20 years of war.

The offensive prompted a mass exodus, with tens of thousands of Afghans thronging the airport in chaotic scenes, hoping for a flight out on the U.S. military airlift. People also fled across the border, to neighboring Iran and Pakistan.

Among those escaping the new Taliban rulers were also former government officials, journalists, activists, those who had helped the U.S. during its campaign against the Taliban.

Israel says it has retrieved the body of a Thai hostage kidnapped into Gaza on Oct. 7, 2023

By SAM MEDNICK and MOHAMMAD JAHJOUH Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel says it has retrieved the body of a Thai hostage kidnapped into Gaza on Oct. 7, 2023, as it continues its military offensive across the strip, killing at least 22 people overnight, according to health officials.

The Prime Minister's office said Saturday that the body of Thai citizen Nattapong Pinta was returned to Israel in a special military operation.

Pinta was kidnapped from Kibbutz Nir Oz and killed in captivity near the start of the war, said the government.

This comes two days after the bodies of two Israeli-American hostages were retrieved. Fifty-five hostages remain in Gaza, of whom Israel says more than half are dead.

The defense minister said Saturday that Pinta's body was retrieved from the Rafah area. He had come to Israel from Thailand to work in agriculture.

The army said he was taken into Gaza by the Mujahideen Brigades, the small armed group that it said had also abducted and killed Shiri Bibas and her two small children. It's also the same group that took the two Israeli-American hostages, Judith Weinstein and Gad Haggai, whose bodies were retrieved by the army Thursday.

Israel said it found Pinta's body based on information received from the hostage task force and military intelligence.

A statement from the hostage forum, which supports the hostages, said it stands with Pinta's family and shares in their grief. It called on the country's decision makers to bring home the remaining hostages and give those who have died a proper burial.

Thais were the largest group of foreigners held captive by Hamas militants. Many of the Thai agricultural workers lived in compounds on the outskirts of southern Israeli kibbutzim and towns, and Hamas militants overran those places first. A total of 46 Thais have been killed during the conflict, according to Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Before Pinta's body was retrieved, three Thai hostages remained in captivity and two were confirmed dead. The fate of Pinta was uncertain until today, according to the hostage forum.

The retrieval of Pinta's body comes as Israel continues its military campaign across Gaza. Hospital officials said they received the bodies of nearly two dozen people Saturday.

Four strikes hit the Muwasi area in southern Gaza between Rafah and Khan Younis. In northern Gaza, one strike hit an apartment, killing seven people including a mother and five children. Their bodies were taken to Shifa hospital.

Israel said Saturday that it's responding to Hamas' "barbaric attacks" and is dismantling its capabilities. It said it follows international law and takes all feasible precautions to mitigate civilian harm.

Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in the Oct. 7 attack and abducted 251 hostages. They are still holding 55 hostages, around a third of them believed to be alive, after most of the rest were released in ceasefire agreements or other deals. Israeli forces have rescued eight living hostages from Gaza and recovered dozens of bodies.

Israel's military campaign has killed more than 54,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants. The offensive has

destroyed large parts of Gaza and displaced around 90% of its population of roughly 2 million Palestinians.

Marchand scores in 2nd OT, Panthers beat Oilers 5-4 in Game 2 to even the Stanley Cup Final

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Hockey Writer

EDMONTON, Alberta (AP) — After allowing the latest tying goal in Stanley Cup Final history, the Florida Panthers kept the chatter going at intermission before overtime. Some guys exchanged predictions on who was going to score the winner.

It turned out to be Brad Marchand in double overtime to give the defending champions a 5-4 victory over the Edmonton Oilers 5-4 in Game 2 on Friday night to even the series.

"To be honest, I blacked out," Marchand said. "I don't even know where it went. It was a fortuitous bounce. We'll take it."

Marchand's second goal of the night 8:04 into the second OT allowed Florida to escape with a split after Corey Perry tied it with 17.8 seconds left in the third period and Stuart Skinner pulled for an extra attacker. Each of the first two games this final have gone to overtime, the first time that has happened since 2014 and just the sixth in NHL history.

"Obviously a long game," said defenseman Seth Jones, who led the Panthers in ice time at 34:15. "We came here for a split and got it and just going to recover now."

Much like last year and the playoff run to this point, Sergei Bobrovsky was dialed in when he was needed the most, making some unreal saves while stopping 42 of the 46 shots he faced — including 14 in the overtimes.

"He gives us a chance every night," winger Evan Rodrigues said. "That's all you can ask for. Some big saves, key saves at key moments, and we're not taking him for granted, that's for sure."

His teammates provided the necessary goal support.

Along with Marchand, Sam Bennett scored his postseason-leading 13th goal and NHL-record 12th on the road. Jones scored into a wide-open net after some spectacular tic-tac-toe passing, and fellow defenseman Dmitry Kulikov tied it with a shot through traffic that Skinner almost certainly did not see.

Kulikov's goal came after Florida controlled play for several minutes in the second, hemming Edmonton in its zone shift after shift and piling up a 34-13 advantage in shot attempts during the period. Marchand's OT goal was his 10th career goal in the final to lead all active players.

Game 3 is Monday night as the teams traverse the continent and play shifts to Sunrise.

"Each game could've went either way," Oilers coach Kris Knoblauch said. "Obviously when you win the first one, you're disappointed not to win the second."

The Panthers wrested home-ice advantage away from the Oilers by splitting the first two, rebounding from a Game 1 overtime loss and asserting they won't go quietly against Draisaitl and Connor McDavid looking like they'll do everything in their power to hoist the Cup for the first time.

Of course, those stars had their moments. They assisted on Evan Bouchard's goal when coach Kris Knoblauch put them on the ice together, and McDavid stickhandled through multiple defenders in highlight-reel fashion to set up Draisaitl scoring on the power play.

There were a lot of those — 10 in total — after officials whistled 14 penalties, including three in the first four minutes. Each team had a few calls it was not happy with, though most of that evened out over the course of the game.

Can an American pope apply US-style fundraising and standards to fix troubled Vatican finances?

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — As a bishop in Peru, Robert Prevost was often on the lookout for used cars that he could buy cheap and fix up himself for use in parishes around his diocese. With cars that were really

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broken down, he'd watch YouTube videos to learn how to fix them.

That kind of make-do-with-less, fix-it-yourself mentality could serve Pope Leo XIV well as he addresses one of the greatest challenges facing him as pope: The Holy See's chronic, 50 million to 60 million euro (\$57-68 million) structural deficit, 1 billion euro (\$1.14 billion) pension fund shortfall and declining donations that together pose something of an existential threat to the central government of the 1.4-billion strong Catholic Church.

As a Chicago-born math major, canon lawyer and two-time superior of his global Augustinian religious order, the 69-year-old pope presumably can read a balance sheet and make sense of the Vatican's complicated finances, which have long been mired in scandal. Whether he can change the financial culture of the Holy See, consolidate reforms Pope Francis started and convince donors that their money is going to good use is another matter.

Leo already has one thing going for him: his American-ness. U.S. donors have long been the economic life support system of the Holy See, financing everything from papal charity projects abroad to restorations of St. Peter's Basilica at home. Leo's election as the first American pope has sent a jolt of excitement through U.S. Catholics, some of whom had soured on donating to the Vatican after years of unrelenting stories of mismanagement, corruption and scandal, according to interviews with top Catholic fundraisers, philanthropists and church management experts.

"I think the election of an American is going to give greater confidence that any money given is going to be cared for by American principles, especially of stewardship and transparency," said the Rev. Roger Landry, director of the Vatican's main missionary fundraising operation in the U.S., the Pontifical Mission Societies.

"So there will be great hope that American generosity is first going to be appreciated and then secondly is going to be well handled," he said. "That hasn't always been the circumstance, especially lately."

Reforms and unfinished business

Pope Francis was elected in 2013 on a mandate to reform the Vatican's opaque finances and made progress during his 12-year pontificate, mostly on the regulatory front. With help from the late Australian Cardinal George Pell, Francis created an economy ministry and council made up of clergy and lay experts to supervise Vatican finances, and he wrestled the Italian-dominated bureaucracy into conforming to international accounting and budgetary standards.

He authorized a landmark, if deeply problematic, corruption trial over a botched London property investment that convicted a once-powerful Italian cardinal. And he punished the Vatican's Secretariat of State that had allowed the London deal to go through by stripping it of its ability to manage its own assets.

But Francis left unfinished business and his overall record, at least according to some in the donor community, is less than positive. Critics cite Pell's frustrated reform efforts and the firing of the Holy See's first-ever auditor general, who says he was ousted because he had uncovered too much financial wrongdoing.

Despite imposing years of belt-tightening and hiring freezes, Francis left the Vatican in somewhat dire financial straits: The main stopgap bucket of money that funds budgetary shortfalls, known as the Peter's Pence, is nearly exhausted, officials say. The 1 billion euro (\$1.14 billion) pension fund shortfall that Pell warned about a decade ago remains unaddressed, though Francis had planned reforms. And the structural deficit continues, with the Holy See logging an 83.5 million euro (\$95 million) deficit in 2023, according to its latest financial report.

As Francis' health worsened, there were signs that his efforts to reform the Vatican's medieval financial culture hadn't really stuck, either. The very same Secretariat of State that Francis had punished for losing tens of millions of euros in the scandalous London property deal somehow ended up heading up a new papal fundraising commission that was announced while Francis was in the hospital. According to its founding charter and statutes, the commission is led by the Secretariat of State's assessor, is composed entirely of Italian Vatican officials with no professional fundraising expertise and has no required external financial oversight.

To some Vatican watchers, the commission smacks of the Italian-led Secretariat of State taking advantage

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of a sick pope to announce a new flow of unchecked donations into its coffers after its 600 million euro (\$684 million) sovereign wealth fund was taken away and given to another office to manage as punishment for the London fiasco.

"There are no Americans on the commission. I think it would be good if there were representatives of Europe and Asia and Africa and the United States on the commission," said Ward Fitzgerald, president of the U.S.-based Papal Foundation. It is made up of wealthy American Catholics that since 1990 has provided over \$250 million (219 million euros) in grants and scholarships to the pope's global charitable initiatives.

Fitzgerald, who spent his career in real estate private equity, said American donors — especially the younger generation — expect transparency and accountability from recipients of their money, and know they can find non-Vatican Catholic charities that meet those expectations.

"We would expect transparency before we would start to solve the problem," he said.

That said, Fitzgerald said he hadn't seen any significant let-up in donor willingness to fund the Papal Foundation's project-specific donations during the Francis pontificate. Indeed, U.S. donations to the Vatican overall have remained more or less consistent even as other countries' offerings declined, with U.S. bishops and individual Catholics contributing more than any other country in the two main channels to donate to papal causes.

A head for numbers and background fundraising

Francis moved Prevost to take over the diocese of Chiclayo, Peru, in 2014. Residents and fellow priests say he consistently rallied funds, food and other life-saving goods for the neediest — experience that suggests he knows well how to raise money when times are tight and how to spend wisely.

He bolstered the local Caritas charity in Chiclayo, with parishes creating food banks that worked with local businesses to distribute donated food, said the Rev. Fidel Purisaca Vigil, a diocesan spokesperson.

In 2019, Prevost inaugurated a shelter on the outskirts of Chiclayo, Villa San Vicente de Paul, to house desperate Venezuelan migrants who had fled their country's economic crisis. The migrants remember him still, not only for helping give them and their children shelter, but for bringing live chickens obtained from a donor.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Prevost launched a campaign to raise funds to build two oxygen plants to provide hard-hit residents with life-saving oxygen. In 2023, when massive rains flooded the region, he personally brought food to the flood-struck zone.

Within hours of his May 8 election, videos went viral on social media of Prevost, wearing rubber boots and standing in a flooded street, pitching a solidarity campaign, "Peru Give a Hand," to raise money for flood victims.

The Rev. Jorge Millán, who lived with Prevost and eight other priests for nearly a decade in Chiclayo, said he had a "mathematical" mentality and knew how to get the job done. Prevost would always be on the lookout for used cars to buy for use around the diocese, Millán said, noting that the bishop often had to drive long distances to reach all of his flock or get to Lima, the capital.

Prevost liked to fix them up himself, and if he didn't know what to do, "he'd look up solutions on YouTube and very often he'd find them," Millán told The Associated Press.

Before going to Peru, Prevost served two terms as prior general, or superior, of the global Augustinian order. While the order's local provinces are financially independent, Prevost was responsible for reviewing their balance sheets and oversaw the budgeting and investment strategy of the order's headquarters in Rome, said the Rev. Franz Klein, the order's Rome-based economist who worked with Prevost.

The Augustinian campus sits on prime real estate just outside St. Peter's Square and supplements revenue by renting out its picturesque terrace to media organizations (including the AP) for major Vatican events, including the conclave that elected Leo pope.

But even Prevost saw the need for better fundraising, especially to help out poorer provinces. Toward the end of his 12-year term and with his support, a committee proposed creation of a foundation, Augustinians in the World. At the end of 2023, it had 994,000 euros (\$1.13 million) in assets and was helping fund self-sustaining projects across Africa, including a center to rehabilitate former child soldiers in Congo.

"He has a very good interest and also a very good feeling for numbers," Klein said. "I have no worry

about the finances of the Vatican in these years because he is very, very clever.”

Search expands for former Army soldier accused of killing his 3 young daughters in Washington state

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Authorities have closed a wide swath of popular campgrounds and backpacking areas along the Pacific Crest Trail in Washington as they search for a former Army soldier wanted in the deaths of his three young daughters.

Dozens of additional law enforcement officers from an array of agencies joined the investigation and search Friday for Travis Caleb Decker, 32, four days after the girls — 9-year-old Paityn Decker, 8-year-old Evelyn Decker and 5-year-old Olivia Decker — were found dead at a remote campsite outside Leavenworth.

The girls’ mother reported them missing the night of May 30 when Decker failed to return them to her home in Wenatchee, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) east of Seattle, after a scheduled visit.

Gov. Bob Ferguson announced Friday night that he was ordering the state’s National Guard to help with the search, saying “we will be providing helicopter transportation for law enforcement as they search in remote areas.”

“The brutal murder of these young children has shocked our state,” he added in a statement on social media. “I’m committed to supporting law enforcement as they seek justice for Paityn, Evelyn and Olivia.”

The Chelan County Sheriff’s Office said in a statement that there were more than 100 officers involved in the search, which covered rugged terrain in the Cascade Mountains of central Washington, and more than 500 tips had poured in from the public.

“Out of an abundance of caution, we have been given notice to, and are working in conjunction with our surrounding counties in the event Mr. Decker moves through the forest into their jurisdiction,” the statement said.

Decker was an infantryman in the Army from March 2013 to July 2021 and deployed to Afghanistan for four months in 2014, according to Army spokesperson Lt. Col. Ruth Castro. From 2014 to 2016, he was an automatic rifleman with the 75th Ranger Regiment at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington.

Last September his ex-wife, Whitney Decker, wrote in a petition to modify their parenting plan that his mental health issues had worsened and that he had become increasingly unstable, often living out of his truck. She sought to restrict him from having overnight visits with the girls until he found housing.

“He has made huge sacrifices to serve our country and loves his girls very much but he has got to get better,” she wrote. “I do not want to keep Travis from the girls at all. ... But I cannot have our girls staying in what is essentially a homeless shelter, at times unsupervised, with dozens of strange men, or staying in a tent or living in his truck with him both in extreme temperatures and unknown areas for their safety.”

Authorities warned people to be on the lookout for Decker and asked those with remote homes, cabins or outbuildings to keep them locked, to leave blinds open so law enforcement can see inside and to leave exterior lights on.

It was unclear if Decker was armed, but the Chelan County Sheriff’s Office said he should be considered dangerous. A reward of up to \$20,000 was offered for information leading to his arrest.

An online fundraiser for Whitney Decker raised more than \$1 million, and friends Amy Edwards, who taught the girls in a theater program called “Short Shakespeareans,” and Mark Belton thanked supporters during a news conference Thursday.

“Their laughter, curiosity and spirit left a mark on all of us,” Edwards said. “They were the kind of children that everyone rooted for, looked forward to seeing and held close in their hearts.”

Edwards and Belton said Whitney Decker hopes the tragedy prompts changes to the state’s Amber Alert system as well as improvements in mental health care for veterans. The night the girls were reported missing, Wenatchee police asked the Washington State Patrol to issue an Amber Alert but it declined, saying that as a custody matter without an imminent threat, the case did not meet the criteria for one.

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The patrol did issue an "endangered missing person alert" the next day, but those do not result in notifications being sent to mobile phones.

As searches expanded for the girls last weekend, a sheriff's deputy found Decker's pickup in the area of Rock Island Campground, northwest of Leavenworth. There were two bloody handprints on the tailgate. The girls' bodies were discovered down an embankment nearby with evidence that they had been bound with zip ties, according to an affidavit filed in support of murder and kidnapping charges against Decker.

County Coroner Wayne Harris said Friday that his office was awaiting pathology results to determine when and how the girls were killed.

Authorities issued closure notices the previous day for that camping area, which lies in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, as well as for a large swath of rugged territory to the north. That included trails and campgrounds along the Pacific Crest Trail, which runs from the Canadian border to Mexico, and around Stehekin, at the northern end of Lake Chelan.

Democratic states double down on laws resisting Trump's immigration crackdown

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

As President Donald Trump's administration targets states and local governments for not cooperating with federal immigration authorities, lawmakers in some Democratic-led states are intensifying their resistance by strengthening state laws restricting such cooperation.

In California alone, more than a dozen pro-immigrant bills passed either the Assembly or Senate this week, including one prohibiting schools from allowing federal immigration officials into nonpublic areas without a judicial warrant.

Other state measures have sought to protect immigrants in housing, employment and police encounters, even as Trump's administration has ramped up arrests as part of his plan for mass deportations.

In Connecticut, legislation pending before Democratic Gov. Ned Lamont would expand a law that already limits when law enforcement officers can cooperate with federal requests to detain immigrants. Among other things, it would let "any aggrieved person" sue municipalities for alleged violations of the state's Trust Act.

Two days after lawmakers gave final approval to the measure, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security included Connecticut on a list of hundreds of "sanctuary jurisdictions" obstructing the enforcement of federal immigration laws. The list later was removed from the department's website after criticism that it errantly included some local governments that support Trump's immigration policies.

States split on whether to aid or resist Trump

Since taking office in January, Trump has enlisted hundreds of state and local law enforcement agencies to help identify immigrants in the U.S. illegally and detain them for potential deportation. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement now lists 640 such cooperative agreements, a nearly fivefold increase under Trump.

Trump also has lifted longtime rules restricting immigration enforcement near schools, churches and hospitals, and ordered federal prosecutors to investigate state or local officials believed to be interfering with his crackdown on illegal immigration. The Department of Justice sued Colorado, Illinois and New York, as well as several cities in those states and New Jersey, alleging their policies violate the U.S. Constitution or federal immigration laws.

Just three weeks after Colorado was sued, Democratic Gov. Jared Polis signed a wide-ranging law expanding the state's protections for immigrants. Among other things, it bars jails from delaying the release of inmates for immigration enforcement and allows penalties of up to \$50,000 for public schools, colleges, libraries, child care centers and health care facilities that collect information about people's immigration status, with some exceptions.

Polis rejected the administration's description of Colorado as a "sanctuary state," asserting that law officers remain "deeply committed" to working with federal authorities on criminal investigations.

"But to be clear, state and local law enforcement cannot be commandeered to enforce federal civil im-

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migration laws," Polis said in a bill-signing statement.

Illinois also has continued to press pro-immigrant legislation. A bill recently given final approval says no child can be denied a free public education because of immigration status — something already guaranteed nationwide under a 1982 U.S. Supreme Court decision. Supporters say the state legislation provides a backstop in case court precedent is overturned.

The bill also requires schools to develop policies on handling requests from federal immigration officials and allows lawsuits for alleged violations of the measure.

Legislation supporting immigrants takes a variety of forms

Democratic-led states are pursuing a wide range of means to protect immigrants.

A new Oregon law bars landlords from inquiring about the immigration status of tenants or applicants. New laws in Washington declare it unprofessional conduct for bail bond agents to enforce civil immigration warrants, prohibit employers from using immigration status to threaten workers and let employees use paid sick leave to attend immigration proceedings for themselves or family members.

Vermont last month repealed a state law that let law enforcement agencies enter into immigration enforcement agreements with federal authorities during state or national emergencies. They now need special permission from the governor to do so.

As passed by the House, Maryland legislation also would have barred local governments from reaching immigration enforcement agreements with the federal government. That provision was removed in the Senate following pushback from some of the seven Maryland counties that currently have agreements.

The final version, which took effect as law at the start of June, forbids public schools and libraries from granting federal immigration authorities access to nonpublic areas without a judicial warrant or "exigent circumstances."

Maryland Del. Nicole Williams said residents' concerns about Trump's immigration policies prompted her to sponsor the legislation.

"We believe that diversity is our strength, and our role as elected officials is to make sure that all of the residents within our community — regardless of their background — feel safe and comfortable," Williams said.

Many new measures reinforce existing policies

Though legislation advancing in Democratic states may shield against Trump's policies, "I would say it's more so to send a message to immigrant communities to let them know that they are welcome," said Juan Avilez, a policy associate at the American Immigration Council, a nonprofit advocacy group.

In California, a law that took effect in 2018 already requires public schools to adopt policies "limiting assistance with immigration enforcement to the fullest extent possible." Some schools have readily applied the law. When DHS officers attempted a welfare check on migrant children at two Los Angeles elementary schools in April, they were denied access by both principals.

Legislation passed by the state Senate would reinforce such policies by specifically requiring a judicial warrant for public schools to let immigration authorities into nonpublic areas, allow students to be questioned or disclose information about students and their families.

"Having ICE in our schools means that you'll have parents who will not want to send their kids to school at all," Democratic state Sen. Scott Wiener said in support of the bill.

But some Republicans said the measure was "injecting partisan immigration policies" into schools.

"We have yet to see a case in California where we have scary people in masks entering schools and ripping children away," said state Sen. Marie Alvarado-Gil. "Let's stop these fear tactics that do us an injustice."

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

By MICHAEL R. SISK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The fourth week of Sean "Diddy" Combs' sex trafficking trial featured testimony

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from the second of two ex-girlfriends who are crucial witnesses in the government's quest to prove sex trafficking and racketeering conspiracy charges against the hip-hop mogul.

Combs, the founder of Bad Boy Records, has pleaded not guilty in the trial, which resumes Monday.

Here are key moments from the past week:

Hotel worker says Combs sought video of Cassie beating

Fearing career ruin, Combs delivered \$100,000 in cash to a security guard for a Los Angeles hotel in return for assurances that he was given the only security footage of Combs' 2016 attack on then-girlfriend Casandra "Cassie" Ventura, the security guard testified.

Eddy Garcia, 33, recounted how the deal came to be, saying he first heard from a fast talking, stuttering and "very nervous" Combs on a phone call seeking to obtain the video of him kicking and dragging Cassie from the hotel's elevator bank into a hallway because "if this got out it could ruin him."

Days later, Garcia said, he was the nervous one when he was greeted in an office building by a smiling Combs who called him "Eddy, my angel" before Garcia turned over a USB drive containing the security footage. Combs then made him sign a nondisclosure agreement promising it was the only copy of the video and that Garcia would never speak of it, he said.

Then, Combs, with a bodyguard at his side, fed stacks of cash from a brown bag into a rectangular money counter machine until it reached \$100,000, Garcia said. He said he pocketed \$30,000 and gave \$50,000 to his boss and \$20,000 to another hotel security guard. Garcia testified under immunity.

A recording of the hotel attack on Cassie aired on CNN last year and security footage along with clips of the security tape recorded by a guard on his personal phone so he could show it to his wife have been shown repeatedly during the trial.

Judge threatens Combs with trial expulsion

Minutes after a prosecutor complained that Combs was seen "nodding furiously" as his lawyer cross examined a witness on Thursday, Judge Arun Subramanian took a look himself and said he saw Combs "nodding vigorously and looking at the jury" and doing the same later when the lawyers and the judge were having a sidebar discussion.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Maurene Comey said prosecutors were concerned because the gestures amounted to "testifying by nodding affirmatively" while his lawyer asked questions.

During a lunch break, defense lawyer Marc Agnifilo promised to speak with Combs and ensure it wouldn't happen again after the judge told him it was "absolutely unacceptable."

The judge sternly responded: "If it happens again, if it happens even once, I will hear an application from the government to give a curative instruction to the jury, which you do not want. Or I will consider taking further measures, which could result in the exclusion of your client from the courtroom."

Mia says she was "brainwashed" to send Combs loving texts after rape

A former Combs personal assistant who testified under the pseudonym "Mia" told jurors that Combs had sexually assaulted her multiple times over her eight-year career, though the attacks were "random, sporadic, so oddly spaced out" so that she thought each was the last.

She said he first molested her and forcibly kissed her at his 40th birthday party before raping her months later in a guest room at his Los Angeles home.

On cross examination, defense lawyer Brian Steel's suggested that she fabricated her claims to cash in on "the #MeToo money grab against Sean Combs."

Steel confronted her with loving texts she sent Combs long after her employment ended and asked how she could tell him, as she did in a 2019 text, that she had imagined Combs rescuing her from a nightmare in which she was trapped in an elevator with R. Kelly, the singer who has since been convicted of sex trafficking.

"I was still brainwashed," Mia explained.

Defense has success with questioning of Cassie's friend

The defense had one of its most successful moments of the trial when attorney Nicole Westmoreland cast doubt on the credibility of a graphic designer who says Combs once dangled her from the balcony of a 17th-floor apartment in Los Angeles.

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Bryana "Bana" Bongolan, a friend of Cassie who is suing Combs, had taken a cellphone image of a softball-size welt on her leg that she said occurred when Combs held her over the balcony for 10 to 15 seconds and then threw her into furniture.

After it was shown to the jury, Westmoreland showed the jury cellphone metadata revealing that the photograph was taken while Combs was on tour in September 2016, staying at a Manhattan hotel.

"You agree that one person can't be in two places at the same time?" Westmoreland asked.

"In, like, theory, yeah," Bongolan responded.

"You're not sure?" Westmoreland asked.

"Hard to answer that one," she said.

Later, Bongolan said she did not recall the exact date, but she had no doubt the balcony episode happened.

Woman recalls sex performances during three years as a Combs' girlfriend

A woman testifying under the pseudonym "Jane" fought through tears and sobs to recount frequent sexual performances she participated in with male sex workers to please Combs and keep their three-year relationship alive until his September arrest.

Jane's testimony, which is likely to continue deep into next week, is identical in many ways to the four-day testimony in the trial's first week by Cassie. Jane said she never wanted to have sex with other men but did it to please Combs because she loved him.

Cassie described having hundreds of drug-fueled sexual performances known as "freak-offs" in which she had sex with male sex workers for days at a time while Combs watched, sometimes directed the activity, and pleased himself.

Jane described having nearly the same experiences from 2021 until last August, though she called them "hotel nights." She said her relationship with Combs began with romance but later became reliant upon the sexual performances, especially after Combs began paying rent for her apartment.

Defense attorneys have insisted that Jane and Combs only engaged in consensual sex and that Jane's protests to Combs in text messages were fueled by jealousy.

The 911 presidency: Trump flexes emergency powers in his second term

By BYRON TAU, SEUNG MIN KIM and CHRIS MEGERIAN The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Call it the 911 presidency.

Despite insisting that the United States is rebounding from calamity under his watch, President Donald Trump is harnessing emergency powers unlike any of his predecessors.

Whether it's leveling punishing tariffs, deploying troops to the border or sidelining environmental regulations, Trump has relied on rules and laws intended only for use in extraordinary circumstances like war and invasion.

An analysis by The Associated Press shows that 30 of Trump's 150 executive orders have cited some kind of emergency power or authority, a rate that far outpaces his recent predecessors.

The result is a redefinition of how presidents can wield power. Instead of responding to an unforeseen crisis, Trump is using emergency powers to supplant Congress' authority and advance his agenda.

"What's notable about Trump is the enormous scale and extent, which is greater than under any modern president," said Ilya Somin, who is representing five U.S. businesses who sued the administration, claiming they were harmed by Trump's so-called "Liberation Day" tariffs.

Because Congress has the power to set trade policy under the Constitution, the businesses convinced a federal trade court that Trump overstepped his authority by claiming an economic emergency to impose the tariffs. An appeals court has paused that ruling while the judges review it.

Growing concerns over actions

The legal battle is a reminder of the potential risks of Trump's strategy. Judges traditionally have given

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presidents wide latitude to exercise emergency powers that were created by Congress. However, there's growing concern that Trump is pressing the limits when the U.S. is not facing the kinds of threats such actions are meant to address.

"The temptation is clear," said Elizabeth Goitein, senior director of the Brennan Center's Liberty and National Security Program and an expert in emergency powers. "What's remarkable is how little abuse there was before, but we're in a different era now."

Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., who has drafted legislation that would allow Congress to reassert tariff authority, said he believed the courts would ultimately rule against Trump in his efforts to single-handedly shape trade policy.

"It's the Constitution. James Madison wrote it that way, and it was very explicit," Bacon said of Congress' power over trade. "And I get the emergency powers, but I think it's being abused. When you're trying to do tariff policy for 80 countries, that's policy, not emergency action."

The White House pushed back on such concerns, saying Trump is justified in aggressively using his authority.

"President Trump is rightfully enlisting his emergency powers to quickly rectify four years of failure and fix the many catastrophes he inherited from Joe Biden — wide open borders, wars in Ukraine and Gaza, radical climate regulations, historic inflation, and economic and national security threats posed by trade deficits," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said.

Trump frequently cites 1977 law to justify actions

Of all the emergency powers, Trump has most frequently cited the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, or IEEPA, to justify slapping tariffs on imports.

The law, enacted in 1977, was intended to limit some of the expansive authority that had been granted to the presidency decades earlier. It is only supposed to be used when the country faces "an unusual and extraordinary threat" from abroad "to the national security, foreign policy, or economy of the United States."

In analyzing executive orders issued since 2001, the AP found that Trump has invoked the law 21 times in presidential orders and memoranda. President George W. Bush, grappling with the aftermath of the most devastating terror attack on U.S. soil, invoked the law just 14 times in his first term. Likewise, Barack Obama invoked the act only 21 times during his first term, when the U.S. economy faced the worst economic collapse since the Great Depression.

The Trump administration has also deployed an 18th century law, the Alien Enemies Act, to justify deporting Venezuelan migrants to other countries, including El Salvador. Trump's decision to invoke the law relies on allegations that the Venezuelan government coordinates with the Tren de Aragua gang, but intelligence officials did not reach that conclusion.

Congress has ceded its power to the presidency

Congress has granted emergency powers to the presidency over the years, acknowledging that the executive branch can act more swiftly than lawmakers if there is a crisis. There are 150 legal powers — including waiving a wide variety of actions that Congress has broadly prohibited — that can only be accessed after declaring an emergency. In an emergency, for example, an administration can suspend environmental regulations, approve new drugs or therapeutics, take over the transportation system, or even override bans on testing biological or chemical weapons on human subjects, according to a list compiled by the Brennan Center for Justice.

Democrats and Republicans have pushed the boundaries over the years. For example, in an attempt to cancel federal student loan debt, Joe Biden used a post-Sept. 11 law that empowered education secretaries to reduce or eliminate such obligations during a national emergency. The U.S. Supreme Court eventually rejected his effort, forcing Biden to find different avenues to chip away at his goals.

Before that, Bush pursued warrantless domestic wiretapping and Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the detention of Japanese-Americans on the West Coast in camps for the duration of World War II.

Trump, in his first term, sparked a major fight with Capitol Hill when he issued a national emergency to compel construction of a border wall. Though Congress voted to nullify his emergency declaration,

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lawmakers could not muster up enough Republican support to overcome Trump's eventual veto.

"Presidents are using these emergency powers not to respond quickly to unanticipated challenges," said John Yoo, who as a Justice Department official under George W. Bush helped expand the use of presidential authorities. "Presidents are using it to step into a political gap because Congress chooses not to act."

Trump, Yoo said, "has just elevated it to another level."

Trump's allies support his moves

Conservative legal allies of the president also said Trump's actions are justified, and Vice President JD Vance predicted the administration would prevail in the court fight over tariff policy.

"We believe — and we're right — that we are in an emergency," Vance said last week in an interview with Newsmax.

"You have seen foreign governments, sometimes our adversaries, threaten the American people with the loss of critical supplies," Vance said. "I'm not talking about toys, plastic toys. I'm talking about pharmaceutical ingredients. I'm talking about the critical pieces of the manufacturing supply chain."

Vance continued, "These governments are threatening to cut us off from that stuff, that is by definition, a national emergency."

Republican and Democratic lawmakers have tried to rein in a president's emergency powers. Two years ago, a bipartisan group of lawmakers in the House and Senate introduced legislation that would have ended a presidentially-declared emergency after 30 days unless Congress votes to keep it in place. It failed to advance.

Similar legislation hasn't been introduced since Trump's return to office. Right now, it effectively works in the reverse, with Congress required to vote to end an emergency.

"He has proved to be so lawless and reckless in so many ways. Congress has a responsibility to make sure there's oversight and safeguards," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., who cosponsored an emergency powers reform bill in the previous session of Congress. He argued that, historically, leaders relying on emergency declarations has been a "path toward autocracy and suppression."

Appeals court hands AP an incremental loss in its attempt to regain its access to Trump events

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

Digging deep into free-speech precedents in recent American history, a federal appeals panel handed The Associated Press an incremental loss on Friday in its continuing battle with the Trump administration over access by its journalists to cover presidential events.

By a 2-1 margin, judges on the three-judge U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington granted Trump a stay in enforcement of a lower-court ruling that the administration had improperly punished the AP for the content of its speech — in this case not renaming the Gulf of Mexico to Trump's liking.

The news outlet's access to events in the Oval Office and Air Force One was cut back starting in February after the AP said it would continue referring to the Gulf of Mexico in its copy, while noting Trump's wishes that it instead be renamed the Gulf of America.

For decades, a reporter and photographer for the AP — a 179-year-old wire service whose material is sent to thousands of news outlets across the world and carried on its own website, reaching billions of people — had been part of a "pool" that covers a president in places where space is limited.

The decision itself was aimed only at whether to continue the stay. But the majority and dissenting opinions together totaled 55 pages and delved deeply into First Amendment precedents and questions about whether places like the Oval Office and Air Force One were, in effect, private spaces.

Trump posted about the decision on the Truth Social platform shortly after the decision: "Big WIN over AP today. They refused to state the facts or the Truth on the GULF OF AMERICA. FAKE NEWS!!!" And White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt, one of the defendants in the AP's lawsuit, posted on X after the decision came down that it was a "VICTORY!" and would allow more media to access the president beyond the "failing legacy media." She added: "And by the way, @AP, it's still the Gulf of America."

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Patrick Maks, an AP spokesman, said that "we are disappointed in the court's decisions and are reviewing our options." One possibility is seeking an expedited review of the full case on its merits.

President given wide latitude by court majority

Judges Gregory G. Katsas and Neomi Rao agreed in Friday's ruling with Trump's assertion that it's up to the president to decide who gets into spaces like the Oval Office — and he can take into account the viewpoint of journalists he allows. That's related to AP's assertion that the ban amounts to a legal principle known as "viewpoint discrimination."

"If the president sits down for an interview with (Fox News') Laura Ingraham, he is not required to do the same with (MSNBC's) Rachel Maddow," Rao wrote in the opinion. "The First Amendment does not control the president's discretion in choosing with whom to speak or to whom to provide special access."

In deciding on a stay, the judges considered the likelihood of which side would win the case when Trump's full appeal is taken up, probably not for a few months. In that situation, a different panel of appeals court judges will hear it.

Katsas and Rao were both appointed to the federal court by Trump in his first term. Judge Cornelia T.L. Pillard, who dissented on Friday, was appointed by former President Barack Obama. Pillard wrote that there's no principled basis for exempting the Oval Office from a requirement that a president not engage in viewpoint discrimination.

There's nothing to stop the majority's reasoning from being applied to the press corps as a whole, she wrote. In that case, it's not hard to see future Republican White Houses limiting the press covering them to the likes of Fox News, and Democrats to MSNBC, she wrote.

"More to the point, if the White House were privileged to exclude journalists based on viewpoint, each and every member of the White House press corps would hesitate to publish anything an incumbent administration might dislike," Pillard wrote.

The bumpiness between Trump and the press is longstanding

Since the original ruling, the White House has installed a rotation system for access to small events. AP photographers are usually included, but text reporters are allowed in much less frequently.

A study earlier this year showed Trump has spoken to the press more often in the first 100 days of his administration than any of his predecessors back to Ronald Reagan. But he's much more likely to speak to a small group of reporters called into the Oval Office than at a formal briefing or press conference — to which AP journalists have been admitted.

Through Leavitt, the White House has opened up to many more conservative news outlets with a friendly attitude toward the president.

In her dissent, Pillard rejected the assertion by the White House and her colleagues that the president suffers damage if news outlets not aligned with his views are permitted into certain restricted spaces to watch the government function. The majority though, insisted that the president, as the head of the executive branch, has wide latitude in that respect.

Wrote Rao: "The Oval Office is the President's office, over which he has absolute control and discretion to exclude the public or members of the press."

Ex-police chief and convicted killer who escaped from an Arkansas prison has been captured

By JEFF MARTIN and SAFIYAH RIDDLE Associated Press

A former police chief and convicted killer known as the "Devil in the Ozarks" was captured by law enforcement 1.5 miles (2.4 kilometers) northwest of the prison he escaped from following a massive, nearly two-week-long manhunt in the rugged mountains of northern Arkansas, authorities announced Friday.

Grant Hardin, a former police chief in the small town of Gateway near the Arkansas-Missouri border, was serving lengthy sentences for murder and rape. Eventually, his notoriety led to a TV documentary, "Devil in the Ozarks."

Hardin briefly attempted to run from officers when he saw them approach Friday afternoon, but he

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was quickly tackled to the ground, said Rand Champion, a spokesperson for the Arkansas prison system.

"He'd been on the run for a week and a half and probably didn't have any energy left in him," he added.

Hardin's identity was confirmed through fingerprinting, the Izard County Sheriff's Office said in a Facebook post.

There's no indication that Hardin was injured, though he will be checked for dehydration and other medical problems.

Now, investigators are "chomping at the bit and really ready to talk to him," said Champion, who used his cellphone to capture an image of Hardin being led away by officers. Hardin said nothing during those moments.

The escape, search and eventual capture

Hardin had been held at the Calico Rock prison since 2017 after pleading guilty to first-degree murder in a fatal shooting. In order to escape, he impersonated a corrections officer "in dress and manner," according to a court document. A prison officer in one of the guard towers opened a secure gate, allowing him to walk out of the facility.

Champion said that someone should have checked Hardin's identity before he was allowed to leave, describing the lack of verification as a "lapse" that's being investigated.

Searchers had been using bloodhounds, officers on horseback, drones and helicopters in their hunt for Hardin since he escaped on May 25.

Shortly after the escape, a bloodhound found — then quickly lost — Hardin's scent when heavy rains blew through the area, Champion said. The bloodhound tracked Hardin's path for less than a quarter of a mile, after which could have gone in any direction.

"That was one of the most frustrating things, that they were able to track him but then they lost him because of the rain," Champion said.

An elite and highly trained U.S. Border Patrol team had recently joined the search, federal authorities announced this week. The Border Patrol Tactical Team provided "advanced search capabilities and operational support," U.S. Customs and Border Protection said.

Its members are experienced in navigating complex terrain, the agency said earlier this week. The team tracked Hardin through the region known for its rocky and rugged landscape, thick forests and an extensive cave network.

U.S. Customs and Border Patrol shared photos on Facebook of Hardin shirtless and covered in mud, laying face down with his hands tied behind his back on Friday. The post said that Hardin was "turned over to Arkansas State Police unharmed" by the federal agency.

A spokesperson for the agency didn't respond to a phone call and emailed request for comment regarding the post on Friday night.

Hardin's criminal convictions

Hardin pleaded guilty in 2017 to first-degree murder for the killing of James Appleton, 59. Appleton worked for the Gateway water department when he was shot in the head Feb. 23, 2017, near Garfield. Police found Appleton's body inside a car. Hardin was sentenced to 30 years in prison.

Hardin's DNA was also matched to the 1997 rape of a teacher at an elementary school in Rogers, north of Fayetteville. He was sentenced to 50 years for that crime.

Cheryl Tillman, Appleton's sister, was with her mother and sister at a flea market in Ozark, Missouri, when law enforcement called to tell her Hardin had been captured. Tillman is also the mayor of Gateway, the 450-person town where Hardin was briefly police chief.

Tillman told The Associated Press that Hardin's capture was a "big sigh of relief" for her whole family.

"We don't have to walk around, turning around all the time, thinking somebody's on our back," Tillman said, emphasizing her appreciation for the officers who helped capture Hardin.

A problematic past in law enforcement

Though Hardin was police chief in Gateway for just four months, he had served as an officer in multiple communities around northwest Arkansas, his police records show.

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In his first job as a police officer 35 years ago in Fayetteville, Hardin struggled almost immediately, his supervisors said. He was dismissed by Fayetteville police, but kept getting hired for other law enforcement jobs in northwest Arkansas over the years.

Hardin worked about six months at the Huntsville Police Department before resigning, but records do not give a reason for his resignation.

He later worked at the Eureka Springs Police Department from 1993 to 1996. Former Chief Earl Hyatt said Hardin resigned because Hyatt was going to fire him over incidents that included the use of excessive force.

"He did not need to be a police officer at all," Hyatt told television station KNWA.

By the time he was the police chief in Gateway in 2016, "he was out chasing cars for no reason," Tillman recalled in the documentary "Devil in the Ozarks."

Republicans urge Donald Trump and Elon Musk to end their feud

By SEUNG MIN KIM and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the Republican Party braces for aftershocks from President Donald Trump's spectacular clash with Elon Musk, lawmakers and conservative figures are urging détente, fearful of the potential consequences from a prolonged feud.

At a minimum, the explosion of animosity between the two powerful men could complicate the path forward for Republicans' massive tax and border spending legislation that has been promoted by Trump but assailed by Musk.

"I hope it doesn't distract us from getting the job done that we need to," said Rep. Dan Newhouse, a Republican from Washington state. "I think that it will boil over and they'll mend fences."

As of Friday afternoon, Musk was holding his fire, posting about his various companies on social media rather than torching the president. Trump departed the White House for his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey, without stopping to talk to reporters who shouted questions about his battle with Musk.

"I hope that both of them come back together because when the two of them are working together, we'll get a lot more done for America than when they're at cross purposes," Sen. Ted Cruz, a Texas Republican, told Fox News host Sean Hannity on Thursday night.

Sen. Mike Lee, a Republican from Utah, sounded almost pained on social media as Trump and Musk volleyed insults at each other, sharing a photo composite of the two men and writing, "But ... I really like both of them."

"Who else really wants @elonmusk and @realDonaldTrump to reconcile?" Lee posted, later adding: "Repost if you agree that the world is a better place with the Trump-Musk bromance fully intact."

So far, the feud between Trump and Musk is probably best described as a moving target, with plenty of opportunities for escalation or detente.

One person familiar with the president's thinking said Musk wants to speak with Trump, but that the president doesn't want to do it — or at least do it on Friday. The person requested anonymity to disclose private matters.

In a series of conversations with television anchors Friday morning, Trump showed no interest in burying the hatchet. Asked on ABC News about reports of a potential call between him and Musk, the president responded: "You mean the man who has lost his mind?"

Trump added in the ABC interview that he was "not particularly" interested in talking to Musk at the moment.

Still, others remained hopeful that it all would blow over.

"I grew up playing hockey and there wasn't a single day that we played hockey or basketball or football or baseball, whatever we were playing, where we didn't fight. And then we'd fight, then we'd become friends again," Hannity said on his show Thursday night.

Acknowledging that it "got personal very quick," Hannity nonetheless added that the rift was "just a major policy difference."

House Speaker Mike Johnson projected confidence that the dispute would not affect prospects for the tax and border bill.

"Members are not shaken at all," the Louisiana Republican said. "We're going to pass this legislation on our deadline."

He added that he hopes Musk and Trump reconcile, saying "I believe in redemption" and "it's good for the party and the country if all that's worked out."

But he also had something of a warning for the billionaire entrepreneur.

"I'll tell you what, do not doubt and do not second-guess and don't ever challenge the president of the United States, Donald Trump," Johnson said. "He is the leader of the party. He's the most consequential political figure of this generation and probably the modern era."

Kilmar Abrego Garcia returned to the US, charged with transporting people in the country illegally

By ERIC TUCKER, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, LINDSAY WHITEHURST and BEN FINLEY Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — Kilmar Abrego Garcia, whose mistaken deportation to El Salvador became a political flashpoint in the Trump administration's stepped-up immigration enforcement, was returned to the United States on Friday to face criminal charges related to what the Trump administration said was a large human smuggling operation that brought immigrants into the country illegally.

His abrupt release from El Salvador closes one chapter and opens another in a saga that yielded a remarkable, months-long standoff between Trump officials and the courts over a deportation that officials initially acknowledged was done in error but then continued to stand behind in apparent defiance of orders by judges to facilitate his return to the U.S.

The development occurred after U.S. officials presented El Salvador President Nayib Bukele with an arrest warrant for federal charges in Tennessee accusing Abrego Garcia of playing a key role in smuggling immigrants into the country for money. He is expected to be prosecuted in the U.S. and, if convicted, will be returned to his home country of El Salvador at the conclusion of the case, officials said Friday.

"This is what American justice looks like," Attorney General Pam Bondi said in announcing Abrego Garcia's return and the unsealing of a grand jury indictment.

Abrego Garcia's attorneys called the case "baseless."

"There's no way a jury is going to see the evidence and agree that this sheet metal worker is the leader of an international MS-13 smuggling conspiracy," attorney Simon Sandoval-Moshenberg said.

Federal Magistrate Judge Barbara Holmes in Nashville, Tennessee, determined that Abrego Garcia will be held in custody until at least next Friday, when there will be an arraignment and detention hearing.

Abrego Garcia appeared in court wearing a short-sleeved, white, button-down shirt. When asked if he understood the charges, he told the judge: "Sí. Lo entiendo." An interpreter then said: "Yes. I understand."

Democrats and immigrant rights group had pressed for Abrego Garcia's release, with several lawmakers — including Sen. Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, where Abrego Garcia had lived for years — even traveling to El Salvador to visit him. A federal judge had ordered him to be returned in April and the Supreme Court rejected an emergency appeal by directing the government to work to bring him back.

But the news that Abrego Garcia, who had an immigration court order preventing his deportation to his native country over fears he would face persecution from local gangs, was being brought back for the purpose of prosecution was greeted with dismay by his lawyers.

The case also prompted the resignation of a top supervisor in the U.S. attorney's office in Nashville, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a personnel matter.

Ben Schrader, who was chief of the office's criminal division, did not explain the reason for his resignation but posted to social media around the time the indictment was being handed down, saying: "It has been an incredible privilege to serve as a prosecutor with the Department of Justice, where the only job description I've ever known is to do the right thing, in the right way, for the right reasons."

He declined to comment when reached by The Associated Press on Friday.

Abrego Garcia's lawyer calls charges 'preposterous'

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"This administration ... instead of simply admitting their mistake, they'll stop at nothing at all, including some of the most preposterous charges imaginable," Sandoval-Moshenberg said.

Ama Frimpong, legal director with the group CASA, said Abrego Garcia's family has mixed emotions about his return to the U.S.

"Let him talk to his wife. Let him talk to his children. This family has suffered enough," she said.

Sandoval-Moshenberg said Abrego Garcia is one of the first, if not the first, person released from a notorious prison in El Salvador, though he was later imprisoned at another facility.

"So it's going to be very interesting to hear what he has to say about the way in which he was treated," the attorney said.

The indictment, filed last month and unsealed Friday, lays out a string of allegations that date back to 2016 but are only being disclosed now, nearly three months after Abrego Garcia was mistakenly deported and following the Trump administration's repeated claims that he is a criminal.

It accuses him of smuggling throughout the U.S. thousands of people living in the country illegally, including children and members of the violent MS-13 gang, from Central America and abusing women he was transporting. A co-conspirator also alleged that he participated in the killing of a gang member's mother in El Salvador, prosecutors wrote in papers urging the judge to keep him behind bars while he awaits trial.

The indictment does not charge him in connection with that allegation.

"Later, as part of his immigration proceedings in the United States, the defendant claimed he could not return to El Salvador because he was in fear of retribution from the 18th Street gang," the detention memo states.

"While partially true — the defendant, according to the information received by the Government, was in fear of retaliation by the 18th Street gang — the underlying reason for the retaliation was the defendant's own actions in participating in the murder of a rival 18th Street gang member's mother," prosecutors wrote.

The charges stem from a 2022 vehicle stop in which the Tennessee Highway Patrol suspected him of human trafficking. A report released by the Department of Homeland Security in April states that none of the people in the vehicle had luggage, while they listed the same address as Abrego Garcia.

Abrego Garcia was never charged with a crime, while the officers allowed him to drive on with only a warning about an expired driver's license, according to the DHS report. The report said he was traveling from Texas to Maryland, via Missouri, to bring in people to perform construction work.

In response to the report's release in April, Abrego Garcia's wife said in a statement that he sometimes transported groups of workers between job sites, "so it's entirely plausible he would have been pulled over while driving with others in the vehicle. He was not charged with any crime or cited for any wrongdoing."

Immigrant rights advocates vs. the Trump administration

Abrego Garcia's background and personal life have been a source of dispute and contested facts. Immigrant rights advocates have cast his arrest as emblematic of an administration whose deportation policy is haphazard and error-prone, while Trump officials have pointed to prior interactions with police and described him as a gang member who fits the mold they are determined to expel from the country.

Abrego Garcia lived in the U.S. for roughly 14 years, during which he worked construction, got married and was raising three children with disabilities, according to court records. Trump administration officials said he was deported based on a 2019 accusation from Maryland police that he was an MS-13 gang member. Abrego Garcia denied the allegation and was never charged with a crime, his attorneys said.

A U.S. immigration judge subsequently shielded Abrego Garcia from deportation to El Salvador because he likely faced persecution there by local gangs. The Trump administration deported him there in March, later describing the mistake as "an administrative error" but insisting he was in MS-13.

Even if Abrego Garcia is convicted of the charges announced Friday, the Trump administration would still have to return to a U.S. immigration court if it wanted to deport him to El Salvador, Sandoval-Moshenberg said. He also expects the case in Maryland to continue as the federal judge there considers whether the administration obeyed her orders to return him.

Abrego Garcia's return comes days after the Trump administration complied with a court order to return

a Guatemalan man deported to Mexico despite his fears of being harmed there. The man, identified in court papers as O.C.G, was the first person known to have been returned to U.S. custody after deportation since the start of President Donald Trump's second term.

Deadly Russian bombardment of Ukraine further dampens hopes for peace

By HANNA ARHIROVA and VASILISA STEPANENKO Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia struck Ukraine with a thunderous aerial bombardment overnight, further dampening hopes that the warring sides could reach a peace deal anytime soon days after Kyiv embarrassed the Kremlin with a surprising drone attack on military airfields deep inside Russia.

The barrage was one of the fiercest of the three-year war, lasting several hours, striking six Ukrainian territories, and killing at least six people and injuring about 80 others, Ukrainian officials said Friday. Among the dead were three emergency responders in Kyiv, one person in Lutsk and two people in Chernihiv.

The attack came after U.S. President Donald Trump said his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, told him Moscow would respond to Ukraine's attack Sunday on Russian military airfields. It was also hours after Trump said it might be better to let Ukraine and Russia "fight for a while" before pulling them apart and pursuing peace. Trump's comments were a remarkable detour from his often-stated appeals to stop the war and signaled he may be giving up on recent peace efforts.

Ukrainian cities have come under regular bombardment since Russia invaded its neighbor in February 2022. The attacks have killed more than 12,000 civilians, according to the United Nations.

"Russia doesn't change its stripes," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.

The war has continued unabated even as a U.S.-led diplomatic push for a settlement has brought two rounds of direct peace talks between delegations from Russia and Ukraine. The negotiations delivered no significant breakthroughs, however, and the sides remain far apart on their terms for an end to the fighting.

Ukraine has offered an unconditional 30-day ceasefire and a meeting between Zelenskyy and Russian leader Vladimir Putin to break the deadlock. But the Kremlin has effectively rejected a truce and hasn't budged from its demands.

"The Kremlin continues efforts to falsely portray Russia as willing to engage in good-faith negotiations to end the war in Ukraine, despite Russia's repeated refusal to offer any concessions," the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, said late Thursday.

Further peace talks between Russia and Ukraine are expected in coming weeks, as is another exchange of prisoners of war.

Homes are struck

The attack involved 407 Russian drones and 44 ballistic and cruise missiles, Ukrainian air force spokesperson Yuriy Ihnat said. Ukrainian forces said they shot down about 30 of the cruise missiles and up to 200 of the drones.

The Kyiv emergency workers were killed while responding to the strikes. "They were working under fire to help people," the Interior Ministry said in a statement.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it aimed at Ukrainian military targets with "long-range precision weapons" and successfully struck arms depots, drone factories and repair facilities, among other targets.

But fitting a pattern for Russian attacks throughout the war, Friday's bombardment also struck apartment buildings and other non-military targets, Associated Press reporters observed.

In Kyiv, explosions were heard for hours as falling drone debris sparked fires across several districts, said Tymur Tkachenko, head of the Kyiv City Administration. He urged people to seek shelter.

Vitalina Vasylenko, a 14-year-old Kyiv resident, sheltered in a parking garage with her 6-year-old sister and their mother after an explosion blew one of their windows off its hinges.

"I heard a buzzing sound, then my dad ran to me and covered me with his hand," she said. "Then there was a very loud explosion. My whole life flashed before my eyes — I already thought that was it. I started having a panic attack. ... I'm shocked that I'm alive."

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In Kyiv's Solomyanskyi district, a fire broke out on the 11th floor of a 16-story apartment building. Emergency services evacuated three people from the burning unit. The attack caused a blackout in some areas, and more than 2,000 households on Kyiv's eastern bank were without power, city officials said.

Elsewhere, 10 people were injured by an aerial attack on the western city of Ternopil, regional governor Viacheslav Nehoda said. The strike damaged industrial and infrastructure facilities, left parts of the city without electricity, and disrupted water supplies.

Russia also targeted the western Lviv and Khmelnytskyi regions, the northern Chernihiv region, and the central Poltava region, where at least three people were injured.

Russia also reports drone attacks

In Russia, air defenses shot down 10 Ukrainian drones heading toward the capital early Friday, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said. As a precaution, flights at Moscow airports were temporarily suspended overnight Thursday into Friday and then again late Friday afternoon.

Ukrainian drones also targeted three other regions of Russia, authorities said, damaging apartment buildings and industrial plants. Three people were injured, officials said.

Russia's Defense Ministry said that air defenses downed 174 Ukrainian drones over 13 regions early Friday. It added that three Ukrainian Neptune missiles were also shot down over the Black Sea.

Ukraine struck airfields and other military targets in Russia, such as fuel storage tanks and transport hubs, the Ukrainian General Staff said.

Also, a locomotive derailed early Friday in the Belgorod region after the track was blown up, Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said. Russia has recently accused Ukraine of sabotaging the rail network.

Pentagon watchdog investigates if staffers were asked to delete Hegseth's Signal messages

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon's watchdog is looking into whether any of Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's aides were asked to delete Signal messages that may have shared sensitive military information with a reporter, according to two people familiar with the investigation and documents reviewed by The Associated Press.

The inspector general's request focuses on how information about the March 15 airstrikes on Houthi targets in Yemen was shared on the messaging app.

This comes as Hegseth is scheduled to testify before Congress next week for the first time since his confirmation hearing. He is likely to face questions under oath not only about his handling of sensitive information but also the wider turmoil at the Pentagon following the departures of several senior aides and an internal investigation over information leaks.

Hegseth already has faced questions over the installation of an unsecured internet line in his office that bypassed the Pentagon's security protocols and revelations that he shared details about the military strikes in multiple Signal chats.

One of the chats included his wife and brother, while the other included President Donald Trump's top national security officials and inadvertently included The Atlantic's editor-in-chief, Jeffrey Goldberg.

Pentagon press secretary Kingsley Wilson had no comment Friday, citing the pending investigation. The inspector general's office would not discuss the details of the investigation but said that when the report is complete, their office will release unclassified portions of it to the public.

Besides finding out whether anyone was asked to delete Signal messages, the inspector general also is asking some past and current staffers who were with Hegseth on the day of the strikes who posted the information and who had access to his phone, according to the two people familiar with the investigation and the documents reviewed by the AP. The people were not authorized to discuss the investigation and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Democratic lawmakers and a small number of Republicans have said that the information Hegseth posted to the Signal chats before the military jets had reached their targets could have put those pilots' lives at

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risk and that for any lower-ranking members of the military it would have led to their firing.

Hegseth has said none of the information was classified. Multiple current and former military officials have said there is no way details with that specificity, especially before a strike took place, would have been OK to share on an unsecured device.

"I said repeatedly, nobody is texting war plans," Hegseth told Fox News Channel in April after reporting emerged about the chat that included his family members. "I look at war plans every day. What was shared over Signal then and now, however you characterize it, was informal, unclassified coordinations, for media coordinations and other things. That's what I've said from the beginning."

Trump has made clear that Hegseth continues to have his support, saying during a Memorial Day speech at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia that the defense secretary "went through a lot" but "he's doing really well."

Hegseth has limited his public engagements with the press since the Signal controversy. He has yet to hold a Pentagon press briefing, and his spokesman has briefed reporters there only once.

The inspector general is investigating Hegseth at the request of the Republican chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, and the committee's top Democrat, Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island.

Signal is a publicly available app that provides encrypted communications, but it can be hacked and is not approved for carrying classified information. On March 14, one day before the strikes against the Houthis, the Defense Department cautioned personnel about the vulnerability of the app.

Trump has said his administration targeted the Houthis over their "unrelenting campaign of piracy, violence and terrorism." He has noted the disruption Houthi attacks caused through the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, key waterways for energy and cargo shipments between Asia and Europe through Egypt's Suez Canal.

The Houthi rebels attacked more than 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two vessels and killing four sailors, between November 2023 until January this year. Their leadership described the attacks as aimed at ending the Israeli war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Trump administration asks Supreme Court to leave mass layoffs at Education Department in place

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's administration on Friday asked the Supreme Court to pause a court order to reinstate Education Department employees who were fired in mass layoffs as part of his plan to dismantle the agency.

The Justice Department's emergency appeal to the high court said U.S. District Judge Myong Joun in Boston exceeded his authority last month when he issued a preliminary injunction reversing the layoffs of nearly 1,400 people and putting the broader plan on hold.

Joun's order has blocked one of the Republican president's biggest campaign promises and effectively stalled the effort to wind down the department. A federal appeals court refused to put the order on hold while the administration appealed.

The judge wrote that the layoffs "will likely cripple the department."

But Solicitor General D. John Sauer wrote on Friday that Joun was substituting his policy preferences for those of the Trump administration.

The layoffs help put in the place the "policy of streamlining the department and eliminating discretionary functions that, in the administration's view, are better left to the states," Sauer wrote.

He also pointed out that the Supreme Court in April voted 5-4 to block Joun's earlier order seeking to keep in place Education Department teacher-training grants.

The current case involves two consolidated lawsuits that said Trump's plan amounted to an illegal closure of the Education Department.

One suit was filed by the Somerville and Easthampton school districts in Massachusetts along with the

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American Federation of Teachers and other education groups. The other suit was filed by a coalition of 21 Democratic attorneys general.

The suits argued that layoffs left the department unable to carry out responsibilities required by Congress, including duties to support special education, distribute financial aid and enforce civil rights laws.

Education Department employees who were targeted by the layoffs have been on paid leave since March, according to a union that represents some of the agency's staff. Joun's order prevents the department from fully terminating them, but none have been allowed to return to work, according to the American Federation of Government Employees Local 252. Without Joun's order, the workers were scheduled to be terminated Monday.

The Education Department said Friday it is "actively assessing how to reintegrate" the employees. A department email sent Friday asked them to share whether they had gained other employment, saying the request was meant to "support a smooth and informed return to duty."

Trump has made it a priority to shut down the Education Department, though he has acknowledged that only Congress has the authority to do that. In the meantime, Trump issued a March order directing Education Secretary Linda McMahon to wind it down "to the maximum extent appropriate and permitted by law."

Trump later said the department's functions will be parceled to other agencies, suggesting that federal student loans should be managed by the Small Business Administration and programs involving students with disabilities would be absorbed by the Department of Health and Human Services. Those changes have not yet happened.

The president argues that the Education Department has been overtaken by liberals and has failed to spur improvements to the nation's lagging academic scores. He has promised to "return education to the states."

Opponents note that K-12 education is already mostly overseen by states and cities.

Democrats have blasted the Trump administration's Education Department budget, which seeks a 15% budget cut including a \$4.5 billion cut in K-12 funding as part of the agency's downsizing.

Gaza marks the start of Eid with outdoor prayers in the rubble and food growing ever scarcer

By WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Palestinians across the war-ravaged Gaza Strip marked the start of one of Islam's most important holidays with prayers outside destroyed mosques and homes early Friday, with little hope the war with Israel will end soon.

With much of Gaza in rubble, men, women and children were forced to hold the traditional Eid al-Adha prayers in the open air and with food supplies dwindling, families were having to make do with what they could scrape together for the three-day feast.

"This is the worst feast that the Palestinian people have experienced because of the unjust war against the Palestinian people," said Kamel Emran after attending prayers in the southern city of Khan Younis. "There is no food, no flour, no shelter, no mosques, no homes, no mattresses. ... The conditions are very, very harsh."

The Islamic holiday begins on the 10th day of the Islamic lunar month of Dhul-Hijja, during the Hajj season in Saudi Arabia. For the second year, Muslims in Gaza were not able to travel to Saudi Arabia to perform the traditional pilgrimage.

In Gaza City on Friday, Sanaa Al-Ghola, a displaced woman from Shejaiyah, stood in the rubble of a badly damaged graveyard near a partially collapsed mosque. She had come to pray for her son, Mohamed al-Ghoul, who she said was killed in shelling last month after going to his grandfather's house to get flour. His father was wounded in the attack.

"We lost our home, money, and everything," she said, crying as she held her son's photo. "There is no more Eid after you're gone, my son."

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Families at a displacement tent camp in Muwasi faced a grim first day of Eid al-Adha.

Tahrir Abu Jazar, 36, of Rafah, warmed up leftover lentils and cooked rice inside her tent, but said she had no bread to feed her five children, who sat on the bare ground nearby.

"There are no Eid celebrations now as there is no new clothes or sacrificial meat, or monetary gifts, or joy," she said, reminiscing over Eid days before the war when the children had meat. "My son went out and tried to celebrate Eid and was scared of the warplane, so he came back."

Israel issues a new warning

In the southern city of Rafah, nine people were killed on their way to try and collect humanitarian aid at various distribution points, according to officials at Nasser Hospital in nearby Khan Younis, where the bodies were brought. Eight died from gunshot wounds and the ninth person from shrapnel injuries.

The Israeli military had no immediate comment on the hospital's claim but said it was looking into the report.

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, a newly formed group of mainly American contractors that Israel wants to use to replace humanitarian groups in Gaza that distribute aid in coordination with the U.N., told The Associated Press that reports of violence in Rafah were inaccurate and that aid distribution was completed "peacefully and without incident."

In northern Gaza on Friday, Israel issued a new warning to civilians saying the military was about to undertake intensive operations in an area after it said rockets were fired toward Israel from the sector.

Meanwhile, the military said four Israeli soldiers were killed Friday in southern Gaza when an explosive detonated as they searched a Hamas compound in Khan Younis, causing part of a building to collapse. Five soldiers were injured, one seriously, spokesperson Effie Defrin said.

The war broke out on Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas-led militants launched a surprise attack on Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted 251 hostages. They are still holding 56 hostages, around a third of them believed to be alive, after most of the rest were released in ceasefire agreements or other deals. Israeli forces have rescued eight living hostages from Gaza and recovered dozens of bodies.

Since then, Israel has killed more than 54,000 Palestinians in its military campaign, primarily women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its figures.

The offensive has destroyed large parts of Gaza and displaced around 90% of its population of roughly 2 million Palestinians.

UN warns of risk of famine

After blocking all food and aid from entering Gaza for more than two months, Israel began allowing a trickle of supplies to enter for the U.N. several weeks ago. But the U.N. says it has been unable to distribute much of the aid because of Israeli military restrictions on movements and because roads that the military designates for its trucks to use are unsafe and vulnerable to looters.

The U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome said Thursday that Gaza's people are projected to fall into acute food insecurity by September, with nearly 500,000 people experiencing extreme food deprivation, leading to malnutrition and starvation.

"This means the risk of famine is really touching the whole of the Gaza Strip," Rein Paulson, director of the FAO office of emergencies and resilience, said in an interview.

Over the past two weeks, shootings have erupted nearly daily 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, and more than 80 people have been killed, according to Gaza hospital officials.

Israel has accused Hamas of stealing aid and trying to block it from reaching Palestinians, and has said soldiers fired warning shots or, in some cases, shot at individuals approaching its troops.

The GHF sent out a message on its Facebook site early Friday that it had closed all aid distribution sites until further notice and urged people to stay away for their own safety.

It later clarified that the measure was only a temporary pause due to excessive crowding and that the agency had distributed all aid available Friday.

Israel's military said that going ahead, distribution sites would be operated from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily and that outside those hours, the areas would be considered closed military zones that are strictly off limits.

US consulting firm lets go of two of its partners

A leading U.S. management-consulting firm, the Boston Consulting Group, said Friday it had let go of two of the firm's partners over what it said was their unauthorized work for the GHF's food distribution in Gaza.

In a statement, the firm said the two partners failed to adequately disclose the nature of the work on the effort. The partners, whom the statement did not identify, "have been exited from the firm," the consulting group said. It said the firm's investigation of the matter was ongoing.

Sean 'Diddy' Combs' ex-girlfriend sobs in court, saying he ignored her pleas to end sex marathons

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, LARRY NEUMEISTER and DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A woman who was dating Sean "Diddy" Combs at the time of his arrest last year broke down Friday describing their many drug-fueled sex marathons, saying the music mogul ignored her signals to stop and scolded her for crying after another encounter.

Testifying under the pseudonym "Jane" for a second day, the woman recounted how Combs pushed her to continue having sex with men while he watched even after she gave "subtle cues" — saying she was tired and hungry, making faces and gestures — that she wanted to stop. Instead, she said, he told her to "finish strong."

Asked why she didn't tell him outright, Jane sobbed, "I just, I don't know." Later, she said Combs would shut her down when she tried to talk about ending the encounters, which she called "dark" and "sleazy."

Combs, 55, has pleaded not guilty to running his business empire as a racketeering enterprise that enabled and concealed the abuse of women over two decades. If convicted, he faces 15 years to life. The defense has asserted the sexual activities were all consensual and nothing Combs did amounted to a criminal enterprise.

Jane tells a story similar to Combs' ex Cassie

Jane's account in the trial's fourth week has closely mirrored that of R&B singer Casandra "Cassie" Ventura, another former girlfriend who testified Combs assaulted her and forced her into "hundreds" of encounters with male sex workers dubbed "freak-offs." Jane called them "hotel nights" and the men "entertainers."

Prosecutor Maurene Comey sought to show that Combs used his wealth to manipulate women into submitting to his sexual demands and make them reliant on him and his needs. By September 2023, Jane said, Combs had been paying her rent for about five months. Asked what she feared would happen if she stopped doing hotel nights, Jane replied, "That Sean would take the house away." Combs is still paying her rent, Jane said.

After one such hotel encounter, Jane said she cried and Combs told her "Don't do that right now," and "I can't do this right now. I'm too high." She testified she'd blacked out earlier from the drug ecstasy that Combs gave her.

During another encounter, she tried to remain sober but vomited in a bathroom after having sex with two men in a row. Combs told her, "That's good. You'll feel better now that you've thrown up. So let's go." She then had sex with a third man, describing herself as "repulsed."

Jane said she endured the encounters because she valued time alone with Combs afterward. "I would really fight to block out how sad I was after," she testified. In messages to him, she wrote: "my heart is really in this and it's breaking."

Jane wiped away tears as she recounted the many ill-effects of hotel nights, including constant back pain, frequent urinary tract infections and soreness in her genitals and pelvic areas. Cassie testified she also suffered UTIs after enduring sex marathons involving Combs and male sex workers.

Jane unsuccessfully tries to end hotel nights

Jane dated Combs from 2021 to 2024. On Thursday, she testified their relationship began as loving and passionate but soon veered into having her engage in sex with other men. The longest lasted three and

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a half days, while most went on for 24 to 30 hours.

On Friday, she said she poured her thoughts into the Notes app on her phone in November 2021, drafting a message to Combs but never sending it.

"I don't know what you're calling me for, but I'm sorry I don't want to do drugs for days and days and have you use me to fulfill your freaky, wild desires in hotel rooms," Jane wrote in the unsent missive.

In 2023, she said she texted Combs to say she longed to return to the early days of their relationship and regretted ever getting involved in the sexual encounters, but felt obligated. Combs responded: "Girl, stop," she said.

Jane said the encounters continued into 2024 and she participated in one at Combs' Miami-area estate as late as August — just weeks before his arrest at a Manhattan hotel.

Jurors on Friday heard the first audio from inside one of those encounters. In the recording, Jane asked a man to wear a condom during her first hotel night, but Combs "guilt tripped me out of it. It wasn't something he wanted to see."

Jane also said Combs had her act as his drug mule at least twice, nervously smuggling pills in her checked luggage on commercial flights from Los Angeles to Miami. She said he divvied up in the colorful pills into bottles, and she ended up using some of the drugs with him.

To protect Jane's anonymity, the judge has barred courtroom observers from describing or sketching her appearance in a way that would reveal her identity. The Associated Press does not identify people who say they're victims of sexual abuse unless they choose to make their names public, as Cassie has done.

Defense targets credibility of witnesses

Combs' lawyers have tried to sow doubt among jurors about the credibility of the prosecution's witnesses. In opening arguments, lawyer Teny Geragos acknowledged Combs had a "bad temper" and violent outbursts, but argued his sexual habits were part of a consensual swinger lifestyle.

The defense painted Cassie, for example, as an eager participant in the freak-offs. When Cassie was on the stand, Combs' lawyers had her read texts and emails in which she expressed willingness to engage in the encounters.

Before Jane began testifying on Thursday, the defense cross-examined Bryana "Bana" Bongolan, a friend of Cassie and a graphic designer who is suing Combs. Bongolan testified that in 2016, Combs held her over the edge of a balcony at a Los Angeles high-rise for 10 to 15 seconds, an episode she said traumatized her and left her with lasting night terrors.

Defense attorney Nicole Westmoreland suggested that Bongolan lied or exaggerated. The lawyer noted Combs was on tour for much of September 2016, including East Coast shows around the time of the balcony incident. Bongolan later testified she didn't recall the exact date of the incident, but had no doubt it occurred.

Wall Street gains ground following a solid jobs report and marks another winning week

By DAMIAN J. TROISE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Stocks gained ground on Wall Street Friday following a better-than-expected report on the U.S. job market.

The gains were broad, with every sector in the S&P 500 rising. That solidified a second consecutive winning week for the benchmark index, which has rallied back from a slump two months ago to come within striking distance of its record high.

The S&P 500 rose 61.06 points, or 1%, to 6,000.36. It is now within 2.3% of its record.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 443.13 points, or 1%, to 42,762.87. The Nasdaq rose 231.50 points, or 1.2%, to 19,529.95.

Technology stocks, with their outsized values, led the broad gains. Chipmaker Nvidia jumped 1.2% and iPhone maker Apple rose 1.6%.

Tesla rose 3.7%, regaining some of the big losses it suffered on Thursday when Trump and Musk sparred

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feverishly on social media.

Circle Internet Group, the U.S.-based issuer of one of the most popular cryptocurrencies, rose 29.4%. That adds to its 168% gain from Thursday when it debuted on the New York Stock Exchange.

U.S. employers slowed their hiring last month, but still added a solid 139,000 jobs amid uncertainty over President Donald Trump's trade war. The closely watched monthly update reaffirmed that the job market remains resilient, despite worries from businesses and consumers about the impact of tariffs on goods going to and coming from the U.S. and its most important trading partners.

"It looks like, for now, everything is kind of running smoothly," said Chris Zaccarelli, chief investment officer for Northlight Asset Management. "Investors see that as a positive, but we also haven't seen the full effect of tariffs yet."

President Donald Trump's on-again-off-again tariffs continue to weigh on companies. Lululemon Athletica plunged 19.8% after the maker of yoga clothing cut its profit expectations late Thursday as it tries to offset the impact of tariffs while being buffeted by competition from start-up brands.

Lululemon joins a wide range of companies, from retailers to airlines, who have warned investors about the potential hit to their revenue and profits because of tariffs raising costs and consumers potentially tightening their spending.

Hopes that Trump will lower his tariffs after reaching trade deals with other countries have been among the main reasons the S&P 500 has rallied back so furiously since dropping roughly 20% from its record two months ago. Senior U.S. administration officials will meet with a Chinese delegation on Monday in London for the next round of trade negotiations between Washington and Beijing.

The economy is already absorbing the impact from tariffs on a wide range of goods from key trading partners, along with raw materials such as steel. Heavier tariffs could hit businesses and consumers in the coming months.

The U.S. economy contracted during the first quarter. Recent surveys by the Institute for Supply Management, a trade group of purchasing managers, found that both American manufacturing and services businesses contracted last month. On Tuesday, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development forecast 1.6% growth for the U.S. economy this year, down from 2.8% last year.

The uncertainty over tariffs and their economic impact has put the Federal Reserve in a delicate position. "All things being equal, you can clearly see they are on hold," Zaccarelli said.

The central bank is holding its benchmark interest rate steady as it worries about tariffs reigniting inflation. It fought hard, using interest rate increases, to ease inflation back toward its target of 2% and rates have been hovering just above that level.

The Fed has been hesitant to cut interest rates in 2025 after trimming rates three times late last year. While lower interest rates can give the economy a boost, they can also push inflation higher. That could be especially damaging if import taxes are also raising costs for businesses and consumers.

Wall Street expects the central bank to hold rates steady at its June meeting, but traders are forecasting that it will have to cut interest rates later this year in an effort to prop up the economy.

In the bond market, Treasury yields made significant gains. The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.51% from 4.39% late Thursday. The two-year Treasury yield, which more closely tracks traders' expectations for what the Federal Reserve will do with overnight interest rates, rose to 4.04% from 3.92% late Thursday.

Markets in Europe were mostly higher.

Employers add a solid 139,000 jobs in May, though hiring slows as some potential weaknesses appear

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. employers slowed hiring last month, but still added a solid 139,000 jobs amid uncertainty over President Donald Trump's trade wars.

Hiring fell from a revised 147,000 in April, the Department of Labor said Friday. The job gains last month

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were above the 130,000 that economists had forecast.

Healthcare companies added 62,000 jobs and bars and restaurants 30,000. The federal government shed 22,000 jobs, however, the most since November 2020, as Trump's job cuts and hiring freeze had an impact. And factories lost 8,000 jobs last month.

Average hourly wages rose 0.4% from April and 3.9% from a year earlier – a bit higher than forecast.

There were a few signs of potential weakening. Labor Department revisions shaved 95,000 jobs from March and April payrolls. The number of people in the U.S. labor force – those working or looking for work – fell by 625,000 last month, the biggest drop since December 2023. And the percentage of those who had jobs fell last month to 59.7%, the lowest since January 2022.

Trump's aggressive and unpredictable policies – especially his sweeping taxes on imports – have muddled the outlook for the economy and the job market and raised fears that the American economy could be headed toward recession. But so far the damage hasn't shown up clearly in government economic data.

"The job market is still standing tall even as some of these headwinds start to blow," said Daniel Zhao, lead economist at the jobs website Glassdoor. "But ultimately we're all still waiting for the other shoe to drop. It's still much too early for tariff impacts to be a significant drag on the economy."

The U.S. economy and job market have proven surprisingly resilient in recent years. When the inflation fighters at the Federal Reserve raised their benchmark interest rate 11 times in 2022 and 2023, the higher borrowing costs were widely expected to tip the United States into a recession. They didn't.

Still, the job market has clearly decelerated. So far this year, American employers have added an average of less than 124,000 a month. That is down 26% from last year, down almost 43% from 2023, and down a whopping 67% compared with 2022.

The modest job gains and steady unemployment rate are likely to keep the Fed on the sidelines for at least the next few months, economists said. The central bank Fed has kept its key short-term interest rate unchanged this year, after cutting it three times last year.

Fed chair Jerome Powell and most other Fed policymakers have voiced concern that Trump's tariffs could push up inflation later this year, which they would seek to counter by raising rates. The Fed is only likely to accelerate interest rate cuts if the job market sharply deteriorates. But so far hiring is holding up.

Investors still expect just two cuts by the Fed this year, starting in September. Jim Lebenthal, chief equity strategist at Cerity Partners, said the central bank will likely stay on hold as it waits to see whether the sweeping tariffs that Trump imposed April 2, then delayed until July 9, return in some form. Those duties are also being challenged in court.

"They need to see the effects of the tariffs before they make any moves," Lebenthal said.

Recent economic reports have sent mixed signals.

The Labor Department reported Tuesday that U.S. job openings rose unexpectedly to 7.4 million in April — seemingly a good sign. But the same report showed that layoffs ticked up and the number of Americans quitting their jobs fell, a sign they were less confident they could find something better elsewhere.

Surveys by the Institute for Supply Management, a trade group of purchasing managers, found that both American manufacturing and services businesses were contracting last month.

And the number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits rose last week to the highest level in eight months, though jobless claims remain low by historical standards.

The job market has clearly decelerated. So far this year, American employers have added an average of less than 124,000 a month. That is down 26% from last year, down almost 43% from 2023, and a down whopping 67% compared with 2022.

Trump's tariffs — and the erratic way he rolls them out, suspends them and conjures up new ones — have already buffeted the economy.

"Employers have been hoarding labor in the face of massive corrosive uncertainty," said Carl Weinberg, chief economist at High Frequency Economics. "We believe firms have been reluctant to lay off workers until they saw the extent of the Trump tariffs. Now that the tariffs are out in the open, we believe most firms see the writing on the wall and will start workforce reductions right now."

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Steel Horse Leather is a Brooklyn company that makes handmade leather bags and imports some of its material and production from China.

Owner Dave Heaton says rapidly evolving tariff rules have made it difficult to manage the business day to day – let alone build on his staff of four. “With the current volatility, hiring really isn’t something at the top of our list, unfortunately,” he said.

Heaton’s company has also begun to supplement sea freight with air shipments to secure products in time for the fall and holiday seasons. He’s raised prices 10% to 15% on some products to cover higher shipping fees and some of the tariffs, the first price hikes in in three years.

“The real challenge is the uncertainty,” Heaton said. “It’s not just about the price hikes — it’s that we can’t plan ahead like we used to.”

Trump once opened the door to the LGBTQ+ community. Now activists say he’s their top threat

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When he first ran for office, Donald Trump appeared to be a new kind of Republican when it came to gay rights.

Years earlier, he overturned the rules of his own Miss Universe pageant to allow a transgender contestant to compete. He said Caitlyn Jenner could use any bathroom at Trump Tower that she wanted. And he was the first president to name an openly gay person to a Cabinet-level position.

But since returning to office this year, Trump has engaged in what activists say is an unprecedented assault on the LGBTQ+ community. The threat from the White House contrasts with World Pride celebrations taking place just blocks away in Washington, including a parade and rally this weekend.

“We are in the darkest period right now since the height of the AIDS crisis,” said Kevin Jennings, who leads Lambda Legal, a longtime advocacy organization. “I am deeply concerned that we’re going to see it all be taken away in the next four years.”

Trump’s defenders insist the president has not acted in a discriminatory way, and they point to public polling that shows widespread support for policies like restrictions on transgender athletes.

“He’s working to establish common sense once again,” said Ed Williams, executive director of the Log Cabin Republicans, which represents LGBT conservatives.

Harrison Fields, the principal deputy press secretary at the White House, said, “the overall MAGA movement is a big tent welcome for all and home to a large swath of the American people.”

“The president continues to foster a national pride that should be celebrated daily, and he is honored to serve all Americans,” Fields said.

Presidential actions were widely expected

Trump made anti-transgender attacks a central plank of his campaign reelection message as he called on Congress to pass a bill stating there are “only two genders” and pledged to ban hormonal and surgical intervention for transgender minors. He signed an executive order doing so in January.

His rally speeches featured a spoof video mocking transgender people and their place in the U.S. military. Trump has since banned them outright from serving. And although June is recognized nationally as Pride month, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters this week that Trump has “no plans for a proclamation.”

“I can tell you this president is very proud to be a president for all Americans, regardless of race, religion or creed,” she added, making no mention of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Williams described Pride activities as a progressive catch-all rather than a civil rights campaign. “If you’re not in the mood to protest or resist the Trump administration,” he said, “Pride is not for you.”

Trump declined to issue Pride Month proclamations in his first term, but did recognize the celebration in 2019 as he publicized a global campaign to decriminalize homosexuality headed by Richard Grenell, then the U.S. Ambassador to Germany and the highest-profile openly gay person in the administration. (Grenell now serves as envoy for special missions.)

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"As we celebrate LGBT Pride Month and recognize the outstanding contributions LGBT people have made to our great Nation, let us also stand in solidarity with the many LGBT people who live in dozens of countries worldwide that punish, imprison, or even execute individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation," Trump posted on social media.

Times have changed where Trump is concerned

This time, there is no celebrating.

The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, which Trump named himself chairman of after firing members of the board of trustees, canceled a week's worth of events celebrating LGBTQ+ rights for this summer's World Pride festival in Washington, D.C., at one of the nation's premier cultural institutions.

Trump, who indicated when he took up the position that he would be dictating programming, had specifically said he would end events featuring performers in drag. The exterior lights that once lit the venue on the Potomac River in the colors of the rainbow were quickly replaced with red, white and blue.

Multiple artists and producers involved in the center's Tapestry of Pride schedule, which had been planned for June 5 to 8, told The Associated Press that their events had been quietly canceled or moved to other venues.

Inside the White House, there's little second-guessing about the president's stances. Trump aides have pointed to their decision to seize on culture wars surrounding transgender rights during the 2024 campaign as key to their win. They poured money into ads aimed at young men — especially young Hispanic men — attacking Democratic nominee Kamala Harris for supporting "taxpayer-funded sex changes for prisoners," including one spot aired during football games.

"Kamala is for they/them. President Trump is for you," the narrator said.

Jennings flatly rejected assertions that the administration hasn't been discriminatory. "Are you kidding me? You're throwing trans people out of the military. That's example No. 1."

He points to the cancellation of scientific grants and funding for HIV/AIDS organizations, along with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's "petty and mean" order to rename the USNS Harvey Milk, which commemorates the gay rights activist and Navy veteran.

Jennings also said it doesn't help that Trump has appointed openly gay men like Grenell and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to high-profile positions: "I would call it window dressing."

Less tolerance for the issues as time passes

Craig Konnoth, a University of Virginia professor of civil rights, compared the U.S.' trajectory to that of Russia, which has seen a crackdown on gay and lesbian rights after a long stretch of more progressive policies. In 2023, Russia's Supreme Court effectively outlawed LGBTQ+ activism.

Williams said Trump has made the Republican Party more accepting of gay people. First lady Melania Trump, he noted, has hosted fundraisers for his organization.

"On the whole, we think he's the best president ever for our community. He's managed to support us in ways that we have never been supported by any administration," Williams said. "We are vastly accepted within our party now."

Trump's approach to LGBTQ+ rights comes amid a broader shift among Republicans, who have grown less tolerant in recent years.

While overall support for same-sex marriage has been stable, according to Gallup, the percentage of Republicans who think marriages between same-sex couples should be recognized as valid with the same rights as traditional marriage dropped to 41% this year. That's the lowest point since 2016, a year after the Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriage is a constitutional right, and a substantial decline from a high of 55% in 2021.

There's been a similar drop in the share of Republicans who say that gay and lesbian relations are morally acceptable, which has dropped from 56% in 2022 to 38% this year. Democrats, meanwhile, continue to overwhelmingly support same-sex marriage and say that same-sex relations are morally acceptable.

An AP-NORC poll from May also found that Trump's approach to handling transgender issues has been a point of relative strength for the president. About half (52%) of U.S. adults said they approve of how he's handling transgender issues — a figure higher than his overall job approval (41%).

Douglas Page, who studies politics and gender at Gettysburg College, said that “trans rights are less popular than gay rights, with a minority of Republicans in favor of trans rights. This provides incentives for Republicans to speak to the conservative side of that issue.”

“Gay people are less controversial to Republicans compared to trans people,” he said in an email, “so gay appointees like Secretary Bessent probably won’t ruffle many feathers.”

Measles outbreaks in Michigan and Pennsylvania end, while Texas logs just 4 new cases

By DEVI SHASTRI AP Health Writer

The U.S. logged 122 more cases of measles this week — but only four of them in Texas — while the outbreaks in Pennsylvania and Michigan have officially ended.

There are 1,168 confirmed measles cases in the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Friday. Health officials in Texas, where the nation’s biggest outbreak raged during the late winter and spring, said they’ll now post case counts only once a week — yet another sign the outbreak is slowing.

There are three other major outbreaks in North America. The longest, in Ontario, Canada, has resulted in 2,009 cases from mid-October through June 3. The province logged its first death Thursday in a baby that got congenital measles but also had other preexisting conditions.

Another outbreak in Alberta, Canada, has sickened 761 as of Thursday. And the Mexican state of Chihuahua had 1,940 measles cases and four deaths as of Friday, according to data from the state health ministry.

Other U.S. states with active outbreaks — which the CDC defines as three or more related cases — include Colorado, Kansas, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio and Tennessee.

In the U.S., two elementary school-aged children in the epicenter in West Texas and an adult in New Mexico have died of measles this year. All were unvaccinated.

Measles is caused by a highly contagious virus that’s airborne and spreads easily when an infected person breathes, sneezes or coughs. It is preventable through vaccines, and has been considered eliminated from the U.S. since 2000.

How many measles cases are there in Texas?

There are a total of 742 cases across 35 counties, most of them in West Texas, state health officials said Friday.

Throughout the outbreak, 94 people have been hospitalized.

State health officials estimated less than 1% of cases — fewer than 10 — are actively infectious. Fifty-five percent of Texas’ cases are in Gaines County, where the virus started spreading in a close-knit, undervaccinated Mennonite community. The county has had 411 cases since late January — just under 2% of the county’s residents.

The April 3 death in Texas was an 8-year-old child, according to Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Local health officials said the child did not have underlying health conditions and died of “what the child’s doctor described as measles pulmonary failure.” A unvaccinated child with no underlying conditions died of measles in Texas in late February; Kennedy said the child was 6.

How many measles cases are there in New Mexico?

New Mexico added two cases in the past week for a total of 81.

Seven people have been hospitalized since the outbreak started. Most of the state’s cases are in Lea County. Sandoval County near Albuquerque has six cases, Eddy County has three, Doña Ana County has two. Chaves, Curry and San Juan counties have one each.

An unvaccinated adult died of measles-related illness March 6. The person did not seek medical care.

How many cases are there in Oklahoma?

Oklahoma added one case this week for a total of 15 confirmed and three probable cases.

The state health department is not releasing which counties have cases.

How many cases are there in Colorado?

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Colorado has seen a total of 12 measles cases in 2025, which includes one outbreak of seven related cases.

The outbreak is linked to a Turkish Airlines flight that landed at Denver International Airport in mid-May, and includes three cases each in Arapahoe and El Paso counties and one in Denver, plus a person who doesn't live in Colorado.

Other counties that have seen measles this year include Archuleta and Pueblo.

How many cases are there in Kansas?

Kansas has a total of 71 cases across 11 counties in the southwestern part of the state, with three hospitalizations. All but two of the cases are connected, and most are in Gray County.

How many cases are there in Montana?

Montana has 17 measles cases as of Thursday. Ten are in Gallatin County, which is where the first cases showed up — Montana's first in 35 years.

Flathead and Yellowstone counties have two cases each, and Hill County has three case.

There are outbreaks in neighboring North Dakota and the Canadian provinces of Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

How many cases are there in North Dakota?

North Dakota, which hadn't seen measles since 2011, is up to 34 cases as of Friday. Two of the people have been hospitalized, and all of the people with confirmed cases were not vaccinated.

There are 16 cases in Williams County in western North Dakota on the Montana border. On the eastern side of the state on the Minnesota border, there are 10 cases in Grand Forks County and seven cases in Cass County. Burke County, in northwest North Dakota on the border of Saskatchewan, Canada, has one case.

How many cases are there in Ohio?

Ohio remained steady for a third week at 34 measles cases and one hospitalization, according to the Ohio Department of Health. That count includes only Ohio residents.

The state has two outbreaks: Ashtabula County near Cleveland has 16 cases, and Knox County in east-central Ohio has 20 — 14 among Ohio residents and the rest among visitors. Allen, Cuyahoga, Holmes and Defiance counties have one case each.

How many cases are there in Tennessee?

Tennessee has had six measles cases since early May, but no change since. Tennessee's outbreak appears to be over, as health officials say there have not been any new cases in six weeks.

Where else is measles showing up in the U.S.?

Measles cases also have been reported in Alaska, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, Virginia and Washington.

Earlier outbreaks in Indiana, Michigan and Pennsylvania were declared over by health officials after six weeks of no new cases.

Cases and outbreaks in the U.S. are frequently traced to someone who caught the disease abroad. The CDC said in May that more than twice as many measles have come from outside of the U.S. compared to May of last year, and most of those are in unvaccinated Americans returning home. In 2019, the U.S. saw 1,274 cases and almost lost its status of having eliminated measles.

What do you need to know about the MMR vaccine?

The best way to avoid measles is to get the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine. The first shot is recommended for children between 12 and 15 months old and the second between 4 and 6 years old.

Getting another MMR shot as an adult is harmless if there are concerns about waning immunity, the CDC says. People who have documentation of receiving a live measles vaccine in the 1960s don't need to be revaccinated, but people who were immunized before 1968 with an ineffective vaccine made from "killed" virus should be revaccinated with at least one dose, the agency said.

People who have documentation that they had measles are immune, and those born before 1957 gener-

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ally don't need the shots because so many children got measles back then that they have "presumptive immunity."

Measles has a harder time spreading through communities with high vaccination rates — above 95% — due to "herd immunity." But childhood vaccination rates have declined nationwide since the pandemic and more parents are claiming religious or personal conscience waivers to exempt their kids from required shots.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles first infects the respiratory tract, then spreads throughout the body, causing a high fever, runny nose, cough, red, watery eyes and a rash.

The rash generally appears three to five days after the first symptoms, beginning as flat red spots on the face and then spreading downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs and feet. When the rash appears, the fever may spike over 104 degrees Fahrenheit, according to the CDC.

Most kids will recover from measles, but infection can lead to dangerous complications such as pneumonia, blindness, brain swelling and death.

How can you treat measles?

There's no specific treatment for measles, so doctors generally try to alleviate symptoms, prevent complications and keep patients comfortable.

Federal vs. state power at issue in a hearing over Trump's election overhaul executive order

By LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Democratic state attorneys general and government lawyers argued Friday over the implications of President Donald Trump's proposed overhaul of U.S. elections and whether the changes could be made in time for next year's midterm elections, how much it would cost the states and, more broadly, whether the president has a right to do any of it in the first place.

The top law enforcement officials from 19 states filed a federal lawsuit after the Republican president signed the executive order in March, saying its provisions would step on states' power to set their own election rules.

During a hearing in U.S. District Court in Boston, lawyers for the states told Judge Denise J. Casper that the changes outlined in the order would be costly and could not be implemented quickly. Updating the voter registration database just in California would cost the state more than \$1 million and take up to a year, said the states' lead attorney, Kevin Quade, a deputy attorney general with the California Department of Justice.

The lawyers said making the changes would take time away from preparing for the next round of elections, potentially undermining public confidence in the voting process.

"The provisions of the executive order cast doubt and shadow on the ability of states to fairly implement federal elections at the local level, and those types of goodwill and reputational harm ... are not the type that can be easily repaired," Quade said.

Trump's election directive was part of a flurry of executive orders he has issued in the opening months of his second term, many of which have drawn swift legal challenges. It follows years of him falsely claiming that his loss to Democrat Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election was due to widespread fraud and an election year in which he and other Republicans promoted the notion that large numbers of noncitizens threatened the integrity of U.S. elections. In fact, voting by noncitizens is rare and, when caught, can lead to felony charges and deportation.

The executive order would require voters to show proof of U.S. citizenship when registering to vote in federal elections, prohibit mail or absentee ballots from being counted if they are received after Election Day, set new rules for voting equipment and prohibit non-U.S. citizens from being able to donate in certain elections. It also would condition federal election grant funding on states adhering to the strict ballot deadline.

Justice Department lawyer Bridget O'Hickey said the order seeks to provide a single set of rules for

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certain aspects of election operations rather than having a patchwork of state laws.

"Public confidence in elections is paramount to the success of the republic, and the government thinks the best way to do that is to have uniform procedures," she said.

She said the harm the states are arguing is only speculation.

The lawsuit is one of three against the executive order. One filed by Oregon and Washington, where elections are conducted almost entirely by mail and ballots received after Election Day are counted as long as they are postmarked by then.

The provision that would create a proof-of-citizenship requirement for federal elections already has been halted in a lawsuit filed by voting and civil rights groups and national Democratic organizations. The judge said the president's attempt to use a federal agency to enact a proof-of-citizenship requirement for voting usurped the power of states and Congress.

During Friday's hearing, where the states argued for a preliminary injunction, the executive order's demand that only ballots received by Election Day should be counted drew considerable attention from both sides.

In defending the provision, O'Hickey said mailed ballots received after Election Day might somehow be manipulated. She suggested people could retrieve their ballots and alter their votes based on what they see in early results.

Uniform deadlines for receiving ballots are needed, she said, "to prevent recasting of ballots." It was not clear how such a thing could happen. States have numerous security measures in place to ensure that eligible voters cast only one ballot that gets counted.

Responding for the states, California Deputy Attorney General Anne Bellows said all ballots received after Election Day require a postmark showing they were sent on or before that date, and that any ballot sent afterward would not count.

"There's simply no world in which there is a meaningful difference afforded to absentee voters that's not given to voters who vote in person," she said.

The government's argument for a national ballot deadline runs contrary to the approach of Republicans nationally, who in recent years have criticized Democrats for "federal overreach" when they offer proposals seeking certain uniform voting standards.

The executive order also tasks the U.S. Election Assistance Commission with updating the federal voter registration form to require people to submit documentation proving they are U.S. citizens. Similar provisions enacted previously in a handful of states have raised concerns about disenfranchising otherwise eligible voters who can't readily access those documents. That includes married women, who would need both a birth certificate and a marriage license if they had changed their last name.

The Justice Department argued that Trump's executive order falls within his authority to direct officials "to carry out their statutory duties," adding that "the only potential voters it disenfranchises are noncitizens who are ineligible to vote anyway."

D-Day veterans return to Normandy to mark 81st anniversary of landings

COLLEVILLE-SUR-MER, France (AP) — Veterans gathered Friday in Normandy to mark the 81st anniversary of the D-Day landings — a pivotal moment of World War II that eventually led to the collapse of Adolf Hitler's regime.

Along the coastline and near the D-Day landing beaches, tens of thousands of onlookers attended the commemorations, which included parachute jumps, flyovers, remembrance ceremonies, parades, and historical reenactments.

Many were there to cheer the ever-dwindling number of surviving veterans in their late 90s and older. All remembered the thousands who died.

Harold Terens, a 101-year-old U.S. veteran who last year married his 96-year-old sweetheart near the D-Day beaches, was back in Normandy.

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"Freedom is everything," he said. "I pray for freedom for the whole world. For the war to end in Ukraine, and Russia, and Sudan and Gaza. I think war is disgusting. Absolutely disgusting."

Terens enlisted in 1942 and shipped to Great Britain the following year, attached to a four-pilot P-47 Thunderbolt fighter squadron as their radio repair technician. On D-Day, Terens helped repair planes returning from France so they could rejoin the battle.

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth commemorated the anniversary of the D-Day landings, in which American soldiers played a leading role, with veterans at the American Cemetery overlooking the shore in the village of Colleville-sur-Mer.

French Minister for the Armed Forces Sébastien Lecornu told Hegseth that France knows what it owes to its American allies and the veterans who helped free Europe from the Nazis.

"We don't forget that our oldest allies were there in this grave moment of our history. I say it with deep respect in front of you, veterans, who incarnate this unique friendship between our two countries," he said.

Hegseth said France and the United States should be prepared to fight if danger arises again, and that "good men are still needed to stand up."

"Today the United States and France again rally together to confront such threats," he said, without mentioning a specific enemy. "Because we strive for peace, we must prepare for war and hopefully deter it."

The June 6, 1944, D-Day invasion of Nazi-occupied France used the largest-ever armada of ships, troops, planes and vehicles to breach Hitler's defenses in western Europe. A total of 4,414 Allied troops were killed on D-Day itself.

In the ensuing Battle of Normandy, 73,000 Allied forces were killed and 153,000 wounded. The battle — and especially Allied bombings of French villages and cities — killed around 20,000 French civilians between June and August 1944.

The exact number of German casualties is unknown, but historians estimate between 4,000 and 9,000 men were killed, wounded or missing during the D-Day invasion alone.

Nearly 160,000 Allied troops landed on D-Day.

Of those, 73,000 were from the U.S. and 83,000 from Britain and Canada. Forces from several other countries were also involved, including French troops fighting with Gen. Charles de Gaulle. The Allies faced around 50,000 German forces.

More than 2 million Allied soldiers, sailors, pilots, medics and other people from a dozen countries were involved in the overall Operation Overlord, the battle to wrest western France from Nazi control that started on D-Day.

Elon Musk pulls back on threat to withdraw Dragon spacecraft

By The Associated Press undefined

As President Donald Trump and Elon Musk argued on social media on Thursday, the world's richest man threatened to decommission a space capsule used to take astronauts and supplies to the International Space Station.

A few hours later, Musk said he wouldn't follow through on the threat.

After Trump threatened to cut government contracts given to Musk's SpaceX rocket company and his Starlink internet satellite services, Musk responded via X that SpaceX "will begin decommissioning its Dragon spacecraft immediately."

It was unclear how serious Musk's threat was, but several hours later — in a reply to another X user — he said he wouldn't do it.

The capsule, developed with the help of government contracts, is an important part of keeping the space station running. NASA also relies heavily on SpaceX for other programs including launching science missions and, later this decade, returning astronauts to the surface of the moon.

The Dragon capsule

SpaceX is the only U.S. company capable right now of transporting crews to and from the space station, using its four-person Dragon capsules.

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Boeing's Starliner capsule has flown astronauts only once; last year's test flight went so badly that the two NASA astronauts had to hitch a ride back to Earth via SpaceX in March, more than nine months after launching last June.

Starliner remains grounded as NASA decides whether to go with another test flight with cargo, rather than a crew.

SpaceX also uses a Dragon capsule for its own privately run missions. The next one of those is due to fly next week on a trip chartered by Axiom Space, a Houston company.

Cargo versions of the Dragon capsule are also used to ferry food and other supplies to the orbiting lab. NASA's other option: Russia

Russia's Soyuz capsules are the only other means of getting crews to the space station right now.

The Soyuz capsules hold three people at a time. For now, each Soyuz launch carries two Russians and one NASA astronaut, and each SpaceX launch has one Russian on board under a barter system. That way, in an emergency requiring a capsule to return, there is always someone from the U.S. and Russia on board.

With its first crew launch for NASA in 2020 — the first orbital flight of a crew by a private company — SpaceX enabled NASA to reduce its reliance on Russia for crew transport. The Russian flights had been costing the U.S. tens of millions of dollars per seat, for years.

NASA has also used Russian spacecraft for cargo, along with U.S. contractor Northrup Grumman.

SpaceX's other government launches

The company has used its rockets to launch several science missions for NASA as well as military equipment.

Last year, SpaceX also won a NASA contract to help bring the space station out of orbit when it is no longer usable.

SpaceX's Starship mega rocket is what NASA has picked to get astronauts from lunar orbit to the surface of the moon, at least for the first two landing missions. Starship made its ninth test flight last week from Texas, but tumbled out of control and broke apart.

Walmart's army of bakery decorators take the cake when it comes to hourly store pay

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Inside a Walmart store in New Jersey, a worker puts the finishing touches on a cake with an edible ink Sponge Bob on top. A colleague creates a buttercream rosette border for a different cake, while another co-worker frosts a tier of what will be a triple-deck dessert.

It's graduation season, the busiest time of year for the 6,200 employees the nation's largest retailer trained to hand-decorate cakes per customers' orders. The cakes themselves come, pre-made, frozen and in a variety of shapes and sizes, from suppliers, not Walmart's in-store bakeries.

But there's no sugar-coating the importance the company places on its custom cake business. Its army of icing artisans are the highest paid hourly workers in a typical U.S. Walmart, excluding managers. Cake decorators earn an average of \$19.25 per hour, compared with \$18.25 for all non-managerial store workers, a company spokesperson said.

Melissa Fernandez, 36, started working in the electronics area and then the wireless services department of the Walmart in North Bergen, New Jersey, before she transferred to the deli area in search of better pay. But Fernandez had her eye on a cake decorating job and after spending two months getting trained by a store colleague, she picked up a piping bag full-time in 2021.

"I love baking at home. I love painting," Fernandez said. "I love doing anything artistic, and I just always wanted to be a part of it." After 11 years with Walmart, she said she now makes about \$24.40 an hour.

Despite their elite status within Walmart, the retailer's cake decorators have attracted detractors on social media.

The company promotes its personalized baked goods on TikTok, and the workers behind such creations do the same with their own profiles. As the content has grown in popularity, critics have accused Walmart

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decorators of stealing ideas and undercutting the work of professional cake artists with their low-priced products.

After TikTok videos praising Walmart's \$25 heart-shaped cakes with borders that resemble vintage lace cropped up before Valentine's Day this year, a few bakers produced their own videos explaining why their cakes cost so much more and critiquing Walmart's.

Debates ensued in the comments sections over whether Walmart represented evils of capitalism or served the needs of the masses.

A customized sheet cake that can be sliced to serve 96 people costs \$59 at Walmart, about one-third to half the price that a nationwide sample of independent bakeries list online for similarly sized cakes. For \$5.20 more, Walmart customers can add strawberry or "Bavarian creme" fillings, which like the bare cakes, are vendor-supplied.

The slice of the celebratory occasion cake market Walmart holds appears vast based on company-supplied figures. One out of four cakes sold in the U.S. comes from Walmart, and its employees will collectively decorate more than 1 million cakes during May and June, according to a company spokesperson.

The number of cakes decorated each day at the location where Fernandez works nearly doubles to 50-60 when school graduations come around, compared to 30-35 a day during the rest of the year, said Michael DeMarco, the manager of the store's fresh food department. He credits the decorators' talent and promotional efforts on TikTok.

"We're getting a lot of repeat customers. We're doing a lot more business because of just the viral sensations," DeMarco said.

A TikTok video that showed Fernandez designing a \$24 version of a customized bouquet cake — 12 cupcakes that are individually decorated and arranged to look like a bunch of flowers — received nearly a half-million views. The bouquet design was one of the North Bergen store's most popular cakes last month, a company spokesperson said.

The dressy heart-shaped cakes, as well as cakes that resemble meals like sushi or a pile of spaghetti and meatballs, are popular too, she said. Fernandez also has created "burn away" cakes: an iced cake topped with an image printed on paper, which is set ablaze to reveal a different image underneath.

"TikTok helps me stay up to date," she said. "A lot of trends that I see on there, within that week or within that month, customers will come asking about it. And we're pretty up to date as well."

Jazzing up a cake by hand requires skill, whether or not someone else did the baking, she said. Funneling buttercream frosting through a bag and various sized piping tips to yield the desired design without misplaced blobs is not the same as drawing or painting, Fernandez explained.

"There's a lot of pressure points that you have to practice in order to get the borders correct and the right thickness or the right texture," she said.

Tiffany Witzke, who has been a Walmart cake decorator since July 2016 and works at a store in Springfield, Missouri, has more than 912,000 followers on TikTok. The job attracts people who "can be extremely skilled and talented," Witzke said, adding that customers want increasingly complicated designs.

"When I first started, it was basically just borders and writing," she said. "Now, everybody wants more and more and more on their cake."

Liz Berman, owner of The Sleepy Baker, in Natick, Massachusetts, said she's not worried about losing customers to Walmart because of her attention to detail and the premium ingredients she uses.

She charges \$205 and up for a half-sized sheet cake, the bouquets made up of two dozen miniature cupcakes cost \$110. All the cakes are made from scratch, and Berman said she designs everything herself.

"It's just a totally different business model," she said. "Everything I do is custom."

For Walmart, the cake decorating business delivers higher profit margins than some other areas, such as groceries and electronics, according to Marshal Cohen, chief retail advisor at market research firm Circana. But it's also resonating with shoppers looking for affordable luxuries.

"We've gone into a period where the consumer is saying, 'This is good enough,'" Cohen said.

Customers interviewed at the North Bergen store on a recent weekday seemed to be satisfied. George Arango, 34, picked up two customized cakes, one to celebrate a co-worker's retirement and the other for

a colleague getting another job. After researching prices on various store websites, he decided to give Walmart a try.

"The price is fantastic," he said. "I'm walking out with two cakes for \$40."

How Trump's pick for surgeon general uses her big online following to make money

By MICHELLE R. SMITH and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — President Donald Trump's pick to be the next U.S. surgeon general has repeatedly said the nation's medical, health and food systems are corrupted by special interests and people out to make a profit at the expense of Americans' health.

Yet as Dr. Casey Means has criticized scientists, medical schools and regulators for taking money from the food and pharmaceutical industries, she has promoted dozens of health and wellness products — including specialty basil seed supplements, a blood testing service and a prepared meal delivery service — in ways that put money in her own pocket.

A review by The Associated Press found Means, who has carved out a niche in the wellness industry, set up deals with an array of businesses.

In her newsletter, on her social media accounts, on her website, in her book and during podcast appearances, the entrepreneur and influencer has at times failed to disclose that she could profit or benefit in other ways from sales of products she recommends. In some cases, she promoted companies in which she was an investor or adviser without consistently disclosing the connection, the AP found.

Means, 37, has said she recommends products that she has personally vetted and uses herself. She is far from the only online creator who doesn't always follow federal transparency rules that require influencers to disclose when they have a "material connection" to a product they promote.

Still, legal and ethics experts said those business entanglements raise concerns about conflicting interests for an aspiring surgeon general, a role responsible for giving Americans the best scientific information on how to improve their health.

"I fear that she will be cultivating her next employers and her next sponsors or business partners while in office," said Jeff Hauser, executive director of the Revolving Door Project, a progressive ethics watchdog monitoring executive branch appointees.

The nomination, which comes amid a whirlwind of Trump administration actions to dismantle the government's public integrity guardrails, also has raised questions about whether Levels, a company Means co-founded that sells subscriptions for devices that continuously monitor users' glucose levels, could benefit from this administration's health guidance and policy.

Though scientists debate whether continuous glucose monitors are beneficial for people without diabetes, U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has promoted their use as a precursor to making certain weight-loss drugs available to patients.

The aspiring presidential appointee has built her own brand in part by criticizing doctors, scientists and government officials for being "bought off" or "corrupt" because of ties to industry.

Means' use of affiliate marketing and other methods of making money from her recommendations for supplements, medical tests and other health and dietary products raise questions about the extent to which she is influenced by a different set of special interests: those of the wellness industry.

A compelling origin story

Means earned her medical degree from Stanford University, but she dropped out of her residency program in Oregon in 2018, and her license to practice is inactive. She has grown her public profile in part with a compelling origin story that seeks to explain why she left her residency and conventional medicine.

"During my training as a surgeon, I saw how broken and exploitative the healthcare system is and left to focus on how to keep people out of the operating room," she wrote on her website.

Means turned to alternative approaches to address what she has described as widespread metabolic dysfunction driven largely by poor nutrition and an overabundance of ultra-processed foods. She co-

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founded Levels, a nutrition, sleep and exercise-tracking app that can also give users insights from blood tests and continuous glucose monitors. The company charges \$199 per year for an app subscription and an additional \$184 per month for glucose monitors.

Means has argued that the medical system is incentivized not to look at the root causes of illness but instead to maintain profits by keeping patients sick and coming back for more prescription drugs and procedures.

"At the highest level of our medical institutions, there are conflicts of interest and corruption that are actually making the science that we're getting not as accurate and not as clean as we'd want it," she said on Megyn Kelly's podcast last year.

But even as Means decries the influence of money on science and medicine, she has made her own deals with business interests.

During the same Megyn Kelly podcast, Means mentioned a frozen prepared food brand, Daily Harvest. She promoted that brand in a book she published last year. What she didn't mention in either instance: Means had a business relationship with Daily Harvest.

Growing an audience, and selling products

Influencer marketing has expanded beyond the beauty, fashion and travel sectors to "encompass more and more of our lives," said Emily Hund, author of "The Influencer Industry: The Quest for Authenticity on Social Media."

With more than 825,000 followers on Instagram and a newsletter that she has said reached 200,000 subscribers, Means has a direct line into the social media feeds and inboxes of an audience interested in health, nutrition and wellness.

Affiliate marketing, brand partnerships and similar business arrangements are growing more popular as social media becomes increasingly lucrative for influencers, especially among younger generations. Companies might provide a payment, free or discounted products or other benefits to the influencer in exchange for a post or a mention. But most consumers still don't realize that a personality recommending a product might make money if people click through and buy, said University of Minnesota professor Christopher Terry.

"A lot of people watch those influencers, and they take what those influencers say as gospel," said Terry, who teaches media advertising and internet law. Even his own students don't understand that influencers might stand to benefit from sales of the products they endorse, he added.

Many companies, including Amazon, have affiliate marketing programs in which people with substantial social media followings can sign up to receive a percentage of sales or some other benefit when someone clicks through and buys a product using a special individualized link or code shared by the influencer.

Means has used such links to promote various products sold on Amazon. Among them are books, including the one she co-wrote, "Good Energy"; a walking pad; soap; body oil; hair products; cardamom-flavored dental floss; organic jojoba oil; a razor set; reusable kitchen products; sunglasses; a sleep mask; a silk pillowcase; fitness and sleep trackers; protein powder and supplements.

She also has shared links to products sold by other companies that included "affiliate" or "partner" coding, indicating she has a business relationship with the companies. The products include an AI-powered sleep system and Daily Harvest, for which she curated a "metabolic health collection."

On a "My Faves" page that was taken down from her website shortly after Trump picked her, Means wrote that some links "are affiliate links and I make a small percentage if you buy something after clicking them."

It's not clear how much money Means has earned from her affiliate marketing, partnerships and other agreements. Daily Harvest did not return messages seeking comment, and Means said she could not comment on the record during the confirmation process.

Disclosing conflicts

Means has raised concerns that scientists, regulators and doctors are swayed by the influence of industry, oftentimes pointing to public disclosures of their connections. In January, she told the Kristin Cavallari podcast "Let's Be Honest" that "relationships are influential."

"There's huge money, huge money going to fund scientists from industry," Means said. "We know that

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when industry funds papers, it does skew outcomes.”

In November, on a podcast run by a beauty products brand, Primally Pure, she said it was “insanity” to have people connected to the processed food industry involved in writing food guidelines, adding, “We need unbiased people writing our guidelines that aren’t getting their mortgage paid by a food company.”

On the same podcast, she acknowledged supplement companies sponsor her newsletter, adding, “I do understand how it’s messy.”

Influencers who endorse or promote products in exchange for payment or something else of value are required by the Federal Trade Commission to make a clear and conspicuous disclosure of any business, family or personal relationship. While Means did provide disclosures about newsletter sponsors, the AP found in other cases Means did not always tell her audience when she had a connection to the companies she promoted. For example, a “Clean Personal & Home Care Product Recommendations” guide she links to from her website contains two dozen affiliate or partner links and no disclosure that she could profit from any sales.

Means has said she invested in Function Health, which provides subscription-based lab testing for \$500 annually. Of the more than a dozen online posts the AP found in which Means mentioned Function Health, more than half did not disclose she had any affiliation with the company.

Means also listed the supplement company Zen Basil as a company for which she was an “Investor and/or Advisor.” The AP found posts on Instagram, X and on Facebook where Means promoted its products without disclosing the relationship.

Though the “About” page on her website discloses an affiliation with both companies, that’s not enough, experts said. She is required to disclose any material connection she has to a company anytime she promotes it.

Representatives for Function Health did not return messages seeking comment through their website and executives’ LinkedIn profiles. Zen Basil’s founder, Shakira Niazi, did not answer questions about Means’ business relationship with the company or her disclosures of it. She said the two had known each other for about four years and called Means’ advice “transformational,” saying her teachings reversed Niazi’s prediabetes and other ailments.

“I am proud to sponsor her newsletter through my company,” Niazi said in an email.

While the disclosure requirements are rarely enforced by the FTC, Means should have been informing her readers of any connections regardless of whether she was violating any laws, said Olivier Sylvain, a Fordham Law School professor who was previously a senior adviser to the FTC chair.

“What you want in a surgeon general, presumably, is someone who you trust to talk about tobacco, about social media, about caffeinated alcoholic beverages, things that present problems in public health,” Sylvain said, adding, “Should there be any doubt about claims you make about products?”

Potential conflicts pose new ethical questions

Means isn’t the first surgeon general nominee whose financial entanglements have raised eyebrows.

Jerome Adams, who served as surgeon general from 2017 to 2021, filed federal disclosure forms that showed he invested in several health technology, insurance and pharmaceutical companies before taking the job — among them Pfizer, Mylan and UnitedHealth Group. He also invested in the food and drink giant Nestle.

He divested those stocks when he was confirmed for the role and pledged that he and his immediate family would not acquire financial interest in certain industries regulated by the Food and Drug Administration.

Vivek Murthy, who served as surgeon general twice, under Presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden, made more than \$2 million in COVID-19-related speaking and consulting fees from Carnival, Netflix, Estee Lauder and Airbnb between holding those positions. He pledged to recuse himself from matters involving those parties for a period of time.

Means has not yet gone through a Senate confirmation hearing and has not yet announced the ethical commitments she will make for the role.

Hund said that as influencer marketing becomes more common, it is raising more ethical questions, such as what past influencers who enter government should do to avoid the appearance of a conflict.

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Other administration officials, including Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz, have also promoted companies on social media without disclosing their financial ties.

"This is like a learning moment in the evolution of our democracy," Hund said. "Is this a runaway train that we just have to get on and ride, or is this something that we want to go differently?"

What to watch for at the Tony Awards, Broadway's biggest night

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Twenty-nine shows on Broadway got Tony Award nominations this season, but not all will walk away with a trophy — and the box office attention they usually bring.

Here are some key things to know as Broadway's biggest night approaches, including how to watch, who is poised to make history, what old favorite gets to take a victory lap and how you can see George Clooney on Broadway from the comfort of your couch.

When are the Tony Awards?

The Tonys will be broadcast to both coasts on Sunday from 8-11 p.m. Eastern/5-8 p.m. Pacific, live from Radio City Music Hall.

How can I watch them?

On CBS and streaming for Paramount+ with Showtime subscribers in the U.S.

Who's hosting the Tony Awards?

Tony, Emmy and Grammy winner (and three-time Oscar nominee) Cynthia Erivo, the "Wicked" star, will be making her debut hosting the Tonys. She won the lead actress in a musical Tony in 2016 for "The Color Purple" and will have just released her new album, "I Forgive You."

A pre-show will be broadcast on Pluto TV from 6:40-8 p.m. Eastern/3:40-5 p.m. Pacific, where some Tonys will be handed out. Darren Criss and Renée Elise Goldsberry will host that telecast. Viewers can access it on their smart TV, streaming device, mobile app or online by going to Pluto TV and clicking on the "Live Music" channel, found within the Entertainment category on the service.

Who can we expect to see?

Presenters include Aaron Tveit, Adam Lambert, Alex Winter, Allison Janney, Ariana DeBose, Auli'i Cravalho, Ben Stiller, Bryan Cranston, Carrie Preston, Charli D'Amelio, Danielle Brooks, Jean Smart, Jesse Eisenberg, Julianne Hough, Katie Holmes, Keanu Reeves, Kelli O'Hara, Kristin Chenoweth, LaTanya Richardson Jackson, Lea Michele, Lea Salonga, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Michelle Williams, Oprah Winfrey, Rachel Bay Jones, Renée Elise Goldsberry, Samuel L. Jackson, Sara Bareilles, Sarah Paulson and Tom Felton.

How many awards are there?

A total of 26 competitive categories, from lead and featured actors to scenic, costume and lighting design. Some technical award handouts may be pre-taped and winners won't appear on the live show, only cut down into edited bits sandwiched into the telecast. Harvey Fierstein will receive a special lifetime achievement Tony.

What are the top nominees?

There are three of them: "Buena Vista Social Club," which takes its inspiration from Wim Wenders' 1999 Oscar-nominated documentary; "Death Becomes Her," based on the 1992 cult classic film; and "Maybe Happy Ending," a rom-com musical about a pair of androids. Each has a leading 10 nominations.

Who is vying for best new play and musical?

For new musicals, it's "Buena Vista Social Club," "Dead Outlaw," "Death Becomes Her," "Maybe Happy Ending" and "Operation Mincemeat: A New Musical."

For new plays, it's "English," "The Hills of California," "John Proctor Is the Villain," "Oh, Mary!" and "Purpose."

Many of the races are unusually tight this year, the product of a Broadway heaving with shows after having largely rebounded from the pandemic.

"I haven't seen one nominated show that I haven't been wowed by. Everything brings something," says

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Lowe Cunningham, lead producer of "Death Becomes Her" and also a Tony voter.

"How dare the Broadway community come together with such excellent work," she jokes. "I needed everything else to be much worse, and I don't appreciate it."

Can history be made?

Audra McDonald, the most recognized performer in the theater awards' history, could possibly extend her Tony lead. Already the record holder for most acting wins with six Tonys, McDonald could add to that thanks to her leading turn in an acclaimed revival of "Gypsy." She will push the record for a performer to most wins with seven if she prevails on Tony night.

And Kara Young — the first Black female actor to be nominated for a Tony Award in four consecutive years — could become the first Black person to win two Tonys consecutively should she win for her role in the play "Purpose."

Other possible firsts: — Daniel Dae Kim could become the first Asian winner in the category of best leading actor in a play for his work in a revival of "Yellow Face." And Marjan Neshat and her co-star Tala Ashe are vying to become the first female actors of Iranian descent to win a Tony.

Some special guests

Normally, shows open for several years don't get any Tony telecast attention but "Hamilton" is no normal show. The original cast will celebrate the show's 10th anniversary on Broadway with a performance featuring creator Lin-Manuel Miranda and actors Goldsberry, Ariana DeBose, Daveed Diggs, Jonathan Groff, Christopher Jackson, Jasmine Cephas Jones, Javier Muñoz, Leslie Odom Jr., Okieriete Onaodowan and Phillipa Soo.

Will there be other performances?

Each of the shows vying for best new musical will get a performance slot — as will some that didn't make the cut, like the Bobby Darin musical "Just in Time" and "Real Women Have Curves."

What will producers hope to avoid?

Any repeat of last year, when Jay-Z's electrifying reunion with Alicia Keys on what appeared to be a live duet of "Empire State of Mind" was actually pre-taped hours before the live show. The appearance by the rapper in support of Keys' musical "Hell's Kitchen" turned out to be a piece of Hollywood trickery, undercutting the Broadway community's full-throated embrace of live singing and dancing.

Broadway's big season

The health of Broadway — once very much in doubt during the pandemic lockdown — is now very good, at least in terms of box office. The 2024-2025 season took in \$1.9 billion, the highest-grossing season in recorded history, overtaking the pre-pandemic previous high of \$1.8 billion during the 2018-2019 season.

In terms of attendance, Broadway welcomed nearly 14.7 million ticket buyers, the second best attended season on record, behind only 2018-2019. But sky-high ticket prices have led to fears that Broadway is getting financially out of touch.

A revival of "Othello" with Denzel Washington and Jake Gyllenhaal broke the record for top-grossing play in Broadway history, with a gross of \$2,818,297 for eight performances, fueled by some seats going for as high as \$921.

How can you get in the mood?

Even if you haven't been able to get to Broadway this season, you can still see one of the shows. The night before the Tonys, "Good Night, and Good Luck" — starring and co-written by Clooney, a Tony acting nominee — will stream across CNN properties.

What the Trump travel ban means for the 2026 World Cup and 2028 Olympic Games

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

GENEVA (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump often says the 2026 World Cup and 2028 Los Angeles Olympics are among the events he is most excited about in his second term.

Yet there is significant uncertainty regarding visa policies for foreign visitors planning trips to the U.S.

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for the two biggest events in sports.

Trump's latest travel ban on citizens from 12 countries added new questions about the impact on the World Cup and the Summer Olympics, which depend on hosts opening their doors to the world.

Here's a look at the potential effects of the travel ban on those events.

What is the travel ban policy?

When Sunday ticks over to Monday, citizens of 12 countries should be banned from entering the U.S.

They are Afghanistan, Myanmar, Chad, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

Tighter restrictions will apply to visitors from seven more: Burundi, Cuba, Laos, Sierra Leone, Togo, Turkmenistan and Venezuela.

Trump said some countries had "deficient" screening and vetting processes or have historically refused to take back their own citizens.

How does it affect the World Cup and Olympics?

Iran, a soccer power in Asia, is the only targeted country to qualify so far for the World Cup being co-hosted by the U.S., Canada and Mexico in one year's time.

Cuba, Haiti and Sudan are in contention. Sierra Leone might stay involved through multiple playoff games. Burundi, Equatorial Guinea and Libya have very outside shots.

But all should be able to send teams to the World Cup if they qualify because the new policy makes exceptions for "any athlete or member of an athletic team, including coaches, persons performing a necessary support role, and immediate relatives, traveling for the World Cup, Olympics, or other major sporting event as determined by the secretary of state."

About 200 countries could send athletes to the Summer Games, including those targeted by the latest travel restrictions. The exceptions should apply to them as well if the ban is still in place in its current form.

What about fans?

The travel ban doesn't mention any exceptions for fans from the targeted countries wishing to travel to the U.S. for the World Cup or Olympics.

Even before the travel ban, fans of the Iran soccer team living in that country already had issues about getting a visa for a World Cup visit.

Still, national team supporters often profile differently to fans of club teams who go abroad for games in international competitions like the UEFA Champions League.

For many countries, fans traveling to the World Cup — an expensive travel plan with hiked flight and hotel prices — are often from the diaspora, wealthier, and could have different passport options.

A World Cup visitor is broadly higher-spending and lower-risk for host nation security planning.

Visitors to an Olympics are often even higher-end clients, though tourism for a Summer Games is significantly less than at a World Cup, with fewer still from most of the 19 countries now targeted.

How is the U.S. working with FIFA, Olympic officials?

FIFA President Gianni Infantino has publicly built close ties since 2018 to Trump — too close according to some. He has cited the need to ensure FIFA's smooth operations at a tournament that will earn a big majority of the soccer body's expected \$13 billion revenue from 2023-26.

Infantino sat next to Trump at the White House task force meeting on May 6 which prominently included Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem. FIFA's top delegate on the task force is Infantino ally Carlos Cordeiro, a former Goldman Sachs partner whose two-year run as U.S. Soccer Federation president ended in controversy in 2020.

Any visa and security issues FIFA faces — including at the 32-team Club World Cup that kicks off next week in Miami — can help LA Olympics organizers finesse their plans.

"It was very clear in the directive that the Olympics require special consideration and I actually want to thank the federal government for recognizing that," LA28 chairman and president Casey Wasserman said Thursday in Los Angeles.

"It's very clear that the federal government understands that that's an environment that they will be accommodating and provide for," he said. "We have great confidence that that will only continue. It has

been the case to date and it will certainly be the case going forward through the games.”

In March, at an IOC meeting in Greece, Wasserman said he had two discreet meetings with Trump and noted the State Department has a “fully staffed desk” to help prepare for short-notice visa processing in the summer of 2028 — albeit with a focus on teams rather than fans.

IOC member Nicole Hoevertsz, who is chair of the Coordination Commission for LA28, expressed “every confidence” that the U.S. government will cooperate, as it did in hosting previous Olympics.

“That is something that we will be definitely looking at and making sure that it is guaranteed as well,” she said. “We are very confident that this is going to be accomplished. I’m sure this is going to be executed well.”

FIFA didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment about the new Trump travel ban.

What have other host nations done?

The 2018 World Cup host Russia let fans enter the country with a game ticket doubling as their visa. So did Qatar four years later.

Both governments, however, also performed background checks on all visitors coming to the month-long soccer tournaments.

Governments have refused entry to unwelcome visitors. For the 2012 London Olympics, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko — who is still its authoritarian leader today — was denied a visa despite also leading its national Olympic body. The IOC also suspended him from the Tokyo Olympics held in 2021.

A Sikh Captain America and other stories: Takeaways from AP’s report about faith themes in comics

By DEEPA BHARATH Associated Press

Representation of many of the world’s faiths and spiritual traditions has been minimal to nonexistent in the mainstream comics universe. Even when they are portrayed in comics, their presentation, as experts point out, is often inauthentic and sometimes, negative.

Recently, however, comic book writers and academics who study the intersection of religion and comics are observing a renaissance of sorts. They say this is because people close to these faith traditions have begun to tell these stories with a reverence and an authenticity that resonate with a wider audience.

Here’s a look at some of the creators and trends:

A Sikh superhero with a message

“Captain America doesn’t wear a beard and a turban, and he’s white.”

Vishavjit Singh looked at the boy who uttered those words, and then he looked at himself — a skinny, bespectacled, turbaned, bearded Sikh in a Captain America suit.

“I wasn’t offended, because I knew that this kid was going to have this image of me, a Sikh Captain America, forever in his mind,” Singh said.

Singh’s journey began after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, triggered anti-Sikh hate incidents. Having faced hate and exclusion throughout his life, he decided to spread his message of kindness and inclusion by capitalizing on the appeal of comics and superheroes — an area where he found Sikh representation to be “virtually zero.”

In 2016, Singh gave up his full-time job to travel around the country to schools, government agencies and corporations to share his story and educate youth about his culture and faith.

Incorporating Black mythology and spirituality

Brooklyn-born Haitian American comic book writer Greg Anderson Elysée said he didn’t learn about African and Caribbean religious traditions until he was a teenager. For the past decade, he’s written a series of comics about Is’nana, the son of Anansi the Spider, the god of wisdom, knowledge and mischief in the Akan religion of West Africa.

What drives his vision and his creativity, Elysée said, is the need to see more Black mythology, deities and spirituality showcased with the same level of respect as European fairy tales and Greek mythology.

“When I started going to ceremonies and rituals, I saw how much power there is in it. When we know

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who we are — whether you believe in the religion or not — it fills you with joy, a purpose and a sense of being.”

Africana religions in comics

Marvel’s Black Panther heralded better representation for Africana religions in the U.S., according to Yvonne Chireau, a professor of religion at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania. However what is seen in Black Panther or other comics is a synthesis of different African religions and cultural practices, she said.

The turn of the last century was a time of revival for Black-centric comics, she said, adding that immigration from African and Caribbean countries, including Haiti, led to increased understanding of religious practices originating in those places.

Zen comics that heal, ground and center

Zen Buddhism has informed much of John Porcellino’s work. For over three decades, he has produced and self-published King-Cat Comics and Stories, a largely autobiographical mini-comic series.

He gave the example of a wordless story titled “October,” featured in King-Cat’s 30th issue, that shows him as a high school student walking the dog one night and suddenly catching a glimpse of the stars.

“It’s the experience of being in everyday, mundane life ... and then suddenly breaking through to some kind of transcendence,” he said.

Why representation matters for children

Teresa Robeson, who grew up in Hong Kong around Buddhist relatives, wrote a graphic novel about the 14th Dalai Lama. She said she jumped at the opportunity to tell the story of the Dalai Lama in graphic novel form because the book focused on a pivotal moment in the spiritual leader’s life, when he fled Tibet for India after the Chinese occupation.

Robeson took on the project because she liked the idea of it representing a religion and culture that do not get much attention in media.

The comics renaissance in India

Amar Chitra Katha was a comic book company started by the late Anant Pai in Mumbai in 1967 as a way to teach Indian children about their own mythology and culture. The first title was “Krishna,” an important god in Hinduism and protagonist of the Bhagavad Gita, one of the religion’s main sacred texts.

Reena I. Puri, the company’s managing director and a veteran of the industry, said Pai started with Hindu mythology and gods but soon expanded to other faiths and more secular themes. But religion remains the mainstay of Amar Chitra Katha, according to Puri.

Atheism, Paganism and ... Lucifer

British comic book writer Mike Carey is known for his 2000-2006 DC Comics series “Lucifer,” which depicts the titular character’s adventures on Earth, in Heaven and in various realms after abandoning Hell. Carey portrayed Lucifer as the “son of God, but as a rebellious disobedient son who wants to find himself as distinct from his father.”

He has also explored Pagan themes, particularly what he calls the “weird interface between British folklore and British religious traditions.”

Carey delved into the concepts of faith, God and morality in a series titled “My Faith in Frankie,” which tells the story of a teenager with a personal god called Jeriven who gets jealous of her boyfriend.

Trump and Musk break up, and Washington holds its breath

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Maybe it was always going to end this way, with two billionaires angrily posting about each other on social media, fingers flying across pocket-sized screens as their incandescent feud burned hotter by the minute.

But even if the finale was predictable, that didn’t make it any less shocking. After long months when Donald Trump and Elon Musk appeared united in their chaotic mission to remake Washington, their relationship imploded this week like a star going supernova.

It began with Musk complaining about the centerpiece of Trump’s legislative agenda, which the president

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at first took in stride. Eventually Trump let slip that he was disappointed in his former adviser, prompting Musk to unleash a flood of insults and taunts.

He accused Trump of betraying promises to cut federal spending, shared a suggestion that the president should be impeached and claimed without evidence that the government was concealing information about his association with infamous pedophile Jeffrey Epstein. Perhaps most viciously, Musk insisted that Trump wouldn't have won last year's election without his help.

Trump, not one to slouch from a fight, could hold back no longer. He posted that Musk had been "wearing thin," that he had "asked him to leave" his administration, that the tech titan had "gone CRAZY."

Maybe, Trump threatened, he should save taxpayer money by canceling government contracts and subsidies for Musk's companies.

Bad blood with high stakes

On and on it went, as liberals savored the spectacle of their most despised political opponents clawing at each other's digital throats and conservatives reeled at the prospect of having to pick sides. Laura Loomer, a right-wing provocateur and conspiracy theorist, saw an opportunity to position herself as the voice of reason.

"This fight should be taken offline," she said — on social media, of course.

The question now is whether Trump and Musk find some way to step back from a battle that is tearing apart one of the most consequential relationships in modern American politics. If they don't, there's little telling how far the fallout could spread from a collision between the world's most powerful man and its wealthiest.

At stake are the future of Musk's companies, including electric automaker Tesla and rocket manufacturer SpaceX; government programs that rely on the billionaire entrepreneur's technology; legislation for advancing tax cuts and Trump's other priorities in Congress; Republican chances in next year's midterm elections; and an entire political ecosystem that has orbited around Trump and Musk's deteriorating partnership.

"It's like India and Pakistan," said Republican Rep. Ryan Zinke of Montana, referring to two nuclear-armed nations that recently skirmished along their border. "It just escalates and neither one of them seem to back down and understand the strength of each other."

Opposites attracted (for a time)

Trump and Musk were always an odd pairing, with contrasting world views and deep generational and stylistic differences.

Trump, 78, comes from old-school New York real estate and never appears in public without a suit and tie unless he's on the golf course. Before running for president, he became a household name as a reality television star.

Musk, 53, is an immigrant from South Africa who struck it rich in Silicon Valley. In addition to running Tesla and SpaceX, Musk owns the social media company X. He's fashioned himself as a black-clad internet edgelord, and his wealth vastly outstrips Trump's.

But Trump and Musk are kindred spirits in other ways. They're experts at generating attention who enjoy stirring the pot by riling up their opponents. Each has sought more power to accomplish existential quests. Trump assails the federal "deep state" that resisted him during his first term, while Musk warns about the country going bankrupt from excessive spending and promotes an interplanetary future powered by his rocket technology.

Musk endorsed Trump after the Republican candidate was nearly assassinated in Butler, Pennsylvania, and he began spending millions to support him. His social media megaphone was a powerful addition to Trump's comeback campaign, magnifying his efforts to court tech leaders and young, very online men.

Trump rarely tolerates sharing the spotlight, but he seemed enamored with his powerful backer, mentioning him in stump speeches and welcoming him onstage at rallies.

After the election, Musk was a fixture around Mar-a-Lago, posing for photos with Trump's family, joining them for dinner, sitting in on meetings. Instead of growing tired of his "first buddy," Trump made plans to bring Musk along to Washington, appointing him to lead a cost-cutting initiative known as the Depart-

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ment of Government Efficiency.

Cracks emerge

Musk tried to establish himself as the president's omniscient and omnipresent adviser. He held court in Cabinet meetings, slept over in the Lincoln Bedroom and helped himself to caramel ice cream from the White House kitchen.

The federal bureaucracy practically trembled before Musk, who oversaw layoffs and downsizing with his team of acolytes and engineers embedded in various agencies.

Musk appeared thrilled at his opportunity to tinker with the government and exulted in his bromance with Trump, posting on Feb. 7 that he loved the president "as much as a straight man can love another man."

Trump returned the favor on March 11, allowing Musk to line up Tesla vehicles on the White House driveway as his company was struggling with declining sales. Trump made a show of choosing a cherry red electric car for himself.

But cracks were emerging, especially as Trump pursued tariffs that could raise costs for Musk's businesses. Musk said Peter Navarro, the president's trade adviser, was "truly a moron" and "dumber than a sack of bricks" on April 8.

The billionaire entrepreneur, who had never before worked in public service, seemed to be souring on government. He suggested there wasn't enough political will, either in Congress or in the White House, to adequately reduce spending.

Trump started signaling that it was time for him to leave even though Musk said he would be willing to stay.

Shortly before announcing his departure, Musk said he was "disappointed" by legislation that Trump called the "big beautiful bill" because it would increase the deficit. The measure includes tax cuts, more money for border security and changes to Medicaid that would leave fewer people with health insurance.

"I think a bill can be big or it could be beautiful," Musk said. "But I don't know if it could be both."

The criticism didn't prevent Trump from giving Musk a send-off in the Oval Office, where he presented his outgoing adviser with a ceremonial key.

"Elon is really not leaving," Trump said. "He's going to be back and forth."

Musk said, "I'll continue to be visiting here and be a friend and adviser to the president."

The implosion comes hard and fast

It's hard to imagine that now.

Musk escalated his attacks on the legislation Tuesday, calling it a "disgusting abomination," and Trump tried to fend off the criticism.

"He hasn't said bad about me personally, but I'm sure that will be next," the president said Thursday in the Oval Office during a meeting with the German chancellor.

It was.

Musk quickly took to X to vent his anger at Trump, saying his tariffs "will cause a recession in the second half of this year" and accusing him of lying. He also said it was "very unfair" that the legislation would eliminate tax incentives for electric vehicles.

Trump fired back in real time as he tried to maintain momentum for his legislation, which faces a difficult debate in the Senate.

"I don't mind Elon turning against me, but he should have done so months ago," the president posted. "This is one of the Greatest Bills ever presented to Congress."

Meanwhile, some of Trump's allies plotted revenge.

Steve Bannon, a former Trump adviser who hosts an influential conservative podcast, said the president should direct the U.S. government to seize SpaceX. He also encouraged Trump to investigate allegations that Musk uses drugs and "go through everything about his immigration status" in preparation for potential deportation.

"We'll see how good Elon Musk takes a little of that pressure," Bannon said, "because I happen to think a little of that pressure might be coming."

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Today in History: June 7, James Byrd Jr. killed in hate crime

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, June 7, the 158th day of 2025. There are 207 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On June 7, 1998, in a crime that shocked the nation and led to stronger state and federal hate crime laws, James Byrd Jr., a 49-year-old Black man, was hooked by a chain to a pickup truck and dragged to his death in Jasper, Texas. (Two white men were later sentenced to death and executed for the crime; a third was sentenced to life in prison.)

Also on this date:

In 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia offered a resolution to the Continental Congress stating "that these united colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent States."

In 1892, Homer Plessy, a Creole of color, was arrested for refusing to leave a whites-only car of the East Louisiana Railroad. (Ruling on his case, Plessy v. Ferguson, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld "separate but equal" racial segregation, a concept it renounced in 1954.)

In 1929, the sovereign state of Vatican City formally came into existence as the Italian Parliament ratified the Lateran Treaty in Rome.

In 1942, the Battle of Midway ended in a decisive victory for American naval forces over Imperial Japan, marking a turning point in the Pacific War.

In 1965, the U.S. Supreme Court, in Griswold v. Connecticut, struck down, 7-2, a Connecticut law used to prosecute a Planned Parenthood clinic in New Haven for providing contraceptives to married couples.

In 1976, New York magazine published an article by journalist Nik Cohn entitled "The Tribal Rites of the New Saturday Night," which inspired the film "Saturday Night Fever," which in turn sparked a nationwide disco craze. (Cohn admitted in 1997 that the article was actually a work of fiction.)

In 1979, Texas became the first state to recognize Juneteenth as an official state holiday. (Juneteenth became a federal holiday in 2021.)

In 1982, Graceland, Elvis Presley's Memphis mansion, was opened to the public as a tourist destination, five years after Presley's death.

In 2006, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of al-Qaida in Iraq, was killed by a U.S. airstrike on his safe house.

In 2021, Maggie Murdaugh, 52, and her son Paul Murdaugh, 22, from a prominent South Carolina legal family, were found shot and killed on their family's property. (Alex Murdaugh, Maggie's husband and Paul's father, would be found guilty of murder and sentenced to life in prison.)

Today's Birthdays: Filmmaker James Ivory is 97. Singer Tom Jones is 85. Actor Liam Neeson is 73. Author Orhan Pamuk is 73. Author Louise Erdrich is 71. Music producer L.A. Reid is 69. Musician Juan Luis Guerra is 68. Former Vice President Mike Pence is 66. Rock musician-TV host Dave Navarro is 58. Sen. Ben Ray Lujan, D-N.M., is 53. Actor Karl Urban is 53. TV personality Bear Grylls is 51. Basketball Hall of Famer Allen Iverson is 50. Actor-comedian Bill Hader is 47. Actor Michael Cera is 37. Rapper Iggy Azalea is 35. Actor-model Emily Ratajkowski is 34. NFL running back Christian McCaffrey is 29.