

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 1 of 76

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News. Headlines](#)
- [4- Transit Fundraiser Ad](#)
- [5- Adult Mosquito Control](#)
- [6- SD News Watch Fact Brief: Is zipper merging more efficient for traffic than early merging?](#)
- [7- Groton Legion Post 39 Looks To Continue Strong Play Against Castlewood Post 250](#)
- [8- Legion beats Spearfish](#)
- [9- Legion Box Score](#)
- [10- Amateurs lose to Northville](#)
- [11- Amateur Box Score](#)
- [12- Schools' tight budgets bench baseball for time being](#)
- [13- Watertown superintendent will lead SDHSAA board](#)
- [14- Hutchinson County Fatal Crash](#)
- [14- Minnehaha County Fatal Crash](#)
- [15- Governor's Office of Economic Development receives third consecutive Silver Shovel Award](#)
- [16- AARP Awards Eight Grants to Seven South Dakota Communities](#)
- [18- SD News Watch: Residents stand ready to help plan the future of Watertown](#)
- [21- SD SearchLight: Group of state and local officials calls on Congress to end tax credits for carbon sequestration](#)
- [22- SD SearchLight: Thune, Rounds vote yes as U.S. Senate confirms Trump pick for Customs and Border Protection](#)
- [23- SD SearchLight: State schedules vaccination clinics as measles cases rise to four](#)
- [24- SD SearchLight: U.S. senators from Minnesota reflect on slain state legislator in Senate floor remarks](#)
- [25- SD SearchLight: Iowa House moves petition for special session to override veto of pipeline bill](#)
- [27- Weather Pages](#)
- [32- Daily Devotional](#)
- [33- Subscription Form](#)
- [34- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [35- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [36- News from the Associated Press](#)

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



**It's time to just be happy.
Being angry, sad and
overthinking isn't worth it
anymore. Just let things
flow. Be Positive
Amen**

Be Positive Be
Happy 🌻

Thursday, June 19

Senior Menu: Chicken pasta salad, three bean salad, fruit, breadstick.

Transit fundraiser, 5 p.m., Groton Community Center

Legion at Milbank Tourney

U10 W&R hosts Sisseton, 5:30 p.m. (DH)

U8 W&R at Britton, 5:30 p.m. (DH)

Softball: U14/U18 at Claremont, 6 p.m. (DH)

T-Ball: G&B scrimmage, 6 p.m.

Friday, June 20

Senior Menu: Meatloaf, baked potato, California blend, peaches, whole wheat bread.

Legion at Milbank Tourney

Jr. Teeners host Redfield, 5:30 p.m. (DH)

Saturday, June 21

U8 Youth Baseball Tournament

Groton Triathlon

Legion at Milbank Tourney

U12 at Webster Tourney

U8 Groton Tourney

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 2 of 76

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.

Transgender Ban Upheld

The Supreme Court ruled 6-3 yesterday to uphold Tennessee's ban on medical treatments for transgender minors. The court found the law did not amount to sex discrimination, barred under the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause.

An estimated 300,000 children ages 13 to 17 identify as transgender in the US (42,000 kids received gender dysphoria diagnoses as of 2021, up nearly threefold from 2017). Tennessee is one of 27 states restricting or banning medical interventions for those kids, including hormone therapy, puberty blockers, and surgery. The Supreme Court ruling is expected to pave the way for state bans to remain in effect, though some legal questions—including on parents' rights—remain unresolved. Following the ruling, Justice Sonia Sotomayor took the rare step of reading her dissenting opinion from the bench.

Separately, the Supreme Court ruled to temporarily resume nuclear waste storage sites in Texas and New Mexico.

Honda's Reusable Rocket

Honda successfully tested a reusable rocket prototype on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido this week. The surprise announcement marked the carmaker's first space-related update since late 2021, when Honda said it was exploring space technology.

Honda said it launched its 20-foot-tall device to an altitude of nearly 1,000 feet Tuesday, with the rocket flying for nearly one minute before landing within 14 inches of its target. The experiment moves Japan's second-largest carmaker closer to its goal of achieving suborbital spaceflight by 2029. Honda says it has not finalized a commercialization plan but cites a growing need for satellites; Goldman Sachs estimates the market will grow sevenfold by 2035, from \$15B to at least \$108B.

SpaceX is the leader in commercialized reusable rockets, though other companies—including Blue Origin and startups in China and Europe—have entered the field. Toyota, the world's biggest carmaker by sales, announced this year it is working to mass-produce launch vehicles.

Bling Bandits Busted

Seven California men have been charged in what federal prosecutors say is the largest jewelry heist in US history. They allegedly stole about \$100M worth of gold, diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and watches from an armored truck in July 2022.

The men, aged 31 to 60, reportedly followed a Brinks semitruck over 300 miles from a trade show to a rest stop north of Los Angeles. Just after 2 am, while one guard was getting food and another was asleep, they nabbed 24 of the 73 bags of jewelry in the truck. The historic escape took under 27 minutes.

Cellphone records and surveillance footage were critical to identifying the suspects, several of whom are also linked to a string of smaller robberies. Authorities recovered some jewelry and arrested two men Monday. Another suspect is serving time for unrelated charges and four remain at large. The charges announced Tuesday carry maximum sentences of five to 20 years in prison.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 3 of 76

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Oklahoma City Thunder take on the Indiana Pacers tonight (8:30 pm ET, ABC) in Game 6 of the NBA Finals; the Thunder are up 3-2 in the best-of-seven series and will look to win the franchise's second NBA title.

Buss family to sell majority stake in Los Angeles Lakers at a \$10B valuation, the largest ever sale of a US sports team.

Film and TV mogul Tyler Perry accused of sexual assault in \$260M lawsuit; actor Derek Dixon alleges Perry threatened career retaliation if Dixon didn't accept his advances.

Karen Read found not guilty in murder of boyfriend, police officer John O'Keefe.

David Hekili Kenui Bell, actor best known for "Lilo & Stitch" live-action film adaptation, dies at age 46.

Science & Technology

US health officials approve twice-a-year preventive HIV shot after clinical trials showed a reduction of at least 96% in new infections; researchers say it may bring a long-sought end to the AIDS epidemic.

Self-driving startup Waymo files permit to conduct self-driving testing in Manhattan with human oversight; company has fully autonomous cars in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Austin.

China's "Dragon Man" skull identified as belonging to a Denisovan; 146,000-year-old specimen allows facial reconstruction of the ancient human relative.

Fewer than a dozen remains of the species, mostly small fragments, have ever been recovered.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.0%, Dow -0.1%, Nasdaq +0.1%).

Federal Reserve leaves benchmark interest rates unchanged, still forecasts two more rate cuts this year.

US Steel shares stop trading on NYSE as Japan's Nippon Steel finalizes its nearly \$15B purchase of the iconic American firm; combined company will become world's fourth-largest steelmaker.

Cryptocurrency firm Circle shares rise roughly 34% a day after the US Senate passed a bill to establish federal regulations for stablecoins—cryptocurrencies pegged to the US dollar; bill now heads to the House.

Politics & World Affairs

Israel says it destroyed Iran's internal security headquarters.

The US moves at least 30 military planes to Europe as President Donald Trump weighs direct US involvement in the Israel-Iran conflict.

Federal judge blocks executive order limiting passport sex markers to male and female.

State Department resumes processing of foreign student visas, requires access to applicants' social media accounts.

Medicare and Social Security trust funds projected to run short of funds by 2033 and 2034 respectively, limiting full benefit payouts, per new report.

Groton Transit Fundraiser



When: Thursday, June 19, 2025

Time: 5:00 pm-7:00 pm

Where: Groton Community Center

*** Groton Transit Fundraiser will be held at the Groton Community Center-
109 N 3rd Street- One block East of Groton Transit***

Let us do the Cooking for you!! Burgers, Brats, Beans, Watermelon, Chips,
and the Famous Mini Donuts!!

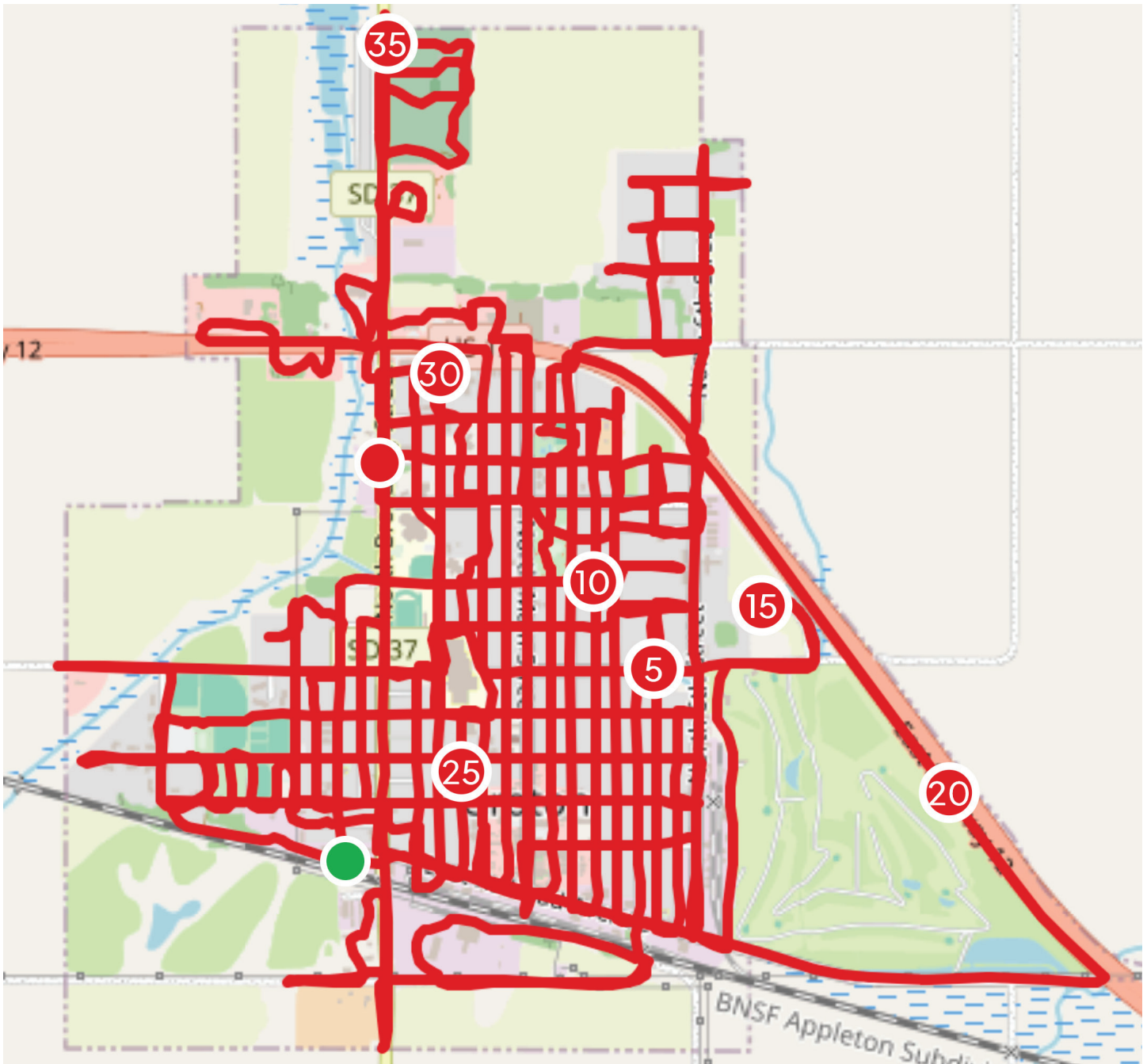
Food*Fun*Door Prizes

FREE WILL DONATION

Please join us & Help support Groton Transit!

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 5 of 76



Adult Mosquito Control

The City of Groton conducted adult mosquito control Wednesday night. The temperature was 68-74 degrees with the wind out of the SSE at 5-10 mph. 10.2 gallons of Perm-X UL 4-4 was used. Travel time was 2 hours and 56 minutes with a distance of 34.42 miles. During my travels I saw 16 rabbits, 5 cats, 1 horse and 1 skunk. Total cost of the application was around \$500.



Is zipper merging more efficient for traffic than early merging?

Yes.

Zipper merging in construction zones can save drivers time and reduce traffic congestion.

A zipper merge occurs when drivers use both lanes of traffic until reaching a merging point, where motorists then take turns moving into a single lane. Early merging is when motorists move to the open lane as soon as possible before a lane closure.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation said zipper merging can reduce the length of backups by 40% and limit crashes. Another study said congestion can be reduced by up to 50%. Several states have encouraged zipper merging by using signage and public awareness campaigns.

In Sioux Falls, Mayor Paul TenHaken held a news conference June 11, 2025, while wearing a shirt saying, "I feel the urge to zipper merge."

"For some reason (in South Dakota), it's considered rude (to zipper merge)," TenHaken said. "And it's not rude, it's very effective," TenHaken said.

Groton Legion Post 39 Looks To Continue Strong Play Against Castlewood Post 250

by GameChanger Media

Groton Legion Post 39 have been playing well lately, going 7-3 in their last 10 games. They'll put that strong play to the test when they take on Castlewood Post 250 on Thursday at Milbank SD.

Last Time Out:

Korbin Kucker drove in four runs as Groton Legion Post 39 defeated Spearfish Post 164 Sr. Legion 18U 20-4.

Player Highlight:

Jarrett Erdmann hits and pitches for Groton Legion Post 39. Erdmann primarily plays left field on the field. Erdmann drove in two runs last game as they went 1-3 at the plate. Erdmann has an on-base percentage of 0.438 this season thanks in part to a 0.217 average and nine walks. Erdmann gets ahead in the count fast on the bump. Erdmann has thrown first pitch strikes to 40 of the 77 batters they've faced this season.

About Groton Legion Post 39:

Groton Legion Post 39 has played well lately, going 7-3 in their last 10 games. They have a 9-3 record overall. Kucker's 1.291 OPS leads Groton Legion Post 39. The second baseman has a 0.510 OBP and a 0.780 slugging percentage this season. Nick Morris leads Groton Legion Post 39 with 16 and two-thirds innings pitched. The starting pitcher has a 2.10 ERA this season. Karsten Fliehs leads Groton Legion Post 39 with 73 total fielding chances this season. Fliehs's primary position is catcher.

About Castlewood Post 250:

Castlewood Post 250 has zero wins against three losses this season. Kaden Nedved's 1.339 OPS leads Castlewood Post 250. The shortstop has a 0.625 OBP and a 0.714 slugging percentage this season. Nedved leads Castlewood Post 250 with three and two-thirds innings pitched. Jarin Eidson leads Castlewood Post 250 with 17 total fielding chances this season. Eidson's primary position is first base.

Groton Legion Post 39 Defeats Spearfish Post 164 Sr. Legion 18U On Back Of Clutch Display From Korbin Kucker

By GameChanger Media

Korbin Kucker drove in four runs on four hits to lead Groton Legion Post 39 past Spearfish Post 164 Sr. Legion 18U 20-4 on Wednesday. Kucker singled in the first inning, scoring two runs, and doubled in the third inning, scoring two.

Groton Legion Post 39 scored 15 runs in the first inning on the way to victory. Brevin Fliehs singled, scoring one run, Carter Simon doubled, scoring one run, Gavin Englund singled, scoring one run, Nick Groeblichhoff singled, scoring one run, Jarrett Erdmann drew a walk, scoring one run, Teylor Diegel singled, scoring one run, Kucker singled, scoring two runs, Fliehs singled, scoring one run, an error scored two runs, Braxton Imrie singled, scoring one run, Karsten Fliehs doubled, scoring two runs, and Erdmann singled, scoring one run.

Jack Branum homered to center field, scoring three runs in the bottom of the first for the Spearfish Post 164 Sr. Legion 18U.

A double by Kucker, and an error helped Groton Legion Post 39 extend their early lead in the third.

Nick Morris earned the win for Groton Legion Post 39. The starting pitcher surrendered eight hits and four runs over five innings, striking out eight and walking two. Aiden Meverden took the loss for Spearfish Post 164 Sr. Legion 18U. The right-handed pitcher went one-third of an inning, giving up 10 runs on eight hits, striking out none and walking two.

Groton Legion Post 39 tallied 19 hits in the game. Diegel and Kucker were a force together in the lineup, as they each collected four hits for Groton Legion Post 39. Fliehs, Groeblichhoff, and Simon each collected multiple hits for Groton Legion Post 39. Imrie paced Groton Legion Post 39 with two walks. Overall, the team had patience at the plate, piling up seven walks for the game. Groton Legion Post 39 turned one double play in the game. Groton Legion Post 39 were sure-handed in the field and didn't commit a single error. Fliehs had the most chances in the field with eight.

Branum drove the middle of the lineup, leading Spearfish Post 164 Sr. Legion 18U with three runs batted in. The left-handed hitter went 1-for-3 on the day. Owen Bruner and Meverden each collected two hits for Spearfish Post 164 Sr. Legion 18U. Spearfish Post 164 Sr. Legion 18U turned one double play in the game.

Groton Legion Post 39 will travel to Milbank Founders Day Tournament for their next game on Thursday.

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 9 of 76

Groton Legion Post 39 20 - 4 Spearfish Post 164 Sr. Legion 18U

9 Away 📅 Wednesday June 18, 2025

	1	2	3	4	5	R	H	E
GRTN	15	0	3	0	2	20	19	0
SPRF	3	0	1	0	0	4	8	2

BATTING

Groton Legion Post 39B	R	H	RR	BB	SO	
T Diegel #7 (CF)	4	4	4	1	1	0
K Kucker #9 (3B)	5	4	4	4	0	0
B Flehs #6 (SS)	4	3	3	3	0	0
C Simon #4 (1B)	5	1	2	1	0	1
G England #10 (3B)	4	2	1	1	1	1
N Groeb... #13 (DH)	3	2	2	1	1	0
B Imrie #1 (RF)	3	2	1	1	2	0
K Flehs #10 (C)	3	1	1	2	1	1
J Erdmann #2 (LF)	3	1	1	2	1	2
CE: A Abeln #5	0	1	0	0	0	0
Totals	34	20	19	19	7	6

2B: K Kucker 3, K Flehs, B Flehs, C Simon, TB: G England, K Kucker 1, T Diegel 4, K Flehs 2, J Erdmann, B Flehs 4, N Groeb... 1, C Simon 3, B Imrie, SF: B Flehs, HBP: N Groeb... 1, LOB: 7

PITCHING

Groton Legion P#B# 39H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR		
N Morris #10	5.0	0	4	4	2	0	1
Totals	5.0	0	4	4	2	0	1

W: N Morris, P-S: N Morris 25-31, HBP: N Morris, BF: N Morris 25

Spearfish Post 16-18 Sr. Legion 18-19	R	H	RR	BB	SO	
T Olson (CF)	2	1	1	0	0	1
A Meyenden (P)	3	1	2	0	0	1
J Granum (1B)	3	1	1	3	0	1
O Bruner (C)	2	1	2	0	1	0
S Sewell (3B)	3	0	1	0	0	1
R Feyersloen (RF)	2	0	0	0	1	1
C Chase (LF)	3	0	1	1	0	1
D Bower (2B)	2	0	0	0	0	2
W Viesman (SS)	2	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	22	4	8	4	2	8

HR: J Granum, TB: J Granum 4, T Olson, A Meyenden 2, S Sewell, O Bruner 2, C Chase, HBP: T Olson, BB: A Meyenden, O Bruner, LOB: 6

Spearfish Post 164 Sr. Legion 18OB	BB	SO	HR				
A Meyenden	0.1	0	10	10	2	0	0
B Bower	2.1	0	0	1	1	1	0
R Feyersloen	2.1	0	4	3	4	4	0
Totals	5.0	10	20	14	7	5	0

L: A Meyenden, P-S: D Bower 50-50, R Feyersloen 57-55, A Meyenden 50-14, WP: R Feyersloen, HBP: B Bower, BF: D Bower 10, R Feyersloen 10, A Meyenden 11

Groton Locke Electric Drops Tough Game Against Northville Merchants

By GameChanger Media

Groton Locke Electric couldn't keep up with Northville Merchants and fell 11-5 on Tuesday at Northville. Northville Merchants got on the board in the bottom of the first inning after Ashton Remily singled to the right side of the infield, and Northville Merchants scored on a wild pitch, each scoring one run.

Northville Merchants added to their early lead in the bottom of the third inning when Carson Simes doubled, scoring one run, Ethan Beyers singled, scoring one run, and Kyle Stahl singled, scoring two runs.

Remily earned the win for Northville Merchants. The pitcher surrendered six hits and four runs (zero earned) over six innings, striking out three and walking two. Jonah Schmidt took the loss for Groton Locke Electric. The starter went four innings, giving up eight runs (five earned) on eight hits, striking out five and walking three.

Groton Locke Electric amassed nine hits in the game. Ryan Groeblichhoff led Groton Locke Electric with two runs batted in from the number eight spot in the lineup. The center fielder went 1-for-3 on the day. Bradin Althoff, Ty Sieber, and Cade Larson each collected two hits for Groton Locke Electric.

Northville Merchants tallied 11 hits in the game. Simes set the tone at the top of the lineup, leading Northville Merchants with three hits in five at bats. Greg Heyne and Max Waltman each collected multiple hits for Northville Merchants.

Groton Locke Electric will travel to Circus Sports Bar for their next game on Wednesday.

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 11 of 76

Groton Locke Electric 5 - 11 Northville Merchants

📍 Away 📅 Tuesday June 17, 2025

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	R	H	E
GRTN	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	1	5	9	3
NRTH	2	0	4	2	0	0	0	3	X	11	11	3

BATTING

Groton Locke Electric	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
D Frey #6 (LF)	4	0	0	0	0	1
N Morris Leg... #17	1	0	0	0	0	0
B Althoff #27 (RF)	5	1	2	0	0	2
B Althoff #1 (3B)	5	1	1	0	0	0
T Sieber #24 (SS)	4	1	2	1	0	1
J Schmidt #21 (P)	4	1	1	0	1	0
B Hansen #18 (1B)	5	0	0	0	0	0
B Richter #19 (2B)	4	1	0	0	0	1
C Cam... #10 (2B)	0	0	0	0	0	0
R Groebli... #0 (CF)	3	0	1	2	1	0
C Larson #17 (C)	4	0	2	1	0	0
Totals	39	5	9	4	2	5

2B: B Althoff, B Althoff 2, **TB:** T Sieber 2, C Larson 2, B Althoff 2, R Groeblichhoff, J Schmidt, B Althoff 4, **HBP:** T Sieber, **LOB:** 10

PITCHING

Groton Locke Electric	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
J Schmi... #21	4.0	8	8	5	3	5
R Groebli... #0	4.0	3	3	0	0	5
Totals	8.0	11	11	5	3	10

L: J Schmidt, **P-S:** R Groeblichhoff 53-33, J Schmidt 98-57, **WP:** R Groeblichhoff 2, J Schmidt 2, **HBP:** R Groeblichhoff, J Schmidt, **BF:** R Groeblichhoff 17, J Schmidt 25

Northville Merchants	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
C Simes #1 (CF)	5	4	3	3	0	0
A Remily #21 (P)	4	2	1	1	1	0
G Heyne #11 (2B)	2	1	2	1	1	0
N Pezon... #28 (SS)	3	1	1	1	0	1
E Beyers #34 (3B)	4	0	1	1	0	1
K Stahl #2 (C)	4	0	1	2	0	3
J Maxfield #13 (P)	4	0	0	0	0	2
M Hudson #4 (LF)	4	0	0	0	0	1
M Waltn... #29 (1B)	4	1	2	0	0	0
X Kadlec #3 (RF)	3	2	0	0	1	2
Totals	37	11	11	9	3	10

2B: N Pezonella, C Simes, **3B:** C Simes 2, **TB:** G Heyne 2, A Remily, K Stahl, E Beyers, N Pezonella 2, M Waltman 2, C Simes 8, **HBP:** G Heyne, N Pezonella, **SB:** C Simes, **LOB:** 7

Northville Merchants	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
A Remily #21	6.0	6	4	0	2	3
J Maxfi... #13	3.0	3	1	0	0	2
Totals	9.0	9	5	0	2	5

W: A Remily, **P-S:** A Remily 94-63, J Maxfield 50-37, **HBP:** A Remily, **BF:** A Remily 29, J Maxfield 13

Schools' tight budgets bench baseball for time being

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. NewsMedia Association



PIERRE — The board of directors of the South Dakota High School Activities Association has decided that now is not the right time to sanction high school baseball. At its meeting on Wednesday, June 18, the board decided not to act on adding baseball to the sports it sanctions, citing an uncertain economy for school districts.

The process for considering the addition of baseball started in April of 2024 after the board received requests to sanction the sport from the McCook Central and Mount Vernon high schools.

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos said that talks with the American

Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and the S.D. High School Baseball Association have been positive. He said the high school baseball association already adheres to SDHSAA's eligibility rules.

Swartos offered the board the results of a survey about adding baseball that was taken by 100 superintendents and activities directors. Their biggest concerns about sanctioning baseball were funding, budget constraints and enrollment decline.

Swartos said some superintendents were concerned with the optics of adding a sport while tight budgets were forcing them to cut staff. "This puts (school) boards in a bad position," Swartos said, as they face funding challenges as well as pressure from parents to add a new sport.

Board member Randy Hartmann, who serves on the Pierre School Board, said there was tremendous pressure from parents to add soccer when the association added that sport.

"It's awful hard to justify adding a sport," Hartmann said of the current economic situation. "It just puts the school board in a very tough situation. It doesn't make sense to me at all."

Board member Adam Shaw of Madison agreed: "I can't cut staff and turn around and add baseball."

Some schools that responded to the survey were willing to add the sport. Swartos said those indicating they were likely or very likely to add the sport included five AA schools, 25 A schools and nine B schools. Some of the A and B schools would need to form co-ops in order to compete, Swartos said.

Swartos said that the activities associations of South Dakota and Wyoming are the only ones that don't sanction baseball. He noted that the sport, with 69 teams, seems to be doing well without the help of SDHSAA.

"I don't know that what's happening right now is broken," Swartos said.

Even though they took no action, the board may revisit the topic if schools find themselves in a better economic position in the future.

"Let's keep looking at this," Swartos said. "Now is not the right time to do it."

Watertown superintendent will lead SDHSAA board

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. NewsMedia Association

PIERRE — The next leader of the South Dakota High School Activities Association will be Watertown Superintendent Jeff Danielsen. He was elected chairman at the board's meeting on Wednesday, June 18, and will serve a one-year term in that position. Elected vice chairman was Randy Hartmann of Pierre.

In addition to electing new leaders, the board certified the results of the election of new board members. Previously elected to the board without opposition was Billy Clanton of Harding County. He replaces Marty Weismantel of Groton as the board member representing small school boards.

The new board member representing Division I, or the largest schools, will be Jordan Bauer of Rapid City Central. He defeated Steve Moore of Sioux Falls Roosevelt. Bauer replaces Ryan Rollinger of Harrisburg.

Rollinger will take part in a run-off election against Brittney Eide of Corsica-Stickney for a position on the board as the East River at-large representative. Rollinger is eligible to run for a new position on the board because the term he served was less than two years.

While Rollinger and Eide got the most votes, neither got the majority that's required for election to the board. Also running for that position on the board were Tim Leibel of Hitchcock-Tulare, Shelby Edwards of Groton Area and Tina Board of Aberdeen Central. Either Rollinger or Eide will replace Trent Osborne of Ipswich on the board.

Chad Allison of Lennox was elected Division III board representative. He defeated Jeff Sheehan of Hamlin. Allison will serve out the remaining three year of the term of board member Adam Shaw of Madison. That board position is earmarked to be filled by a principal and Shaw has taken on a new position as a superintendent. Other board members were elected to five-year terms.

Clanton, Bauer and Allison will start their terms at the board's next meeting in July.

Member schools also voted on five amendments to the SDHSAA constitution. All were approved overwhelmingly by the schools. All five amendments dealt with transfer rules and determining the eligibility of student-athletes who transfer from one school district to another.



Dr. Jeff Danielsen
Superintendent of Schools
Watertown School District

Hutchinson County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash
Where: SD Highway 44, mile marker 361, 11 miles east of Parkston, SD
When: 12:22 p.m., Wednesday, June 18, 2025

Driver 1: 81-year-old male from Burke, SD, fatal injuries
Vehicle 1: 2011 Ford Econoline 350
Seat belt Used: Yes

Hutchinson County, S.D.- A Burke, SD man died in a single vehicle crash this afternoon, 11 miles east of Parkston, SD.

The name of the person involved has not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2011 Ford Econoline 350 was traveling westbound on SD Highway 44 when the vehicle left the roadway, vaulted over a field approach and rolled. The driver was pronounced deceased at the scene.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

Minnehaha County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash
Where: Interstate 29, mile marker 79, Sioux Falls, SD
When: 11:34 p.m., Tuesday, June 17, 2025

Driver 1: 59-year-old male from Sioux Falls, SD, fatal injuries
Vehicle 1: 2008 Lexus IS250
Seat belt Used: Yes

Driver 2: 57-year-old male from Council Bluffs, IA, no injuries
Vehicle 2: 2024 Freightliner Cascadia
Seat belt Used: Yes

Minnehaha County, S.D.- A Sioux Falls man died in a collision with a semi Tuesday evening in Sioux Falls, SD.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2008 Lexus IS250 was traveling northbound on Interstate 29 in a construction zone near mile marker 79. At the same time, the driver of a 2024 Freightliner Cascadia with double trailers was traveling the same direction in the next lane. The trailer wheels struck a concrete barrier, sending the second trailer airborne which then tipped over, landing on the Lexus. Both vehicles came to rest in the east ditch.

The driver of the Lexus was pronounced deceased at the scene. The semi driver was not injured.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

Governor's Office of Economic Development receives third consecutive Silver Shovel Award



PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota has received a 2025 Silver Shovel Award from Area Development magazine, marking the third year in a row the state has earned national recognition for job creation and business investment.

The Silver Shovel Awards honor states for major economic development projects that result in new jobs and capital investment. South Dakota was recognized in the category for states with fewer than 3 million people, based on project activity during 2024.

"South Dakota is Open for Opportunity, and this award shows that our efforts are working," said Governor Larry Rhoden. "We're proud to be building on our strengths and helping businesses succeed across the state."

According to Area Development, the expansions of SFC Global Supply Chain, Riverview LLP, Plainview Dairy, and Brookings Biogas are helping grow critical industries in South Dakota and creating significant workforce opportunities statewide.

"This recognition reflects the hard work of the GOED team and the strong partnerships we have with local communities, business leaders, and other key partners across South Dakota," said GOED Commissioner Bill Even. "We're thankful for the recognition and focused on creating even more opportunities for South Dakotans."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 16 of 76

AARP Awards Eight Grants to Seven South Dakota Communities

More than \$97,000 in grants aims to help residents of all ages, especially older adults, improve how they live, move and stay connected in their neighborhoods through innovative local projects.

Sioux Falls, SD— AARP South Dakota announced today that seven communities across the state will receive 2025 Community Challenge grants. The grants are part of AARP's \$4.2 million commitment this year to fund 383 quick-action projects aimed at making communities more livable for people of all ages, with a focus on the needs of older adults.

Now in its ninth year, the national grant program has awarded more than \$414,000 in grants to 40 non-profit organizations and local government entities across South Dakota since 2017.

"AARP South Dakota is committed to working with local leaders to improve residents' quality of life through tangible changes," said state director Erik Gaikowski. "We are proud to collaborate with this year's grantees as they make immediate improvements in their communities to jumpstart long-term change, especially for South Dakotans 50 and over."

This year, the AARP Community Challenge accepted applications across three different grant opportunities, including flagship grants to fund a wide variety of projects; capacity-building microgrants for improving walkability, disaster preparedness or HomeFit® Guide Modifications; and demonstration grants that focus on improving transportation systems, with funding support provided by Toyota Motor North America.

The following projects were funded in South Dakota for 2025:

Flagship Grants

Crooks Veterans Park – transform a parcel in Crooks into a vibrant Veterans Park with historical displays, colorful landscaping and memorials honoring soldiers past and present. The ADA-compliant design ensures that older adults can fully enjoy the park.

Gayville-Volin School District - create an outdoor classroom on Gayville-Volin School property, fostering intergenerational learning and community engagement. It will be used for school activities, community events and summer programs, bringing together residents over 50 and students to share knowledge and experiences.

Hayti Softball Field - improve the baseball/softball field grandstand in Hayti by adding a roof, a rail and cement pads for comfortable seating. These enhancements will provide a safe and accessible environment for all generations, especially older adults, to enjoy social engagement and softball games.

Downtown Sioux Falls, Inc. – transform areas of downtown into pedestrian-friendly zone through a series of Open Streets events to enhance walkability and community connections. By supporting local businesses and fostering social engagement, the project promotes a vibrant, age-inclusive downtown.

Spearfish Trails Coalition – The Lunch Loops Trail Project will create accessible, multi-use trails near Spearfish for all ages and abilities. Designed for walkers, runners, and cyclists, these trails will promote health, connection and outdoor enjoyment, with features that accommodate older adults and individuals with physical impairments.

Capacity-building Microgrants

Canton, SD – Two microgrant projects, spearheaded by the Canton Chamber of Commerce and the Canton Trails Committee, will implement two bike audits and two walk audits to assess walkability, bikeability, safety needs and opportunities for biking paths, sidewalks or other active transportation amenities.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 17 of 76

Demonstration Grant*:

Brookings, SD – The “Safe Steps: Crosswalks & Bump-Outs for a Walkable Brookings” project will improve pedestrian safety at two key intersections in downtown Brookings by installing high-visibility crosswalks and painted bump-outs. These enhancements will make the area safer and more accessible, especially for older adults, and foster a more walkable community.

*This demonstration grant to support pedestrian safety initiatives is funded by AARP with support from Toyota Motor North America.

“AARP Community Challenge projects may be quick to launch, but their impact is long-lasting,” said Nancy A. LeaMond, AARP Executive Vice President and Chief Advocacy & Engagement Officer. “We’re proud to support communities nationwide to advance solutions that make neighborhoods and towns of all sizes better places to live where everyone can thrive. And this year, we’re particularly proud to invest in projects benefiting often overlooked rural areas.”

AARP Community Challenge grant projects will be funded in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. True to the program’s quick-action nature, projects must be completed by December 15, 2025. View the full list of grantees and their project descriptions at aarp.org/communitychallenge and learn more about AARP’s livable communities work at aarp.org/livable.



**SOUTH DAKOTA
NEWS WATCH**

Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

Residents stand ready to help plan the future of Watertown

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

WATERTOWN, S.D. – Lindsey Schwinger isn't sure how she can help chart a positive future for the city of Watertown, but she is certain she wants to try.

Schwinger, 38, grew up here and is now a stay-at-home mother who engages in charity work through the roller derby team she competes with.

"Being involved in the community and helping shape the future for our family and our children, that's super important," she said.

Schwinger explored opportunities to get further involved in her community at a June 12 event that marked the next stage of an ongoing, resident-driven planning process known as H2O-50, or Watertown 2050.

In many respects, Schwinger is exactly the type of person that organizers of the "visioning" effort hope will get engaged and make her voice and ideas heard on how this northeastern South Dakota city should change and grow over the next 25 years.

She's a homeowner, she's raising a family, she knows the city well and she's committed to seeing the community prosper.

A major component of the H2O-50 process is encouraging residents like Schwinger to participate and share their knowledge, hopes and expectations for how life can be even better than it is now in the city of 23,000 people. Given the optimism that permeated the community event, and based on her interest level, it appears organizers were successful in attracting Schwinger to participate.

"I'm big into recreation, so I'd like to see us improve access to activities for medium- and low-income residents," she said. "I like being a part of my community, and this seems like a great way to be active in that."

Schwinger was among about 135 people, including a dozen or so children, who attended the gathering at the Goss Opera House in downtown Watertown to usher in the third and final phase of the H2O-50 planning process. It had a festive vibe, with a live band, drinks and many discussions on how Watertown can evolve.

The opera house was a fitting site for the event, as its restoration was one of the significant outcomes of the first planning process undertaken in Watertown, known as H2O-20.

The plan to restore the historic structure, and to find the money to do so, was one of a handful of successful capital improvement projects achieved by the initial planning effort. Those efforts included construction of the \$21 million Prairie Lakes Wellness Center in 2017, the \$5 million restoration of the 130-year-old opera house in 2023 and the construction of the \$36.5 million Prairie Lakes Ice Arena that opened last year.



Nash Colberg, a real estate agent, is helping lead discussions on housing as part of the community planning process in Watertown, S.D. Colberg attended the community planning meeting in Watertown on June 12, 2025. (Photo: Bart Pfankuch /

South Dakota News Watch)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 19 of 76

South Dakota News Watch is monitoring and reporting about the planning process in Watertown as part of the news organization's "Engage South Dakota," effort, which seeks to use storytelling and civic engagement as a way to identify and share solutions to problems in cities and towns across the state. News Watch previously reported on the H2O-50 process in September.

Planning process moves along in phases

The first phase of the H2O-50 process was to gather resident input into how the community could be improved.

Over roughly the past year, organizers interviewed about two dozen community leaders, held two community meetings and seven focus groups and sent out a community survey.

Just as they did during H2O-20, many residents responded, with nearly 3,100 surveys completed, representing ideas from more than 10% of the city population. The surveys included a couple dozen responses in Spanish, which organizers said ensures the city's Hispanic residents are being heard.

In the second phase, organizers used the resident input combined with analyses of a handful of similar-sized cities in the region to identify Watertown's strengths and its needs. Based on those findings, organizers identified four key "pillars" upon which further planning efforts will focus – housing supply, activities and recreation, workforce capacity and community building.

The surveys revealed that many residents feel great about living in Watertown. But it also revealed some big needs, including a lack of affordable housing and a shortage of amenities that could attract more young people to the city.

Now, committees and subcommittees consisting of residents and local officials will begin to tackle challenges in those four categories, according to local attorney Liam Culhane, who is chairing the H2O-50 effort along with his wife, Amanda.

Some committees will examine issues of a large scope, while others, such as one focused specifically on the future of Lake Kampeska, will drill in on highly specific topics, Liam Culhane said.

"The lake is a hot issue and a sometimes contentious issue," Culhane said. "What do we do in terms of development there, in term of recreational opportunities, and what should the city's role be in that?"

Culhane said he doesn't think the desire for large capital projects is as high as it was during H2O-20 and instead expects the final report to identify solutions to challenges that can hamper quality of life or restrict growth, such as expanding access to housing and child care while creating new recreational and social opportunities.

Culhane said a major strength of the planning process is that residents play a big role in determining what to tackle and how to do so.

"We've known about a lot of these challenges for years now, and we know we can't wait on the state or federal government to bail us out," Culhane said. "We're going to have to get creative on the local level."

Culhane said the high survey response rate and strong attendance at the June 12 event give him confidence positive changes will result.

"I'm really energized and refreshed to see that in the end, we're all on the same page on many issues in Watertown," Culhane said. "We might have different ideas on how to get there, and that's OK. But generally the community really wants to see the same things get done."



Watertown, S.D., residents Liam Culhane and his wife, Amanda Culhane, shown at a community meeting on June 12, 2025 with daughter Wren, are the main organizers of the H2O-50 planning process. (Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 20 of 76

Mayor: Process 'making my job easier'

Watertown Mayor Ried Holien, a former state lawmaker, told News Watch he is eager to hear from residents about their wants and needs, and he sees great value in the resident-driven approach to the H2O-50 planning process.

"I've been in politics a long time and I know there are people in elected positions or in government staff who have some hesitancy to accept when citizens take a leadership position or push an agenda of what they want to see in their community," Holien said at the event. "I've always thought that was odd because in my mind they're making my job easier because they're all just trying to make Watertown better."

Holien said the H2O-50 process will undoubtedly lead to tangible results for the community. "We'll get way more done than just a lone voice trying to lead a community can because these people all care deeply about their community."

Generating ideas from the ground up

Local real estate agent Nash Colberg is working with the committee that will examine ways to improve the housing situation in Watertown. Colberg said he's already well aware that providing opportunities for affordable housing – both for renters and potential owners – is critical to the future growth and success of the community.

"It's a challenge almost every growing community in South Dakota is facing, and we have really high demand for housing here in Watertown right now," he said.

Colberg came to the June 12 event to answer questions from the public about the planning process and to generate interest among residents in possibly joining the committee focused on housing.

He said a couple ideas have already bubbled up in the community survey and from discussions with other residents and community leaders. Among them: finding resources to rehabilitate older properties that may be in disrepair, developing public-private partnerships and rezoning some areas of the city to make it easier and faster to develop new housing.

"If we had more housing, especially affordable housing, that would make it easier for people to move here and keep the community growing."

This story was produced by South Dakota News Watch, an independent, nonprofit organization. Read more stories and donate at sdnewswatch.org and sign up for an email to get stories when they're published.



Resident input is at the heart of the H2O-50 civic planning process now underway in Watertown, S.D. Project organizers held a community discussion on the process at the Goss Opera House on June 12, 2025. (Photo:

Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Group of state and local officials calls on Congress to end tax credits for carbon sequestration

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JUNE 18, 2025 5:41 PM

Over 100 state and local officials from the Midwest and West, including South Dakota, are asking the U.S. Senate to eliminate tax credits for carbon capture and sequestration as part of a federal budget reconciliation bill.

Established by Congress and then-President George W. Bush in 2008, the 45Q tax credits incentivize companies to capture carbon dioxide from processes such as ethanol production and sequester it underground, so it won't contribute to climate change by acting as a greenhouse gas in the atmosphere. The carbon can also be sequestered as part of enhanced oil recovery, in which pressurized gas is used to push more oil to the surface.

Opponents say the credits don't work as intended.

"The 45Q tax credits really only make sense to the industries that are poised to make billions of dollars from them," said North Dakota state Sen. Tim Mathern, D-Fargo. "They are supposedly intended to reduce carbon emissions, but in fact, 45Q tax credits pay polluters for polluting and subsidize private oil production at the expense of the taxpayer."

Companies receive up to \$85 per metric ton for regular sequestration and up to \$60 per metric ton for sequestration via enhanced oil recovery — though there is a provision in a draft portion of the Senate reconciliation bill that would raise the maximum oil recovery credit to \$85.

The repeal effort includes officials from Colorado, Indiana, Iowa, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming. A few of those officials held a virtual press conference Wednesday.

South Dakota state Sen. Joy Hohn, R-Hartford, described the tax credits as wasteful spending.

"We are concerned about preserving taxpayer dollars, and I guess that's the main gist of our conference today," Hohn said.

Mathern said repealing the tax credits would put projects like Summit Carbon Solutions' proposed five-state carbon dioxide pipeline "in dire danger."

"And that's really positive," he said.

Summit's project alone could qualify for more than \$1 billion annually from 45Q credits. It aims to capture some of the CO2 emitted by dozens of ethanol plants and ship the carbon via pipeline to a sequestration area southeast of the oilfields in western North Dakota.

Earlier this year, South Dakota's legislators and governor adopted a law banning the use of a legal process known as eminent domain to acquire land access for carbon dioxide pipelines. South Dakota regulators



State Sen. Joy Hohn, R-Hartford, listens to debate on the South Dakota Senate floor on Feb. 10, 2025.

(John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

also rejected Summit's project application, saying there was no path forward for the project under the eminent domain ban.

Those moves came after several years of anti-pipeline activism by landowners focused on property rights and the danger from potential leaks of toxic carbon dioxide plumes. The project has permits in other states, but some of those are being challenged in court.

Congressional Republicans are using the complex reconciliation process to move a budget package through Congress with simple majority votes in each chamber, avoiding the Senate's 60-vote legislative filibuster. The House recently passed its version of the bill without a repeal of the 45Q tax credits. U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, voted for the bill.

A spokesperson for Johnson sent a statement when asked via email if the congressman supports repealing the tax credits: "While Dusty wished the reconciliation bill was more conservative, he voted in favor of it when it passed the House. We'll see what the Senate passes."

A spokesperson for U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds, R-South Dakota, said Rounds met with a group of South Dakota lawmakers when they traveled to D.C. to voice opposition to the 45Q tax credits.

"Senator Rounds has long held the belief that many industry specific tax credits should not be perpetual, a belief which this group of landowners shares," the statement said. "However, he has not had a chance to hear details of President Trump's interest in this program. While many in South Dakota may oppose 45Q, it has been a popular proposal for other states for almost two decades and was included in the House-passed reconciliation bill."

The office of Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-South Dakota, did not respond to South Dakota Searchlight's request for his position.

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.

Thune, Rounds vote yes as U.S. Senate confirms Trump pick for Customs and Border Protection

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JUNE 18, 2025
6:10 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate Wednesday confirmed President Donald Trump's nominee to lead U.S. Customs and Border Protection, a major role for carrying out the president's border enforcement agenda and the handling of unauthorized migration.

In a 51-46 party-line vote, the Senate confirmed Rodney Scott, of Oklahoma.

Scott previously served as the chief of the Border Patrol, which is an agency within CBP, during the first Trump administration and under former President Joe Biden's administration.

During the first Trump administration, Scott implemented a policy that required asylum-seekers



Rodney Scott, President Donald Trump's nominee to be chief of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, prepares to testify during his confirmation hearing before the Senate Finance Committee in the Dirksen Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill April 30, 2025 in Washington, D.C.

(Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images News)

to remain in Mexico while their cases were pending in immigration court.

As the new head of CBP, Scott will oversee more than 60,000 employees. The agency also manages more than 300 ports of entry at borders, airports and seaports.

During his Senate confirmation hearing in April, the Senate Finance Committee's top Democrat, Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden, raised concerns about the 2010 death of an immigrant at a CBP station in San Diego that Scott ran.

Anastasio Hernández Rojas was detained by CBP officers, and was beaten and later died from his injuries, Wyden said.

"Rather than following the agency's own policy and immediately referring the incident to outside investigators, the San Diego CBP office began its own investigation," Wyden said. "In the course of that investigation, the CBP officers taped over the only video copy of Hernández Rojas's death and tampered with physical evidence, according to court documents."

The United States paid \$1 million to settle a lawsuit brought by Hernández Rojas' widow and in 2015 the Justice Department declined to pursue federal charges against any of the officers or leaders involved in the case.

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem sent a letter to the committee before Scott's confirmation hearing, and informed senators that the agency reviewed the 2010 incident and that Scott's work "was in accordance with his duties, the law and professional standards."

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

State schedules vaccination clinics as measles cases rise to four

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JUNE 18, 2025 5:06 PM

The number of reported measles cases has grown to four in South Dakota, according to a Wednesday news release from the state Department of Health. In response, the department will hold vaccination clinics across the state.

The super-contagious disease is nearing a six-year record as outbreaks spread across the United States. According to a federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention update June 13, there are 1,197 confirmed cases affecting 34 states.

North Dakota reports the highest rate of any state at 34 cases. Reports of new cases in Texas, where the outbreak originated, may be subsiding as hesitant residents become more willing to vaccinate, experts say.

The measles vaccine offers the best protection against infection, according to the South Dakota Health Department.

"We encourage everyone to check their vaccination status and take advantage of these clinics, especially if they're unsure of their immunity," said Dr. Joshua Clayton, state epidemiologist, in a news release.

The release did not say whether the clinics will charge for the vaccinations, or how much, and the department did not immediately respond to questions from South Dakota Searchlight.

South Dakota had a 91% vaccination rate among kindergarteners during the 2024-25 school year, according to state data, which was down from 96% before the COVID-19 pandemic. Vaccination coverage of 95% or above is needed to halt measles transmission, according to medical professionals.

The state has experienced lower vaccination rates in recent years as more parents claim religious ex-



(Getty Images)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 24 of 76

emptions allowed in state law. The counties with the worst measles, mumps and rubella vaccination rates among kindergarteners include Faulk (56%), Jones (60%), Hutchinson (64%) and Sanborn (66%). Fifteen counties report a vaccination rate at or above 95%.

One of the patients in the latest measles report visited the Rapid City Medical Center Urgent Care waiting room at 2820 Mount Rushmore Road from 9 to 11:30 a.m. on June 10 while infected. A press release from the Health Department did not say whether the new cases are among children or adults.

Measles symptoms appear in two stages, first with a runny nose, cough and slight fever. Second, occurring on the third to seventh day of the illness, a red blotchy rash appears and lasts for up to a week. The rash usually begins on the face. The person's temperature also rises to 103-105 degrees Fahrenheit.

Vaccination clinics

Vaccination clinics will be held at public health offices or through the state Health Department's mobile clinic:

Belle Fourche: 8:30 a.m.-12 p.m. on June 30 and 1-4:30 p.m. on July 7 at the Belle Fourche Public Health Office.

Custer: 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. on July 3 at the Custer County Public Health Office.

Dupree: 1-2:30 p.m. on July 1 at the Ziebach County Public Health Office.

Hot Springs: 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. on July 2 at the Fall River Public Health Office.

Martin: 10 a.m.-1 p.m. on June 26 at the Bennett County Public Health Office.

Murdo: 1-4 p.m. on June 23 at the Murdo Department of Transportation (WOW Mobile Clinic).

Pierre: 3-5:30 p.m. on June 23 at the Hughes County Public Health Office.

Rapid City: 1-4:30 p.m. on July 9 and 8 a.m.-12 p.m. on July 22 at the Rapid City One Stop.

Spearfish: 12-3 p.m. on July 10 at the Spearfish One Stop.

Sturgis: 8:30-10 a.m. and 2:30-4:30 p.m. on July 9 at the Sturgis Public Health Office.

Timber Lake: 12-2 p.m. on July 9 at the Dewey County Public Health Office.

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

U.S. senators from Minnesota reflect on slain state legislator in Senate floor remarks

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - JUNE 18, 2025 11:19 AM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Sens. Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith honored Minnesota House Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman and her husband, Mark, during remarks on the Senate floor.

The Minnesota Democratic senators on Tuesday reflected on Melissa's leadership, devotion to her community and many contributions to her state.

The Hortmans were killed over the weekend in what has been called a political assassination. Minnesota state Sen. John Hoffman and his wife, Yvette, were also shot and are on a path to recovery.

Authorities have arrested Vance Boelter, who is accused of killing the Hortmans and shooting and injuring the Hoffmans. He faces both federal and state charges.

"Melissa is someone that I wish the whole Senate and the



From left, U.S. Sens. Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith, both Minnesota Democrats. (Courtesy photos.)

whole nation knew," Klobuchar said. "We treasured her in Minnesota. She was the epitome of what you want in a public servant. She went into it for all the right reasons."

Klobuchar said Melissa "knew no limits in terms of trying to get people together, trying to get things done." She described both Melissa and Mark as "great neighbors, wonderful friends and great parents for their beloved children, Sophie and Colin."

The senior senator recited a bit of Hortman's lengthy list of legislative accomplishments: "When a Minnesota student gets a free school lunch, that's Melissa. When a Minnesota parent is able to take paid leave to spend those early, precious moments with a newborn, that's Melissa. When a Minnesota voter casts a ballot without facing unfair discrimination, that's Melissa."

Smith, who confronted her Republican colleague U.S. Sen. Mike Lee of Utah on Monday over some tawdry tweets he posted after the killings, said Melissa Hortman was funny, straightforward, kind, smart, driven and determined.

"She did well because she worked hard at everything that she did, from her first job making burritos, to her last job leading her caucus through a deeply divided legislative session."

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.

Iowa House moves petition for special session to override veto of pipeline bill

BY: CAMI KOONS, IOWA CAPITAL DISPATCH - JUNE 18, 2025 9:26 AM

The Iowa House of Representatives Tuesday secured the necessary two-thirds majority on a petition calling for a special session to override the governor's veto of a bill pertaining to eminent domain and carbon sequestration pipelines.

Seventy representatives signed the petition in favor of returning to the state Capitol to override the veto on House File 639, but two-thirds of the Senate will also have to sign on for a special session to be called.

House Speaker Pat Grassley called for the petition immediately following Gov. Kim Reynolds' veto of HF 639, which would have restricted the use of eminent domain for carbon sequestration pipelines and added a slew of additional requirements for pipelines and the regulator.

"This veto was a major setback for Iowa landowners and the tireless efforts of the House to safeguard property rights,"

Grassley said in a press release Tuesday. "With 70 members of the House standing united, we've met the constitutional threshold to move forward. We now call on our colleagues in the Senate to join us by securing the necessary signatures so we can convene a special session, override this veto, and deliver the protections Iowa landowners deserve against eminent domain for private gain."

Members of the House have pushed forward similar bills over the past several years. The 2025 session was the first time the Senate took up the issue, but only after a group of 12 Republican senators said they



Iowans gathered at the Iowa State Capitol to rally against carbon dioxide pipeline projects March 18, 2025. (Photo by Cami Koons/Iowa Capital Dispatch)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 26 of 76

would not vote on budget bills until HF 639 was debated.

The bill is tied to opposition of the Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline which was granted a permit, and the right of eminent domain, by the Iowa Utilities Commission in June 2024. Landowners opposed to the pipeline feel the privately owned project should not have the power of condemnation and fear the impact of the pipeline on their land. The five-state pipeline would also pass through South Dakota, which has twice denied a permit for the project and has passed a law banning eminent domain for carbon pipelines.

The pipeline would connect to biorefineries and transport captured carbon dioxide to underground storage in North Dakota. This would give ethanol facilities and corn farmers access to the ultra-low carbon fuel market, which industry leaders say is needed to fuel the agricultural economy in the state.

The debate on the issue, and HF 639 in particular, has created rifts within the Republican Party of Iowa, with those in favor of the bill alleging their colleagues, including Reynolds, abandoned GOP values.

Those against the bill said it reached beyond its intended targets and would have caused unintended consequences to agricultural and energy infrastructure in Iowa.

A press release from Iowa House Republicans about the petition said Reynolds' veto denied "critical protections" against eminent domain, was an "undermining" of years of legislative efforts and represented a "significant setback" for those who have fought for "fair treatment" in carbon capture projects.

House Republicans also urged the Senate to "act swiftly" to meet the petition requirements to call a special session.

Senate Republican leadership did not respond to requests for comment on the latest news, but Sen. Jack Whitver, R-Grimes, said last week the majority of his caucus would "not be interested" in pursuing a special session override.

Sen. Kevin Alons, R-Salix, who was one of the 12 holdouts on the Senate floor for debate on the bill, did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

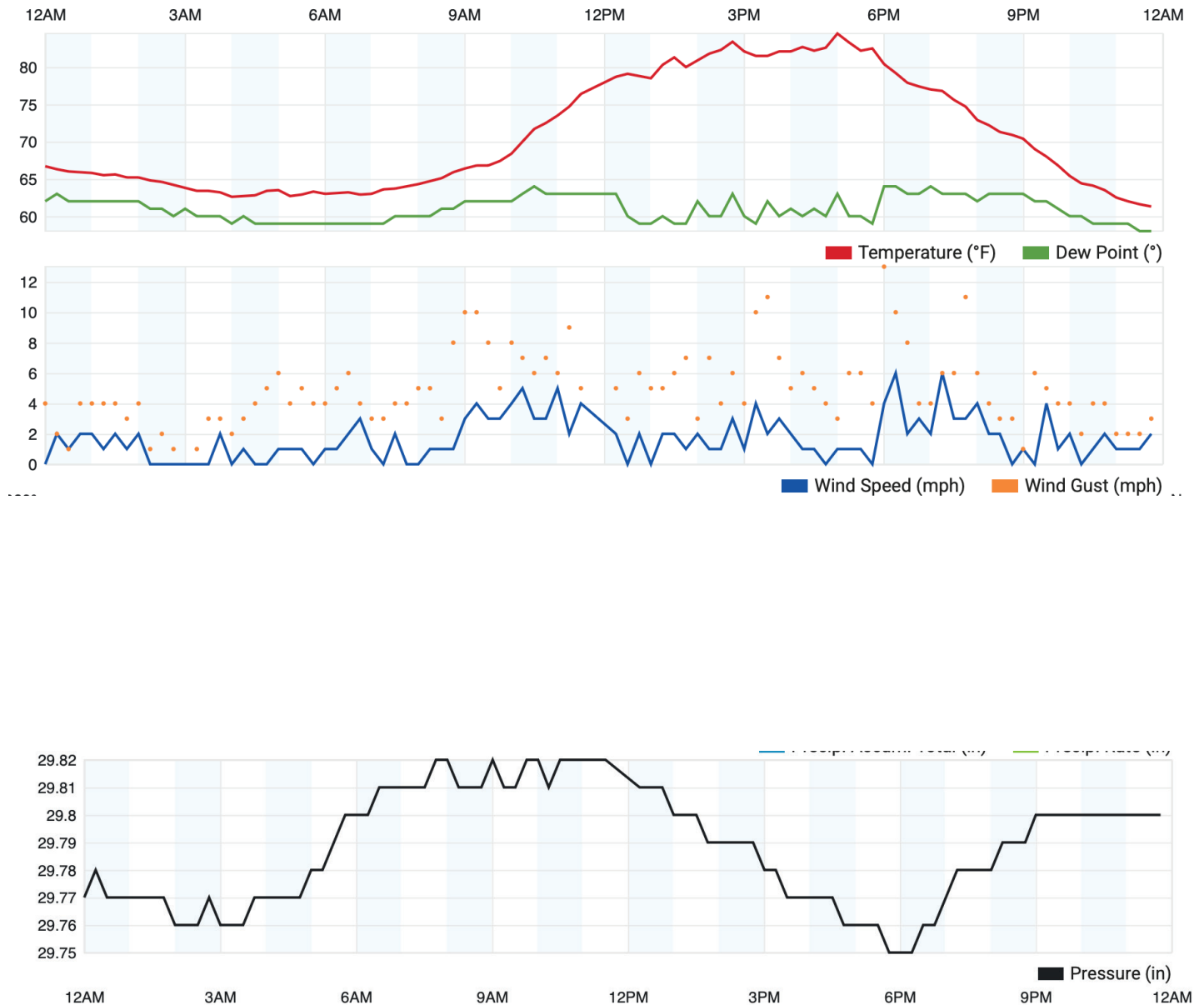
Of the 30 representatives who did not sign the petition, 10 were Republicans and 20 were Democrats.

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.

Groton Daily Independent

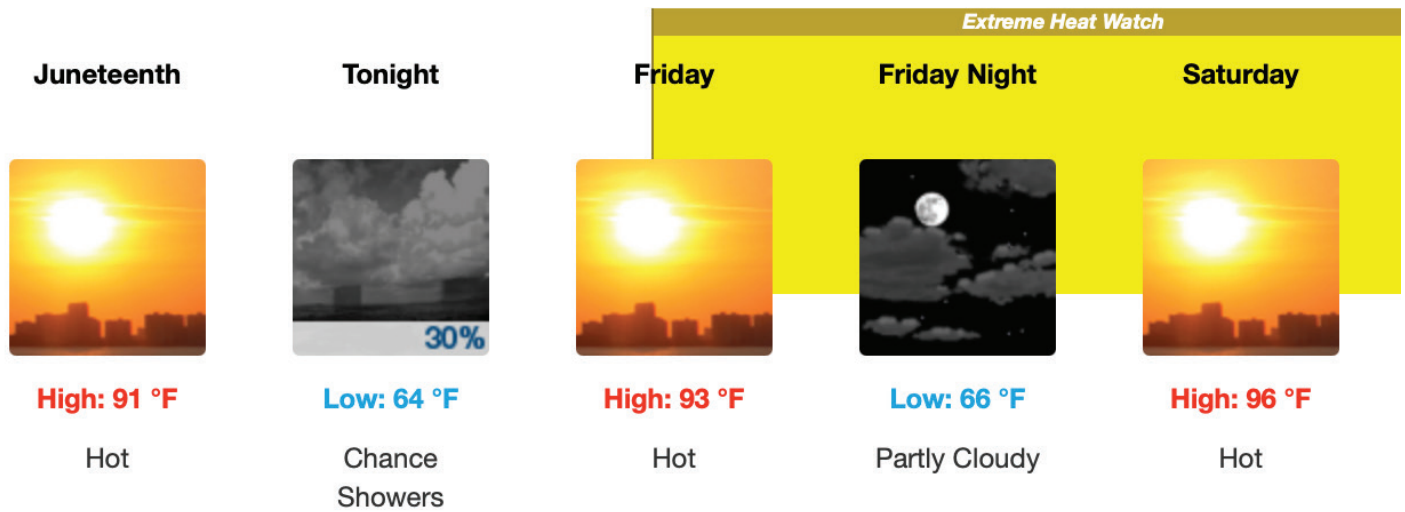
Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 27 of 76


Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs




Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 28 of 76

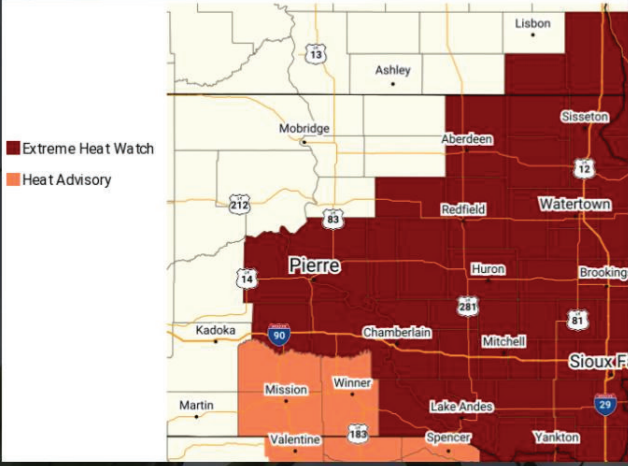





Max Heat Index:
95°F – 107°F
*warmest in central SD




Friday through Sunday.




■ Extreme Heat Watch
■ Heat Advisory




Extreme Heat Watch




Adjust Time of Outdoor Activities




Wear Light Clothing




Take Frequent Breaks in A/C



Stay Hydrated with Water




NEVER Leave Kids or Pets in Vehicle



Recognize Heat Illness

Thu Jun 19, 2025 5:47 AM



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
weather.gov/aberdeen

An Extreme Heat Watch remains in effect for portions of the listening area Friday through Sunday as max heat indices will range from 95 to 107°, warmest over central SD. Please stay hydrated, take frequent breaks, and never leave kids or pets in vehicles.

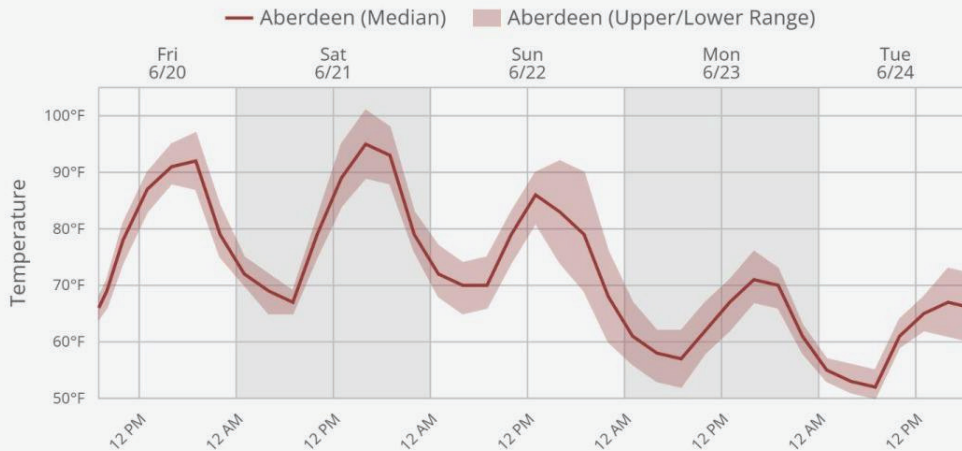
Broton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 29 of 76



Range of Temperatures

Friday Morning, Jun 20 - Tuesday Evening, Jun 24



Information:

The range line chart shows the lower, median, and upper percentiles of a weather event occurring based on model predictions from the National Blend of Models. A larger shaded area means less certainty.

Additional Details

Upcoming Heat:

- Warm temperatures through the weekend will bring heat indices over 100°F at times.

Potential Impacts:

- Anyone without effective cooling or adequate hydration risks heat exhaustion or heatstroke.

What to do:

- Drink plenty of fluids, stay in air conditioned rooms, stay out of the sun, and check on relatives and neighbors.

Valid: Fri 07 am CDT - Tue 07 pm CDT

Issued: Thu, Jun 19, 2025, 4 am CDT



THREAT ASSESSMENT

HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

2

WHAT THIS MEANS:
Scattered severe storms
possible

TIMING

Evening into
overnight especially
in yellow areas

PRIMARY THREATS



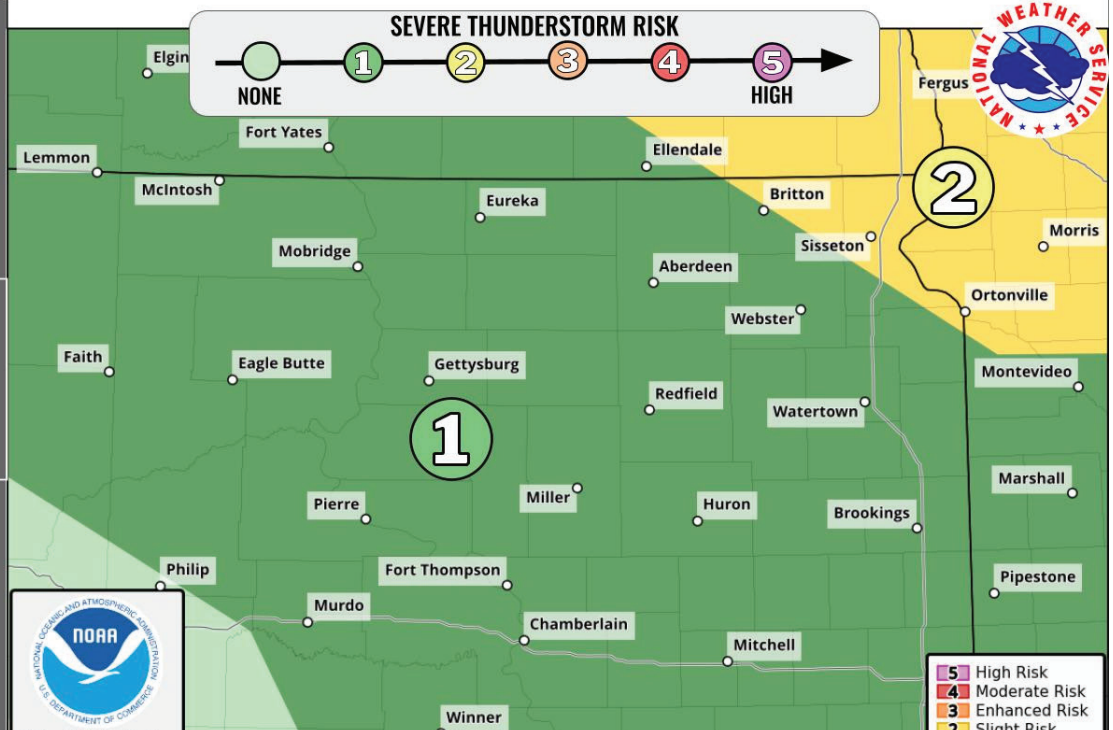
LARGE HAIL



DAMAGING WIND

Get your up to date
forecast at weather.gov/abr

SEVERE STORMS Possible Late This Evening/Overnight



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 30 of 76

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 85 °F at 4:58 PM

Low Temp: 62 °F at 11:27 PM

Wind: 13 mph at 5:50 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 44 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 108 in 1933

Record Low: 38 in 1948

Average High: 81

Average Low: 56

Average Precip in June.: 2.29

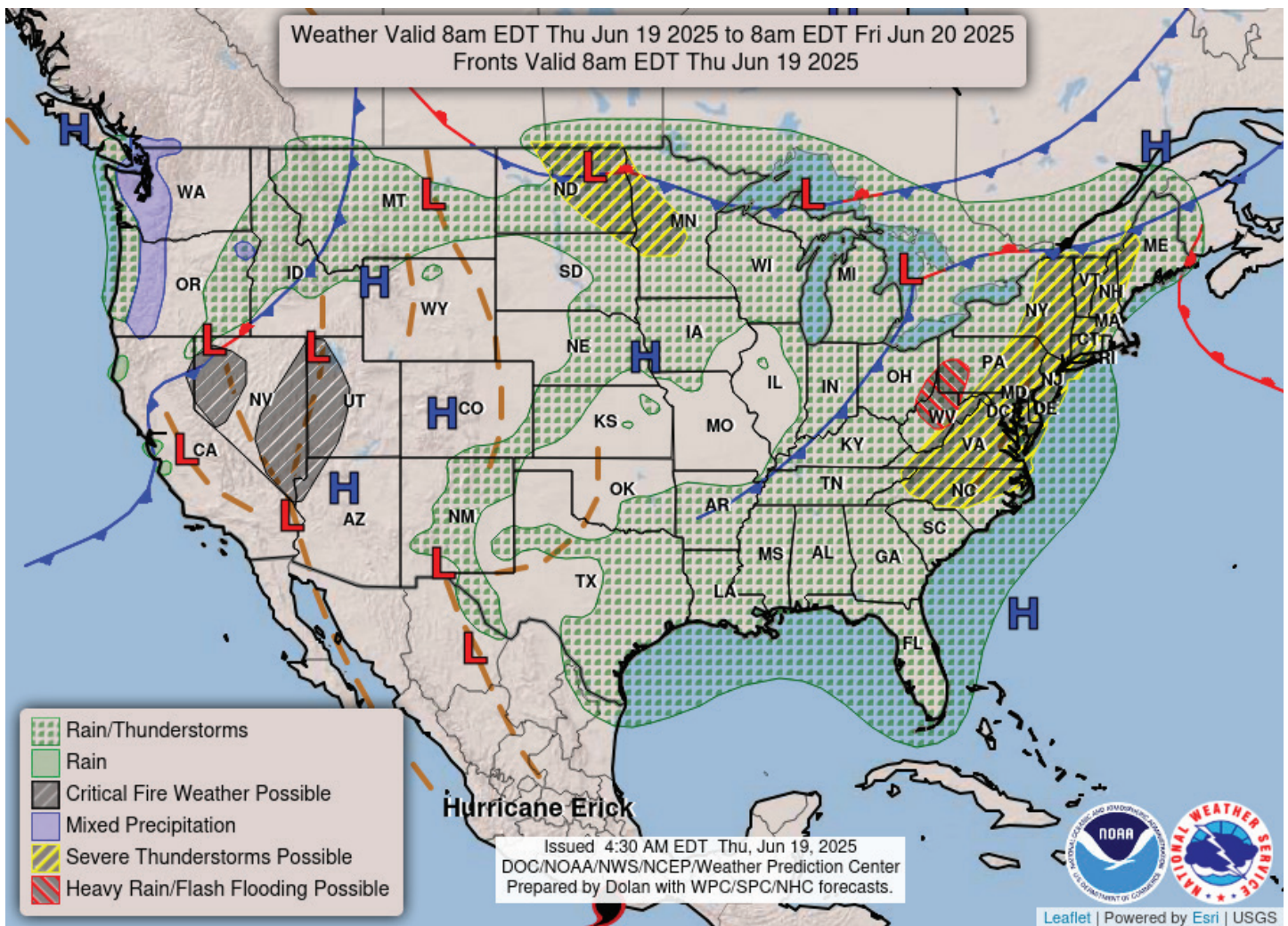
Precip to date in June: 2.54

Average Precip to date: 9.54

Precip Year to Date: 8.59

Sunset Tonight: 9:26:00 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:41:58 am



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 31 of 76

Today in Weather History

June 19th, 1894: A tornado moved NNE, passing 12 miles northwest of Bowdle and ending in extreme southeastern Campbell County. A child was killed, and the mother and four other children were severely injured. A man was killed in another home, and his wife was injured. Fourteen homes were damaged or destroyed. Clothes were said to be torn to shreds and scattered for miles. The tornado was estimated to be an F3.

June 19th, 1931: A tornado moved east from just south of St. Lawrence, passing south of Wessington. Buildings were destroyed on eight farms. Two farms were said to be wiped out, house and all. A woman was injured as she tried to rescue chickens. The storm killed cattle, horses, and over 100 hogs. This tornado had an estimated strength of an F3.

June 19th, 2013: Slow-moving thunderstorms brought large hail, heavy rains, and flash flooding to parts of northeast South Dakota. One thunderstorm produced quarter hail and winds over 50 mph, which caused significant damage to a bean field and damaged the house's siding south of Wilmot in Roberts County. Several roads in Wilmot had water running over them for several hours. Over three inches of rain caused water to go over a part of Highway 123 south of Wilmot. The three to four inches of heavy rain brought many flooded roads in and around Veblen in Marshall County.

1835 - A tornado tore through the center of New Brunswick NJ killing five persons and scattering debris as far as Manhattan Island. The tornado provided the first opportunity for scientists to study firsthand the track of such a storm. (David Ludlum)

1938 - A cloudburst near Custer Creek, MT, (near Miles City) caused a train wreck killing forty-eight persons. An estimated four to seven inches of rain deluged the head of the creek that evening, and water flowing through the creek weakened the bridge. As a result, a locomotive and seven passenger cars plunged into the swollen creek. One car, a tourist sleeper, was completely submerged. (David Ludlum)

1972 - Hurricane Agnes moved onshore near Cape San Blas FL with wind gusts to 80 mph, and exited Maine on the 26th. There were 117 deaths, mainly due to flooding from North Carolina to New York State, and total damage was estimated at more than three billion dollars. Up to 19 inches of rain deluged western Schuylkill County PA. The rains of Hurricane Agnes resulted in one of the greatest natural disasters in U.S. history. Agnes caused more damage than all other tropical cyclones in the previous six years combined (which included Celia and Camille). (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - It was a warm June day, with plenty of thunderstorms east of the Rockies. Lightning knocked out power at Throckmorton, TX, and ignited an oil tank battery. A woman in Knox City TX was struck by lightning while in her car, and a man was struck by lightning near his home in Manatee County FL. Strong thunderstorm winds overturned several outhouses near Bixby OK, but no injuries were reported. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Temperatures soared above 100 degrees in the central U.S. for Father's Day. Fifteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date. Severe thunderstorms in Minnesota and Wisconsin produced softball size hail near River Falls WI, and wind gusts to 80 mph at Menomonie WI. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Fourteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date as searing heat spread from the southwestern deserts into the High Plains Region. Record highs included 98 degrees at Billings, MT, 107 degrees at Valentine, NE, and 112 degrees at Tucson, AZ. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - What would eventually be known as the "Inland Hurricane" stuck south central Kansas. This storm system produced a swath of 65 to 120 mph winds across six counties and caused \$80 million dollars in damage. The peak recorded wind gust was 116 mph, which reaches low-end category 3 on the Saffir-Simpson hurricane wind intensity scale. On the enhanced Fujita Scale the 116mph winds would be rated an EF2. The storm knocked out power to all the Wichita TV stations, and they were off the air for hours. All but one of the Wichita Radio Stations, including the Wichita NOAA Weather Radio Station KEC-59, was knocked off the air. (National Weather Service Wichita)

2006 - Up to 11 inches of rain fell in the Houston, Texas area, causing widespread flash flooding. The Houston Fire Department rescued more than 500 people from flood waters, but no serious injuries or fatalities were reported.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 32 of 76



Sin is sin.

There's no way around it. Some ridicule those who fear it. Some try to hide it. Some look forward to doing it. Some suffer horrible consequences because of it. Some do their best to avoid it. Some can't get enough of it.

Some have ways of classifying sins. One sin, to some, may be worse than another sin. "If you do it, it's a sin! But if I do it, well, it's a mistake or something that could not be avoided." Or, "God was testing me, and it was more than even the best Christian could resist. It got me!"

Many consider the rich, wealthy, or prosperous to be devious and dishonest, sinister and sinful, unable to be honest and helpful because they are successful.

They cannot believe that what the rich have is a result of clean living, hard work, honoring God and serving others. However, this position cannot be supported by Scripture.

There is nothing wrong with being wealthy or rich or successful. What makes the difference?

"Those who trust in their riches will fail, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf."

Many who have riches are also very righteous. They recognize that what they have comes from God, and in turn, honor Him from the abundance of His gifts and with hearts that are pure.

What we have and do with what we have, proves our motives and what we love.

The Bible clearly states that the problems of the rich do not come from their riches, but from the way they relate to worldly wealth.

Thank God for their wealth if they use it to honor and glorify Him. However, it's not what they do with God's blessings, but what I do with mine.

Prayer: Father, whatever I have are gifts that come to me from Your love and grace. What I do with them, and how I use them, proves how much I love You.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Scripture: "Those who trust in their riches will fail, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf." Proverbs 11:28

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 33 of 76

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.17.25

16 23 39 46 55 12

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$302,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 13 Hrs 52 Mins
16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.18.25

11 18 25 29 32 9

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,250,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 13 Hrs 7 Mins
15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.18.25

6 16 25 26 44 14

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 13 Hrs 22 Mins 15
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.18.25

8 15 23 25 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$32,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 13 Hrs 22
Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.18.25

13 15 17 36 66 10

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 13 Hrs 51 Mins
16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.18.25

23 29 50 64 67 11

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$118,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 13 Hrs 51 Mins
16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 35 of 76

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
09/6-7/25 Fly in/Drive in at Groton Municipal Airport
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
11/30/2025 Snow Queen Contest, 4 p.m.
12/06/2025 Olive Grove Holiday Party and Silent Live Auction Fundraiser

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Buss family to sell controlling stake of Lakers to Mark Walter for \$10B valuation, AP source says

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

The Buss family has agreed to sell the controlling stake of the Los Angeles Lakers to TWG Global CEO and Los Angeles Dodgers owner Mark Walter, doing so with a franchise valuation of \$10 billion — the highest ever for a professional sports franchise, a person with knowledge of the agreement said Wednesday.

As part of the deal, Jeanie Buss — whose family has had control of the Lakers since her father bought the team in 1979 — intends to remain as team governor, said the person, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because neither side immediately announced details.

It is not clear how much more of the Lakers that Walter is acquiring. He was part of a group that bought 27% of the Lakers in 2021. Jeanie Buss will still own at least 15% of the Lakers once this transaction is completed; by NBA rule, a governor must have at least that much of an ownership stake.

Walter and TWG Global already had the controlling interest in the Dodgers, Premier League club Chelsea, the Professional Women's Hockey League and — through TWG Motorsports — owns several auto racing teams including Cadillac Formula 1.

"The Lakers are an amazing organization. I'm looking forward to meeting Mark and excited about the future," Lakers guard Luka Doncic posted on social media Thursday. "I am also grateful to Jeanie and the Buss family for welcoming me to LA, and I'm happy that Jeanie will continue to be involved."

Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said news of the sale to Walter marks "a very exciting day for the Lakers, for the city of Los Angeles."

"He's very competitive and he's going to do everything he can to produce a championship-caliber team every single year and make sure the city feels proud about the Lakers and the legacy that they've already built with the Buss family," Roberts said.

ESPN first reported the agreement.

"Mark Walter is the best choice and will be the best caretaker of the Laker brand," Lakers great Magic Johnson, a business partner of Walter's and someone extremely close to Jeanie Buss, posted on social media. "The proof is in the pudding on what he's been able to accomplish with the LA Dodgers. Mark has been nothing short of a winner notching 2 World Series and 11 NL West divisional titles in the last 12 years!"

Johnson said he is certain Jeanie Buss made the deal only after being convinced that Walter will do right by the Lakers.

"Laker fans should be (ecstatic)," Johnson said. "A few things I can tell you about Mark — he is driven by winning, excellence, and doing everything the right way. AND he will put in the resources needed to win! I can understand why Jeanie sold the team to Mark Walter because they are just alike — they are competitive people, have big hearts, love to give back, and both prefer to be behind the scenes. This makes all the sense in the world."

Walter is intensely private in shunning the spotlight. He is CEO of the financial services firm Guggenheim Partners, which is estimated to have more than \$325 billion in assets. Johnson is among Guggenheim's investors.

The agreement for the sale of the Lakers comes about three months after Bill Chisholm agreed to buy the Boston Celtics with an initial valuation of \$6.1 billion — which was going to be a record, topping the previous mark of \$6.05 billion sale for the NFL's Washington Commanders. The Celtics' sale is not yet finalized, pending final approval by the NBA's board of governors. That board is scheduled to meet in Las Vegas next month.

And now, the Lakers are sold with a valuation of \$10 billion — not just a record, but a total smashing of the previous mark.

The Lakers have been in the control of the Buss family for 46 years, the longest of any current NBA

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 37 of 76

franchise. Herb Simon bought the Indiana Pacers — currently in the NBA Finals — in 1983, the second-longest current ownership of an NBA club.

Jerry Buss bought the Lakers for \$67.5 million and made it to the NBA Finals 16 times out of his 34 seasons leading the club, winning 10 championships in that span. When he died in 2013, ownership of the Lakers went into a trust controlled by Buss' six children — who all worked for the Lakers in various capacities for several years.

Eventually, the family began clashing over control. An agreement was struck in 2017 calling for Jeanie Buss to serve as controlling owner, ending a fight that included her going to court after her brothers Jim and Johnny Buss called for a board meeting that she interpreted as a challenge to her power — shortly after she removed Jim Buss as the Lakers' executive vice president of basketball operations.

The Lakers won their 11th title while under Buss family control in 2020, the franchise's most recent championship.

A guide to what the Juneteenth holiday is and how to celebrate it

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

It was 160 years ago that enslaved people in Galveston, Texas, learned they had been freed — after the Civil War's end and two years after President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

The resulting Juneteenth holiday — its name combining "June" and "nineteenth" — has only grown in one-and-a-half centuries. In 2021, President Joe Biden designated it a federal holiday — expanding its recognition beyond Black America.

This year will be the first Juneteenth under President Donald Trump's second administration, which has banned diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, or DEI, in the federal government. This has included removing Black American history content from federal websites. Trump officials have also discouraged some federal agencies from recognizing other racial heritage celebrations.

Still, many people anticipate getting Juneteenth off work. There are a plethora of street festivals, fairs, concerts and other events planned throughout the week leading into the holiday. But with the current political climate, some may wonder if their company will honor it.

"I don't think anyone should be intimidated or obligated into not celebrating the day," said Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League. "I've not heard of anyone being denied. I think it would be absolutely reprehensible."

People who never gave the occasion more than a passing thought may be asking themselves, is there a "right" way to celebrate Juneteenth?

For beginners and those brushing up on history, here are some answers:

Is Juneteenth more of a solemn day of remembrance or a party?

It depends on what you want. Juneteenth festivities are rooted in cookouts and picnics. Originally celebrated as Black Americans' true Independence Day, outdoor events allowed for large, raucous reunions among formerly enslaved family, many of whom had been separated. The gatherings were especially revolutionary because they were free of restrictive measures, known as "Black Codes," enforced in Confederate states. Codes controlled whether liberated slaves could vote, buy property, gather for worship and other aspects of daily life.

Last year, the White House kicked things off early with a concert on the South Lawn for Juneteenth and Black Music Month. The atmosphere was primarily festive with Vice President Kamala Harris, the first Black vice president, dancing on stage with gospel singer Kirk Franklin.

Plans for a Juneteenth event or proclamation this year have not been decided, according to the White House press office.

Others may choose to treat Juneteenth as a day of rest and remembrance. That can mean doing community service, attending an education panel or taking time off.

"The most important thing everyone should do is be able to quickly answer the question 'What is Juneteenth?'" Morial said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 38 of 76

What if you've never celebrated Juneteenth?

Dr. David Anderson, a Black pastor and CEO of Gracism Global, a consulting firm helping leaders navigate conversations bridging divides across race and culture, never did anything on Juneteenth in his youth. He didn't learn about it until his 30s.

"I think many folks haven't known about it — who are even my color as an African American male. Even if you heard about it and knew about it, you didn't celebrate it," Anderson said. "It was like just a part of history. It wasn't a celebration of history."

For many African Americans, the farther away from Texas that they grew up increased the likelihood they didn't have big Juneteenth celebrations regularly. In the South, the day can vary based on when word of Emancipation reached each state.

What kind of public Juneteenth events are taking place?

Search online and you will find gatherings nationwide varying in scope and tone. Some are more carnivalesque festivals with food trucks, arts and crafts and parades. Within those festivals, you'll likely find information on health care, finance and community resources. There also are concerts and fashion shows to highlight Black creativity. There will also be panels to educate about Juneteenth's history.

The National Park Service is again making entry into all sites free on the holiday, according to its website.

Are there special Juneteenth decorations or foods?

The red, black and green African Liberation Flag, also known as the Pan-African flag, has historically been displayed at both Black History Month and Juneteenth celebrations. Red represents bloodshed and sacrifice of enslaved ancestors. Black symbolizes Black people. Green represents richness of the land in Africa.

More people, however, have leaned into the Juneteenth flag created in 1997 by activist Ben Haith, who founded the National Juneteenth Celebration Foundation. Like the American flag, it is red, white and blue to indicate those freed are also Americans. The five-point white star in the middle is a tribute to Juneteenth's birthplace of Texas. It is encircled by another white starry line that represents the spreading of freedom.

Aside from barbecue, the color red has been a through line for Juneteenth food for generations. Red symbolizes the bloodshed and sacrifice of enslaved ancestors. A Juneteenth menu might incorporate items like barbecued ribs or other red meat, watermelon and red velvet cake. Drinks like fruit punch and red Kool-Aid may make an appearance at the table.

In recent years, Juneteenth has become more commercialized with national chains selling Juneteenth party supplies, T-shirts and other merchandise. However, this year, Juneteenth items appear to be fewer or only online. Morial says he would be disappointed if companies decided selling Juneteenth items out in the open was too risky because of politics. At the same time, it might be a good opportunity for consumers.

"I would also encourage people to go online and look for an African American vendor," Morial said. "If you got to participate in that (commercialism), that's what I would do."

Does how you celebrate Juneteenth matter if you aren't Black?

Dr. Karida Brown, a sociology professor at Emory University whose research focuses on race, said there's no reason to feel awkward about wanting to recognize Juneteenth just because you have no personal ties or you're not Black. In fact, embrace it.

"I would reframe that and challenge my non-Black folks who want to lean into Juneteenth and celebrate," Brown said. "It absolutely is your history. It absolutely is a part of your experience. ... Isn't this all of our history? The good, the bad, the ugly, the story of emancipation and freedom for your Black brothers and sisters under the Constitution of the law."

What are other names used to refer to Juneteenth?

Over the decades, Juneteenth has also been called Freedom Day, Emancipation Day, Black Fourth of July and second Independence Day among others.

"Because 1776, Fourth of July, where we're celebrating freedom and liberty and all of that, that did not include my descendants," Brown said. "Black people in America were still enslaved. So that that holiday always comes with a bittersweet tinge to it."

Is there a proper Juneteenth greeting?

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 39 of 76

It's typical to wish people a "Happy Juneteenth" or "Happy Teenth," according to Alan Freeman, a comedian who has organized a June 19 comedy show at Club 68, which local media has described as the last Black bar and club on Galveston Island. The day after he will host a stand-up comedy and jazz show at his Houston restaurant and lounge, the Frisky Whisky.

"You know how at Christmas people will say 'Merry Christmas' to each other and not even know each other?" Freeman said. "You can get a 'Merry Christmas' from everybody. This is the same way."

Congo and Rwanda will sign a peace deal on June 27, a major step in ending fighting in eastern Congo

By WILSON MCMAKIN, and SALEH MWANAMILONGO Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Congo and Rwanda will sign a peace agreement in Washington on June 27 that aims to ending fighting in eastern Congo, the two countries and the U.S. State Department said.

Congo has accused Rwanda of backing M23 rebels in its mineral-rich eastern region across the border with Rwanda. U.N. experts say the rebels are supported by about 4,000 troops from Rwanda, which has denied backing M23.

The decades-long conflict escalated in January, when the M23 rebels advanced and seized the strategic Congolese city of Goma, followed by the town of Bukavu in February.

The draft agreement includes "provisions on respect for territorial integrity and a prohibition of hostilities; disengagement, disarmament, and conditional integration of non-state armed groups," the joint statement said Wednesday. The agreement also includes a commitment to respecting territorial integrity and the conditional integration of non-state armed groups.

Congo and Rwanda are not formally at war and in the past had held peace talks that have largely stalled, including those hosted by Qatar.

Corneille Nangaa, leader of the Congo River Alliance, a coalition of rebel groups, told The Associated Press in April that international sanctions and Congo's proposed minerals deal with the United States in search of peace would not stop the fighting.

Christian Moleka, a political scientist at the Congolese think tank Dypol, told The Associated Press that he believes that the duration of the agreement will depend on "Kinshasa's willingness to undertake structural reforms of the security apparatus, and the commitment of the international community to accompany the reforms to the end." He added that the proposed agreement did not significantly differ from previous attempts at peace.

M23 is one of about 100 armed factions vying for control in eastern Congo. But unlike the others, they are mainly made up of ethnic Tutsis who failed to integrate into the Congolese army. The group says it is defending ethnic Tutsis and Congolese of Rwandan origin from discrimination, although critics say their Rwanda-backed campaign is a pretext for economic and political influence over eastern Congo.

Rwanda's longtime President Paul Kagame accuses Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi of overlooking the concerns of the ethnic Tutsis and ignoring previous peace agreements.

SpaceX rocket being tested in Texas explodes, but no injuries reported

By The Associated Press undefined

A SpaceX rocket being tested in Texas exploded Wednesday night, sending a dramatic fireball high into the sky.

The company said the Starship "experienced a major anomaly" at about 11 p.m. while on the test stand preparing for the tenth flight test at Starbase, SpaceX's launch site at the southern tip of Texas.

"A safety clear area around the site was maintained throughout the operation and all personnel are safe and accounted for," SpaceX said in a statement on the social platform X.

CEO Elon Musk 's SpaceX said there were no hazards to nearby communities. It asked people not to try

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 40 of 76

to approach the site.

The company said it is working with local officials to respond to the explosion.

Erick makes landfall in southern Mexico as a Category 3 storm

By LUIS ALBERTO CRUZ and FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ Associated Press

PUERTO ESCONDIDO, Mexico (AP) — Powerful Hurricane Erick made landfall in Mexico's southern state of Oaxaca early Thursday, the National Hurricane Center in Miami said.

The hurricane's center was located about 20 miles (30 kilometers) east of Punta Maldonado. Its maximum sustained winds were clocked at 125 mph (205 kph). It was moving northwest at 9 mph (15 kph), the hurricane center said.

The storm was downgraded slightly before making landfall, from a powerful Category 4 to a Category 3. While slightly reduced in power, Erick is still considered a major hurricane as a Category 3, which can carry winds of up to 129 mph (210 kph).

The storm threaded the needle between the resorts of Acapulco and Puerto Escondido, tearing into a sparsely populated stretch of coastline near the border of Oaxaca and Guerrero states. Agricultural fields blanket the low-lying coastal area between small fishing villages.

Erick is expected to rapidly weaken as it crashes into the coastal mountains of southern Mexico, and the system is likely to dissipate late Thursday or early Friday, the hurricane center said.

The storm threatened to unleash destructive winds near where the eye crashes ashore, flash floods and a dangerous storm surge, forecasters said.

Storm moves south on approach

At first light Thursday, Acapulco awoke under ominous dark clouds, but without a drop of rain and small waves lapping at its central beach.

However, the storm was forecast to move northwest just inland up the coast through midday, bringing heavy rain to the resort and the mountains that tower dramatically above it.

Still, it appeared Acapulco had dodged the worst at least in terms of Erick's strong winds.

Late Wednesday, Erick's projected path had crept south, closer to the resort city of Puerto Escondido in Oaxaca state with Acapulco up the coast to the northwest.

President Claudia Sheinbaum said in a video message Wednesday night that all activities in the region were suspended and she urged people to stay in their homes or to move to shelters if they lived in low-lying areas.

Waves were crashing onto the esplanade in Puerto Escondido by nightfall, swamping wooden fishing boats that had been pulled up there for safety. The beach disappeared under pounding waves and the rising tide had already reached the interiors of some waterfront restaurants.

Last-minute purchases ended at nightfall as stores closed and the streets emptied.

Earlier in the day, fishermen in Puerto Escondido pulled their boats out of the water ahead of the storm's arrival. Some surfers continued to ride waves at the Zicatela beach, even with red flags up to warn people to stay out of the water.

Acapulco still scarred by Otis

Acapulco residents had braced for Erick's arrival with more preparation and trepidation because of the memory of the devastation wrought by Hurricane Otis two years earlier.

The city of nearly 1 million was devastated in October 2023 by Hurricane Otis, a Category 5 hurricane that rapidly intensified and caught many unprepared. At least 52 people died in Otis and the storm severely damaged almost all of the resort's hotels.

Guerrero state Gov. Evelyn Salgado said via X that all movement in Acapulco and other beach communities was to be suspended at 8 p.m. Wednesday. Schools across the state were to remain closed for a second day Thursday.

Carlos Ozuna Romero, 51, lost his restaurant at the edge of an Acapulco beach when Otis slammed the resort with devastating winds. On Wednesday, he directed workers storing tables and chairs.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 41 of 76

"Authorities' warnings fill us with fear and obviously make us remember everything we've already been through," Ozuna Romero said in reference to Otis.

Elsewhere, workers nailed sheets of plywood over shop windows and stacked sandbags outside doorways. Cars lined up to fill their tanks and shoppers made last-minute purchases before rushing home.

Verónica Gómez struggled through the streets of Acapulco with a large jug of water. "We're all afraid because we think the same thing could happen," said the 40-year-old employee of a shipping company.

But she said she and others learned a lot from Otis. "Now it's not going to catch us by surprise," she said, holding out a bag of canned food as evidence.

In Acapulco on Wednesday, there was a strong presence of National Guard and police in the streets, but most visible were trucks from the national power company. Crews worked to clear drainage canals and brush.

Rain could be Erick's legacy

Forecasters expected Erick to lash Mexico's Pacific coast with heavy rain, strong winds and a fierce storm surge. Rains of up to 16 inches (40 centimeters) could fall across the Mexican states of Oaxaca and Guerrero, with lesser totals in Chiapas, Michoacan, Colima and Jalisco states, the center's advisory said. The rainfall threatened flooding and mudslides, especially in areas with steep terrain.

Laura Velázquez, Mexico's national civil defense coordinator, said Erick was forecast to bring "torrential" rains to Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas in southern Mexico. The mountainous region along the coast is especially prone to mudslides with numerous rivers at risk of flooding.

Acapulco's port closed Tuesday evening. Salgado said 582 shelters were set to receive people who might evacuate their homes across Guerrero.

Erick quickly doubled in strength

Having doubled in strength in less than a day, Erick churned through an ideal environment for quick intensification. Last year, there were 34 incidents of rapid intensification — when a storm gains at least 35 mph in 24 hours — which is about twice as many as average and causes problems with forecasting, according to the hurricane center.

Zelenskyy calls for more pressure on Russia after deadly Kyiv missile strike

By JUSTIN SPIKE and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Thursday said a Russian missile strike on a nine-story Kyiv apartment building was a sign that more pressure must be applied on Moscow to agree to a ceasefire, as Moscow intensifies attacks in the three-year war.

The drone and missile attack on Kyiv early on Tuesday, the deadliest assault on the capital this year, killed 28 people across the city and injured 142 more, Kyiv Military Administration head Tymur Tkachenko said on Thursday.

Zelenskyy, along with the head of the presidential office Andrii Yermak and Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko, visited the site of the apartment building in Kyiv's Solomianskyi district Thursday morning, laying flowers and paying tribute to the 23 people who died there after a direct hit by a missile collapsed the structure.

"This attack is a reminder to the world that Russia rejects a ceasefire and chooses killing," Zelenskyy wrote on Telegram, and thanked Ukraine's partners who he said are ready to pressure Russia to "feel the real cost of the war."

Intensifying attacks

Tuesday's attack on Kyiv was part of a sweeping barrage as Russia once again sought to overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses. Russia fired more than 440 drones and 32 missiles in what Zelenskyy called one of the biggest bombardments of the war, now in its fourth year.

As Russia proceeds with a summer offensive on parts of the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line, U.S.-led peace efforts have failed to gain traction. Russian President Vladimir Putin has effectively rejected an offer from U.S. President Donald Trump for an immediate 30-day ceasefire, making it conditional on a

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 42 of 76

halt on Ukraine's mobilization effort and a freeze on Western arms supplies.

Meanwhile, Middle East tensions and U.S. trade tariffs have drawn world attention away from Ukraine's pleas for more diplomatic and economic pressure to be placed on Moscow.

Russia in recent weeks has intensified long-range attacks that have struck urban residential areas. Yet on Wednesday, Putin denied that his military had struck such targets, saying that attacks were "against military industries, not residential quarters."

Speaking to senior news leaders of international news agencies in St. Petersburg, Putin said he was open to talks with Zelenskyy, but repeated his claim that the Ukrainian leader had lost his legitimacy after his term expired last year — allegations rejected by Kyiv and its allies.

"We are ready for substantive talks on the principles of a settlement," Putin said, noting that a previous round of talks in Istanbul had led to an exchange of prisoners and the bodies of fallen soldiers.

Prisoners exchanged

A new round of such exchanges took place in Ukraine's Chernihiv region on Thursday, involving the repatriation of Ukrainian prisoners of war who, according to Ukraine's Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War (KSHPPV), were suffering from severe health issues caused by injuries and prolonged detention.

The exchange was confirmed by Russia's Defense Ministry, which released a video of Russian servicemen at an exchange area in Belarus after being released in the prisoner swap.

Commenting on the exchange, Zelenskyy wrote on Telegram: "We are working to get our people back. Thank you to everyone who helps make these exchanges possible. Our goal is to free each and every one."

Many of the exchanged Ukrainian POWs had spent over three years in captivity, with a large number captured during the defense of the now Russian-occupied city of Mariupol in 2022, according to the KSHPPV, which added that preparations for another prisoner exchange are ongoing.

In St. Petersburg on Wednesday, Putin praised Trump's push for peace in Ukraine. But Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha wrote on X on Thursday that it was his country that had "unconditionally accepted" the U.S. proposal for a ceasefire, and said that Russian claims of willingness to end the war were "manipulations."

"It has been exactly 100 days since Ukraine unconditionally accepted the U.S. peace proposal to completely cease fire, put an end to the killing, and move forward with a genuine peace process ... 100 days of Russia escalating terror against Ukraine rather than ending it," Sybiha wrote.

"Ukraine remains committed to peace. Unfortunately, Russia continues to choose war, disregarding U.S. efforts to end the killing," he added.

Overnight on Wednesday, Russia fired a barrage of 104 Shahed and decoy drones across Ukraine, according to the country's air force. Of those, 88 were intercepted, jammed, or lost from radars mid-flight.

There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage caused by the attack.

Japan's royal couple mourn A-bomb victims ahead of Hiroshima's 80th anniversary

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's Emperor Naruhito paid respects to atomic bombing victims in Hiroshima as the city marks the 80th anniversary of the tragedy later this year.

Naruhito, accompanied by his wife, Empress Masako, bowed deeply at the cenotaph for the atomic bombing victims and offered bouquets of white flowers.

The atomic bomb dropped by the United States on Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, destroyed the city, killing 140,000 people. A second bomb dropped three days later on Nagasaki killed 70,000 more. Japan surrendered on Aug. 15, ending World War II and its nearly half-century aggression in Asia.

Naruhito has repeatedly stressed the importance to remember and keep telling the tragedy of the war to younger generations.

Naruhito and Masako were also to visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum to observe exhibits, in-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 43 of 76

cluding those featuring Nihon Hidankyo, a grassroots organization awarded last year's Nobel Peace Prize. The couple were to meet atomic bombing survivors, or hibakusha, and those born after the war and trained to tell the stories on behalf of those who can no longer do so.

Naruhito is making his third trip to mourn the war dead this year.

In April, the couple visited Iwo Jima to pay tribute to about 20,000 Japanese and nearly 7,000 U.S. Marines killed in the Battle of Iwo Jima, fought from Feb. 19 to March 26, 1945.

Earlier this month, Naruhito also visited Okinawa to mourn about 188,000 Japanese, half of them Okinawan civilians, and about 12,000 Americans, killed in the Battle of Okinawa. Naruhito accompanied his daughter, Princess Aiko, underscoring his wish that she would learn the hardships of the Okinawan people and share their stories with younger generations.

Ducks return to a Long Island farm that lost its entire flock to the bird flu

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

AQUEBOGUE, N.Y. (AP) — Doug Corwin knew there was a problem at his family's commercial duck farm in Long Island when he spotted scores of dead or lethargic birds during a barn inspection in January.

Within days, Crescent Duck Farm became a casualty of the global avian flu outbreak, one of many farms around the U.S. that had to cull their entire flock, sending the prices of eggs and other agricultural commodities soaring.

Now the more than century-old farm — the last duck farm remaining in a New York region once synonymous with the culinary delicacy — is cautiously rebuilding.

But for Corwin, a 66-year-old fourth-generation farmer, it's not enough to bring the farm back to its 100,000-bird capacity.

With ducks hatched from eggs spared from slaughter, he's working to preserve the unique lineage of fowl that's allowed his family's farm to thrive even as others on Long Island fell by the wayside — all while worrying that another flu outbreak would finally wipe him out.

"All I know is I don't want to be hit again," Corwin said. "If I go through this twice, I'm done as a duck farmer."

Make way for ducklings

For months, Corwin and his reduced staff have been thoroughly sanitizing the farm's dozens of barns, clearing out hay and debris, and replacing feeders, ventilation systems, wooden and metal structures and more.

At the end of May, the first wave of roughly 900 young ducks arrived from a nearby farm where they had been carefully raised in quarantine these last few months.

Another batch of 900 arrived last week and some 900 more will soon make their way to the roughly 140-acre (55-hectare) farm in Aquebogue, which is tucked among the vineyards and agricultural lands of Long Island's North Fork, about 80 miles (129 km) east of Manhattan.

By the end of next summer, Corwin hopes the first ducks will be ready to be processed and brought to market.

But he says he won't rush the reopening. It will be many more months — if ever — before the operation, which processed about 1 million ducks for consumption annually, returns to full capacity, he said.

"I keep telling people I'm running a high hurdle race," Corwin said. "I've got a lot a lot of steps to get back to where we were."

Bird flu pandemic still looms

Since 2022, the H5N1 strain of bird flu has been detected in all 50 states, leading to more than 1,700 recorded outbreaks affecting nearly 175 million birds, according to the most recent tally from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The outbreak at Corwin's farm shows how this strain has inflicted more damage on a wider range of species than past variants, said Dr. Gavin Hitchener, director of Cornell University's Duck Research Labora-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 44 of 76

tory, located a short drive away in Eastport.

Ducks have generally been less prone to serious illness and death than chickens and turkeys, he said. H5N1 is also vexing American cattle farmers after the virus jumped from fowl to cattle last year.

"Something has changed in the virus' makeup that has made it more virulent," Hitchener said.

With no end to the bird flu pandemic in sight, Corwin worries he won't be able to weather another outbreak.

The farm received federal compensation for its euthanized ducks, but it wasn't nearly close to the market value of the birds — never mind the expense of rebuilding in a high cost region that also includes the Hamptons, he said.

Corwin hopes the federal government will, at long last, require poultry operators to vaccinate their livestock against bird flu. It's an uphill climb, given the Trump administration's deep skepticism of vaccines and the long-standing opposition of far larger, industrial poultry operations, he acknowledged.

"I would sleep an awful lot better at night. But right now I'm very nervous," Corwin said. "We're just playing with deck chairs on the Titanic."

Carrying on local heritage

The ducks newly arrived to the farm are crucial to its revival.

Fully grown and approaching breeding age, the cohort of white Pekin ducks were all that survived from the more than 15,000 eggs state officials allowed the farm to spare from the winter culling after they tested negative for bird flu.

That means they and their progeny carry on the unique genetic makeup the farm has honed over generations of selective breeding to build its reputation.

Established in 1908 by Corwin's great-grandfather, Crescent Duck Farms has been the island's lone commercial duck operation for the better part of a decade. But in the early 1960s, Long Island boasted more than 100 farms producing about two-thirds of the nation's duck output.

"I feel I owe it to the ancestors of farmers who've been here all these years and have come this far to just make a go of it," Corwin said. "I want to make Long Island proud."

Israel threatens Iran's top leader after missiles damage hospital and wound more than 200

By SAM MEDNICK, NATALIE MELZER, and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

BEERSHEBA, Israel (AP) — Israel's defense minister overtly threatened Iran's supreme leader on Thursday after the latest missile barrage from Iran damaged the main hospital in southern Israel and hit several other residential buildings near Tel Aviv. Israel meanwhile struck a heavy water reactor that is part of Iran's nuclear program.

At least 240 people were wounded by the Iranian missiles, four of them seriously, according to Israel's Health Ministry. The vast majority were lightly wounded, including more than 70 people from the Soroka Medical Center in the southern city of Beersheba, where smoke rose as emergency teams evacuated patients.

In the aftermath of the strikes, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz blamed Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and said the military "has been instructed and knows that in order to achieve all of its goals, this man absolutely should not continue to exist."

U.S. officials said this week that President Donald Trump had vetoed an Israeli plan to kill Khamenei. Trump later said there were no plans to kill him "at least not for now."

Israel carried out strikes on Iran's Arak heavy water reactor, in its latest attack on the country's sprawling nuclear program. The conflict began last Friday with a surprise wave of Israeli airstrikes targeting military sites, senior officers and nuclear scientists.

A Washington-based Iranian human rights group said at least 639 people, including 263 civilians, have been killed in Iran and more than 1,300 wounded. In retaliation, Iran has fired over 400 missiles and

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 45 of 76

hundreds of drones, killing at least 24 people in Israel and wounding hundreds.

Missile hits main hospital in southern Israel

Two doctors told The Associated Press that the missile struck almost immediately after air raid sirens went off, causing a loud explosion that could be heard from a safe room. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief media.

The hospital said the main impact was on an old surgery building that had been evacuated in recent days. After the strike, the medical facility was closed to all patients except for life-threatening cases, it said. Soroka has over 1,000 beds and provides services to around 1 million residents of Israel's south.

There were no serious injuries from the strike on the hospital.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the attack and vowed a response, saying: "We will exact the full price from the tyrants in Tehran."

Iran has fired hundreds of missiles and drones at Israel, though most have been shot down by Israel's multi-tiered air defenses, which detect incoming fire and shoot down missiles heading toward population centers and critical infrastructure. Israeli officials acknowledge it is imperfect.

Many hospitals in Israel activated emergency plans in the past week, converting underground parking to hospital floors and moving patients underground, especially those who are on ventilators or are difficult to move quickly.

Israel also boasts a fortified, subterranean blood bank that kicked into action after Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attack ignited the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip.

'No radiation danger' after strike on reactor

Israel's military said its fighter jets targeted the Arak facility and its reactor core seal in order to prevent it from being used to produce plutonium.

"The strike targeted the component intended for plutonium production, in order to prevent the reactor from being restored and used for nuclear weapons development," the military said. Israel separately claimed to have struck another site around Natanz it described as being related to Iran's nuclear program.

Iranian state TV said there was "no radiation danger whatsoever" from the attack on the Arak site. An Iranian state television reporter, speaking live in the nearby town of Khondab, said the facility had been evacuated and there was no damage to civilian areas around the reactor.

Israel had warned earlier Thursday morning it would attack the facility and urged the public to flee the area.

Iran rejects calls to surrender or end its nuclear program

Iran has long maintained its program is for peaceful purposes. However, it also enriches uranium up to 60%, a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%. Iran is the only non-nuclear-weapon state to enrich at that level.

Israel is the only nuclear-armed state in the Middle East but does not acknowledge having such weapons.

The strikes came a day after Iran's supreme leader rejected U.S. calls for surrender and warned that any military involvement by the Americans would cause "irreparable damage to them." Israel had lifted some restrictions on daily life Wednesday, suggesting the missile threat from Iran on its territory was easing.

Already, Israel's campaign has targeted Iran's enrichment site at Natanz, centrifuge workshops around Tehran and a nuclear site in Isfahan. Its strikes have also killed top generals and nuclear scientists.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said he would travel to Geneva for meetings with his European counterparts on Friday, indicating a new diplomatic initiative might be taking shape. Iran's official IRNA news agency said the meeting would include foreign ministers from the United Kingdom, France and Germany and the European Union's top diplomat.

Trump has said he wants something "much bigger" than a ceasefire and has not ruled out the U.S. joining in Israel's campaign. Iran has warned of dire consequences if the U.S. deepens its involvement, without elaborating.

Arak had been redesigned to address nuclear concerns

The Arak heavy water reactor is 250 kilometers (155 miles) southwest of Tehran.

Heavy water helps cool nuclear reactors, but it produces plutonium as a byproduct that can potentially

be used in nuclear weapons. That would provide Iran another path to the bomb beyond enriched uranium, should it choose to pursue the weapon.

Iran had agreed under its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers to redesign the facility over proliferation concerns.

The reactor became a point of contention after President Donald Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal in 2018. Ali Akbar Salehi, a high-ranking nuclear official in Iran, said in 2019 that Tehran bought extra parts to replace a portion of the reactor that it had poured concrete into to render it unusable under the deal.

Israel, in conducting its strike, signaled it remained concerned the facility could be used to produce plutonium again one day.

"The strike targeted the component intended for plutonium production, in order to prevent the reactor from being restored and used for nuclear weapons development," the Israeli military said in a statement.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, has been urging Israel not to strike Iranian nuclear sites. IAEA inspectors reportedly last visited Arak on May 14.

Due to restrictions Iran imposed on inspectors, the IAEA has said it lost "continuity of knowledge" about Iran's heavy water production -- meaning it could not absolutely verify Tehran's production and stockpile.

Hackers say they wiped out \$90 million from Iran cryptocurrency exchange

By GABE LEVIN Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Hackers with possible links to Israel have drained more than \$90 million from Nobitex, Iran's largest cryptocurrency exchange, according to blockchain analytics firms.

The group that claimed responsibility for the hack leaked on Thursday what it said was the company's full source code. "ASSETS LEFT IN NOBITEX ARE NOW ENTIRELY OUT IN THE OPEN," the group wrote on its Telegram account.

The stolen funds were transferred to addresses bearing messages that criticized Iran's Revolutionary Guard, Blockchain analytics firm Elliptic wrote in a blog post. It said the attack likely was not financially motivated as the wallets the hackers had poured the money into "effectively burned the funds in order to send Nobitex a political message."

The hackers group, Gonjeshke Darande — "Predatory Sparrow" in Farsi — accused Nobitex of having helped Iran's government to evade Western sanctions over the country's rapidly advancing nuclear program and transfer money to militants, in a post on X claiming the attack.

Nobitex appeared to have confirmed the attack. Its app and website were down as it assessed "unauthorized access" to its systems, it said in a post on X.

The theft spanned a range of cryptocurrencies, including Bitcoin, Ethereum, Dogecoin and more, said head of national security intelligence at Chainalysis Andrew Fierman. The breach is "particularly significant given the comparatively modest size of Iran's cryptocurrency market," he added.

The hack appears to be motivated by escalating tensions in the Israel-Iran conflict, which broke out last week when Israel struck Iran's nuclear sites and military officials, drawing Tehran's response with barrages of missiles. It came after the group said it had destroyed data in a cyberattack against Iran's state-controlled Bank Sepah on Tuesday.

Elliptic said that relatives of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei were linked to the exchange and that sanctioned Revolutionary Guard operatives had used Nobitex. It shared evidence that the exchange had sent and received funds from cryptocurrency wallets controlled by Iranian allies including Yemen's Houthis and Hamas.

Gonjeshke Darande has previously claimed responsibility for other high-level cyberattacks against Iran, including a 2021 operation that paralyzed gas stations and a 2022 effort against a steel mill that sparked a large fire.

Israeli media have widely reported that Gonjeshke Darande is linked to Israel but the country's govern-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 47 of 76

ment has never officially acknowledged ties to the group.

U.S. Senators Elizabeth Warren and Angus King last year raised concerns about Iran's use of cryptocurrencies to evade sanctions.

Putin says Russia could help broker a deal between Iran and Israel

By JAMES JORDAN and HARRIET MORRIS Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin offered Wednesday to help mediate an end to the conflict between Israel and Iran, suggesting Moscow could help negotiate a settlement that could allow Tehran to pursue a peaceful atomic program while assuaging Israeli security concerns.

Speaking to senior news leaders of international news agencies, Putin noted that "it's a delicate issue," but added that "in my view, a solution could be found."

Asked how Russia would react if Israel kills Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Putin refused to answer, saying that "I don't even want to discuss such a possibility."

Khamenei has rejected U.S. calls for surrender in the face of more Israeli strikes and warned that any military involvement by the Americans would cause "irreparable damage to them."

Putin said he shared Moscow's proposals with Iran, Israel and the United States.

"We are not imposing anything on anyone; we are simply talking about how we see a possible way out of the situation. But the decision, of course, is up to the political leadership of all these countries, primarily Iran and Israel," he said.

Russia has maintained a delicate balancing act in the Middle East for decades, trying to navigate its warm relations with Israel even as it developed strong economic and military ties with Iran, a policy that could allow Moscow to play power broker.

Putin's comments follow a mediation offer that he made in a call with U.S. President Donald Trump last weekend.

Trump said Wednesday that he told Putin to stay focused on finding an endgame to his own conflict with Ukraine.

"I said, 'Do me a favor, mediate your own,'" Trump said he told Putin. "I said, 'Vladimir, let's mediate Russia first. You can worry about this later.'"

The comments represented a shift for Trump, who earlier this week said he was "open" to Putin's offer to mediate in the Middle East.

Over 200 Russians remain at Iran's nuclear power plant

Putin, meeting with senior news leaders of international news agencies including The Associated Press on the sidelines of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, emphasized that Russia has a trusting relationship with Iran and helped built its first nuclear power plant in Bushehr on the Persian Gulf south of Tehran.

He said that over 200 Russian workers are involved in building two more reactors in Bushehr, adding that "we agreed with the Israeli leadership that their security will be ensured."

Putin emphasized that Tehran hasn't asked Moscow for military assistance, noting the "strategic partnership" treaty between the countries that was signed in January doesn't envision such aid.

In addition to a few air defense systems that Russia supplied to Iran in the past, it also offered previously to help create comprehensive air defenses, but Tehran didn't want it, he said.

"Our proposal was to create a system, not isolated deliveries, but a system," Putin said. "We used to discuss it in the past, but the Iranian side showed little interest."

Israel said that it knocked out Iran's Russia-supplied S-300 air defense missile systems during last year's strikes.

Praise for Trump's push for peace in Ukraine

Putin on Wednesday praised Trump's push for peace in Ukraine, seconding the American leader's repeated claims that the 3-year-old conflict wouldn't have started if he had been in the White House in 2022.

"If Trump had been the president, the conflict indeed might not have erupted," Putin said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 48 of 76

Russia has intensified its aerial campaign in Ukraine recently and stepped up ground attacks along the more than 1,000-kilometer (over 600-mile) front line. Putin has effectively rejected Trump's offer of an immediate 30-day ceasefire, making it conditional on a halt on Ukraine's mobilization effort and a freeze on Western arms supplies.

He said he is open for talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, but repeated his claim that he lost his legitimacy after his term expired last year — allegations rejected by Kyiv and its allies.

"We are ready for substantive talks on the principles of a settlement," Putin said, noting the previous round of talks had led to an exchange of prisoners and the bodies of fallen soldiers.

Asked by AP about Russia condemning Israel's strikes on Iran even as Ukrainian civilians are killed in attacks by Moscow, Putin responded that Russia was targeting the country's arms factories.

"The strikes were carried out against military industries, not residential quarters," Putin said.

AP reporters have documented damage to residential buildings in Ukraine, most recently this week. On Wednesday, emergency workers pulled more bodies from the rubble of a nine-story Kyiv apartment building demolished by a Russian attack earlier this week, raising the death toll from the strike on the capital to 28.

Putin vowed that Moscow will achieve its goal to "demilitarize" Ukraine.

"We will not allow Ukraine to have armed forces that would threaten the Russian Federation and its people," he said. "And if we fail to reach a settlement, we will achieve our goals by military means."

He strongly warned Germany against delivering long-range Taurus missiles to Ukraine, saying that it could draw it into a direct military conflict with Russia but won't help stem Russian advances.

"Our troops are advancing along the entire line of contact," he said, warning Ukraine to accept Russia's terms for a peace deal or face tougher conditions in the future. "If they fail to agree, the situation could change for the worse."

He also dismissed Western warnings of Russia's purported plans to attack NATO countries as "ravings," noting the alliance's military spending far exceed Moscow's defense budget.

Putin has used the annual forum to highlight Russia's economic achievements and seek foreign investment. Western executives, who attended the event in the past, have avoided it after Putin sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022, leaving it to business leaders from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

He met earlier with former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, who now heads the New Development Bank created by the BRICS alliance of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. He is also set to have meetings with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto and He's also expected to confer with top officials from China, South Africa and Bahrain and the head of the OPEC group of oil-producing countries.

US resumes visas for foreign students but demands access to social media accounts

By MATTHEW LEE and ALBEE ZHANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. State Department said Wednesday it is restarting the suspended process for foreigners applying for student visas but all applicants will now be required to unlock their social media accounts for government review.

The department said consular officers will be on the lookout for posts and messages that could be deemed hostile to the United States, its government, culture, institutions or founding principles.

In a notice made public Wednesday, the department said it had rescinded its May suspension of student visa processing but said new applicants who refuse to set their social media accounts to "public" and allow them to be reviewed may be rejected. It said a refusal to do so could be a sign they are trying to evade the requirement or hide their online activity.

The Trump administration last month temporarily halted the scheduling of new visa interviews for foreign students hoping to study in the U.S. while preparing to expand the screening of their activity on social media, officials said.

Students around the world have been waiting anxiously for U.S. consulates to reopen appointments for

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 49 of 76

visa interviews, as the window left to book their travel and make housing arrangements narrows ahead of the start of the school year.

On Wednesday afternoon, a 27-year-old Ph.D. student in Toronto was able to secure an appointment for a visa interview next week. The student, a Chinese national, hopes to travel to the U.S. for a research internship that would start in late July. "I'm really relieved," said the student, who spoke on condition of being identified only by his surname, Chen, because he was concerned about being targeted. "I've been refreshing the website couple of times every day."

Students from China, India, Mexico and the Philippines have posted on social media sites that they have been monitoring visa booking websites and closely watching press briefings of the State Department to get any indication of when appointment scheduling might resume.

In reopening the visa process, the State Department also told consulates to prioritize students hoping to enroll at colleges where foreigners make up less than 15% of the student body, a U.S. official familiar with the matter said. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to detail information that has not been made public.

Foreign students make up more than 15% of the total student body at almost 200 U.S. universities, according to an Associated Press analysis of federal education data from 2023. Most are private universities, including all eight Ivy League schools. But that criteria also includes 26 public universities, including the University of Illinois and Pennsylvania State University. Looking only at undergraduate students, foreign students make up more than 15% of the population at about 100 universities, almost all of them private.

International students in the U.S. have been facing increased scrutiny on several fronts. In the spring, the Trump administration revoked permission to study in the U.S. for thousands of students, including some involved only in traffic offenses, before abruptly reversing course. The government also expanded the grounds on which foreign students can have their legal status terminated.

As part of a pressure campaign targeting Harvard University, the Trump administration has moved to block foreign students from attending the Ivy League school, which counts on international students for tuition dollars and a quarter of its enrollment. Trump has said Harvard should cap its foreign enrollment at 15%.

This latest move to vet students' social media, the State Department said Wednesday, "will ensure we are properly screening every single person attempting to visit our country."

In internal guidance sent to consular officers, the department said they should be looking for "any indications of hostility toward the citizens, culture, government, institutions, or founding principles of the United States."

Jameel Jaffer, executive director at the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, said the new policy evokes the ideological vetting of the Cold War, when prominent artists and intellectuals were excluded from the U.S.

"This policy makes a censor of every consular officer, and it will inevitably chill legitimate political speech both inside and outside the United States," Jaffer said.

The Trump administration also has called for 36 countries to commit to improving vetting of travelers or face a ban on their citizens visiting the United States. A weekend diplomatic cable sent by the State Department says the countries have 60 days to address U.S. concerns or risk being added to a travel ban that now includes 12 nations.

Erick strengthens into a Category 3 major hurricane approaching Mexico's coast

By FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ and LUIS ALBERTO CRUZ Associated Press

ACAPULCO, Mexico (AP) — Hurricane Erick powered up into a Category 3 major hurricane Wednesday evening as it bore down on the southern Mexico coast, threatening to unleash destructive winds, flash floods and a dangerous storm surge on the region in coming hours, forecasters said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 50 of 76

Swiftly strengthening from a Category 1 hurricane hours earlier, Erick had maximum sustained winds of 125 mph (200 kph) by nightfall as it churned offshore about 55 miles (85 kilometers) southwest of Puerto Angel, the Miami-based U.S. National Hurricane Center said.

Erick was also about 125 miles (200 kilometers) southeast of Punta Maldonado and moving northwest at 9 mph (15 kph) toward an expected landfall sometime Thursday morning, according to the center's latest advisory. A major hurricane is defined as Category 3 or higher and wind speeds of at least 111 mph (180 kph). Forecasters said further strengthening is expected and devastating wind damage is possible near where the eye crashes ashore.

Acapulco warily eyes the approaching hurricane

The projected path would take its center near the resort of Acapulco, which was devastated in October 2023 by Hurricane Otis, a Category 5 hurricane that rapidly intensified and caught many unprepared. At least 52 people died in Otis and 32 were missing, after the storm severely damaged almost all of the resort's hotels.

In Acapulco on Wednesday, there was a strong presence of National Guard and police in the streets, but most visible were trucks from the national power company. Crews worked to clear drainage canals and brush.

Some beaches were already closed, but tourists continued to sunbathe on others hours earlier as the storm gained strength well offshore.

On a beach in Acapulco, a line of people waited for the help of a backhoe to pull their boats out of the water.

Adrián Acevedo Durantes, 52, hauls tourists around Acapulco's picturesque coastline in boats. Two of his boats sank in Hurricane Otis and a third was badly damaged.

"We're taking precautions because with Otis we never expected one of that magnitude to come and now with climate change the water is warmer and the hurricanes are more powerful," Acevedo said.

This time the port administration ordered that no one ride out the storm aboard their boats. During Otis many lost their lives by staying on boats in the harbor, which had traditionally been how they ensured their safety during previous storms. He said knew some of those lost at sea.

He acknowledged that it was sunny and the water calm Wednesday afternoon, making it hard to imagine a major storm was on the way, but said "with Otis it was calm all day, sunny, then at midnight there were two hours of strong winds and we saw what had happened the next day."

Some rush to finish storm preparations

Francisco Casarubio, a 46-year-old choreographer, carried a carton of eggs as he did some last-minute shopping ahead of the storm. He planned to pick up rice, beans and some canned food as well.

His home flooded and lost power in Otis and said he was taking Erick more seriously, but hadn't had time to shop until Wednesday.

Forecasters said Erick was expected to lash Mexico's Pacific coast with heavy rain, strong winds and a fierce storm surge. Rains of up to 16 inches (40 centimeters) could fall across the Mexican states of Oaxaca and Guerrero, with lesser totals in Chiapas, Michoacan, Colima and Jalisco states, the center's advisory said. The rainfall threatened flooding and mudslides, especially in areas with steep terrain.

A hurricane warning was in effect from Acapulco to Puerto Angel. A hurricane warning means hurricane conditions are expected in the area, and preparations to protect life and property should be rushed to completion, according to the hurricane center advisory.

Down the coast in Puerto Escondido near the southern edge of Erick's possible path, some fishermen began pulling their boats out of the water under a drizzling sky Wednesday.

Surfers ignore red flag warnings to ride the waves

Even though the wind had yet to pick up at the Zicatela beach, red flags were up to warn people to stay out of the water. But some surfers ignored them as they continued to ride waves.

Laura Velázquez, Mexico's national civil defense coordinator, said Erick was forecast to bring "torrential" rains to Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas in southern Mexico. The mountainous region along the coast is especially prone to mudslides with numerous rivers at risk of flooding.

Guerrero Gov. Evelyn Salgado said all schools were closed Wednesday and the state had alerted all of the fishing and tourism operators to make their boats storm-ready. Acapulco's port closed Tuesday evening. Salgado said 582 shelters were set to receive people who might evacuate their homes.

President Claudia Sheinbaum warned in her daily briefing that those in the hurricane's path should heed government instructions and wait out the storm in their homes or designated shelters.

Erick quickly doubled in strength

Having doubled in strength in less than a day, Erick was churning through an ideal environment for quick intensification. Last year, there were 34 incidents of rapid intensification — when a storm gains at least 35 mph in 24 hours — which is about twice as many as average and causes problems with forecasting, according to the hurricane center.

Karen Read found not guilty of second-degree murder, guilty of drunken driving in boyfriend's death

By MICHAEL CASEY, PATRICK WHITTLE, LEAH WILLINGHAM and HOLLY RAMER Associated Press DEDHAM, Mass. (AP) — A jury found Karen Read not guilty of second-degree murder and manslaughter charges Wednesday in the 2022 death of her Boston police officer boyfriend, a case that attracted legions of true crime followers who erupted in cheers when word of the acquittal spread outside court.

The same jury also found her guilty of a lesser charge of drunken driving after deliberating for at least 22 hours since June 13.

Cheers from the crowd outside could be heard in the courtroom as the verdict was read. With gleeful supporters, Read departed the courthouse with her attorneys and family.

It was a huge victory for Read's lawyers, who have long asserted that she was framed by police after dropping John O'Keefe off at a party at the home of a fellow officer. Prosecutors argued that the 45-year-old Read hit O'Keefe, 46, with her SUV before driving away, but the defense maintained that he was killed inside the home and later dragged outside.

"No one has fought harder for justice for John O'Keefe than I have," Read said.

Members of O'Keefe's family left the courtroom with bowed heads. Prosecutors did not speak to reporters outside.

The verdict came nearly a year after a separate jury deadlocked over Read's involvement in the January 2022 death of John O'Keefe and resulted in a mistrial.

Read faced charges of second-degree murder, manslaughter and leaving the scene outside Boston. A second-degree murder conviction would have carried a life sentence. She will face a year of probation for the drunken driving conviction.

Read's father, Bill Read, told The Associated Press he was "thankful that it's over."

"I'm pleased, obviously, with the outcome," he said. "We always knew Karen was innocent. I'm glad she is free of this mess. Just a weight off our shoulders. The power of the state is immense, and we were able to fight it"

Some witnesses see miscarriage of justice

Several witnesses in the case said in a statement Wednesday that their "hearts are with John and the entire O'Keefe family." Those who signed the statement included Jennifer McCabe, who was with Read and O'Keefe the night of his death, and Brian Albert, who owned the home where the party took place.

"While we may have more to say in the future, today we mourn with John's family and lament the cruel reality that this prosecution was infected by lies and conspiracy theories spread by Karen Read, her defense team, and some in the media. The result is a devastating miscarriage of justice," the statement said.

Jubilation among Read's supporters

Outside the court, Read supporters celebrated in an atmosphere similar to sports fans reveling in a team's championship, complete with pink confetti.

T.D. Floras of Nashua, New Hampshire, stood next to the barrier facing the courthouse holding Lucy, her chorkie, a cross between a Chihuahua and a Yorkie. The dog wore a sign around its neck that read

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 52 of 76

"Free Karen." Floras said she was "beyond thrilled and excited" about the outcome.

"I would do that OUI probation for her myself," she said. "It's been a long time coming, so let's put this behind her now so she can have some peace in her life."

The trial

Much like during the first trial, attorneys spent months presenting their case, featuring hundreds of pieces of evidence and dozens of witnesses.

Read's defense said O'Keefe was beaten, bitten by a dog and left outside a home in the Boston suburb of Canton, in a conspiracy orchestrated by police that included planting evidence.

Prosecutors have described Read as a scorned lover who chose to leave O'Keefe dying in the snow after striking him with her SUV.

Shira Diner, a lecturer at the Boston University Law School, said the verdict "gives us an opportunity to reflect how this case would have been different if Karen Read was not a white woman of privilege and means."

"The criminal legal system is full of inequities, and the fact the defendant in this case was able to post bail and wasn't held in custody while the case was pending made a huge difference," Diner said. "She was able to work directly with her lawyers in a way that people can't from behind bars. She was able to give interviews and craft a public narrative that a person without means would be unable to do. All of that work helped contribute to the verdict, and that is a privilege that most people charged with second-degree murder do not have."

Daniel Medwed, a law professor at Northeastern University, said it was a mercy or compromise verdict, in which jurors opt for acquittal on the most serious charges but convict on lesser offense when they have doubts about the case but want to hold the person accountable.

"Here the evidence — including the defendant's own admissions — made it clear that she drove while intoxicated, and therefore OUI was a natural place for the jury to land," Medwed said.

Blogger and Read champion 'overcome with emotion'

A blogger who has championed Read's innocence and has been charged with witness intimidation in connection with her case, told AP he was "overcome with emotion" after the verdict.

"Two and a half years of this. It's finally over. Karen Read's free," Aidan Kearney said. "Everything I did was worth it, and we finally have justice. We finally put this nightmare behind us."

The state's case was led by special prosecutor Hank Brennan, who called fewer witnesses than prosecutor Adam Lally, who ran the first trial against Read.

Describing O'Keefe as a "good man" who "helped people," Brennan told jurors during closing arguments that O'Keefe needed help that night and the only person who could provide it was Read.

"She was drunk. She hit him and she left him to die," he said.

The defense rejected the idea that there was ever a collision at all and called expert witnesses who agreed.

"There is no evidence that John was hit by a car. None. This case should be over right now, done, because there was no collision," attorney Alan Jackson said during closing.

Iran's leader rejects calls to surrender and warns that intervention would harm the US

By JOSEPH KRAUSS, JON GAMBRELL and JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's supreme leader rejected U.S. calls for surrender in the face of more Israeli strikes Wednesday and warned that any military involvement by the Americans would cause "irreparable damage to them." European diplomats prepared to hold talks with Iran on Friday.

The second public appearance by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei since the Israeli strikes began six days ago came as Israel lifted some restrictions on daily life, suggesting that the missile threat from Iran was easing.

Khamenei spoke a day after U.S. President Donald Trump demanded in a social media post that Iran surrender without conditions and warned Khamenei that the U.S. knows where he is but has no plans to kill him, "at least not for now."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 53 of 76

Trump initially distanced himself from Israel's surprise attack aimed at Iran's nuclear program, but in recent days he has hinted at greater American involvement, saying he wants something "much bigger" than a ceasefire. The U.S. has also sent more military aircraft and warships to the region.

Senior European diplomats were set to hold nuclear talks with Iran on Friday in Geneva, according to a European official familiar with the matter.

The official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and requested anonymity to discuss matters freely, said the meeting would include high-ranking diplomats from Germany, France and the United Kingdom, as well as the European Union's top diplomat.

There are no plans for American involvement in the talks, although that could change, according to another U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private diplomatic communications.

Separately, the U.N. Security Council scheduled a second emergency meeting on the Israel-Iran conflict for Friday at the request of Russia, China and Pakistan. Russian President Vladimir Putin offered to help mediate, suggesting Moscow could help negotiate a settlement allowing Tehran to pursue a peaceful atomic program while assuaging Israeli security concerns.

"In my view, a solution could be found," Putin said Wednesday at a session with journalists.

In a video address to Israelis, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed appreciation for Trump's support in the conflict, calling him "a great friend of Israel" and praising U.S. help defending Israel's skies.

"We speak constantly, including last night," he said Wednesday. "We had a very warm conversation."

'The Iranian nation is not one to surrender'

Khamenei dismissed the "threatening and absurd statements" by Trump.

"Wise individuals who know Iran, its people and its history never speak to this nation with the language of threats, because the Iranian nation is not one to surrender," he said in a low-resolution video.

"Americans should know that any military involvement by the U.S. will undoubtedly result in irreparable damage to them."

Iran released Khamenei's statement before the video was aired, perhaps as a security measure. His location is not known, and it was impossible to discern from the tight shot, which showed only beige curtains, an Iranian flag and a portrait of Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Khamenei's immediate predecessor, who died in 1989.

An Iranian diplomat had warned earlier Wednesday that U.S. intervention would risk "all-out war."

Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei did not elaborate, but thousands of American troops are based in nearby countries within range of Iran's weapons. The U.S. has threatened a massive response to any attack.

Another Iranian official said the country would keep enriching uranium for peaceful purposes, apparently ruling out Trump's demands that Iran give up its disputed nuclear program.

Meanwhile, Iranian state TV reported late Wednesday that it was under a cyberattack by Israel.

Social media users reported that the regular broadcast on state TV was briefly interrupted and replaced with an anti-government video urging people to take to the streets. After the normal broadcast resumed, a message on the screen said, "If you see an irrelevant message on the screen, it's due to a cyber attack by the Zionist regime."

Strikes in and around Tehran

Israeli military spokesman Brig. Gen. Effie Defrin told a news conference Wednesday that Israel launched three waves of aerial attacks in the last 24 hours, deploying dozens of warplanes to strike over 60 targets in Tehran and western Iran.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said the military struck the headquarters of Iran's internal security forces, without specifying the agency or location. The strike marks a shift toward targeting Iran's domestic security apparatus, which has long cracked down on dissent and suppressed protests.

Iran's police force acknowledged the strike hours later, saying that Israel hit its central command buildings in Tehran and wounded some officers, without saying how many.

In addition, the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency said, Israel hit two centrifuge-production facilities in and near Tehran.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 54 of 76

The Israeli military said it began a new round of airstrikes Thursday in Tehran and other areas of Iran, without elaborating.

Israel's air campaign has struck several nuclear and military sites, killing top generals and nuclear scientists. A Washington-based Iranian human rights group said at least 639 people, including 263 civilians, have been killed in Iran and more than 1,300 wounded.

In retaliation, Iran has fired some 400 missiles and hundreds of drones, killing at least 24 people in Israel and wounding hundreds. Some have hit apartment buildings in central Israel, causing heavy damage.

Israeli military officials said their defenses intercepted 10 missiles overnight and several more Wednesday evening as Iran's retaliatory barrages diminished. Air-raid sirens forced Israelis to run for shelter. There were no reports of injuries.

Iran has fired fewer missiles as the conflict has worn on. It has not explained the decline, but Israel has targeted launchers and other infrastructure related to the missiles.

Some U.S. diplomats and their families at the U.S. Embassy in Israel were evacuated Wednesday, according to two U.S. officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe sensitive diplomatic movements. A number of diplomats left on a government plane shortly before U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee announced that the embassy was making evacuation plans for private American citizens, the officials said.

By Wednesday, Israel eased some of the restrictions that it had imposed on civilians when Iran launched its retaliatory attack, allowing gatherings of up to 30 people and letting workplaces reopen as long as there is a shelter nearby.

Casualties mount in Iran

The Washington-based group Human Rights Activists said it had identified 263 of those killed in Israeli strikes as civilians and 154 as security personnel.

The group, which also provided detailed casualty figures during 2022 protests over the death of Mahsa Amini, crosschecks local reports against a network of sources it has developed in Iran.

Iran has not published regular death tolls during the conflict and has minimized casualties in the past. Its last update, issued Monday, put the toll at 224 people killed and 1,277 others wounded.

Internet service, which has faced repeated disruption in Iran over the past six days, crashed on Wednesday. The internet-monitoring group NetBlocks reported a "near-total national internet blackout."

The Iranian Communications Ministry announced that the government was limiting internet access to prevent Israel's "misuse of the country's communication network for military purposes."

Shops have been closed across Tehran, including in its famed Grand Bazaar, as people wait in gas lines and pack roads leading out of the city to escape the onslaught.

Witnesses reported that more than 10 powerful explosions shook central Tehran around 8 p.m., sending white smoke into the air.

At least one strike appeared to target Tehran's eastern neighborhood of Hakimiyeh, where the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard has an academy.

Israel says it launched the strikes to prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon, after talks between the United States and Iran over a diplomatic resolution made little visible progress over two months but were still ongoing. Trump has said Israel's campaign came after a 60-day window he set for the talks.

Kyiv rescuers find more bodies as death toll from latest Russian attack climbs to 28

By JUSTIN SPIKE and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Emergency workers pulled more bodies Wednesday from the rubble of a nine-story Kyiv apartment building demolished by a Russian missile, raising the death toll from the latest attack on the Ukrainian capital to 28.

The building in Kyiv's Solomianskyi district took a direct hit and collapsed during the deadliest Russian attack on Kyiv this year. Authorities said that 23 of those killed were inside the building. The remaining five died elsewhere in the city.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 55 of 76

Workers used cranes, excavators and their hands to clear more debris from the site, while sniffer dogs searched for buried victims. The blast blew out windows and doors in neighboring buildings in a wide radius of damage.

The attack overnight on Monday into Tuesday was part of a sweeping barrage as Russia once again sought to overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses. Russia fired more than 440 drones and 32 missiles in what Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said was one of the biggest bombardments of the war, now in its fourth year.

Russia has launched a summer offensive on parts of the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line and has intensified long-range attacks that have struck urban residential areas.

At the same time, U.S.-led peace efforts have failed to gain traction. Also, Middle East tensions and U.S. trade tariffs have drawn world attention away from Ukraine's pleas for more diplomatic and economic pressure to be placed on Russia.

The U.S. Embassy in Kyiv said the attack clashed with the attempts by the administration of President Donald Trump to reach a settlement that will stop the fighting.

"This senseless attack runs counter to President Trump's call to stop the killing and end the war," the embassy posted on social platform X.

Kyiv authorities declared Wednesday an official day of mourning. Mourners laid flowers on swings and slides at a playground across the street from the collapsed building. On Tuesday, a man had waited hours there for his 31-year-old son's body to be pulled from the rubble.

Psychologists from Ukraine's emergency services provided counseling to survivors of the attack and to family members of those who died.

"Some people are simply in a stupor, they simply can't move," Karyna Dovhal, one of the psychologists, told AP. "People are waiting for their sons, brothers, uncles ... Everyone is waiting."

Valentin Hrynkov, a 64-year-old handyman in a local school who lived on the seventh floor of a connected building that did not collapse, said he and his wife woke up to the sound of explosions followed by a pause, and then another blast that rattled their own building.

He said his wife had shrapnel injuries in her back and his legs and feet were cut by broken glass. The damage trapped them in their apartment for around 30 minutes before rescue workers could free them, he said.

He felt an overwhelming sense of "helplessness and primal fear" during the attack, he told The Associated Press.

"I was especially scared to sleep last night," Hrynkov said. "A car drives by and I cover my head. It's scary."

By dawn on Tuesday, residents of buildings in the densely populated neighborhood could be seen huddled in ground-floor entryways to seek shelter from the ongoing drone assault.

Drones were striking every few minutes within hundreds of meters of the building hit by the missile. The continuing attack forced firefighters and rescue teams to delay the rescue operation.

Relatives and friends of the destroyed building's residents later gathered outside in shock, many crying and calling out names, hoping survivors might still be found beneath the rubble.

The world's only twice-a-year shot to prevent HIV could stop transmission — if people can get it

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. has approved the world's only twice-a-year shot to prevent HIV, the first step in an anticipated global rollout that could protect millions — although it's unclear how many in the U.S. and abroad will get access to the powerful new option.

While a vaccine to prevent HIV still is needed, some experts say the shot made by Gilead Sciences — a drug called lenacapavir — could be the next best thing. It nearly eliminated new infections in two ground-breaking studies of people at high risk, better than daily preventive pills they can forget to take.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 56 of 76

"This really has the possibility of ending HIV transmission," said Greg Millett, public policy director at amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research.

Condoms help guard against HIV infection if used properly but what's called PrEP — regularly using preventive medicines such as the daily pills or a different shot given every two months — is increasingly important. Lenacapavir's six-month protection makes it the longest-lasting type, an option that could attract people wary of more frequent doctor visits or stigma from daily pills.

But upheaval in U.S. healthcare — including cuts to public health agencies and Medicaid — and slashing of American foreign aid to fight HIV are clouding the prospects.

Millett said "gaping holes in the system" in the U.S. and globally "are going to make it difficult for us to make sure we not only get lenacapavir into people's bodies but make sure they come back" twice a year to keep up their protection.

Gilead's drug already is sold to treat HIV under the brand name Sunlenca. The prevention dose will be sold under a different name, Yeztugo. It's given as two injections under the skin of the abdomen, leaving a small "depot" of medication to slowly absorb into the body. People must test negative for HIV before getting their twice-a-year dose, Gilead warned. It only prevents HIV transmission — it doesn't block other sexually transmitted diseases. Some researchers who helped test the shot advise cold packs to counter injection-site pain.

Global efforts at ending the HIV pandemic by 2030 have stalled. There still are more than 30,000 new infections in the U.S. each year and about 1.3 million worldwide.

Only about 400,000 Americans already use some form of PrEP, a fraction of those estimated to benefit. A recent study found states with high use of PrEP saw a decrease in HIV infections, while rates continued rising elsewhere.

About half of new infections are in women, who often need protection they can use without a partner's knowledge or consent. One rigorous study in South Africa and Uganda compared more than 5,300 sexually active young women and teen girls given twice-yearly lenacapavir or the daily pills. There were no HIV infections in those receiving the shot while about 2% in the comparison group caught HIV from infected sex partners.

A second study found the twice-yearly shot nearly as effective in gay men and gender-nonconforming people in the U.S. and in several other countries hard-hit by HIV.

Ian Haddock of Houston had tried PrEP off and on since 2015 but he jumped at the chance to participate in the lenacapavir study and continues with the twice-yearly shots as part of the research follow-up.

"Now I forget that I'm on PrEP because I don't have to carry around a pill bottle," said Haddock, who leads the Normal Anomaly Initiative, a nonprofit serving Black LGBTQ+ communities.

"Men, women, gay, straight — it really just kinds of expands the opportunity for prevention," he added. Just remembering a clinic visit every six months "is a powerful tool versus constantly having to talk about, like, condoms, constantly making sure you're taking your pill every day."

Gilead said the U.S. list price, meaning before insurance, is \$28,218 a year, which it called similar to some other PrEP options. The company said it anticipated insurance coverage but also has some financial assistance programs.

Most private insurers are supposed to cover PrEP options without a co-pay although the Supreme Court is considering a case that could overturn that requirement. Congress also is considering huge cuts to Medicaid. And while community health centers still are an option, the Trump administration has largely dismantled HIV prevention work at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that would normally get the message to vulnerable populations who'd qualify for the shot, said Carl Schmid of the nonprofit HIV+Hepatitis Policy Institute.

Schmid worries the shot won't meet its potential because "we're basically pulling the rug out of HIV prevention and testing and outreach programs."

Gilead also has applications pending for the twice-yearly shot in other countries. Last fall, the company signed agreements with six generic drug makers to produce low-cost versions of the shot for 120 poor

countries mostly in Africa, Southeast Asia and the Caribbean. Gilead plans to make enough shots to supply 2 million people in those countries, at no profit, until the generics are available, said company senior vice president Dr. Jared Baeten.

Winnie Byanyima, executive director of UNAIDS, said in a statement the price is still too high. If it's unaffordable, she said, "it will change nothing."

And HIV experts worry the arrangements Gilead has made to reduce costs in some countries leave out middle-income countries like some in Latin America.

"Everyone in every country who's at risk of HIV needs access to PrEP," said Dr. Gordon Crofoot of Houston, who helped lead the study in men. "We need to get easier access to PrEP that's highly effective like this is."

Supreme Court OKs Tennessee ban on gender-affirming care for kids, a setback for transgender rights

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Wednesday upheld Tennessee's ban on gender-affirming care for transgender minors, a jolting setback to transgender rights.

The justices' 6-3 decision in a case from Tennessee effectively protects from legal challenges many efforts by President Donald Trump's Republican administration and state governments to roll back protections for transgender people. Another 26 states have laws similar to Tennessee's.

Chief Justice John Roberts wrote for a conservative majority that the law banning puberty blockers and hormone treatments for trans minors doesn't violate the Constitution's equal protection clause, which requires the government to treat similarly situated people the same.

"This case carries with it the weight of fierce scientific and policy debates about the safety, efficacy, and propriety of medical treatments in an evolving field. The voices in these debates raise sincere concerns; the implications for all are profound," Roberts wrote. "The Equal Protection Clause does not resolve these disagreements. Nor does it afford us license to decide them as we see best."

In a dissent for the court's three liberal justices that she summarized aloud in the courtroom, Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote, "By retreating from meaningful judicial review exactly where it matters most, the court abandons transgender children and their families to political whims. In sadness, I dissent."

The law also limits parents' decision-making ability for their children's health care, she wrote.

Efforts to regulate transgender people's lives

The decision comes amid other federal and state efforts to regulate the lives of transgender people, including which sports competitions they can join and which bathrooms they can use. In April, Trump's administration sued Maine for not complying with the government's push to ban transgender athletes in girls sports.

The Republican president also has sought to block federal spending on gender-affirming medical care for those under age 19 — instead promoting talk therapy only to treat young transgender people. And the Supreme Court has allowed him to kick transgender service members out of the military, even as court fights continue. The president signed another order to define the sexes as only male and female.

The debate even spilled into Congress when Delaware elected Democrat Sarah McBride as the first transgender member of the House. Her election prompted immediate opposition among Republicans, including House Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana and Rep. Nancy Mace of South Carolina, over which bathroom McBride could use.

Some providers have stopped treatment already

Several states where gender-affirming care remains in place have adopted laws or state executive orders seeking to protect it. But since Trump's executive order, some providers have ceased some treatments. For instance, Penn Medicine in Philadelphia announced last month it wouldn't provide surgeries for patients under 19.

The president of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Dr. Susan Kressly, said the organization is "unwavering" in its support of gender-affirming care and "stands with pediatricians and families making health

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 58 of 76

care decisions together and free from political interference."

Five years ago, the Supreme Court ruled LGBTQ people are protected by a landmark federal civil rights law that prohibits sex discrimination in the workplace. That decision is unaffected by Wednesday's ruling.

But the justices declined to apply the same sort of analysis the court used in 2020 when it found "sex plays an unmistakable role" in employers' decisions to punish transgender people for traits and behavior they otherwise tolerate. Roberts joined that opinion written by Justice Neil Gorsuch, who was part of Wednesday's majority.

Justice Amy Coney Barrett also fully joined the majority but wrote separately to emphasize that laws classifying people based on transgender status should not receive any special review by courts. Barrett, also writing for justice Clarence Thomas, wrote that "courts must give legislatures flexibility to make policy in this area."

'A devastating loss' or a 'Landmark VICTORY'

Chase Strangio, the American Civil Liberties Union lawyer who argued the case for transgender minors and their families, called the ruling "a devastating loss for transgender people, our families, and everyone who cares about the Constitution."

Mo Jenkins, a 26-year-old trans woman who began taking hormone therapy at 16, said she was disheartened but not surprised by the ruling. "Trans people are not going to disappear," said Jenkins, a Texas native and legislative staffer at the state capitol in Austin. Texas outlawed puberty blockers and hormone treatment for minors in 2023.

Tennessee's leading Republican elected officials all praised the outcome. Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti on social media called the ruling a "Landmark VICTORY for Tennessee at SCOTUS in defense of America's children!"

There are about 300,000 people between the ages of 13 and 17 and 1.3 million adults who identify as transgender in the U.S., according to the Williams Institute, a think tank at the UCLA School of Law that researches sexual orientation and gender identity demographics.

When the case was argued in December, then-President Joe Biden's Democratic administration and families of transgender adolescents called on the high court to strike down the Tennessee ban as unlawful sex discrimination and to protect the constitutional rights of vulnerable Americans.

They argued the law violates the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment in part because the same treatments that the law prohibits for transgender minors can be used for other purposes.

Soon after Trump took office, the Justice Department told the court its position had changed.

A major issue in the case was the appropriate level of scrutiny courts should apply to such laws.

The lowest level is known as rational basis review, and almost every law looked at that way is upheld. Indeed, the federal appeals court in Cincinnati that allowed the Tennessee law to be enforced held that lawmakers acted rationally to regulate medical procedures.

The appeals court reversed a trial court that employed a higher level of review, heightened scrutiny, which applies in cases of sex discrimination. Under this more searching examination, the state must identify an important objective and show the law helps accomplish it.

Roberts' 24-page majority opinion was devoted almost entirely to explaining why the Tennessee law, called SB1, should be evaluated under the lower standard of review. The law's restrictions on treating minors for gender dysphoria turn on age and medical use, not sex, Roberts wrote.

Doctors may prescribe puberty blockers and hormone therapy to minors of any sex to treat some disorders, but not those relating to transgender status, he wrote.

But in her courtroom statement, Sotomayor asserted that similar arguments were made to defend the Virginia law prohibiting interracial marriage that the Supreme Court struck down in 1967.

"A ban on interracial marriage could be described in the same way as the majority described SB1," she said.

Roberts rejected the comparison.

Fed leaves key rate unchanged as it awaits the impact of tariffs and Trump again scolds Powell

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve kept its key rate unchanged Wednesday as it waits for additional information on how tariffs and other potential disruptions will affect the economy this year.

The Fed's policymakers signaled they still expect to cut rates twice this year, even as they also project that President Donald Trump's import duties will push inflation higher. They also expect growth to slow and unemployment to edge up, according to their latest quarterly projections released Wednesday.

Fed policymakers had cut their rate three times late last year but have since have been on hold. Inflation has cooled steadily since January, but Fed Chair Jerome Powell said at a news conference that tariffs are likely to reverse that progress and push inflation higher in the coming months. The Fed expects the bump to inflation will be temporary, but they want to see more data to be sure.

"Increases in tariffs this year are likely to push up prices and weigh on economic activity," Powell said. "This is something we know is coming, we just don't know the size of it."

Changes to the Fed's rate typically — though not always — influence borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans, credit cards, and business loans.

So far inflation has continued to decline while some cracks have appeared in the economy, particularly in housing, where elevated borrowing costs are slowing sales and homebuilding. Hiring has also slowed. Such trends would typically lead the Fed to reduce its key rate, which is currently at about 4.3%.

Yet Powell said the economy remains in good shape and the Fed has to consider the potential for prices to rise soon.

"You can see perhaps a very, very slow continued cooling" in the job market, "but nothing that's troubling at this time," he said.

"We have to be forward looking," Powell said later. "We expect a meaningful amount of inflation to arrive in coming months and we have to take that into account."

Powell also said the Fed will learn much more over the summer about how tariffs will affect the economy. George Pearkes, global macro strategist for Bespoke Investment Group, said he interpreted that to mean the Fed won't cut until September, at the earliest. Its next meeting is in July.

"Unless we see a really, really rapid deterioration in the labor market we won't see a cut until September, and maybe not even then," he said.

Wall Street investors currently expect the Fed to cut in September, according to futures prices tracked by CME Fedwatch.

Fed officials see inflation, according to their preferred measure, rising to 3% by the end of this year, from 2.1% in April, according to the projections released Wednesday. They also project the unemployment rate will rise to 4.5%, from 4.2% currently. Growth is expected to slow to just 1.4% this year, down from 2.5% last year.

Claudia Sahm, chief economist at New Century Advisors and a former Fed economist, said that the projections show that policymakers do expect inflation to come down in 2026 and 2027, with the tariffs having just a temporary impact. Without the duties, officials would be more likely to cut rates soon, she said.

"The Fed seems to be in agreement that this will be temporary, but they don't have high enough conviction yet," she said.

So far, inflation has cooled this year to just 2.1% in April, essentially back at the central bank's target of 2%. Core inflation, which excludes the volatile food and energy categories, remains elevated at 2.5%.

Trump has pointed to the mild inflation figures to argue that the Fed should lower borrowing costs and has repeatedly criticized Powell for not doing so. On Wednesday he called Powell "stupid" and accused him of being "political" for not cutting rates.

"So we have no inflation, we have only success," Trump said, before the Fed announced its decision. "And I'd like to see interest rates get down."

Trump has previously argued that a rate cut would boost the economy. Now his focus has shifted to the

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 60 of 76

federal government's borrowing costs, which have shot higher since the pandemic, with interest payments running at an annual rate of more than \$1 trillion.

Pushing the Fed to cut rates simply to save the government on its interest payments typically raises alarms among economists, because it would threaten the Fed's congressional mandate to focus on stable prices and maximum employment.

One of Trump's complaints is that the Fed isn't cutting rates even as other central banks around the world have reduced their borrowing costs, including in Europe, Canada, and the U.K. On Tuesday, the Bank of Japan kept its key short-term rate unchanged at 0.5%, after actually raising it recently.

But the European Central Bank, Bank of Canada, and Bank of England have reduced their rates this year in part because U.S. tariffs are weakening their economies. So far the U.S. economy is mostly solid, with the unemployment rate low.

The Bank of England has cut its rate twice this year but is expected to keep it unchanged at 4.25% when it meets Thursday.

Scientists warn that greenhouse gas accumulation is accelerating and more extreme weather will come

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Humans are on track to release so much greenhouse gas in less than three years that a key threshold for limiting global warming will be nearly unavoidable, according to a study to be released Thursday.

The report predicts that society will have emitted enough carbon dioxide by early 2028 that crossing an important long-term temperature boundary will be more likely than not. The scientists calculate that by that point there will be enough of the heat-trapping gas in the atmosphere to create a 50-50 chance or greater that the world will be locked in to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) of long-term warming since preindustrial times. That level of gas accumulation, which comes from the burning of fuels like gasoline, oil and coal, is sooner than the same group of 60 international scientists calculated in a study last year.

"Things aren't just getting worse. They're getting worse faster," said study co-author Zeke Hausfather of the tech firm Stripe and the climate monitoring group Berkeley Earth. "We're actively moving in the wrong direction in a critical period of time that we would need to meet our most ambitious climate goals. Some reports, there's a silver lining. I don't think there really is one in this one."

That 1.5 goal, first set in the 2015 Paris agreement, has been a cornerstone of international efforts to curb worsening climate change. Scientists say crossing that limit would mean worse heat waves and droughts, bigger storms and sea-level rise that could imperil small island nations. Over the last 150 years, scientists have established a direct correlation between the release of certain levels of carbon dioxide, along with other greenhouse gases like methane, and specific increases in global temperatures.

In Thursday's Indicators of Global Climate Change report, researchers calculated that society can spew only 143 billion more tons (130 billion metric tons) of carbon dioxide before the 1.5 limit becomes technically inevitable. The world is producing 46 billion tons (42 billion metric tons) a year, so that inevitability should hit around February 2028 because the report is measured from the start of this year, the scientists wrote. The world now stands at about 1.24 degrees Celsius (2.23 degrees Fahrenheit) of long-term warming since preindustrial times, the report said.

Earth's energy imbalance

The report, which was published in the journal *Earth System Science Data*, shows that the rate of human-caused warming per decade has increased to nearly half a degree (0.27 degrees Celsius) per decade, Hausfather said. And the imbalance between the heat Earth absorbs from the sun and the amount it radiates out to space, a key climate change signal, is accelerating, the report said.

"It's quite a depressing picture unfortunately, where if you look across the indicators, we find that records are really being broken everywhere," said lead author Piers Forster, director of the Priestley Centre for Climate Futures at the University of Leeds in England. "I can't conceive of a situation where we can

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 61 of 76

really avoid passing 1.5 degrees of very long-term temperature change.”

The increase in emissions from fossil-fuel burning is the main driver. But reduced particle pollution, which includes soot and smog, is another factor because those particles had a cooling effect that masked even more warming from appearing, scientists said. Changes in clouds also factor in. That all shows up in Earth’s energy imbalance, which is now 25% higher than it was just a decade or so ago, Forster said.

Earth’s energy imbalance “is the most important measure of the amount of heat being trapped in the system,” Hausfather said.

Earth keeps absorbing more and more heat than it releases. “It is very clearly accelerating. It’s worrisome,” he said.

Crossing the temperature limit

The planet temporarily passed the key 1.5 limit last year. The world hit 1.52 degrees Celsius (2.74 degrees Fahrenheit) of warming since preindustrial times for an entire year in 2024, but the Paris threshold is meant to be measured over a longer period, usually considered 20 years. Still, the globe could reach that long-term threshold in the next few years even if individual years haven’t consistently hit that mark, because of how the Earth’s carbon cycle works.

That 1.5 is “a clear limit, a political limit for which countries have decided that beyond which the impact of climate change would be unacceptable to their societies,” said study co-author Joeri Rogelj, a climate scientist at Imperial College London.

The mark is so important because once it is crossed, many small island nations could eventually disappear because of sea level rise, and scientific evidence shows that the impacts become particularly extreme beyond that level, especially hurting poor and vulnerable populations, he said. He added that efforts to curb emissions and the impacts of climate change must continue even if the 1.5 degree threshold is exceeded.

Crossing the threshold “means increasingly more frequent and severe climate extremes of the type we are now seeing all too often in the U.S. and around the world — unprecedented heat waves, extreme hot drought, extreme rainfall events, and bigger storms,” said University of Michigan environment school dean Jonathan Overpeck, who wasn’t part of the study.

Andrew Dessler, a Texas A&M University climate scientist who wasn’t part of the study, said the 1.5 goal was aspirational and not realistic, so people shouldn’t focus on that particular threshold.

“Missing it does not mean the end of the world,” Dessler said in an email, though he agreed that “each tenth of a degree of warming will bring increasingly worse impacts.”

Amazon hopes to deliver 10,000 robotaxis annually with new factory, challenging Waymo

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

HAYWARD, Calif. (AP) — Amazon is gearing up to make as many as 10,000 robotaxis annually at a sprawling plant near Silicon Valley as it prepares to challenge self-driving cab leader Waymo. Tesla CEO Elon Musk is also vying to join the autonomous race.

The 220,000-square-foot (20,440-square-meter) robotaxi factory announced Wednesday heralds a new phase in Amazon’s push into a technological frontier that began taking shape in 2009, when Waymo was launched as a secret project within Google.

Amazon began eyeing the market five years ago when it shelled out \$1.2 billion for self-driving startup Zoox, which will be the brand behind a robotaxi service that plans to begin transporting customers in Las Vegas late this year before expanding into San Francisco next year.

Zoox, conceived in 2014, will be trying to catch up to Waymo, which began operating robotaxis in Phoenix nearly five years ago. It started charging for rides in San Francisco in 2023 and also expanded into Los Angeles and Austin, Texas. Waymo says it has recorded more than 10 million paid rides while other would-be rivals such as Amazon and Tesla are still fine-tuning their self-driving technology and tackling how to ramp up their fleet.

Zoox’s manufacturing plant in Hayward, California spans across the equivalent of three-and-a-half foot-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 62 of 76

ball fields. It's located about 17 miles (27 kilometers) north of a factory where Tesla makes some of the electric vehicles that Musk believes will eventually be able to operate without a driver behind the wheel.

Since moving into the former bus manufacturing factory in 2023, Zoox has transformed it into a high-tech facility where its boxy, gondola-like vehicles are put together and tested along a 21-station assembly line. For now, Zoox is only making one robotaxi per day, but by next year hopes to be churning out three vehicles per hour.

Once it gets the factory up to full speed with production spread over two eight-hour shifts, Zoox is aiming to make 10,000 robotaxis annually in Hayward for a fleet aimed at entering other major markets, including Miami, Los Angeles and Atlanta.

Although Zoox will be assembling its robotaxis in the U.S., about half of the parts are imported from outside the country, according to company officials. Waymo is also planning to expand into Atlanta and Miami and on Wednesday took the first step toward bringing its robotaxis to the most populous U.S. city with the disclosure of an application to begin testing its vehicles in New York.

"It's an exciting time to be heading on this journey," Zoox CEO Aicha Evans said during a Tuesday tour of the robotaxi factory that she co-hosted with Jesse Levinson, the company's co-founder and chief technology officer.

Although Zoox will be lagging well behind, it believes it can lure passengers with vehicles that look more like carriages than cars, with seating for up to four passengers. Waymo, in contrast, adds its self-driving technology to cars made by major automakers, making its robotaxi look similar to vehicles steered by humans. Zoox isn't even bothering to put a steering wheel in its robotaxis.

As it continues to test its robotaxis in Las Vegas, Zoox recently struck a partnership to give rides to guests of Resorts World. It's also still testing its robotaxis in San Francisco, where Waymo has turned driverless cars into an everyday sight in a city renowned for cable cars since the 1870s. While testing in San Francisco last month, a minor collision between a Zoox robotaxi and a person riding an electric scooter prompted the company to issue a voluntary recall to update its self-driving technology. No injuries were reported in the incident.

Tesla is angling to compete against Waymo too, although it remains unclear when Musk will fulfill his long-running promise to build the world's largest robotaxi service. Musk still hasn't given up on the goal, though his current ambitions are more modest than they were in 2019. When he predicted Tesla would be running a fleet of 1 million robotaxis by now. He is currently aiming for a limited rollout of Tesla robotaxis in Austin this Sunday, although that date could change because Musk is "being super paranoid about safety."

Zoox, in contrast, is planning to operate 500 to 1,000 of its robotaxis in small to medium-sized markets and about 2,000 robotaxis in major cities, according to Evans. The company says each robotaxi produced in its Hayward plant should be on the road for about five years, or about 500,000 miles.

Supreme Court work goes on with 16 cases to decide, including birthright citizenship

By MARK SHERMAN and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is in the homestretch of a term that has lately been dominated by the Trump administration's emergency appeals of lower court orders seeking to slow President Donald Trump's efforts to remake the federal government.

But the justices also have 16 cases to resolve that were argued between December and mid-May. One of the argued cases was an emergency appeal, the administration's bid to be allowed to enforce Trump's executive order denying birthright citizenship to U.S.-born children of parents who are in the country illegally.

The court typically aims to finish its work by the end of June. On Wednesday it decided one of its most closely watched cases, handing down an opinion that upheld a Tennessee ban on some healthcare for transgender minors.

Here are some of the biggest remaining cases:

Trump's birthright citizenship order has been blocked by lower courts

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 63 of 76

The court rarely hears arguments over emergency appeals, but it took up the administration's plea to narrow orders that have prevented the citizenship changes from taking effect anywhere in the U.S.

The issue before the justices is whether to limit the authority of judges to issue nationwide injunctions, which have plagued both Republican and Democratic administrations in the past 10 years.

These nationwide court orders have emerged as an important check on Trump's efforts and a source of mounting frustration to the Republican president and his allies.

At arguments last month, the court seemed intent on keeping a block on the citizenship restrictions while still looking for a way to scale back nationwide court orders. It was not clear what such a decision might look like, but a majority of the court expressed concerns about what would happen if the administration were allowed, even temporarily, to deny citizenship to children born to parents who are in the country illegally.

Democratic-led states, immigrants and rights groups who sued over Trump's executive order argued that it would upset the settled understanding of birthright citizenship that has existed for more than 125 years.

The court seems likely to side with Maryland parents in a religious rights case over LGBTQ storybooks in public schools

Parents in the Montgomery County school system, in suburban Washington, want to be able to pull their children out of lessons that use the storybooks, which the county added to the curriculum to better reflect the district's diversity.

The school system at one point allowed parents to remove their children from those lessons, but then reversed course because it found the opt-out policy to be disruptive. Sex education is the only area of instruction with an opt-out provision in the county's schools.

The school district introduced the storybooks in 2022, with such titles as "Prince and Knight" and "Uncle Bobby's Wedding."

The case is one of several religious rights cases at the court this term. The justices have repeatedly endorsed claims of religious discrimination in recent years. The decision also comes amid increases in recent years in books being banned from public school and public libraries.

A three-year battle over congressional districts in Louisiana is making its second trip to the Supreme Court

Lower courts have struck down two Louisiana congressional maps since 2022 and the justices are weighing whether to send state lawmakers back to the map-drawing board for a third time.

The case involves the interplay between race and politics in drawing political boundaries in front of a conservative-led court that has been skeptical of considerations of race in public life.

At arguments in March, several of the court's conservative justices suggested they could vote to throw out the map and make it harder, if not impossible, to bring redistricting lawsuits under the Voting Rights Act.

Before the court now is a map that created a second Black majority congressional district among Louisiana's six seats in the House of Representatives. The district elected a Black Democrat in 2024.

A three-judge court found that the state relied too heavily on race in drawing the district, rejecting Louisiana's arguments that politics predominated, specifically the preservation of the seats of influential members of Congress, including Speaker Mike Johnson. The Supreme Court ordered the challenged map to be used last year while the case went on.

Lawmakers only drew that map after civil rights advocates won a court ruling that a map with one Black majority district likely violated the landmark voting rights law.

The justices are weighing a Texas law aimed at blocking kids from seeing online pornography

Texas is among more than a dozen states with age verification laws. The states argue the laws are necessary as smartphones have made access to online porn, including hardcore obscene material, almost instantaneous.

The question for the court is whether the measure infringes on the constitutional rights of adults as well. The Free Speech Coalition, an adult-entertainment industry trade group, agrees that children shouldn't be seeing pornography. But it says the Texas law is written too broadly and wrongly affects adults by requiring them to submit personal identifying information online that is vulnerable to hacking or tracking.

The justices appeared open to upholding the law, though they also could return it to a lower court for additional work. Some justices worried the lower court hadn't applied a strict enough legal standard in

determining whether the Texas law and others like that could run afoul of the First Amendment.

As Israel strikes Iran, many wonder if the US will deepen its involvement

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — As Israeli strikes kill top Iranian generals, take out air defenses and damage nuclear sites, many wonder if President Donald Trump will deepen U.S. involvement in the conflict.

Trump has long railed against what he refers to as the “stupid, endless wars” waged by his predecessors, including in Afghanistan and Iraq, where the U.S. helped overthrow governments. But with Iran’s government looking increasingly fragile, if the U.S. does get involved, its strikes could help severely damage the country’s nuclear program or even end its 4-decade-old theocracy.

“I may do it, I may not do it,” Trump said in an exchange with reporters at the White House about whether he has decided to order a U.S. strike. “I mean, nobody knows what I’m going to do.”

But the recent history of U.S. attempts to remake the Middle East by force is one of costly blunders and colossal failures — and there are plenty of hard-earned lessons for anyone who wants to try it again.

Initial success is often fleeting

U.S. special forces and Afghan allies drove the Taliban from power and chased Osama bin Laden into Pakistan within months of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. American tanks rolled into Baghdad weeks after the 2003 invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

Both wars went on for years.

The Taliban waged a tenacious insurgency for two decades and swept back into power as the U.S. beat a chaotic retreat in 2021. The overthrow of Saddam plunged Iraq into chaos, with Sunni insurgents and Shiite militias battling each other and U.S. forces.

Israel may succeed in taking out Iran’s air defenses, ballistic missiles and much of its nuclear program. But that would still leave hundreds of thousands in the military, the Revolutionary Guard and forces known as the Basij, who played a key role in quashing waves of anti-government protests in recent years.

Ground forces are key but do not guarantee success

Airstrikes have never been enough on their own.

Take Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi, for example. His forces withstood a seven-month NATO air campaign in 2011 before rebels fighting city by city eventually cornered and killed him.

There are currently no insurgent groups in Iran capable of taking on the Revolutionary Guard, and it’s hard to imagine Israeli or U.S. forces launching a ground invasion of a mountainous country of some 80 million people that is about four times as big as Iraq.

A split in Iran’s own security forces would furnish a ready-made insurgency, but it would also likely tip the country into civil war.

There’s also the question of how ordinary Iranians would respond.

Protests in recent years show that many Iranians believe their government is corrupt and repressive, and would welcome its demise. But the last time a foreign power attacked Iran — the Iraqi invasion of 1980 — people rallied around the flag.

At the moment, many appear to be lying low or leaving the capital.

Be wary of exiled opposition groups

Some of the biggest cheerleaders for the U.S. invasion of Iraq were exiled opposition figures, many of whom had left the country decades before. When they returned, essentially on the back of U.S. tanks, they were marginalized by local armed groups more loyal to Iran.

There are several large Iranian opposition groups based abroad, but they are not united and it’s unclear how much support any of them has inside the country.

The closest thing to a unifying opposition figure is Reza Pahlavi, the son of the shah who was overthrown in the 1979 Islamic Revolution that brought the theocracy to power. But many Iranians have bitter memories of repression under the shah, and others might reject Pahlavi over his outreach to Israel, especially

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 65 of 76

if he tries to ride to power on the back of a foreign invasion.

Chaos is practically guaranteed

In Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya — and in Syria and Yemen after their 2011 uprisings — a familiar pattern emerged when governments were overthrown or seriously weakened.

Armed groups emerged with competing agendas. Neighboring countries backed local proxies. Weapons flowed in and large numbers of civilians fled. The fighting in some places boiled over into full-blown civil war, and ever more violent extremist groups sprouted from the chaos.

When it was all over, Saddam had been replaced by a corrupt and often dysfunctional government at least as friendly to Iran as it was to the U.S. Gadhafi was replaced by myriad militias, many allied with foreign powers. The Taliban were replaced by the Taliban.

What to know about the COVID variant that may cause 'razor blade' sore throats

By DEVI SHASTRI AP Health Writer

The COVID-19 variant that may be driving a recent rise in cases in some parts of the world has earned a new nickname: "razor blade throat" COVID.

That's because the variant — NB.1.8.1. or "Nimbus" — may cause painful sore throats. The symptom has been identified by doctors in the United Kingdom, India and elsewhere, according to media outlets in those countries.

Other COVID-19 symptoms of any variant include fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath or loss of taste or smell.

Experts say there isn't major cause for concern with the Nimbus variant, but here's what else you need to know about it.

Here's where the variant causing 'razor blade throat' is spreading

The rise in cases late last month is primarily in eastern Mediterranean, Southeast Asia and western Pacific regions, the World Health Organization said May 28. The new variant had reached nearly 11% of sequenced samples reported globally in mid-May.

Airport screening in the United States detected the new variant in travelers arriving from those regions to destinations in California, Washington state, Virginia and New York.

You aren't likely to get sicker from this variant than others

Not so far, anyway.

The WHO said some western Pacific countries have reported increases in COVID cases and hospitalizations, but there's nothing so far to suggest that the disease associated with the new variant is more severe compared to other variants.

COVID-19 vaccines are effective against the Nimbus variant

Yes.

The WHO has designated Nimbus as a "variant under monitoring" and considers the public health risk low at the global level. Current vaccines are expected to remain effective.

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. announced last month that COVID-19 shots are no longer recommended for healthy children and pregnant women — a move immediately questioned by public health experts.

Hegseth says the Pentagon has given Trump options for Israel-Iran conflict

By TARA COPP, DAVID KLEPPER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told lawmakers Wednesday that the Pentagon was providing options to President Donald Trump as he decides next steps on Iran but would not say whether the military was planning to assist with Israeli strikes, an action that could risk dragging America

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 66 of 76

into a wider war in the Middle East.

Hegseth was on Capitol Hill for the last of a series of combative hearings before lawmakers, who have pressed him on everything from a ban on transgender troops to his use of a Signal chat to share sensitive military plans earlier this year.

In questioning before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Hegseth said "maximum force protection" was being provided for U.S. troops in the Middle East and that it is Trump's decision whether to provide Israel a "bunker buster" bomb to strike at the core of Iran's nuclear program, which would require U.S. pilots flying a B-2 stealth bomber. He would not indicate what the U.S. may do next.

"They should have made a deal. President Trump's word means something — the world understands that," Hegseth said of Trump pressing Iran to agree to a deal during U.S. talks over Tehran's rapidly developing nuclear program.

"And at the Defense Department, our job is to stand ready and prepared with options. And that's precisely what we're doing," Hegseth said.

Options for Israel

Hegseth said the U.S. military was readying options for Trump, noting that it's his job to provide the president with options and what the ramifications could be.

Trump would not say Wednesday whether he has decided to order a U.S. strike on Iran, a move that Tehran warned anew would be greeted with stiff retaliation.

Israel has struck multiple Iranian nuclear facilities in the past several days, but one of its key uranium production sites, Fordo, requires the deep penetrating munition from the U.S.

"I may do it, I may not do it," Trump told reporters at the White House. "I mean, nobody knows what I'm going to do."

Democratic senators urged caution.

Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the committee's ranking Democrat, warned that "the Trump administration must take urgent steps to prevent a wider war." He said Israel launching the attack on Iran against "against the urging of the president threatens the stability of the entire region and the safety of American stationed there."

The U.S. has shifted significant numbers of refueling tanker and fighter aircraft to position them to be able to respond to the escalating conflict, such as by supporting possible evacuations or conducting air-strikes. Hegseth said this week that was done to protect U.S. personnel and airbases.

Troops being sent to Los Angeles protests

Hegseth's testimony last week in three congressional hearings also was taken over by events, with the Trump administration dispatching the National Guard and 700 active-duty Marines to the protests in Los Angeles against California Gov. Gavin Newsom's wishes.

Hegseth was repeatedly questioned on whether the California deployment was just the beginning of wider use of the military at home.

Hegseth would not directly say whether he had authorized troops to conduct arrests of civilians or use lethal force against them, instead, as he has in past hearings, redirecting the issue to immigration agents facing violent protesters. He would also not answer questions on whether the Pentagon has the authority to expand the deployment of troops to other cities.

"I take it from your answer that you do have contingency plans for the use of military in other cities," Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., pressed.

"We have never and will not illegally deploy troops," Hegseth said. "All have been under existing and well-established authorities."

Last week, a district court ordered Trump to return control of the guard to Newsom. But the administration quickly appealed, and a three-judge appellate panel temporarily paused that order and appeared inclined to return that power to the president.

Questions on DEI, the renaming of bases

Hegseth has dedicated much of the early part of his tenure to social issues, such as eradicating diversity and equity influence from the military — to the extent that he has pursued restoring base names back to

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 67 of 76

their Confederate origins and renaming warships that were honoring civil rights icons.

For example, Hegseth directed the renaming of a Navy ship that had honored Harvey Milk, a slain gay rights activist who served as a sailor during the Korean War. He also has touted other moves to eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion programs and said a ban on transgender troops was a way to regain the "warrior ethos."

Hegseth was challenged on why the Pentagon has worked to find names similar to those of the Confederate officers the bases originally honored. For example, Virginia's Fort Lee, named for Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, was renamed during the Biden administration to Fort Gregg-Adams, honoring two Black officers — Lt. Gen. Arthur Gregg, the first African American to serve as a three-star, and Lt. Col. Charity Adams, the highest-ranking Black woman of World War II.

The Pentagon announced Monday that the name Lee has been restored, now honoring Army Pvt. Fitz Lee, a Buffalo Soldier and Medal of Honor recipient. The Buffalo Soldiers were an all-Black Army unit.

The surviving members of the Gregg and Adams families were not contacted by Hegseth's office prior to the announcement that their names would be removed, said Sen. Tim Kaine, a Virginia Democrat.

"This was never about the names of the bases they were renamed to," Hegseth said. "It was about restoring all bases to their original names."

In the previous hearings — where Hegseth appeared to discuss the Pentagon's spending plan — lawmakers made it clear they were unhappy that he has not provided full details on the administration's first proposed defense budget.

This photo of the nearby Sculptor galaxy spans 65,000 light years

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Astronomers have revealed a nearby spiral galaxy in all its brilliant glory, shining in thousands of colors.

The dazzling panoramic shot released Wednesday of the Sculptor galaxy by a telescope in Chile is so detailed that it's already serving as a star-packed map.

Scientists used the European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope to observe the galaxy for some 50 hours, stitching together more than 100 exposures to create the picture. The image spans 65,000 light-years, almost the entire galaxy. A light-year is 5.8 trillion miles.

Sculptor — officially labeled NGC 253 — is considered a starburst galaxy, one heavy with stellar action. It's located 11 million light-years away in the Southern Hemisphere's constellation Sculptor, and easy to view with binoculars or small telescopes.

"The Sculptor galaxy is in a sweet spot," the observatory's Enrico Congiu, who led the research, said in a statement. "It is close enough that we can resolve its internal structure and study its building blocks with incredible detail, but at the same time, big enough that we can still see it as a whole system."

The more shades of color from stars, gas and dust in a galaxy, the more clues to their age, composition and motion, according to the scientists. Sculptor's latest snapshot contains thousands of colors — a glowing montage of purples, pinks and yellows — compared with just a handful for traditional pictures.

The team has already discovered 500 planetary nebulae, clouds of gas and dust from dying stars that can serve as cosmic mile markers. Their research has been accepted for publication in the journal *Astronomy & Astrophysics*.

US unemployment ticked down, hovering at historically low levels

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits dipped to 245,000 last week, hovering at historically low levels, the Labor Department said Wednesday.

U.S. jobless claims ticked down from 250,000 the week before. Economists had expected last week's claims to match that at 250,000.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 68 of 76

The four-week average of claims, which smooths out week-to-week volatility, rose to 245,500, the highest since August 2023.

The number of Americans collecting unemployment benefits the week of June 7 slid to 1.95 million.

Weekly unemployment claim are a proxy for layoffs and mostly have stayed within a healthy band of 200,000 to 250,000 since the economy recovered from a brief but painful COVID-19 recession in 2020, which temporarily wiped out millions of jobs.

In recent weeks, however, claims have stayed at the high end of range, adding to evidence that U.S. job market is decelerating after years of strong hiring. So far this year, employers are adding a decent but far from spectacular 124,000 jobs a month, down from an average 168,000 last year and an average of nearly 400,000 from 2021 through 2023.

The hiring slowdown is partly the drawn-out result of 11 interest rate hikes by the Federal Reserve in 2022 and 2023. But Trump's aggressive and often-erratic trade policies — including 10% taxes on imports from almost every country on earth — are also weighing on the economy, paralyzing businesses and worrying consumers who fear they'll mean higher prices.

Carl Weinberg of High Frequency Economics is worried that claims remain elevated compared with recent years, when employment has remained very low by historical standards.

"We believe firms have been 'hoarding' workers to ensure that they don't lay off skilled and trained workers by mistake, especially with the labor market still very close to full employment," Weinberg wrote. "With uncertainty still high ... companies have remained hesitant about layoffs. That may be changing."

The Fed, satisfied that an inflation was coming down, cut rates three times last year. But the central bank has turned cautious in 2025, worried that Trump's tariffs will rekindle inflationary pressures. The Fed is expected to leave rates unchanged as it wraps up a two-day meeting Wednesday.

Argentines reel from health care cutbacks as President Milei's state overhaul mirrors Trump's

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — To outsiders, the Facebook group chat reads like a snarl of nonsensical emojis and letters. To uninsured Argentine cancer patients, it's a lifeline.

The surreptitious network connects advocates who have spare drugs to Argentines with cancer who lost access to their treatment in March 2024 when President Javier Milei suspended a federal agency, known as DADSE, that paid for their expensive medications.

Whenever Facebook cracks the coded pleas and removes the group for violating its rules on drug sales, another appears, swelling with Argentines who say they've grown sicker since the radical libertarian president took a chainsaw to health care.

"All I need for my body to function is this medication, and Milei is saying, 'There's no money,'" said Ariel Wagener, a 47-year-old pizza chef with leukemia who was hospitalized this year with failing kidneys after losing access to his medication. Without DADSE, a month's worth of his leukemia drug costs \$21,000.

Wagener's condition stabilized after he got leftover medication via Facebook, donated by a family whose loved one had died of cancer.

The halting of millions of dollars of free cancer drugs is just one way Milei's austerity drive has torn through the public health system that once set Argentina apart in Latin America, ensuring that health care was free for pretty much everyone who couldn't afford private insurance.

Since taking office in December 2023, Milei has slashed Argentina's health care budget by 48% in real terms. His administration fired over 2,000 Health Ministry employees, including 1,400 over just a few days in January.

As part of Milei's plan to remake Argentina's troubled economy and cut waste and bureaucracy, officials gutted the National Cancer Institute, suspending early detection programs for breast and cervical cancer.

They froze federal funds for immunization campaigns, hobbling vaccine access as Argentina confronts a

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 69 of 76

measles outbreak for the first time in decades. They dismantled the National Directorate for HIV, Hepatitis and Tuberculosis, leading to testing and treatment delays. They defunded emergency contraception and stopped distributing abortion pills.

"We're seeing setbacks we haven't seen in decades," said María Fernanda Boriotti, president of Argentina's Federation of Health Professionals. "HIV patients without treatment, cancer patients dying for lack of medication, hospitals without resources, health professionals pushed out of the system."

The government curtailed medical coverage for retirees and lifted price controls on prescription medication and private health plans, causing prices to spike by 250% and 118% respectively, official data shows.

"We've stopped buying milk, yogurt, anything that's not absolutely essential," said Susana Pecora, 71, who lost the insurance plan that covered her husband's antipsychotic drugs when the price jumped 40% last year.

Milei and Trump see eye-to-eye

Milei campaigned on a promise to shrink the state two years before President Donald Trump and Elon Musk took up their own chainsaws.

The Argentine has become a close ally of the Trump administration, including on health policy. Argentina has followed the U.S. out of the World Health Organization, and last month received a visit from U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Meeting Kennedy in Buenos Aires, Argentine Health Minister Mario Lugones announced a review of Argentina's health system to align it with Kennedy's Make America Healthy Again movement.

"We have similar visions about the path forward," Lugones said of Kennedy.

Milei has not yet attempted to replace universal coverage with an insurance-based system, as he vowed on the campaign trail.

But in stripping Argentines of coverage and increasing premiums and out-of-pocket expenses, he is moving Argentina closer to the U.S. model, said Macarena Sabin Paz, health team coordinator at Argentina's Center for Legal and Social Studies.

"We are beginning to see the idea ... where if you lose your job, or become seriously ill, you may have to sell your car, whatever you have, to pay for health care," she said.

Milei's staffing cuts have eviscerated agencies tasked with planning, financing and tracking immunization campaigns, disrupting data collection and jeopardizing the country's respected childhood vaccine program.

The cuts have coincided with a measles outbreak that in April led to Argentina's first measles death in two decades.

"Argentina has been one of the most advanced South American countries and here we see it abandoning public health," said Dr. Stanley Plotkin, an American physician who helped develop the measles vaccine in the 1960s.

Milei's spokesperson, Manuel Adorni, did not respond to requests for comment. Lugones also did not respond to questions on the impact of policy changes.

A tidal wave of cuts

After decades of unbridled spending by left-wing populist governments that brought Argentina infamy for defaulting on its debts, Milei delivered on his campaign promises of taming extreme inflation and notching a fiscal surplus.

But even experts who agree Argentina's health care system needed reform say the cutbacks have been so deep and fast that they've hit like a tidal wave.

"In terms of the destruction of the state, we've never experienced anything like this, not even during the military dictatorship," said Fabio Nuñez, ex-coordinator of the National Directorate for HIV, Hepatitis and Tuberculosis who was among hundreds fired from the agency.

Charged with leading prevention efforts and treatments for infectious diseases, the agency has lost 40% of its staff and 76% of its annual budget. Hospitals now face shortages of everything from virus testing supplies to medications to condoms.

The cuts have coincided with a surge in sexually transmitted infections. Last year HIV cases spiked by 20% and syphilis by 50%.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 70 of 76

"They're avoiding the expense now but will pay for it later as people seek emergency care," said Cristian Pizzuti, a 31-year-old with HIV who documented 103 cases of patients deprived of their daily antiretroviral pills for weeks at a time last year. Pizzuti said he recently received expired medication and suffered a severe allergic reaction after being switched to a cheaper drug.

Tuberculosis cases also climbed by 25% last year. TB clinics report delays in obtaining test results.

"As people go about their lives, waiting for results, they are spreading the disease to others," said Dr. Santiago Jimenez, who treats HIV and TB patients in an impoverished Buenos Aires neighborhood. "It's an epidemiological disaster."

Hospitals under strain

Free public hospitals have become flooded with Argentines who dropped their private insurance due to increased premiums or who lost their job — and with it, their social security plans funded through payroll contributions. Buenos Aires facilities reported a 20%-30% increase in demand in the first quarter of 2025 compared to the same period last year.

The strain was visible at the free public Rodolfo Rossi Hospital in La Plata last month, where crowds jostled in the outpatient clinic and long lines spilled from the pharmacy.

Pharmacists have reported drug shortages as mass layoffs caused administrative chaos and the government froze a program that provided basic medications to Argentine public health centers.

Silvana Mansilla, 43, spent half the day waiting to pick up her monthly supply of thyroid medication — which has doubled in price to \$22 — only to find the hospital had run out. "Where's the government? What are they doing about this?" she asked.

With hiring frozen, doctors said they're handling double the patient load.

Overwhelmed by ever-increasing workloads, Argentina's leading public Garrahan Pediatric Hospital in Buenos Aires has hemorrhaged 200 medical professionals since Milei took office.

As annual inflation neared 200% last fall, their salaries lost half of their purchasing power. Doctors left for jobs abroad or better-paying work in private clinics. None were replaced. Medical residents ran a weeklong strike in May, displaying their pay slips for a month of 70-hour work weeks: \$700.

Waiting for treatment

A lawsuit filed by patient advocacy groups said more than 60 cancer patients have died due to the government's suspension of the DADSE medication program, and over 1,500 patients were waiting for their drugs.

A federal judge ordered the government to reinstate the drug deliveries, but it appealed, arguing that DADSE no longer exists. It said it had created a new, more efficient program to fulfill outstanding requests. But the timeline varies and sometimes the drugs don't come at all.

Timing was everything for patients like Alexis Almirón.

His medical records show the government drug bank received his request for an expensive medication to shrink his malignant tumor on Dec. 11, 2023, the day after Milei's inauguration. His doctor told the agency immediate treatment was urgently needed for the aggressive cancer.

Months passed. His mother, Claudia Caballero, bombarded DADSE with desperate calls asking what was taking so long as Almirón's lymphoma spread from his neck to his brain and stomach. He vomited blood. He lost his eyesight. Caballero tried to crowd-source the \$20,000 for a month's supply of the drug but couldn't raise enough.

On March 12 last year, Almirón died at 22.

"They didn't give him the chance to choose to live," Caballero said, her voice breaking.

The day after she buried her son, Caballero received a call from the Health Ministry. They had good news, the caller said: Her son's medication had finally arrived.

Evacuees from Israel and stranded Israelis find shelter and kosher meals in Cyprus

By MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS Associated Press

LARNACA, Cyprus (AP) — Carrie Best-Lary was among hundreds of Jews who had traveled to Israel on a trip that was supposed to be about culture and Jewish roots, only to find herself fleeing on a cruise ship to Cyprus. She is in one of two groups that have converged on the Mediterranean island — one leaving Israel and the other trying to get back in.

At a scary time, the two groups that never expected their paths to cross are coming together, seeking shelter and sharing kosher meals.

Cyprus has become a transit point for those being evacuated from Israel or Israelis wishing to return home after being stranded abroad, with thousands now in Cyprus trying to reach Israel.

No one expected Iranian missiles

Best-Lary, from Weston, Florida, arrived in Cyprus on Wednesday from the Israeli port of Ashdod, escaping barrages of Iranian missiles raining down on Israeli cities in retaliation for Israel's strikes on Iran's nuclear program and top military leaders.

Like Best-Lary, the Jewish emigres — many from the United States — were on the subsidized, 10-day journey through Israel, sponsored by the Birthright Israel Foundation, to reconnect with their Jewish identity by soaking up Israel's history and culture.

What was supposed to be a journey of cultural immersion instead put them in the front row of a deadly conflict. Now all she wants is to get home in time to celebrate her 50th birthday with her family.

"We saw explosions ... we saw missiles," she told The Associated Press. "We heard sirens. ... we went to (the) shelter the minute we got that notification. It's a very scary time."

Closed air spaces and flight delays

With their flights uncertain amid so many delays and air space closures over the conflict region, Best-Lary and other Birthright travelers crowded Larnaca's Jewish Community Center for a kosher meal, a bathroom break and to recharge mobile phones as they waited for news.

Slicing mushrooms at the center was Yossi Levitan, 44, from the town of Ramla, 30 kilometers (19 miles) south of the Israeli city of Tel Aviv.

He is one of thousands stranded in Cyprus, where he visited his brother, and is now hoping to travel the other way — home to Israel, about 470 kilometers (292 miles) across the Mediterranean Sea.

There are about 6,500 people at the moment in Cyprus trying to reach Israel, a number that soared from the 2,400 passengers who were aboard Israel-bound flights that got stranded in Cyprus after their aircraft were abruptly diverted here since last Friday, to avoid the deadly Israel-Iran exchanges.

If no flight takes off, maybe a chartered boat could take them home, he hopes. Levitan is eager to see his eight children and first grandchild — his 18-year-old daughter recently gave birth.

"We're waiting," he said. "In the meantime, we here are helping however we can all the people who are stuck."

A rabbi mobilizes his flock

When at least 10 Israel-bound passenger planes were diverted to Cyprus' main airport in Larnaca on Friday, Rabbi Arie Zeev Raskin, the Jewish faith's leader in Cyprus, sprung into action.

He got the island's 14 rabbis to find accommodation for everyone — a challenge at the height of the tourist season. The kosher meals were handled by the community center, or Chabad, he said.

As days went by, with the conflict now in its sixth day, the needs multiplied.

"New flights have started to arrive from Hungary, from Rome, from Georgia, from New York, all people who are on the way ended up here," Raskin said. Locals have provided shelter while doctors have treated travelers in need, he added.

The hope is that with Cyprus being the closest European neighbor of Israel, once the flights resume, they would quickly get home.

Israel has tried to help the stranded and those with priority needs first. Raskin said an El Al plane left

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 72 of 76

Wednesday from Larnaka with two mothers with special needs children onboard. A short flight later it landed at Ben Gurion airport.

"Anyone ... in urgent need would get a priority to go on the flight," he said.

Raskin pulled strings and secured a seat on the same flight for a groom whose wedding was scheduled for Wednesday afternoon in Israel. He later got a message that the young man was able to get to his own wedding in time.

Arranging boats or yachts for the 20-hour trip to Israel is tougher, and Raskin said many sea voyages have been canceled at the last minute.

Cyprus has become "a door to Israel" but Raskin advises Israelis stranded elsewhere not to come hoping to get "closer" to Israel.

"We don't have enough rooms, we don't enough beds," he says. "When things get better, you will be welcome."

Firms led by US military veterans deliver aid in Africa and Gaza, alarming humanitarian groups

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER, SAM MEDNICK and FLORENCE MIETTAUX Associated Press

ON A PLANE OVER UPPER NILE STATE, South Sudan (AP) — Swooping low over the banks of a Nile River tributary, an aid flight run by retired American military officers released a stream of food-stuffed sacks over a town emptied by fighting in South Sudan, a country wracked by conflict.

Last week's air drop was the latest in a controversial development: private contracting firms led by former U.S. intelligence officers and military veterans delivering aid to some of the world's deadliest conflict zones, in operations organized with governments that are combatants in the conflicts.

The moves are roiling the global aid community, which warns of a more militarized, politicized and profit-seeking trend that could allow governments or combatants to use life-saving aid to control hungry civilian populations and advance war aims.

In South Sudan and Gaza, two for-profit U.S. companies led by American national security veterans are delivering aid in operations backed by the South Sudanese and Israeli governments.

The American contractors say they're putting their security, logistics and intelligence skills to work in relief operations. Fogbow, the U.S. company that carried out last week's air drops over South Sudan, says it aims to be a "humanitarian" force.

"We've worked for careers, collectively, in conflict zones. And we know how to essentially make very difficult situations work," said Fogbow President Michael Mulroy, a retired CIA officer and former senior defense official in the first Trump administration, speaking on the airport tarmac in Juba, South Sudan's capital.

But the U.N. and many leading non-profit groups say U.S. contracting firms are stepping into aid distribution with little transparency or humanitarian experience, and, crucially, without commitment to humanitarian principles of neutrality and operational independence in war zones.

"What we've learned over the years of successes and failures is there's a difference between a logistics operation and a security operation, and a humanitarian operation," said Scott Paul, a director at Oxfam America.

"Truck and chuck' doesn't help people," Paul said. "It puts people at risk."

'We don't want to replace any entity'

Fogbow took journalists up in a cargo plane to watch their team drop 16 tons of beans, corn and salt for South Sudan's Upper Nile state town of Nasir.

Residents fled homes there after fighting erupted in March between the government and opposition groups.

Mulroy acknowledged the controversy over Fogbow's aid drops, which he said were paid for by the South Sudanese government.

But, he maintained: "We don't want to replace any entity" in aid work.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 73 of 76

Shared roots in Gaza and U.S. intelligence

Fogbow was in the spotlight last year for its proposal to use barges to bring aid to Gaza, where Israeli restrictions were blocking overland deliveries. The United States focused instead on a U.S. military effort to land aid via a temporary pier.

Since then, Fogbow has carried out aid drops in Sudan and South Sudan, east African nations where wars have created some of the world's gravest humanitarian crises.

Fogbow says ex-humanitarian officials are also involved, including former U.N. World Food Program head David Beasley, who is a senior adviser.

Operating in Gaza, meanwhile, Safe Reach Solutions, led by a former CIA officer and other retired U.S. security officers, has partnered with the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, a U.S.-backed nonprofit that Israel says is the linchpin of a new aid system to wrest control from the U.N., which Israel says has been infiltrated by Hamas, and other humanitarian groups.

Starting in late May, the American-led operation in Gaza has distributed food at fixed sites in southern Gaza, in line with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's stated plan to use aid to concentrate the territory's more than 2 million people in the south, freeing Israel to fight Hamas elsewhere. Aid workers fear it's a step toward another of Netanyahu's public goals, removing Palestinians from Gaza in "voluntary" migrations.

Since then, several hundred Palestinians have been killed and hundreds more wounded in near daily shootings as they tried to reach aid sites, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Witnesses say Israeli troops regularly fire heavy barrages toward the crowds in an attempt to control them.

The Israeli military has denied firing on civilians. It says it fired warning shots in several instances, and fired directly at a few "suspects" who ignored warnings and approached its forces.

It's unclear who is funding the new operation in Gaza. No donor has come forward, and the U.S. says it's not funding it.

In response to criticism over its Gaza aid deliveries, Safe Reach Solutions said it has former aid workers on its team with "decades of experience in the world's most complex environments" who bring "expertise to the table, along with logisticians and other experts."

South Sudan's people ask: Who gets our aid drops?

Last week's air drop over South Sudan went without incident, despite fighting nearby. A white cross marked the drop zone. Only a few people could be seen. Fogbow contractors said there were more newly returned townspeople on previous drops.

Fogbow acknowledges glitches in mastering aid drops, including one last year in Sudan's South Kordofan region that ended up with too-thinly-wrapped grain sacks split open on the ground.

After gaining independence from Sudan in 2011, South Sudan has struggled to emerge from a civil war that killed nearly 400,000 people. Rights groups say its government is one of the world's most corrupt, and until now has invested little in quelling the dire humanitarian crisis.

South Sudan said it engaged Fogbow for air drops partly because of the Trump administration's deep cuts in U.S. Agency for International Development funding. Humanitarian Minister Albino Akol Atak said the drops will expand to help people in need throughout the country.

But two South Sudanese groups question the government's motives.

"We don't want to see a humanitarian space being abused by military actors ... under the cover of a food drop," said Edmund Yakani, head of the Community Empowerment for Progress Organization, a local civil society group.

Asked about suspicions the aid drops were helping South Sudan's military aims, Fogbow's Mulroy said the group has worked with the U.N. World Food Program to make sure "this aid is going to civilians."

"If it wasn't going to civilians, we would hope that we would get that feedback, and we would cease and desist," Mulroy said.

In a statement, WFP country director Mary-Ellen McGroarty said: "WFP is not involved in the planning, targeting or distribution of food air-dropped" by Fogbow on behalf of South Sudan's government, citing humanitarian principles.

A 'business-driven model'

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 74 of 76

Longtime humanitarian leaders and analysts are troubled by what they see as a teaming up of warring governments and for-profit contractors in aid distribution.

When one side in a conflict decides where and how aid is handed out, and who gets it, "it will always result in some communities getting preferential treatment," said Jan Egeland, executive director of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

Sometimes, that set-up will advance strategic aims, as with Netanyahu's plans to move Gaza's civilians south, Egeland said.

The involvement of soldiers and security workers, he added, can make it too "intimidating" for some in need to even try to get aid.

Until now, Western donors always understood those risks, Egeland said. But pointing to the Trump administration's backing of the new aid system in Gaza, he asked: "Why does the U.S. ... want to support what they have resisted with every other war zone for two generations?"

Mark Millar, who has advised the U.N. and Britain on humanitarian matters in South Sudan and elsewhere, said involving private military contractors risks undermining the distinction between humanitarian assistance and armed conflict.

Private military contractors "have even less sympathy for a humanitarian perspective that complicates their business-driven model," he said. "And once let loose, they seem to be even less accountable."

Fear stalks Tehran as Israel bombards, shelters fill up and communicating grows harder

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The streets of Tehran are empty, businesses closed, communications patchy at best. With no bona fide bomb shelters open to the public, panicked masses spend restless nights on the floors of metro stations as strikes boom overhead.

This is Iran's capital city, just under a week into a fierce Israeli blitz to destroy the country's nuclear program and its military capabilities. After knocking out much of Iran's air defense system, Israel says its warplanes have free rein over the city's skies. U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday told Tehran's roughly 10 million residents to evacuate "immediately."

Thousands have fled, spending hours in gridlock as they head toward the suburbs, the Caspian Sea, or even Armenia or Turkey. But others — those elderly and infirm — are stuck in high-rise apartment buildings. Their relatives fret: what to do?

Israeli strikes on Iran have killed at least 585 people and wounded over 1,300, a human rights group says. State media, also a target of bombardment, have stopped reporting on the attacks, leaving Iranians in the dark. There are few visible signs of state authority: Police appear largely undercover, air raid sirens are unreliable, and there's scant information on what to do in case of attack.

Shirin, 49, who lives in the southern part of Tehran, said every call or text to friends and family in recent days has felt like it could be the last.

"We don't know if tomorrow we will be alive," she said.

Many Iranians feel conflicted. Some support Israel's targeting of Iranian political and military officials they see as repressive. Others staunchly defend the Islamic Republic and retaliatory strikes on Israel. Then, there are those who oppose Iran's rulers — but still don't want to see their country bombed.

To stay, or to go?

The Associated Press interviewed five people in Iran and one Iranian American in the U.S. over the phone. All spoke either on the condition of anonymity or only allowed their first names to be used, for fear of retribution from the state against them or their families.

Most of the calls ended abruptly and within minutes, cutting off conversations as people grew nervous — or because the connection dropped. Iran's government has acknowledged disrupting internet access. It says it's to protect the country, though that has blocked average Iranians from getting information from the outside world.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 75 of 76

Iranians in the diaspora wait anxiously for news from relatives. One, an Iranian American human rights researcher in the U.S., said he last heard from relatives when some were trying to flee Tehran earlier in the week. He believes that lack of gas and traffic prevented them from leaving.

The most heartbreaking interaction, he said, was when his older cousins — with whom he grew up in Iran — told him “we don’t know where to go. If we die, we die.”

“Their sense was just despair,” he said.

Some families have made the decision to split up.

A 23-year-old Afghan refugee who has lived in Iran for four years said he stayed behind in Tehran but sent his wife and newborn son out of the city after a strike Monday hit a nearby pharmacy.

“It was a very bad shock for them,” he said.

Some, like Shirin, said fleeing was not an option. The apartment buildings in Tehran are towering and dense. Her father has Alzheimer’s and needs an ambulance to move. Her mother’s severe arthritis would make even a short trip extremely painful.

Still, hoping escape might be possible, she spent the last several days trying to gather their medications. Her brother waited at a gas station until 3 a.m., only to be turned away when the fuel ran out. As of Monday, gas was being rationed to under 20 liters (5 gallons) per driver at stations across Iran after an Israeli strike set fire to the world’s largest gas field.

Some people, like Arshia, said they are just tired.

“I don’t want to go in traffic for 40 hours, 30 hours, 20 hours, just to get to somewhere that might get bombed eventually,” he said.

The 22-year-old has been staying in the house with his parents since the initial Israeli strike. He said his once-lively neighborhood of Saadat Abad in northwestern Tehran is now a ghost town. Schools are closed. Very few people even step outside to walk their dogs. Most local stores have run out of drinking water and cooking oil. Others closed.

Still, Arshia said the prospect of finding a new place is too daunting.

“We don’t have the resources to leave at the moment,” he said.

Residents are on their own

No air raid sirens went off as Israeli strikes began pounding Tehran before dawn Friday. For many, it was an early sign civilians would have to go it alone.

During the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, Tehran was a low-slung city, many homes had basements to shelter in, and there were air raid drills and sirens. Now the capital is packed with close-built high-rise apartments without shelters.

“It’s a kind of failing of the past that they didn’t build shelters,” said a 29-year-old Tehran resident who left the city Monday. “Even though we’ve been under the shadow of a war, as long as I can remember.”

Her friend’s boyfriend was killed while going to the store.

“You don’t really expect your boyfriend — or your anyone, really — to leave the house and never return when they just went out for a routine normal shopping trip,” she said.

Those who choose to relocate do so without help from the government. The state has said it is opening mosques, schools and metro stations for use as shelters. Some are closed, others overcrowded.

Hundreds crammed into one Tehran metro station Friday night. Small family groups lay on the floor. One student, a refugee from another country, said she spent 12 hours in the station with her relatives.

“Everyone there was panicking because of the situation,” she said. “Everyone doesn’t know what will happen next, if there is war in the future and what they should do. People think nowhere is safe for them.”

Soon after leaving the station, she saw that Israel had warned a swath of Tehran to evacuate.

“For immigrant communities, this is so hard to live in this kind of situation,” she said, explaining she feels like she has nowhere to escape to — especially not her home country, which she asked not be identified.

Fear of Iran mingles with fear of Israel

For Shirin, the hostilities are bittersweet. Despite being against the theocracy and its treatment of women, the idea that Israel may determine the future does not sit well with her.

“As much as we want the end of this regime, we didn’t want it to come at the hands of a foreign gov-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 359 ~ 76 of 76

ernment," she said. "We would have preferred that if there were to be a change, it would be the result of a people's movement in Iran."

Meanwhile, the 29-year-old who left Tehran had an even more basic message for those outside Iran:

"I just want people to remember that whatever is happening here, it's not routine business for us. People's lives here — people's livelihoods — feel as important to them as they feel to anyone in any other place. How would you feel if your city or your country was under bombardment by another country, and people were dying left and right?"

"We are kind of like, this can't be happening. This can't be my life."

Today in History: June 19, Union troops arrive in Galveston on 'Juneteenth'

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, June 19, the 170th day of 2025. There are 195 days left in the year. This is Juneteenth.

Today in history:

On June 19, 1865, Union troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, with news that the Civil War was over and that all remaining enslaved people in Texas were free — an event now celebrated nationwide as Juneteenth.

Also on this date:

In 1910, the first-ever Father's Day in the United States was celebrated in Spokane, Washington. (President Richard Nixon would make Father's Day a federally recognized annual observation through a proclamation in 1972.)

In 1953, Julius Rosenberg, 35, and his wife, Ethel, 37, convicted of conspiring to pass U.S. atomic secrets to the Soviet Union, were executed at Sing Sing Prison in Ossining, New York; they were the first American civilians to be executed for espionage.

In 1963, Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova completed her historic flight as the first woman in space, landing safely by parachute to conclude the Vostok 6 mission.

In 1964, the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 was approved by the U.S. Senate, 73-27, after surviving a lengthy filibuster.

In 1975, former Chicago organized crime boss Sam Giancana was shot to death in the basement of his home in Oak Park, Illinois; the killing has never been solved.

In 1986, University of Maryland basketball star Len Bias, the first draft pick of the Boston Celtics two days earlier, suffered a fatal cocaine-induced seizure.

In 1987, the U.S. Supreme Court, in the case *Edwards v. Aguillard*, struck down a Louisiana law requiring any public school teaching the theory of evolution to teach creation science as well.

Today's Birthdays: Hall of Fame auto racer Shirley Muldowney is 85. Nobel peace prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi is 80. Author Tobias Wolff is 80. Author Salman Rushdie is 78. Actor Phylicia Rashad is 77. Rock singer Ann Wilson (Heart) is 75. Actor Kathleen Turner is 71. Singer-choreographer-TV personality Paula Abdul is 63. TV host Lara Spencer is 56. Actor Jean Dujardin is 53. Actor Robin Tunney is 53. Basketball Hall of Famer Dirk Nowitzki is 47. Actor Zoe Saldana is 47. Rapper Macklemore is 42. Actor Paul Dano is 41.