

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 1 of 61

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- U10 Tourney pairings for today](#)
- [4- Service Notice: Duane Kurtz](#)
- [4- Community Development Block Grants Awarded across the state](#)
- [5- Brevin Fliehs Drives 5 Runners Home In Groton Legion Post 39 Victory Over 2025 Lake Norden/Badger Legion](#)
- [6- SD SearchLight: Johnson expected to announce for governor, Jackley 'preparing to run' for Johnson's U.S. House seat](#)
- [7- SD SearchLight: U.S. Supreme Court ruling clears way for online pornography restrictions in South Dakota](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: If public lands go up for sale, so will America's frontier spirit](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: Democratic resolution to block military action in Iran fails to advance in US Senate](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: Weekend work on the mega-bill: first vote in US Senate as soon as Saturday](#)
- [14- SD SearchLight: US Supreme Court limits injunctions, allows Trump to act on birthright citizenship ban](#)
- [18- Weather Pages](#)
- [24- Daily Devotional](#)
- [25- Subscription Form](#)
- [26- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [27- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [28- News from the Associated Press](#)

Saturday, June 28

Jr. Legion hosts Clear Lake, 3 p.m.
Jr. Teeners host Clear Lake, 1 p.m.
Groton U10 Tourney

Sunday, June 29

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion 11 a.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.;

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

It's Saturday

Good Morning

**Today is
going to be
a good day
simply
because
God made it.**



**Have a wonderful
weekend!**

Worship, 11 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.

Amateurs at Redfield, 4 p.m.

Groton U12 Tourney

Monday, June 30

Senior Menu: Breaded pork cutlet, mashed potatoes with gravy, capri blend, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.

Legion vs. W.I.N. at Northville, 5:30 p.m.

Jr. Legion vs. W.I.N. at Northville, 7:30 p.m.

U8 R&B hosts Frankfort, 6 p.m.

Softball: U10G hosts Frankfort, 7 p.m. (DH); U8G at Webster, 6 p.m.; U8B at Webster, 6 p.m.

T-Ball: Black hosts Frankfort, 5 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 2 of 61

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.

Final Flurry of Rulings

The US Supreme Court yesterday limited federal judges' power to issue nationwide injunctions, allowing President Donald Trump to enforce his executive order restricting birthright citizenship in parts of the country. The 6-3 ruling, split along ideological lines, did not address the constitutionality of such restrictions. Lower courts now must decide how to revise their injunctions accordingly.

The ruling was one of five released on the high court's final day in session. The conservative majority also sided with religious parents seeking to exempt their children from school lessons with LGBTQ+ books and upheld a Texas law requiring age verification on porn sites. In two rulings that cut across ideological lines, the justices required health insurers to continue covering free preventive care and maintained a phone and internet access program for rural and low-income Americans.

The last remaining case of the 2024-25 term, a challenge to Louisiana's redrawn congressional map, has been set for reargument.

Trump ends trade talks with Canada over digital services tax.

President Donald Trump said yesterday he is halting trade talks with Canada in response to a new tax on companies making more than \$15M off Canadian internet users. The tax, for which first payments will be collected Monday, is estimated to cost US companies up to \$3B. Trump said he would inform Canada of the tariff levels he plans to impose within seven days; Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney has not responded at the time of this writing.

Son of Norway's crown princess charged with sexual assault.

Marius Borg Høiby, the eldest son of Norway's Crown Princess Mette-Marit, has been charged by Oslo police with multiple offenses, including rape, sexual assault, and bodily harm, after an investigation involving a "double-digit" number of alleged victims. The 28-year-old Høiby denies most of the accusations.

Scientists discover how squids make themselves transparent.

A research team led by scientists at the University of California, Irvine, has revealed how squids manipulate light to shift from transparent to vividly colored. They found cells composed of stacked, spiraling columns of platelets from a protein called reflectin function as reflectors, selectively transmitting and reflecting light at specific wavelengths. The breakthrough could inspire advances in adaptive camouflage, responsive fabrics, and optical technologies.

Fed's preferred inflation gauge rises more than expected in May.

The core personal consumption expenditures price index, which measures costs consumers pay across a wide range of items, excluding food and energy, rose 2.7% year over year and 0.2% month over month. The annualized rate is up 0.1 percentage point from April. The Federal Reserve targets 2% annual inflation.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 3 of 61

Lalo Schifrin, composer of the 'Mission: Impossible' theme, dies at 93.

The Grammy-winning Argentine composer passed away from complications of pneumonia. During his career, Schifrin created more than 100 film and television scores. He was best known for composing the "Mission: Impossible" theme's "dun dun dun-dun dun dun" hook, which became a signature for both the original 1960s TV series and the Tom Cruise film franchise.

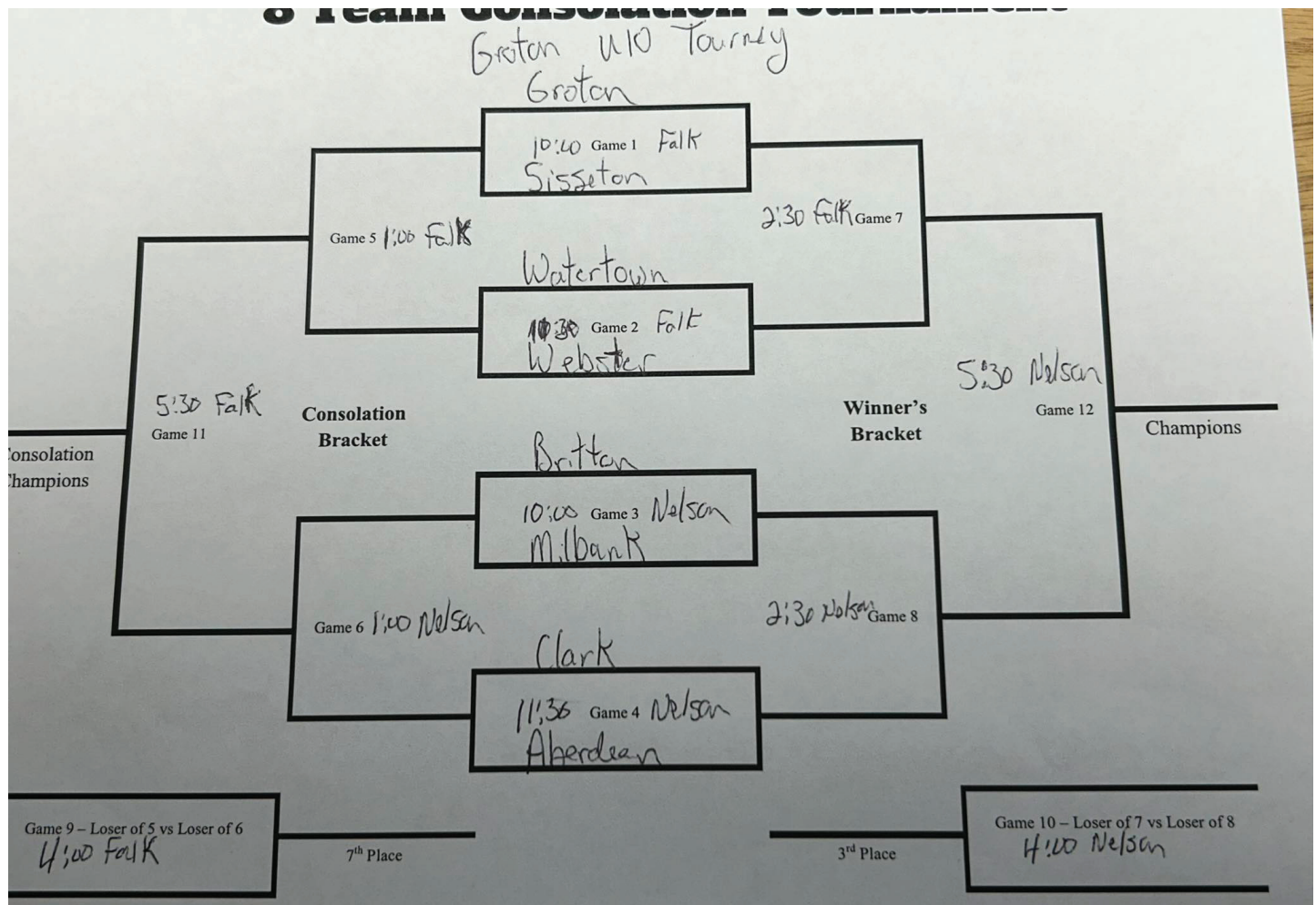
Tectonic forces may create a new ocean in Africa.

British university researchers say pulsing waves of molten rock deep beneath Ethiopia's Afar region are slowly stretching and thinning Africa's crust; the motion is guided by the tectonic plates above. Although the continent isn't expected to split for millions of years, growing insights into the relationship between deep Earth pulses and tectonic activity could enhance understandings of surface volcanism and earthquakes.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Marilyn P. in Miami, Florida.

"I was drenched before getting on a flight. (I'd) changed my clothes in the airport restroom, but (was) still cold without a sweater. A lady across the aisle noticed my shivering and placed her sweatshirt over me for the entire trip."



Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 4 of 61



Service Notice: Duane Kurtz

Funeral services for Duane Kurtz, 82, of Aberdeen and formerly of Groton will be 11:00 a.m., Wednesday, July 2nd at Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton. Rev. Jeremy Yeadon will officiate. Burial will follow in Sunset Memorial Gardens, Aberdeen under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel.

Visitation will be held at the funeral chapel on Tuesday from 5-7 p.m.

Duane passed away June 26, 2025 at Avantara Groton.

Community Development Block Grants Awarded across the state

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Larry Rhoden recently awarded more than \$2.7 million in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding to five projects across the state.

"These infrastructure and housing projects help strengthen South Dakota's communities and improve quality of life," said Governor Rhoden. "We're proud to support the kind of local progress that benefits both current and future generations."

Projects include:

The city of Lennox was awarded \$840,000 to reconstruct Oriole Avenue from State Highway 44 to Main Street, upgrading to 8-inch concrete pavement and extending storm sewer facilities to improve drainage and reduce flooding.

The city of Mitchell was awarded \$770,000 to partner with LifeQuest in constructing a MicroVillage that will provide affordable housing for adults with disabilities.

The town of Veblen was awarded \$1,000,000 to improve its wastewater lines with liner and replacement lines, extending the life of the system and meeting future demand.

The city of Eureka was awarded an additional \$41,198 for the demolition of four slum and blight buildings on Main Street, increasing the total project award to \$241,198.

The city of McLaughlin was awarded an additional \$77,000 for water system improvements, increasing the total project award to \$847,000.

The CDBG program provides funding to local governments to complete projects that improve living conditions for low to moderate income persons. The program is funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and administered by the Governor's Office of Economic Development.

Brevin Fliehs Drives 5 Runners Home In Groton Legion Post 39 Victory Over 2025 Lake Norden/Badger Legion

By GameChanger Media

Brevin Fliehs drove in five runs on three hits to lead Groton Legion Post 39 past 2025 Lake Norden/Badger Legion 18-0 on Friday at Lake Norden. Fliehs hit a grand slam to right field in the second inning, scoring four runs, and doubled in the sixth inning, scoring one.

Groton Legion Post 39 got on the board in the top of the second inning after Karsten Fliehs drew a walk, scoring one run, Lincoln Krause singled, scoring one run, Teylor Diegel singled, scoring one run, and Fliehs hit a grand slam to right field.

Groton Legion Post 39 added one run in the third. Krause hit a sacrifice fly, making the score 8-0.

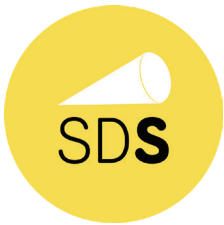
Jarrett Erdmann earned the win for Groton Legion Post 39. The starting pitcher allowed two hits and zero runs over six innings, striking out six and walking two. Ted Smith took the loss for 2025 Lake Norden/Badger Legion. The hurler went two innings, giving up eight runs on five hits, striking out none and walking four.

Groton Legion Post 39 tallied 14 hits in the game. Nick Morris, Krause, Korbin Kucker, and Nick Groebelinghoff each collected multiple hits for Groton Legion Post 39. Groton Legion Post 39 had a strong eye at the plate, piling up nine walks for the game. Braxton Imrie and Diegel led the team with two free passes each.

Rylan Thue and Smith were a force together in the lineup, as they each collected one hit for 2025 Lake Norden/Badger Legion. Thue stole two bases.

Next up for Groton Legion Post 39 is a game at W.I.N. On Monday.

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Johnson expected to announce for governor, Jackley 'preparing to run' for Johnson's U.S. House seat

BY: SETH TUPPER AND JOSHUA HAIAR - JUNE 27, 2025 4:34 PM

With just under a year to go before the 2026 primary election, Republican political dominoes have begun to fall in South Dakota.

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson said Friday that he'll make a "political announcement" Monday — widely expected to be a run for governor.

Earlier Friday, state Attorney General Marty Jackley said he's "preparing to run" for the seat Johnson will apparently vacate.

Jackley made his announcement to KELOLAND News in a story published Friday morning, saying "the fight is in Washington."

"From fentanyl and methamphetamine pouring across the southern border to public corruption and wasteful spending in Washington, I want to work with President Trump to find solutions," Jackley said in a KELO video.

In a later interview with South Dakota Searchlight, Jackley said he'll run as a "straightforward, very limited-government type of conservative" while opposing abortion and supporting gun rights. He also said he'll run on his "record of action," which he said includes "not just advocating but winning in the courts" on numerous issues while serving as attorney general.

Shortly after KELO published its story about Jackley, Johnson sent a press release saying he'll make his own announcement at noon Monday at the Canopy by Hilton in Sioux Falls. He did not specify what he will announce.

For Johnson, a run for governor would be the culmination of a political journey two decades in the making. The 48-year-old is in the midst of his fourth term in the U.S. House after previously serving as an elected member of South Dakota's Public Utilities Commission from 2004 to 2011. He served as chief of staff to then-Gov. Dennis Daugaard from 2011 to 2014 and then worked in the private sector for Vantage Point Solutions, a telecommunications company in Mitchell, prior to his election to Congress.

Johnson brings a load of campaign cash to the race, with more than \$6 million of total money spread among his federal campaign committee and several federal or state political action committees.

Jackley, 54, previously served as U.S. attorney for South Dakota and then as attorney general, but his political career was interrupted by a loss to Kristi Noem in the 2018 Republican gubernatorial primary race. Jackley was again elected attorney general in 2022.

It was Noem's departure from the governor's office in January — with two years left in her final term — that triggered the current maneuvering in the South Dakota Republican Party. Noem is now leading the federal Department of Homeland Security.

Noem's lieutenant governor, Larry Rhoden, took over as governor and is serving the remainder of Noem's term. He has not announced whether he will seek the party's nomination for governor in the June 2026



U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, left, and Republican South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley. (South Dakota

Searchlight photos)

primary.

Two other candidates have already announced their bids for the Republican gubernatorial nomination: state House Speaker Jon Hansen and Aberdeen businessman Toby Doeden. Robert Arnold, a 19-year-old college student, has announced his intention to run for the Democratic nomination.

Jackley is the first candidate to publicly announce his intention to run for the U.S. House.

Jackley's announcement will trigger a race for attorney general. Other major offices up for election next year in South Dakota include the U.S. Senate seat held by Republican Mike Rounds, who is expected to seek reelection. Democratic businessman and former state trooper Julian Beaudion is seeking his party's nomination to challenge Rounds. Brian Bengs, who ran unsuccessfully as a Democrat against U.S. Sen. John Thune in 2022, has said he will run as an independent next year against Rounds.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

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.

U.S. Supreme Court ruling clears way for online pornography restrictions in South Dakota

Legal challenges still a possibility for state's age verification setup

BY: JOHN HULT - JUNE 27, 2025 2:34 PM

A Friday decision by the U.S. Supreme Court set the stage for a law restricting access to online pornography to take effect Tuesday in South Dakota, but the ruling doesn't shield the state from lawsuits.

In *Free Speech Coalition v. Paxton*, the nation's high court ruled that a Texas law requiring adults to prove their age to access adult-oriented websites is constitutional.

Under the Texas law, websites where one-third or more of the content is pornographic would have to collect information like photo identification or credit card information before allowing access.

The Free Speech Coalition, an adult entertainment industry group, argued the law placed an unconstitutional burden on adults.

The justices disagreed in their 6-3 decision, authored by Justice Clarence Thomas. The court's three liberal justices dissented.

"Obscenity is no exception to the widespread practice of requiring proof of age to exercise age-restricted rights," Thomas wrote, citing laws restricting alcohol use or handgun purchases.

South Dakota lawmakers passed, and Gov. Larry Rhoden signed, an age verification bill this year, but its language is more broad than that of the Texas law.

For the law set to take effect Tuesday in South Dakota, age verification would be required of any site



The U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. (Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 8 of 61

that hosts adult material "in the regular course of the website's trade or business."

Lawmakers were cautioned during the session that such broad verbiage could draw First Amendment challenges regardless of the outcome in the Texas case. Some argued explicitly for an age verification law that mirrored the one in Texas.

South Dakota's law requires websites to delete proof of age information immediately after an adult provides it. Adult websites that fail to perform age verification would be subject to criminal fines.

South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley praised the Supreme Court decision, saying Friday that it "supports the protections enacted by the South Dakota Legislature to protect South Dakota families."

Ruling: 'Incidental' privacy infringement acceptable

The Supreme Court's Friday ruling drew lines around any free speech arguments that might be deployed about South Dakota's law.

At issue in the Texas case was not just the constitutionality of age verification laws, but how courts are meant to review them.

Texas wanted the Supreme Court to give it – and other states, by extension – broad authority to write laws restricting minors' access to online pornography. The Free Speech Coalition said age verification laws ought to be minimally restrictive because they affect First Amendment rights.

Neither side prevailed on that issue. Instead, the justices said the Texas law stood up to what it called "intermediate scrutiny."

The state's strictures amount to an "incidental" burden on adults' free speech, but adults can still get the content, the majority ruled.

A law that only requires age verification for sites on which one-third or more of the content is obscene is narrowly tailored enough to achieve Texas' goal of targeting pornography, the court ruled.

"It is reasonable for Texas to conclude that websites with a higher proportion of sexual content are more inappropriate for children to visit than those with a lower proportion," Thomas wrote.

In her dissent, Justice Elena Kagan said the state of Texas ought to have tailored its law more narrowly "to ensure it is not undervaluing the interest in free expression."

Restrictions on free speech, she said, should be viewed with the courts' most critical eye.

"Many reasonable people, after all, view the speech at issue here as ugly and harmful for any audience," Kagan wrote. "But the First Amendment protects those sexually explicit materials, for every adult. So a state cannot target that expression, as Texas has here, any more than is necessary to prevent it from reaching children."

Future for South Dakota law

Unlike the Texas version, South Dakota's age verification law does not apply to sites with a certain proportion of adult content.

It's more sweeping language applying it to sites that host porn in their "regular course" of business was a cause of concern for some lobbyists and lawmakers, as well as for Attorney General Jackley.

Lobbyist Doug Abraham told the Senate Judiciary Committee in February that age verification for any site with adult material would be akin to carding anyone who enters a shopping mall because a store in the mall sells alcohol.

Sen. David Wheeler, R-Huron, who's since been appointed as a circuit court judge, was among the lawmakers who argued on behalf of a bill with a one-third content standard nearly identical to the Texas law. That bill failed.

Jackley told lawmakers that he supports age verification for porn sites, but told them he'd rather defend a law that looks like the one passed by Texas.

Rep. Bethany Soye, R-Sioux Falls, sponsored the version of the bill that's set to become law on Tuesday.

Soye told her colleagues that the one-third standard was "made up" by the Louisiana lawmakers who were the first to move on age verification.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 9 of 61

A cutoff line for adult content creates a loophole, she said. To avoid adherence to the law, sites could make sure that their adult material represents just under one-third of its content.

Soye also said that legal battles sparked by a strong moral stance are worth the investment of the state's time and treasure.

On Friday, Soye said the Paxton decision "reaffirms the right of state governments to protect children from obscene material."

"Age verifying online is no different than checking IDs in person," Soye said. "I am proud to see South Dakota protect children from the predatory pornography industry beginning July 1st."

Gov. Rhoden also praised the decision.

"The safety of our kids is of utmost importance, and the Supreme Court's decision today was an important step forward in protecting children from harmful materials," Rhoden said.

As of Friday afternoon, the state had not been sued in federal court over the law.

The American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota argued against the bill in Pierre. Andrew Malone, its senior staff attorney, said Friday in a statement to South Dakota Searchlight that the Supreme Court "has departed from decades of settled precedents that ensured that sweeping laws purportedly for the benefit of minors do not limit adults' access to First Amendment-protected materials."

"With this decision, the court has carved out an unprincipled pornography exception to the First Amendment. The Constitution should protect adults' rights to access information about sex online, even if the government thinks it is too inappropriate for children to see," Malone said. "Efforts to childproof the internet not only hurt everyone's ability to access information, but also give the government far too much leeway to go after speech it doesn't like — all while failing to actually protect children."

The Free Speech Coalition did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the South Dakota law, but Alison Boden, executive director, posted about the Paxton ruling on social media.

"As it has been throughout history, pornography is once again the canary in the coal mine of free expression," Boden said, in part. "The government should not have the right to demand that we sacrifice our privacy and security to use the internet."

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

COMMENTARY

If public lands go up for sale, so will America's frontier spirit

by Brett Koenecke

Americans have long enjoyed the practical and romantic aspects of the West. The West has provided us with minerals, timber, energy and space to roam freely for generations. We have a wonderful asset in the West — our public lands — which are owned by the people of the United States and held in trust for us by the federal government. Anybody can go out there and recreate, for free, any time, and that is a good thing for all of us.

Congress previously recognized the value of the public lands, declaring that these lands would remain in public ownership in an act known as the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. The U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management are each commissioned in FLPMA to allow a variety of uses on their managed lands. Most of the public land in the West is thus managed under a nonexclusive shared-use arrangement. Lands for grazing, mining and logging — or all three — typically remain open to the public for hiking, hunting and camping.

"Multiple use" is defined as "management of the public lands and their various resource values so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people." FLPMA addresses topics such as land use planning, land acquisition, fees and payments, administration of federal land, range management, and rights-of-way on federal land. Local communities are

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 10 of 61

empowered to ask for transfers to accommodate growth patterns.

Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, has proposed significant changes to the manner in which public lands are sold. He seeks congressional action to bypass FLPMA and its requirements, instead claiming that the "housing crisis" can be eased if only the federal government will sell off millions of acres of public land to developers. That's nonsense, and those proposals have drawn significant criticism for good reasons.

Previous homestead acts have done much to foster private land ownership in the U.S. Those effects are undeniably positive. But Sen. Lee's proposal isn't a homestead act, and it fails to take into account that the land in the West which is capable of human habitation has by

and large already been claimed. There's little water, even less infrastructure and where those shortfalls can be blunted, the cost of developing housing in those locations is significantly higher than in already settled areas. Think of the expense of drilling (and maintaining) a fresh water well for each home, along with the needs for electricity, telecommunications, solid and liquid waste, and you can easily determine that further developing wild land for housing results in costs that can't be recovered.

Further, Sen. Lee's proposals have not been subjected to hearings or formal input as he seeks to put them in the One Big Beautiful (budget reconciliation) Bill currently under consideration in Congress. While it's true that the Senate parliamentarian ruled the Lee Amendment out of order with respect to that bill, Sen. Lee continues to push his proposal in the media, and in Congress. Senators Thune and Rounds have not declared their positions on his proposal to my knowledge. While maps show that South Dakota does not have any parcels for sale, Lee's original proposal put parcels in the Wyoming Black Hills on the chopping block. Lee has since said he would alter the proposal to include only Bureau of Land Management land within 5 miles of a population center and exempt U.S. Forest Service lands altogether.

Americans need space to be free, and fortunately we have it still. We need wild spaces in America to allow for the continuation of the frontier spirit that made us who we are as a people.

Brett Koenecke is an attorney and lobbyist whose family homesteaded in South Dakota in the 1800s. He and his family split time between Custer and Pierre and enjoy public lands in both communities and all across the West.



A May 2024 view of the Black Hills National Forest in South Dakota. (Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)

Democratic resolution to block military action in Iran fails to advance in US Senate

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - JUNE 27, 2025 7:27 PM

The U.S. Senate rejected Friday, 47-53, a resolution authored by Virginia Democrat Tim Kaine to block American forces from hostility against Iran.

Though a shaky ceasefire agreement between Iran and Israel has held this week, somewhat diminishing the urgency of the vote, proponents of the resolution made two major arguments during floor debate Friday: Congress should reassert its constitutional role as the only branch of government that can declare war and U.S. policy toward Iran should tilt more toward diplomacy.

"We all agree that Iran must not obtain a nuclear weapon," Maryland Democrat Chris Van Hollen said.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 11 of 61



Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Air Force Gen. Dan Caine discusses the mission details of a strike on Iran during a news conference at the Pentagon on June 22, 2025 in Arlington, Virginia.

(Photo by Andrew Harnik/Getty Images)

"But bombing is not the best, most sustainable way of achieving that goal. And nothing, nothing I heard yesterday at the (classified) intelligence briefing changes that assessment. The bombing attack was also a clear violation of the U.S. Constitution, which reserves to the Congress the power to declare war."

The vote was nearly party-line, with Pennsylvania's John Fetterman the only Democrat to vote against the measure and Rand Paul of Kentucky the only Republican in favor.

Supporters argue for congressional role

U.S. forces dropped bombs on three Iranian nuclear enrichment sites June 21 amid that country's war with Israel.

President Donald Trump claimed an unqualified victory, though news reporting of intelligence assessments has shown the result was inconclusive and could have set Iran's nuclear program back only a matter of months.

Military and intelligence officers provided the classified briefing to members of Congress Thursday.

Kaine, who has consistently called for presidents to win congressional authorization before taking offensive military action, said the framers of the Constitution deliberately gave the power to Congress.

"War is too big an issue to leave in the hands of even a completely careful and deliberative individual," Kaine said. "The framers didn't want to leave war in the hands of George Washington, for God's sake. They thought Congress should be involved."

Following the vote, Kaine said in a written statement he was upset with the senators who voted no.

"I am disappointed that many of my colleagues are not willing to stand up and say Congress needs to be part of a decision as important as whether or not the U.S. should send our nation's sons and daughters to fight against Iran," he said.

Paul, who has often clashed with his party on executive authority and other issues, made a constitutional argument and criticized the foreign policy that leads to active military engagement.

"The American people are sick and tired of sending their children to fight and die in war zones on the other side of the world with no tangible U.S. interest at stake," he said. "Abdicating our constitutional responsibility by allowing the executive branch to unilaterally introduce U.S. troops into wars is an affront to the Constitution and to the American people."

535 commanders in chief

Opponents of the resolution argued it would needlessly tie the president's hands in matters of war.

The process required of going through Congress to approve military action would be too long to be practical, South Carolina Republican Lindsey Graham said.

"Just think (of) the chaos that would ensue in this country if there were not one commander-in-chief, but 535, and we had to sit down and talk among ourselves and debate as to whether or not we should go forward with the military operation in question," he said. "That would paralyze this country."

Tennessee Republican Bill Hagerty said the operation was a success and the decision to order it was entirely within Trump's constitutional power as commander-in-chief. Iran had been hostile to the U.S. and its ally Israel for decades, he said.

"President Trump's actions last weekend did not start a war," Haggerty said. "His actions ended a war,

and not a single American life was lost. We should not be here debating how to constrain effective residential leadership, but rather discussing how to recognize effective leadership and supporting it.”

Constraining a president’s power undermines the ability to use the element of surprise that is crucial to modern warfare, Hagerty added.

The resolution “elevates process over common sense, policy and political optics over operational necessity,” he said.

Jacob covers federal policy and helps direct national coverage as deputy Washington bureau chief for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

Weekend work on the mega-bill: first vote in US Senate as soon as Saturday

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT, SHAUNEEN MIRANDA AND ASHLEY MURRAY - JUNE 27, 2025 5:00 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Republicans appear ready to take an initial vote on their “big, beautiful bill” as soon as Saturday, which would set up final passage within a couple of days — though Majority Leader John Thune called the timeline “aspirational.”

GOP senators have been negotiating the sweeping tax and spending cuts package for weeks, trying to ensure the dozens of provisions meet the complex rules for writing a reconciliation bill and can garner the support needed to actually become law.

“We are continuing to explore options on all the outstanding issues,” Thune said Friday afternoon. But several Republican senators leaving a closed-door working lunch that lasted more than two hours told reporters they expect to see the final bill text possibly by Friday night before taking their first procedural vote at noon Eastern on Saturday.

However, when the Senate adjourned on Friday night, the time to convene again was at 2 p.m. Eastern — and no vote was scheduled.

Republicans were still going back and forth with the Senate parliamentarian throughout the day Friday as they tried to rework numerous policy changes she deemed not compliant with the guardrails for a reconciliation bill.

The special legislative process gets Republicans around the Senate’s 60-vote legislative filibuster, but means the successful policy provisions need to have an effect on federal revenues, spending or the debt limit.

There were still various outstanding disputes among GOP senators about how exactly the bill should be structured. If those are not resolved before amendment debate begins, it could lead to Republicans publicly splitting on issues related to Medicaid, tax policy and several other issues.



U.S. Sen. John Thune, R-South Dakota, speaks to the Brandon Valley Area Chamber of Commerce on Nov. 26, 2024, in Brandon.

(Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

Public lands, Medicaid provider tax

Montana Sen. Steve Daines said he’s still waiting to see whether the parliamentarian accepts a revised proposal from Utah Sen. Mike Lee that would lead to a sell-off of some public lands.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 13 of 61

Daines didn't want to comment on whether he'd bring up an amendment to strike the language from the bill, if it makes it into the final version of the package.

"He's got to get it in the bill first. So it's a hypothetical at this point," Daines said. "I think there's some trouble getting it through the parl. So I think that's the most likely scenario."

North Dakota Sen. John Hoeven said he believes Republicans have successfully reworked language addressing a change to the maximum percentage that states can set their Medicaid provider tax rate at. An earlier version reducing that rate from 6% to 3.5% over time was blocked by the parliamentarian.

"We think we've got it fixed, yeah. It's just like on a number of these issues. We think we have it fixed. We don't have the final word," Hoeven said. "That's what we talked about earlier. We think we'll have the final word on this by the end of today, so we can start tomorrow."

The Medicaid provider tax rate would normally be considered in-the-weeds, but has become a central debate within the GOP amid major concerns about how changes would affect rural health care systems.

Republicans may have also agreed to a final figure for a rural hospital fund meant to help offset the impact of Medicaid changes in the bill. That number will likely be higher than a previously floated \$15 billion, but Hoeven didn't say what the compromise will be.

"The number you all saw is \$15 billion. It's going to be bigger than that," Hoeven said. "But I don't have a specific number yet."

Maine Republican Sen. Susan Collins has been pressing for that fund to be at least \$100 billion.

SALT talks

Hoeven said that during the lunch, Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., advocated for a \$40,000 cap on state and local tax deductions, or SALT, for five years. The issue, also somewhat obscure, is crucial to the Senate bill making it back through the House, where GOP lawmakers from higher-tax states have been adamant the bill must help their constituents.

Hoeven said the goal is to reach final agreement among Republicans and clear those changes with the parliamentarian, so the Senate can take its procedural vote on the bill Saturday around noon.

Oklahoma Sen. Markwayne Mullin said he thinks both chambers are getting close to reaching a final deal on the state and local tax deduction.

"We still have some talking to do in the Senate, but I think we're getting close," Mullin said, declining to get into numbers.

Senators, he said, are planning to take the procedural vote around noon Saturday, setting up an amendment voting session that can last upwards of 12 hours and might begin later that day or Sunday morning.

"There's a discussion about starting it earlier in the morning than in the middle of the night," Mullin said. "So who knows?"

The bill clearing the House could come shortly after the Senate passes its version of the package, since that chamber's 72-hour rule starts winding down once the Senate's bill text is released, not once the Senate actually passes it.

"Putting on my hat from the House side. The 72-hour rule may not even have to be applied here because we're amending the bill that's already been put out," Mullin said. "But I think what Speaker Johnson wants to do is give adequate time to go through it, which would be kind of a 72-hour rule anyway."

Artificial intelligence

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz also said he expects the chamber will take the procedural vote around noon Saturday. Cruz expressed confidence that a section in his committee's bill preventing state and local governments from regulating artificial intelligence if they want part of a \$500 million fund will survive a possible floor amendment.

"The provision is in the bill and I believe it will be in the final bill that passes," Cruz said, appearing to brush aside weeks of criticism from fellow GOP lawmakers.

Ohio Sen. Bernie Moreno was optimistic that both chambers will be able to pass the package before the

party's self-imposed Fourth of July deadline.

"Look, ultimately, at the end of the day, we'll be in good shape. We're going to get a bill across the finish line," Moreno said. "The sausage-making can be ugly, but the final product is delicious."

Sen. Ron Johnson was not as upbeat as some of his colleagues, storming up the steps just outside the closed-door lunch after it wrapped up, not wanting to speak to reporters.

"Notice I'm not really wanting (to) talk right now," the Wisconsin Republican said.

"Go back downstairs," he told a large group of reporters.

Asked about the timing of the procedural vote this weekend, Iowa GOP Sen. Chuck Grassley said, "it's going to be brought up ... there's no question about that."

"The question is, on final passage, will we need the vice president?" Grassley said. "And I'm glad he's a Republican, but we gotta get it passed."

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

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.

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

US Supreme Court limits injunctions, allows Trump to act on birthright citizenship ban

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JUNE 27, 2025 9:51 AM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court Friday in a major decision reined in nationwide injunctions by some lower courts that had blocked President Donald Trump's executive order barring birthright citizenship.

The high court declined to decide the constitutionality of birthright citizenship itself. But the justices said the Trump executive order rewriting the constitutional right to birthright citizenship could go into effect within 30 days after Friday's ruling in the 28 states that did not initially sue.

The Supreme Court's 6-3 decision thus raises the prospect that a child born in some states would be regarded legally as a U.S. citizen but not in others until the overall question of constitutionality is settled, unless there is further legal action.

The sweeping ruling also likely could hamper other legal challenges against Trump administration actions in which nationwide injunctions are sought. Democratic attorneys general in the states have been successful in obtaining injunctions in the months since Trump was elected.

"GIANT WIN in the United States Supreme Court!" Trump wrote on social media shortly after the ruling.

Speaking at the White House later, Trump said his administration will move forward with several executive orders that have faced nationwide injunctions, such as suspending refugee resettlement and revoking federal funds from "sanctuary" states and localities.



The U.S. Supreme Court, as seen on Oct. 9, 2024. (Photo by Jane Norman/States Newsroom)

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 15 of 61

"Thanks to this decision, we can now promptly file to proceed with these numerous policies and those that have been wrongly enjoined on a nationwide basis, including birthright citizenship," Trump said.

Liberals on the high court issued a strong dissent. "No right is safe in the new legal regime the Court creates," wrote Justice Sonia Sotomayor. "Today, the threat is to birthright citizenship. Tomorrow, a different administration may try to seize firearms from law abiding citizens or prevent people of certain faiths from gathering to worship."

Joining the dissent were Justices Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson.

Barrett writes ruling

In the ruling, the conservative justices found that nationwide "injunctions likely exceed the equitable authority that Congress has given to federal courts."

"The Court grants the Government's applications for a partial stay of the injunctions entered below, but only to the extent that the injunctions are broader than necessary to provide complete relief to each plaintiff with standing to sue," according to the ruling, written by Justice Amy Coney Barrett and joined by Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Brett Kavanaugh, Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito and Neil Gorsuch.

While the dispute before the court related to Trump's executive order to rewrite the constitutional right to birthright citizenship, the Trump administration asked the high court to instead focus on the issue of preliminary injunctions granted by lower courts.

"The applications do not raise—and thus the Court does not address—the question whether the Executive Order violates the Citizenship Clause or Nationality Act," according to the ruling, referring to the practice of granting citizenship to babies born on U.S. soil.

Attorney General Pam Bondi, who appeared at the White House with the president, predicted the Supreme Court in its new term in October will take up the merits of the executive order that aims to redefine birthright citizenship.

The high court's ruling instructs lower courts to "move expeditiously to ensure that, with respect to each plaintiff, the injunctions comport with this rule and otherwise comply with principles of equity."

In the first 100 days of the second Trump administration, through April 29, judges issued about 25 nationwide injunctions, according to the Congressional Research Service.

"The lower courts should determine whether a narrower injunction is appropriate; we therefore leave it to them to consider these and any related arguments," according to the ruling.

A narrower injunction could refer to a class action suit.

Barrett argued that a nationwide injunction would not grant more relief for barring the enforcement of Trump's executive order against a pregnant person who is not a U.S. citizen and fears their child would be denied citizenship.

"Her child will not be denied citizenship. And extending the injunction to cover everyone similarly situated would not render her relief any more complete," according to the ruling. "So the individual and associational respondents are wrong to characterize the universal injunction as simply an application of the complete-relief principle."

Stateless people

Trump ran on a reelection campaign platform promising mass deportations of people without permanent legal status and vowed to end the constitutional right of birthright citizenship.

During the press conference at the White House Trump said that birthright citizenship historically was only meant to benefit the children of the newly freed African Americans, not the children of immigrants.

"It wasn't meant for people trying to scam the system and come into the country on vacation," Trump said.

Under birthright citizenship, all children born in the United States are considered citizens, regardless of their parents' legal status.

If birthright citizenship were to be eliminated, more than 250,000 children born each year would not

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 16 of 61

be granted U.S. citizenship, according to a recent study by the think tank the Migration Policy Institute.

It would effectively create a class of 2.7 million stateless people by 2045, according to the study.

In last month's oral arguments, Solicitor General D. John Sauer, who argued on behalf of the Trump administration, contended that it's unconstitutional for federal judges to issue nationwide injunctions. Instead, he said, the injunctions should be limited to those who brought the challenges.

'Consequences for the children'

New Jersey Attorney General Matt Platkin said during a briefing with reporters that one group of private individuals that challenged the executive order has already filed a class action suit.

"I suspect more will come," Platkin said.

Washington state Attorney General Nick Brown said at the press conference of Democratic attorneys general that because of Friday's ruling, the rights of future newborns who hail from states that have not directly challenged the order will be in question.

"In Washington and New Jersey and Massachusetts, Connecticut, your rights are much more strong, but in all those other states, including many of our neighbor states, not participating in this case is going to have consequences for the children born in those states," Brown said.

With 22 states part of the initial suits challenging Trump's birthright citizenship order included, that means the order could impact the 28 states that were not part of the initial suit.

Those 28 states are: Alaska, Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia and Wyoming.

'The gamesmanship in this request is apparent'

Sotomayor, in her dissent, argued that the Trump administration brought the question of nationwide injunctions before the high court because it would be "an impossible task" to prove the constitutionality of the birthright citizenship executive order.

"So the Government instead tries its hand at a different game. It asks this Court to hold that, no matter how illegal a law or policy, courts can never simply tell the Executive to stop enforcing it against anyone," she said. "Instead, the Government says, it should be able to apply the Citizenship Order (whose legality it does not defend) to everyone except the plaintiffs who filed this lawsuit."

"The gamesmanship in this request is apparent and the Government makes no attempt to hide it. Yet, shamefully, this Court plays along," she continued.

Sotomayor also questioned the irreparable harm the Trump administration would face.

"Simply put, it strains credulity to treat the Executive Branch as irreparably harmed by injunctions that direct it to continue following settled law," she said.

She argued that the issue of birthright citizenship was ratified in the 14th Amendment of the Constitution in 1868, following the Civil War, to establish citizenship for newly freed Black people. It was meant to rectify a 1857 case in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* where the Supreme Court initially denied citizenship to Black people, whether they were free or enslaved.

"By stripping all federal courts, including itself, of that power, the Court kneecaps the Judiciary's authority to stop the Executive from enforcing even the most unconstitutional policies," Sotomayor said. "That runs directly counter to the point of equity: empowering courts to do complete justice, including through flexible remedies that have historically benefited parties and nonparties alike."

Origins of birthright citizenship case

The case, *Trump v. CASA*, was consolidated from three cases.

George Escobar, the chief of programs and services of CASA, which brought the case, said in a statement that the ruling from the high court "undermines the fundamental promise of the Constitution — that every child born on U.S. soil is equal under the law."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 17 of 61

"Today's decision sends a message to U.S.-born children of immigrants that their place in this country is conditional," Escobar said. "But we are not backing down."

The CASA case was on behalf of several pregnant women in Maryland who are not U.S. citizens who filed their case in Maryland; the second came from four states — Washington, Arizona, Illinois, and Oregon — that filed a case in Washington state; and the third came from 18 Democratic state attorneys general who filed the challenge in Massachusetts.

Those 18 states are California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Vermont and Wisconsin. The District of Columbia and the county and city of San Francisco also joined.

This is not the first time the Supreme Court has addressed the issue of birthright citizenship.

In 1898, the Supreme Court upheld the 14th Amendment, in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, extending birthright citizenship.

In that 19th-century case, Ark was born in San Francisco, California, to parents who were citizens of the Republic of China, but had legal authority to be in the United States, such as a temporary visa. While Ark was born in California, his citizenship was not recognized when he went on a trip to China. Upon his return to California, he was denied reentry due to the Chinese Exclusion Act— a racist law designed to restrict and limit nearly all immigration of Chinese nationals.

When his case went all the way to the Supreme Court, the high court ruled that children born in the U.S. to parents who were not citizens automatically become citizens at birth.

The Trump administration has argued that the 1898 case was misinterpreted and point to a specific phrase: "subject to the jurisdiction" of the United States.

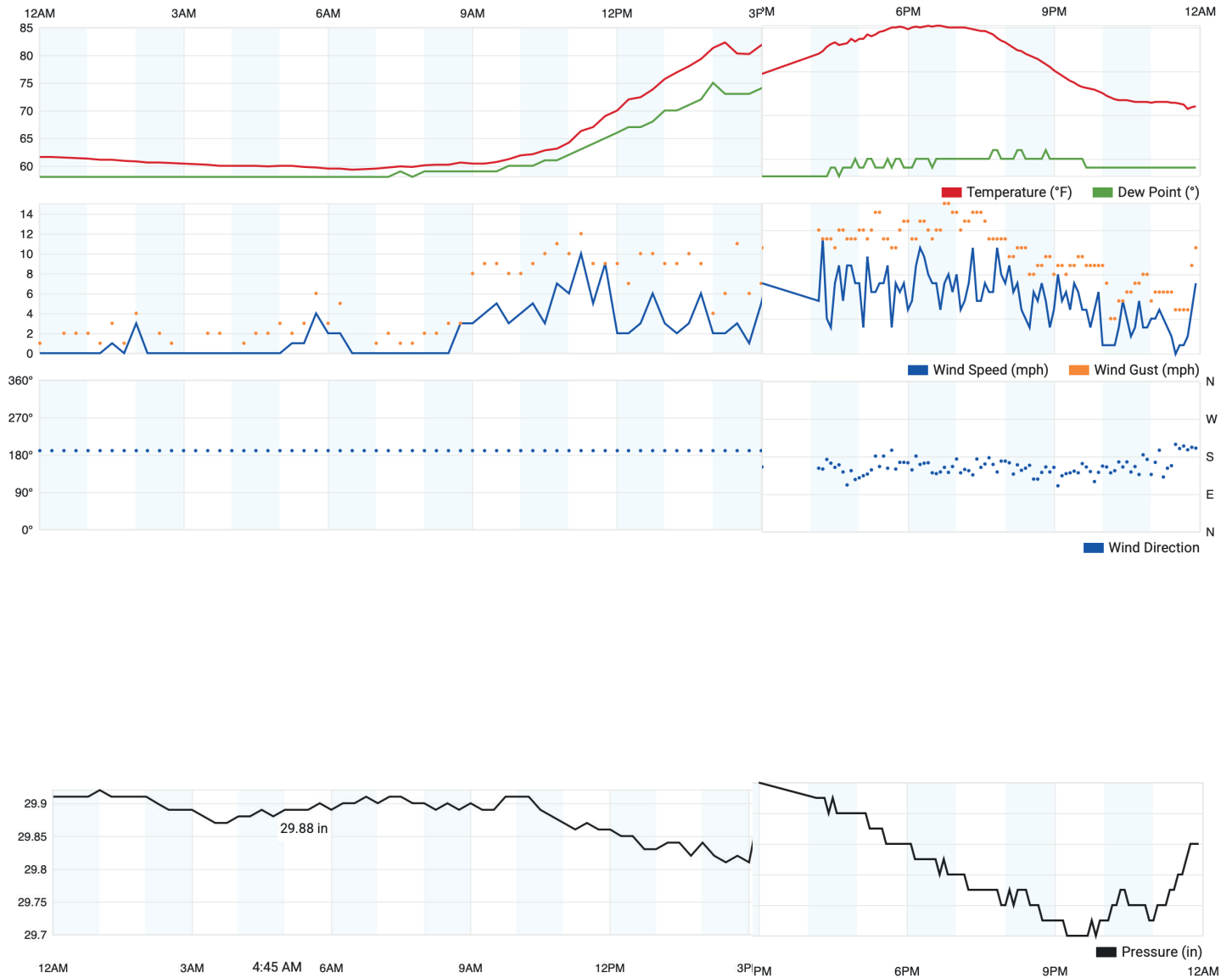
Government attorneys contend that the phrase in the 14th Amendment means that birthright citizenship does not apply to people in the U.S. without legal status or temporary legal status who are "subject to the jurisdiction" of their country of origin.

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

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 18 of 61

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 19 of 61

Today



High: 88 °F

Showers
Likely then
Sunny

Tonight



Low: 63 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms

Sunday



High: 85 °F

Chance
T-storms then
Slight Chance
Showers

Sunday Night



Low: 58 °F

Partly Cloudy

Monday



High: 82 °F

Sunny

THREAT ASSESSMENT

HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

2

WHAT THIS MEANS:
Scattered severe storms
possible.

TIMING

Late afternoon into early
evening

PRIMARY THREATS



LARGE HAIL



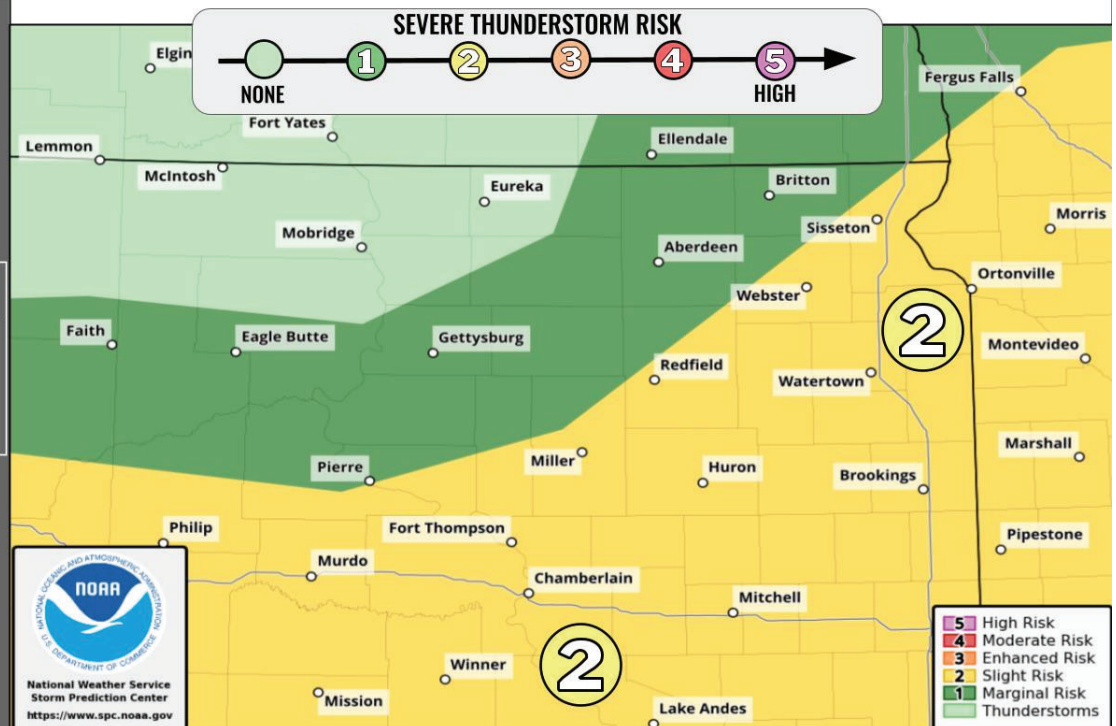
DAMAGING
WIND



HEAVY RAIN

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

SEVERE STORMS Possible Again Today/Tonight



Severe storms are possible once again today, from late afternoon into the early evening hours across northeast South Dakota into west central Minnesota. Southern South Dakota is also in a risk for severe storms.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 20 of 61



Severe Weather Threats - Hail

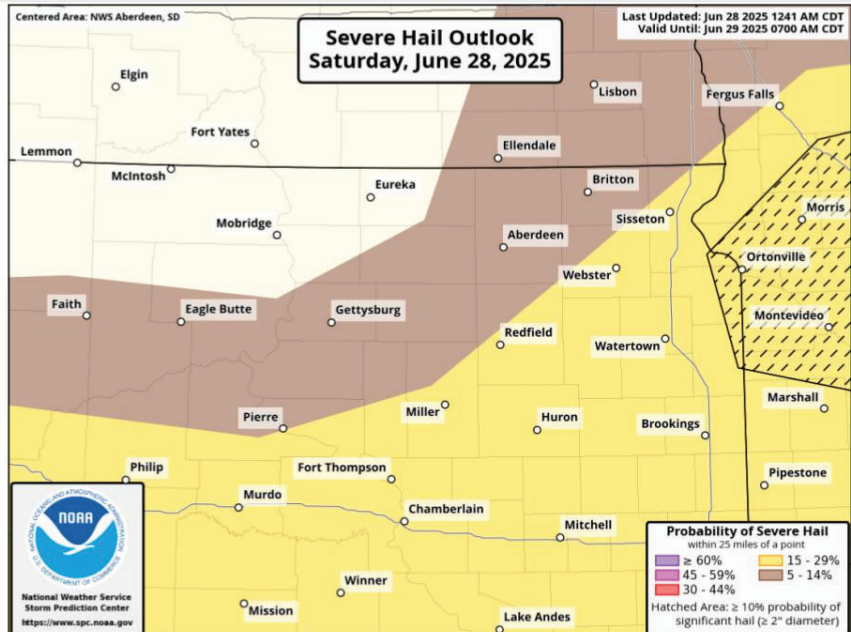
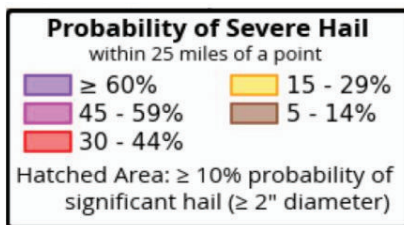
June 28, 2025
3:23 AM

Hail Threat Highlights:

Any severe storms that develop may produce hail around quarter size to golf ball size. In the hatched area, hail in excess of 2 inches diameter is possible.

Area of Greatest Risk:

Extreme east central SD into west central MN.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

The threat for very large hail in excess of 2 inches in diameter has shifted eastward today into Minnesota. Across our area, any storms that develop could produce hail around quarter to golf ball size.



Severe Weather Threats - High Winds

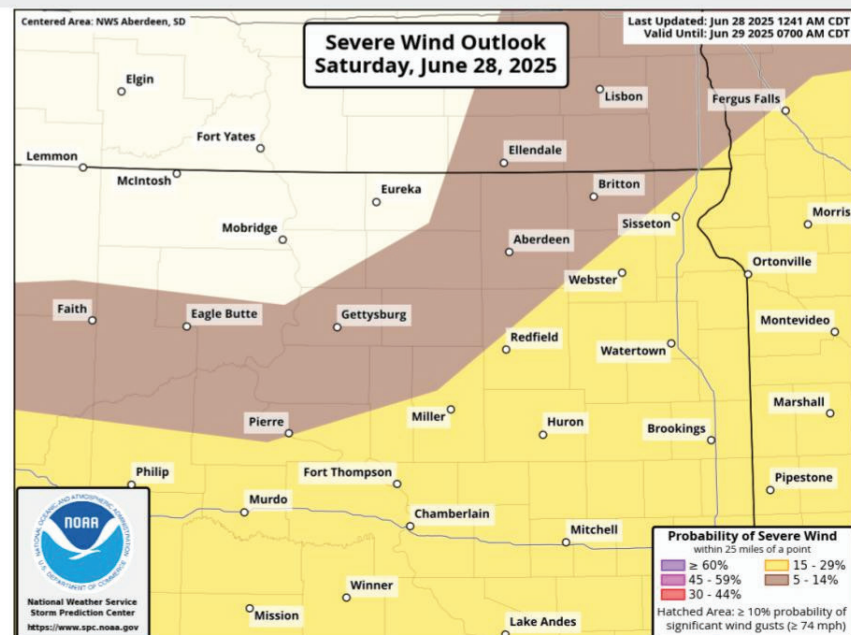
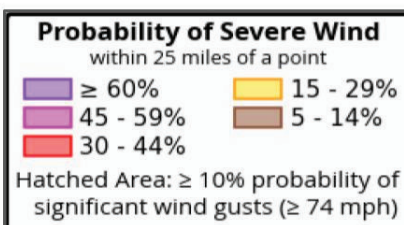
June 28, 2025
3:27 AM

Wind Threat Highlights:

60 to 70 mph wind gusts will be possible with any storms that develop today.

Area of Greatest Risk:

South central SD northeast through northeast SD into west central MN.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 21 of 61



Severe Weather Threats - Tornado

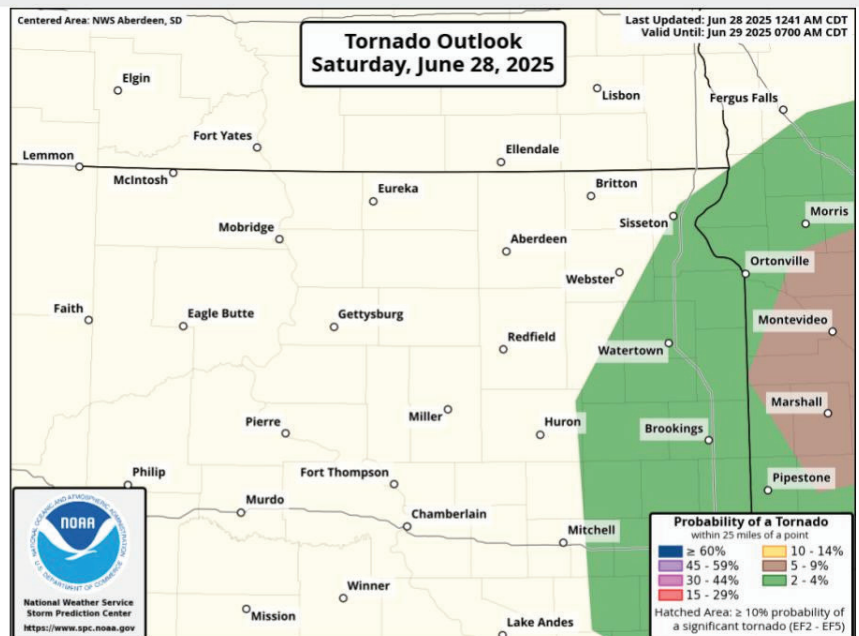
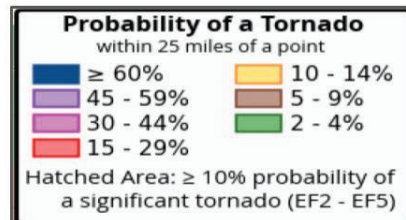
June 28, 2025
3:30 AM

Tornado Threat Highlights:

Supercells may produce an isolated tornado or two during the late afternoon/early evening hours.

Area of Greatest Risk:

Greatest tornado risk (5-9% within 25 miles of a point) shifts into MN today, although a very small chance (2-4%) exists over portions of northeast SD and west central MN.



The main area of concern for tornadoes today has also shifted eastward into Minnesota, although there is a very small chance (2-4% within 25 miles of a point) across northeast South Dakota into west central Minnesota.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 22 of 61

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 85 °F at 4:24 PM

Low Temp: 59 °F at 6:29 AM

Wind: 18 mph at 6:45 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 42 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 112 in 1931

Record Low: 40 in 1951

Average High: 83

Average Low: 58

Average Precip in June.: 3.51

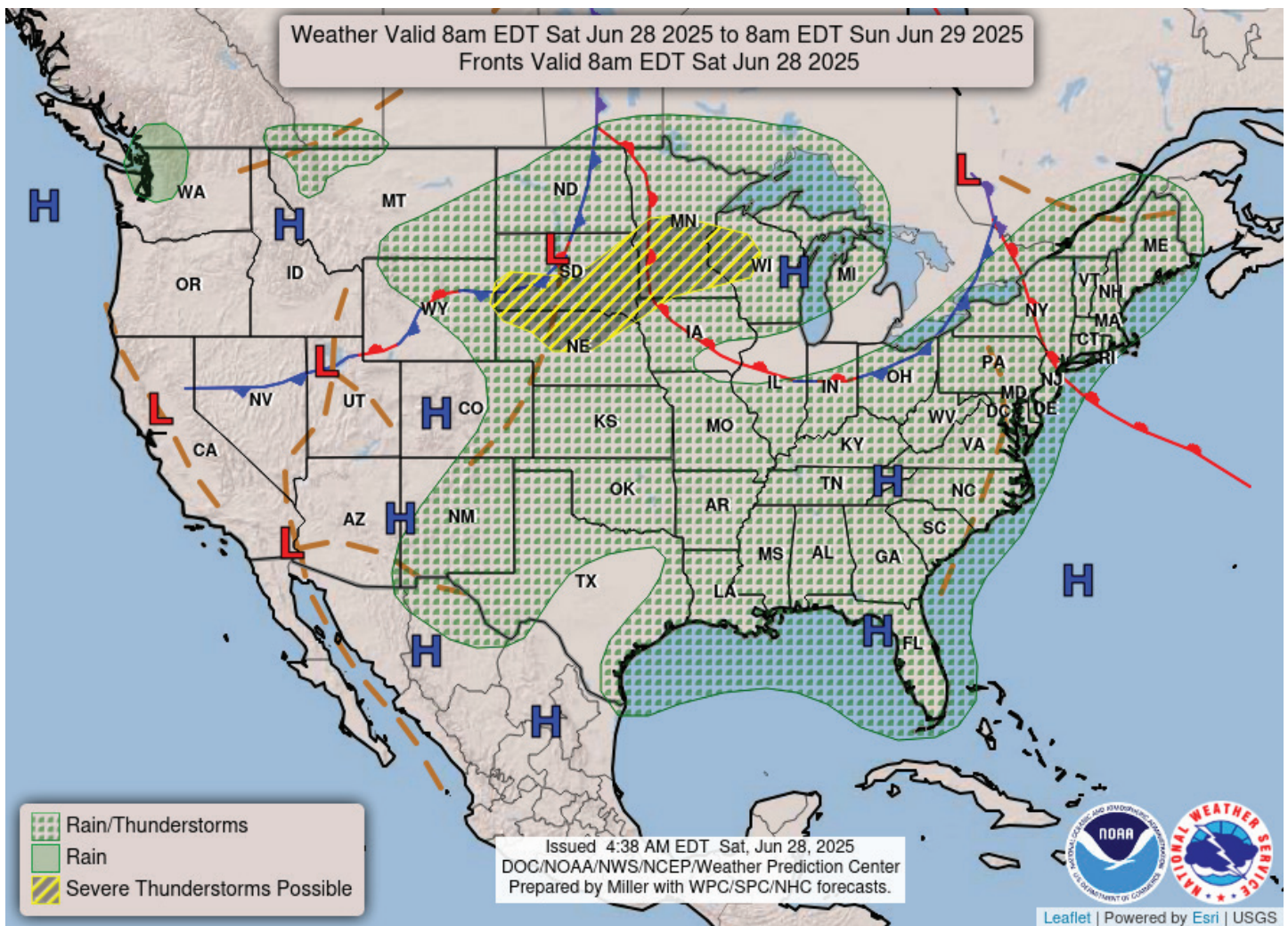
Precip to date in June: 3.14

Average Precip to date: 10.76

Precip Year to Date: 9.19

Sunset Tonight: 9:26:50 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:45:17 am



Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 23 of 61

Today in Weather History

June 28, 1961: An F2 tornado skipped ESE from about 5 miles south of Eureka to Lake Mina. About twelve farm buildings were destroyed. A house was damaged when a small shed was smashed against it in Hillsview. The storm struck north of Roscoe where a barn was unroofed. A second F2 tornado hit west of Hoven. On one farm, a barn, and five small buildings were destroyed, although grain bin nearby was untouched. Another farm, across the road, lost four buildings including a house. The Langford area of Marshall County was struck by an EF2 tornado shortly after 8:00 pm. An estimated 15 to 20 farm buildings were demolished or heavily damaged, and a store in town was partially unroofed.

June 28, 1982: An estimated thunderstorm wind gust up to 94 mph knocked down trees and caused minor structural damage to several homes just west of Wheaton, Minnesota.

June 28, 1990: KDIO radio in Ortonville, Minnesota, clocked winds of 80 to 85 mph for several minutes as a thunderstorm passed. There were reports of numerous trees downed and scattered power outages in Ortonville.

1788: The Battle of Monmouth in central New Jersey was fought in sweltering heat. The temperature was 96 degrees in the shade, and there were more casualties from the heat than from bullets.

1892 - The temperature at Orogrande UT soared to 116 degrees to establish a record for the state. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders)

1923 - A massive tornado hit Sandusky, OH, then swept across Lake Erie to strike the town of Lorain. The tornado killed 86 persons and caused twelve million dollars damage. The tornado outbreak that day was the worst of record for the state of Ohio up til that time. (David Ludlum)

1924: An estimated F4 tornado struck the towns of Sandusky and Lorain, killing 85 people and injuring over 300. This tornado is the deadliest ever in Ohio history.

1975 - Lee Trevino and two other golfers are struck by lightning at the Western Open golf tournament in Oak Brook, IL. (The Weather Channel)

1980 - The temperature at Wichita Falls, TX, soared to 117 degrees, their hottest reading of record. Daily highs were 110 degrees or above between the 24th of June and the 3rd of July. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather in the north central U.S. Thunderstorms in Nebraska produced wind gusts to 70 mph and baseball size hail at Arapahoe, and wind gusts to 80 mph along with baseball size hail at Wolback and Belgrade. Six cities in the Ohio Valley reported record low temperatures for the date, including Cincinnati, OH, with a reading of 50 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Showers and thunderstorms brought much needed rains to parts of the central U.S. Madison, WI, received 1.67 inches of rain, a record for the date, and their first measurable rain since the Mother's Day tornado outbreak on the 8th of May. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Evening thunderstorms deluged Winnfield LA with eleven inches of rain in four hours and fifteen minutes, and Baton Rouge LA reported 11 inches of rain in two days. Totals in west central Louisiana ranged up to 17 inches. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the Northern High Plains. Two inch hail broke windows in nearly every building at Comstock, NE. Thunderstorms in North Dakota produced two inch hail at Killdeer, and golf ball size hail at Zap. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 24 of 61



"Dr. Guido," she said rather timidly, "How do you see yourself? All of the teachers we have are different. But tell us, what makes you different from all of the others?"

My first thought was to explain how my worldview differed from most other professors because of my faith in Christ. That would have been a safe, standard answer. But I wanted to say something that made the way I taught distinct from other professors. As I reflected on the importance of her question, I realized how critical my answer would be.

After a few moments, God brought a word to my mind that I had never associated with teaching before. I looked at the young lady and said,

"I see my role as being similar to the role of a midwife. I believe that it is my responsibility to bring into your life, and the lives of others, what God has planted or will plant within you. My role is to work with God to bring what He plants in your head and heart to life, and to prepare you for the life He has for you."

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the one who is wise saves lives," wrote Solomon.

What we do in our relationships with others is a matter of life and death. We are responsible, with the opportunities and guidance that God gives us, to bring others into a saving relationship with Him. We are to use whatever gifts, talents, skills, influence or position God has given us to bring His message of "life" to others.

A "tree of life" will grow in the life of one who has been redeemed by Christ. And, that "tree" will also bear fruit and bring "the tree of life" to others by its fruit. By this we will be known.

Prayer: Lord, we plant "seeds" continually by what we do and what we say. May we constantly plant Your "seeds," bring "life" and "bear fruit" wherever we go. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Scripture: "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the one who is wise saves lives." Proverbs 11:30

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

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 25 of 61

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Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 26 of 61



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.27.25

18 21 29 42 50 2

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$50,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.25.25

12 14 25 30 42 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,400,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 14 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.27.25

5 12 33 43 47 17

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 29 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.25.25

5 18 19 22 24

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$39,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 29 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.25.25

1 11 49 57 61 25

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 58 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.25.25

2 12 37 51 61 22

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$155,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 58 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 27 of 61

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

Hundreds of thousands mourn top Iranian military commanders and scientists killed in Israeli strikes

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of mourners lined the streets of downtown Tehran on Saturday for the funeral of the head of the Revolutionary Guard and other top commanders and nuclear scientists killed during a 12-day war with Israel.

The caskets of Guard's chief Gen. Hossein Salami, the head of the Guard's ballistic missile program, Gen. Amir Ali Hajizadeh and others were driven on trucks along the capital's Azadi Street as people in the crowds chanted: "Death to America" and "Death to Israel."

Salami and Hajizadeh were both killed on the first day of the war, June 13, as Israel launched a war it said meant to destroy Iran's nuclear program, specifically targeting military commanders, scientists and nuclear facilities.

State media reported more than 1 million people turned out for the funeral procession, which was impossible to independently confirm, but the dense crowd packed the main Tehran thoroughfare along the entire 4.5 kilometer (nearly 3 mile) route.

There was no immediate sign of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in the state broadcast of the funeral. Khamenei, who has not made a public appearance since before the outbreak of the war, has in past funerals held prayers for fallen commanders over their caskets before the open ceremonies, later aired on state television.

Top officials are among the mourners

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi was on hand, and state television reported that Gen. Esmail Qaani, who heads the foreign wing of the Revolutionary Guard, the Quds Force, and Gen. Ali Shamkhani were also among the mourners.

Shamkhani, an adviser to Khamenei who was wounded in the first round of Israel's attack and hospitalized, was shown in a civilian suit leaning on a cane in an image distributed on state television's Telegram channel.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard was created after its 1979 Islamic Revolution. Since it was established, it has evolved from a paramilitary, domestic security force to a transnational force that has come to the aid of Tehran's allies in the Middle East, from Syria and Lebanon to Iraq. It operates in parallel to the country's existing armed forces and controls Iran's arsenal of ballistic missiles, which it has used to attack Israel twice during the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

Over 12 days before a ceasefire was declared on Tuesday, Israel claimed it killed around 30 Iranian commanders and 11 nuclear scientists, while hitting eight nuclear-related facilities and more than 720 military infrastructure sites. More than 1,000 people were killed, including at least 417 civilians, according to the Washington-based Human Rights Activists group.

Iran fired more than 550 ballistic missiles at Israel, most of which were intercepted, but those that got through caused damage in many areas and killed 28 people.

Saturday's ceremonies were the first public funerals for top commanders since the ceasefire, and Iranian state television reported that they were for 60 people in total, including four women and four children.

Crowd expresses feelings of anger and defiance

Authorities closed government offices to allow public servants to attend the ceremonies.

Many in the crowd expressed feelings of anger and defiance.

"This is not a ceasefire, this is just a pause," said 43-year-old Ahmad Mousapoor, waving an Iranian flag. "Whatever they do, we will definitely give a crushing response."

State media published images of an open grave plot at Tehran's sprawling Behesht-e-Zahra cemetery

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 29 of 61

where army chief of staff, Gen. Mohammad Bagheri, who was killed on the first day of the war, was to be buried beside his brother, a Guards commander killed during the 1980s Iran-Iraq war.

Many of the others were to be buried in their hometowns.

The Iranian judiciary's Mizan news agency confirmed that the top prosecutor at the notorious Evin prison had been killed in an Israeli strike on Monday.

It reported that Ali Ghanaatkar, whose prosecution of dissidents, including Nobel Peace Prize winner Narges Mohammadi, led to widespread criticism by human rights groups, would be buried at a shrine in Qom.

Iran has always insisted its nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes. But Israel views it as an existential threat and said its military campaign was necessary to prevent Iran from building an atomic weapon.

Khamenei's last public appearance was June 11, two days before hostilities with Israel broke out, when he met with Iranian parliamentarians.

On Thursday, however, he released a pre-recorded video, in his first message since the end of the war, filled with warnings and threats directed toward the United States and Israel, the Islamic Republic's long-time adversaries.

The 86-year-old downplayed U.S. strikes on three Iranian nuclear sites as having not achieved "anything significant" and claimed victory over Israel.

Questions remain over possible talks

The head of the United Nations nuclear watchdog agency, Rafael Grossi, has characterized the damage done by American bunker-buster bombs to Iran's Fordo nuclear site, which was built into a mountain, as "very, very, very considerable."

U.S. President Donald Trump has said that he expects Iran to open itself to international inspection to verify it doesn't restart its nuclear program, and White House officials have said they expect to restart talks soon with Iran, though nothing has been scheduled.

Iran's parliament has voted to suspend collaboration with Grossi's International Atomic Energy Agency for the time being.

In a post on X on Saturday, Araghchi indicated that Iran might be open to talks, but criticized Trump's remarks from Friday in which the president scoffed at a warning from Khamenei against further U.S. attacks, saying Iran "got beat to hell."

"If President Trump is genuine about wanting a deal, he should put aside the disrespectful and unacceptable tone towards Iran's Supreme Leader, Grand Ayatollah Khamenei and stop hurting his millions of heartfelt followers," Araghchi wrote.

At 100, this globetrotting Catholic priest still bakes pies, enjoys opera and performs daily Mass

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

BLUE BELL, Pa. (AP) — Throughout his remarkable lifetime, the Rev. James Kelly has baptized thousands of people, married thousands more, ministered to the sick in hospitals, and traveled the world extensively. He became friends with an opera superstar and, yes, even with a saint.

The longest-serving priest in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia recently celebrated the 75th anniversary of his ordination and his 100th birthday. He's grateful to have reached these milestones, but nearly didn't after experiencing a health challenge last year that required life-saving surgery.

He feels God gave him some extra time and tries to make each day count.

"The Lord was wonderful to me to give me the health and the strength and the energy to travel, to meet beautiful things — God was always giving me surprises," Kelly says.

Born on Jan. 7, 1925, in the Philadelphia neighborhood of Roxborough to a devoutly Catholic family, Kelly's path to the priesthood seems ordained from the start. He loved attending church. Other children dreamt of becoming athletes, doctors, firefighters. He wanted to be a priest.

"When I was 4 or 5 years old, I'd play Mass," he says, laughing, as he recalls that his parents were his first congregants. "I always had a little altar in my room, and I'd have a glass, and some flowers in there,

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 30 of 61

and I'd make a vestment, put a scarf on, and have some candy, and give Communion to everybody."

Kelly wakes up at dawn to celebrate Mass at the retirement living community that he now calls home. He listens to opera. He bakes pies.

Memories, parachute jumps and climbing a bridge to save a life

Sitting in his room, Kelly flips through a photo album detailing his journey. He smiles with every page turn, pointing to black-and-white photos of him as a toddler and milestones as a Catholic — his baptism, confirmation and ordination as a priest.

"I turned down Hollywood!" he says, laughing as he points to the portrait of a dapper, young priest, his hair slicked and flashing a wide smile.

He also points to the photo published by a Philadelphia newspaper of the time when he climbed in his Roman collar to the top of a bridge and dissuaded a man from jumping to his death.

"Nobody would climb there, so I climbed up — it was 400 feet high. It was a bitter cold day," he says. "I was able to talk to him and break him down emotionally, so he wouldn't jump. I told him, 'What's your grandchild going to say one day: Papa, why didn't you take me fishing?'"

He points to other photos of the many ceremonies he proudly led during his 19 years as pastor of Saint Pius X Parish in Broomall, Pennsylvania, about 10 miles (16 kilometers) west of Philadelphia.

There are images of him during a vacation in Mexico when he made a parachute jump. Or that one time, when he visited the majestic Iguazu Falls on the border between Argentina and Brazil, which he recalls as one of the most beautiful sights of his life.

"Everywhere you turned, there was a rainbow, there was a mist ... the water gushing forth and spray and the colors," he says. "It was, as the kids would say, awesome."

Imagination, friends and being grateful for the simple pleasures

Imagination, he says, is one of his favorite words, recalling that he wrote his college thesis on it. "Jesus used his imagination to teach," he says, in what became an example when he prepared his own sermons.

He treasures other memories, such as traveling to more than 100 countries and meeting Saint Teresa of Kolkata, also known as Mother Theresa. Kelly says the two became friends over the years after meeting in Philadelphia and running into each other at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. The centenarian also shared the time when he took a group of blind children to a live performance of his friend, acclaimed soprano Joan Sutherland.

"I've been fortunate to meet some of the most magnificent, good people in this world, and they've been most generous and gracious to me," Kelly says.

These days, he enjoys simple pleasures: the taste of cherries, a beautiful song, or his favorite meal — roast chicken with mashed potatoes, fresh string beans, and corn on the cob.

He loves learning and often attends lectures on music, art history and Egyptology at the Normandy Farms Estates retirement community where he resides in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania.

His apartment is decorated with a painting of the Virgin Mary that he drew with chalk, a portrait of his mother, and a note signed by the late Pope Francis.

On his bedside table, he keeps an image of Carlo Acutis, the Catholic Church's first millennial-era saint. Kelly is inspired by Acutis, who died at 15 in 2006. Especially Acutis' devotion and how he used his computer skills to create an online exhibit about scores of eucharistic miracles recognized by the church over centuries.

The ritual of a humble daily Mass and the secret to a long life

Every morning, he wakes up without the need of an alarm clock and says the same prayer: "Lord, what surprise do you have for me today?"

"I hope it'll be a nice one that I'll love and enjoy. I never know, but I want to thank you for whatever happens today."

After a cup of coffee, he celebrates Mass in his apartment for a few residents of his community.

"When I moved here, I never thought I was going to have a private chapel!" Kathleen Quigley, a retired nurse, quipped after a recent service. "I just love my faith, and he's such a stronghold of faith that it's

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 31 of 61

wonderful for me to have. I just come right downstairs, have Mass, we talk, he shares his food.”

Kelly once ministered to large congregations, but he feels the daily Mass in his living room is as important.

“It’s not in a beautiful chapel or church. But it’s here that I can offer my love and efforts to the Heavenly Father,” he says. After the final prayer, he always remembers to be grateful.

“That’s all I can say — two words: thank you. It’s wonderful that I have another day, and I might be able to eat some delicious cherries today, and meet people, new friends,” he says. “God knows what surprises I’ll encounter today.”

His secret to longevity?

“I drink lots of milk,” he says, laughing. “And I say lots of prayers.”

A Russian drone strike on Odesa kills a married couple and injures 17 people, Ukraine says

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian drones struck the southern Ukrainian port city of Odesa overnight, killing two people died and injuring at least 17, Ukrainian authorities said on Saturday.

A drone slammed into a residential tower block in the city, causing damage to three floors and trapping residents, emergency services said. The two killed in the attack were a married couple, according to regional Gov. Oleh Kiper, who added that three children were among the injured.

There was no immediate comment from Moscow. According to Russia’s Defense Ministry, over 40 Ukrainian drones were shot down overnight and on Saturday morning over western Russia and Kremlin-occupied Crimea.

Long-range drone strikes have been a hallmark of the war, now in its fourth year. The race by both sides to develop increasingly sophisticated and deadlier drones has turned the war into a testing ground for new weaponry.

Ukrainian drones have pulled off some stunning feats. At the start of June, nearly a third of Moscow’s strategic bomber fleet was destroyed or damaged in a covert Ukrainian operation using cheaply made drones sneaked into Russian territory.

Smaller, short-range drones are used by both sides on the battlefield and in areas close to the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line.

The U.N. Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine said in a report published Thursday that short-range drone attacks killed at least 395 civilians and injured 2,635 between the start of the war in February 2022 and April 2025. Almost 90% of the attacks were by the Russian armed forces, it reported.

More than 13,300 civilians have died and over 34,700 have been injured in the war, the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said a June 11 report.

At least 49 people killed in Israeli strikes in Gaza as ceasefire prospects inch closer

By WAFAA SHURAF and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — At least 49 people were killed across Gaza by Israeli strikes, health staff say, as Palestinians face a growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza and ceasefire prospects inch closer.

The strikes began late Friday and continued into Saturday morning, among others killing 12 people near the Palestine Stadium in Gaza City, which was sheltering displaced people, and eight more living in apartments, according to staff at Shifa hospital where the bodies were brought. More than 20 bodies were taken to Nasser hospital, according to health officials.

The strikes come as U.S. President Donald Trump says there could be a ceasefire agreement within the next week. Taking questions from reporters in the Oval Office Friday, the president said, “we’re working on Gaza and trying to get it taken care of.”

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 32 of 61

An official with knowledge of the situation told The Associated Press that Israel's Minister for Strategic Affairs, Ron Dermer, will arrive in Washington next week for talks on Gaza's ceasefire, Iran and other subjects. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media.

Talks have been on again off again since Israel broke the latest ceasefire in March, continuing its military campaign in Gaza and furthering the Strip's dire humanitarian crisis. Some 50 hostages remain in Gaza, fewer than half of them believed to still be alive. They were part of some 250 hostages taken when Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, sparking the 21-month-long war.

The war has killed over 56,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants. It says more than half of the dead were women and children.

There is hope among hostage families that Trump's involvement in securing the recent ceasefire between Israel and Iran might exert more pressure for a deal in Gaza. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is riding a wave of public support for the Iran war and its achievements, and he could feel he has more space to move toward ending the war in Gaza, something his far-right governing partners oppose.

Hamas has repeatedly said it is prepared to free all the hostages in exchange for an end to the war in Gaza. Netanyahu says he will only end the war once Hamas is disarmed and exiled, something the group has rejected.

Meanwhile hungry Palestinians are enduring a catastrophic situation in Gaza. After blocking all food for 2 1/2 months, Israel has allowed only a trickle of supplies into the territory since mid-May.

Efforts by the United Nations to distribute the food have been plagued by armed gangs looting trucks and by crowds of desperate people offloading supplies from convoys.

Palestinians have also been shot and wounded while on their way to get food at newly formed aid sites, run by the American and Israeli backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, according to Gaza's health officials and witnesses.

Palestinian witnesses say Israeli troops have opened fire at crowds on the roads heading toward the sites. Israel's military said it was investigating incidents in which civilians had been harmed while approaching the sites.

Bespoke bash for a billionaire: Jeff Bezos weds Lauren Sánchez in lavish Venice ceremony

By DAVID BILLER and PAOLO SANTALUCIA Associated Press

VENICE, Italy (AP) — The sky itself is no limit for billionaire Jeff Bezos and fiancée Lauren Sánchez, who have traveled into space — and expectations were about as high ahead of their wedding in Venice on Friday.

One of the world's most enchanting cities as backdrop? Check.

Star-studded guestlist and tabloid buzz? Of course.

Local flavor? You bet.

And then, time to tie the knot. The couple held their wedding ceremony Friday night, and Sánchez posted to Instagram a photo of herself beaming in a white gown as she stood alongside a tuxedo-clad Bezos, the world's fourth-richest man.

It was the second day of events spread across the Italian lagoon city, which added complexity to what would have been a massive logistical undertaking even on dry land.

Dozens of private jets had flocked to Venice's airport, and yachts pulled into the city's famed waterways. Athletes, celebrities, influencers and business leaders converged to revel in extravagance that was as much a testament to the couple's love as to their extraordinary wealth.

The heady hoopla recalled the 2014 wedding in Venice of actor George Clooney to human rights lawyer Amal Alamuddin, when adoring crowds lined the canals and hundreds of well-wishers gathered outside City Hall.

Not so for these nuptials, which became a lightning rod for small, colorful protests. But any desire to dampen the prevailing fever pitch hadn't materialized as of Friday. Instead, the glitterati were partying,

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 33 of 61

and the paparazzi jostling for glimpses of the gilded gala.

And the bride wore a classic mermaid-line gown, featuring Dolce & Gabbana's signature Italian lace. A traditional tulle-and-lace veil completed her look.

"Not just a gown, a piece of poetry," she wrote on Instagram, where her name now appears as Lauren Sánchez Bezos.

Logistics and costs

Venice is famed for its network of canals, where gondoliers croon for lovestruck couples and even ambulances are aquatic. But water transport of everything from bouquets to guests makes Venice among the world's most challenging cities for a party, according to Jack Ezon, CEO of Embark Beyond, a luxury travel advisory and destination event service.

"It's a very tight-knit community; everyone there knows everyone, and you need to work with the right people," said Ezon, whose company has put on a dozen high-end events in Venice. "There's very tight control, especially on movement there with boats."

It at least triples the cost versus staging the same soiree in Rome or Florence, he said.

Veneto Gov. Luca Zaia was first to give an estimated tally for the Bezos/Sánchez bash: He told reporters this week the most recent total he saw was between 40 million and 48 million euros (up to \$56 million).

It's an eye-popping, jaw-dropping figure that's over 1,000 times the \$36,000 average cost of American couples' weddings in 2025, according to wedding planning website Zola's annual report.

Bezos' team has been tight-lipped about where these millions are going. When the youngest son of Asia's richest man married last July, performances by pop stars Rihanna and Justin Bieber pushed up the price tag.

"How do you spend \$40 million on a three- or four-day event?" Ezon said. "You could bring headliners, A-list performers, great DJs from anywhere in the world. You could spend \$2 million on an incredible glass tent that's only there for 10 hours, but it takes a month to build," or expand the celebration to local landmarks.

There's no sign Sánchez and Bezos, the former CEO of Amazon, intend to take over any of Venice's tourist-thronged hotspots. Still, intense hand-wringing about the prospect prompted their wedding coordinator, Lanza & Baucina, to issue a rare statement calling those rumors false.

On Friday afternoon, Sánchez emerged from her hotel wearing a silk scarf on her head and blew a kiss to journalists before stepping into her water taxi. It carried her through the canals to San Giorgio island, across the lagoon basin from St. Mark's Square, where the couple held their ceremony Friday night. Bezos followed two hours later.

Then, in a string of water taxis, came their illustrious guests — Oprah Winfrey, Kim Kardashian, Ivanka Trump, Tom Brady, Bill Gates, Queen Rania of Jordan, Leonardo DiCaprio, and more. Paparazzi trailed on their own boats, trying to capture them all on camera.

Vogue magazine, to which the couple granted exclusive access, reported that the Dolce & Gabbana-designed gown took 900 hours to complete. Inspired by Sophia Loren's wedding dress in the 1958 film *Houseboat*, it featured high-necked, hand-appliqued lace and 180 silk chiffon-covered priest buttons.

'No Space'

There are some who say these two shouldn't have been wed in this city.

They characterize the wedding as a decadent display of wealth in a world with growing inequality, and argue it's a shining example of tourism taking precedence over residents' needs, particularly affordable housing and essential services. Venice is also one of the cities most vulnerable to rising sea levels from climate change.

"Venice is not just a pretty picture, a pretty postcard to please the needs and wants of the elite or of mass tourists, but it is an alive city, made of people who want to actually live there," Stella Faye, a researcher at a university from Venice, said on Friday.

About a dozen Venetian organizations — including housing advocates, anti-cruise ship campaigners and university groups — are protesting under the banner "No Space for Bezos," a play on words referring to his space exploration company Blue Origin and the bride's recent space flight.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 34 of 61

Greenpeace unfurled a banner in St. Mark's Square denouncing Bezos for paying insufficient taxes. Activists floated a bald-headed Bezos-inspired mannequin down Venice's Grand Canal atop an Amazon delivery box, its hands clenching fake cash.

Authorities — from Venice's mayor to the nation's tourism minister — have dismissed the outcry, saying it ignores the visibility and economic boost the wedding has brought.

"There will be photos everywhere, social media will go wild over the bride's dress, over the ceremony," Italy's tourism minister, Daniela Santanchè, told the AP.

"All of this translates into a massive free publicity campaign. In fact, because they will spend a lot of money, they will enrich Venice — our shopkeepers, artisans, restaurateurs, hotels. So it's a great opportunity both for spending and for promoting Italy in the world."

Philanthropy

As Amazon's CEO, Bezos usually avoided the limelight, frequently delegating announcements and business updates to his executives. Today he has a net worth of \$234 billion, according to Forbes.

In 2019, he announced he was divorcing his first wife, MacKenzie Scott, just before the National Enquirer published a story about an affair with Sánchez, a former TV news anchor. Sánchez filed for divorce the day after Bezos' divorce was finalized.

He stepped down as CEO in 2021, saying he wished to spend more time on side projects, including Blue Origin, The Washington Post, which he owns, and his philanthropic initiatives.

Sitting beside Sánchez during an interview with CNN in 2022, he announced plans to give away the majority of his wealth during his lifetime.

Last week, a Venetian environmental research association issued a statement saying Bezos' Earth Fund was supporting its work with an "important donation." CORILA, which seeks protection of the Venetian lagoon system, said contact began in April, well before any protests.

Local media have reported a reception Saturday in the Arsenale, a former navy base best known as a primary venue for the Venice Biennale.

Protesters rally in Bangkok to demand Thai prime minister's resignation over leaked Cambodia call

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Thousands rallied in Thailand's capital on Saturday to demand the resignation of Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, part of the brewing political turmoil set off by a leaked phone call with former Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen.

Paetongtarn faces growing dissatisfaction over her handling of a recent border dispute with Cambodia involving an armed confrontation May 28. One Cambodian soldier was killed in a relatively small, contested area.

The recorded phone call with Hun Sen was at the heart of the demonstration Saturday and has set off a string of investigations in Thailand that could lead to Paetongtarn's removal.

Outrage over the call mostly revolved around Paetongtarn's comments toward an outspoken regional army commander and her perceived attempts to appease Hun Sen, the current Cambodian Senate president, to ease tensions at the border.

About 6,000 protesters joined the rally as of early afternoon, according to an estimate by the Bangkok police. Despite a downpour, they held national flags and placards around the Victory Monument in central Bangkok as speakers took turns blasting the government. The participants chanted slogans, sang and danced to nationalist songs.

"From a heart of a Thai person, we've never had a prime minister who's so weak," said Tatchakorn Srisuwan, 47, a guide from Surat Thani province. "We don't want to invade anyone, but we want to say that we are Thai and we want to protect Thailand's sovereignty."

There were many familiar faces from a conservative, pro-royalist group known as Yellow Shirts. They

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 35 of 61

are longtime foes of Paetongtarn's father, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who reportedly has a close relationship with Hun Sen and who was toppled in a military coup in 2006. Rallies organized by Yellow Shirts also helped oust the elected government of Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, in a 2014 coup.

Hun Sen responds

Hun Sen on Saturday said the border action by the Thai army was a serious violation of Cambodia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, despite the country's good will in attempting to resolve the border issue.

"This poor Cambodia has suffered from foreign invasion, war and genocide, been surrounded and isolated and insulted in the past, but now Cambodia has risen on an equal face with other countries," Hun Sen told an audience of thousands at the 74th anniversary celebration of the founding of his long-ruling Cambodian People's Party in the capital, Phnom Penh.

There is a long history of territorial disputes between the countries. Thailand is still rattled by a 1962 International Court of Justice ruling that awarded Cambodia the disputed territory where the historic Preah Vihear temple stands. There were sporadic though serious clashes there in 2011. The ruling from the U.N. court was reaffirmed in 2013, when Yingluck was prime minister.

Political fracture and investigations

The scandal has broken Paetongtarn's fragile coalition government, costing her Pheu Thai Party the loss of its biggest partner, Bhumjaithai Party. Its departure left the 10-party coalition with 255 seats, just above the majority of the 500-seat house.

Paetongtarn also faces other investigations that could lead to her removal from office.

Sarote Phuengrampan, secretary-general of the Office of the National Anti-Corruption Commission, said Wednesday that his agency is investigating Paetongtarn for a serious breach of ethics over the Hun Sen phone call. He did not give a possible timeline for a decision.

Reports said the Constitutional Court could decide as early as next week whether it will take a petition requesting Paetongtarn's removal due to the phone call, enabling the court to suspend her from duty pending an investigation. The prime minister said Tuesday she is not worried and is ready to give evidence to support her case.

"It was clear from the phone call that I had nothing to gain from it, and I also didn't cause any damage to the country," she said.

The court last year removed her predecessor from Pheu Thai over a breach of ethics. Thailand's courts, especially the Constitutional Court, are considered a bulwark of the country's royalist establishment, which has used them and nominally independent state agencies such as the Election Commission to cripple or sink political opponents.

Netanyahu denounces report that Israeli soldiers have orders to shoot at Palestinians seeking aid

By JULIA FRANKEL, FATMA KHALED and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Israel Katz emphatically rejected a report in the left-leaning Israeli daily Haaretz on Friday, which claimed Israeli soldiers were ordered to shoot at Palestinians approaching aid sites inside Gaza. They called the report's findings "malicious falsehoods designed to defame" the military.

More than 500 Palestinians have been killed and hundreds more wounded while seeking food since the newly formed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation began distributing aid in the territory about a month ago, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

Palestinian witnesses say Israeli troops have opened fire at crowds on the roads heading toward the sites. Reacting to the Haaretz piece, Israel's military confirmed that it was investigating incidents in which civilians had been harmed while approaching the sites. It rejected the article's allegations "of deliberate fire toward civilians."

The foundation, which is backed by an American private contractor, has been distributing food boxes at

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 36 of 61

four locations, mainly in the far south of Gaza, for the past month.

"GHF is not aware of any of these incidents but these allegations are too grave to ignore and we therefore call on Israel to investigate them and transparently publish the results in a timely manner," the group said in a social media post.

Palestinians trying to find food have frequently encountered chaos and violence on their way to and on arrival at the aid sites. Tens of thousands are desperate for food after Israel imposed a 2 1/2 month siege on Gaza, blocking all food, water and medicine from entering the territory pending the setup of the GHF sites.

The bodies of eight people who died Friday had come to Shifa Hospital from a GHF site in Netzarim, although it was not immediately clear how they died, Dr. Mohamed Abu Selmyiha, the hospital's director, told The Associated Press. A GHF spokesperson challenged the report, saying they did not know of any incidents at or near their sites Friday.

Twenty other bodies his hospital received Friday came from airstrikes across north Gaza, he said.

Thousands of Palestinians walk for hours to reach the hubs, moving through Israeli military zones where witnesses say Israeli troops regularly open fire with heavy barrages to control the crowds. The Israeli military says it has only fired warning shots.

Mohammad Fawzi, a displaced man from Rafah, told the AP that he was only able to get empty boxes, not food, from the aid site in the Shakoush area in Rafah when he trekked there early Thursday morning.

"We've been shot at since 6 a.m. up until 10 a.m. just to get aid and only some people were able to receive it. There are martyrs and injured people. The situation is difficult," he said.

The group Doctors Without Borders on Friday condemned the distribution system as "a slaughter masquerading as humanitarian aid" and called for it to be immediately shut down.

More than 6,000 people have been killed and more than 20,000 injured in Gaza since the ceasefire collapsed on March 18. Since the war began, more than 56,000 people have been killed and 132,000 injured, according to the health ministry.

The Gaza Health Ministry doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants, but has said that women and children make up more than half the 56,000 dead. Israel says it only targets militants and blames civilian deaths on Hamas, accusing the militants of hiding among civilians, because they operate in populated areas.

The Israel-Hamas war started following the Hamas-led attack in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, when some 1,200 people were killed and around 250 taken hostage. About 50 of them still remain in captivity in Gaza.

The latest deaths include six people killed and 10 wounded in Israeli strikes on a group of citizens near the Martyrs Roundabout in the Bureij Camp in central Gaza Strip, officials at Awda Hospital in Nuseirat said Friday.

The United Nations chief meanwhile urged leaders to show "political courage" and agree to a ceasefire like the one forged between Israel and Iran.

Secretary-General António Guterres also urged a return to the U.N.'s long-tested distribution system for aid in Gaza, where he said Israeli military operations have created "a humanitarian crisis of horrific proportions.."

"The search for food must never be a death sentence," Guterres stressed to U.N. reporters Friday.

Islanders' No. 1 pick Matthew Schaefer pays tribute to late mother with a kiss and a promise

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — After Matthew Schaefer pulled the blue-and-orange sweater over his head at the NHL draft, his eyes already glistening with tears, he glanced down at his left shoulder and saw a pink ribbon.

The symbol of breast cancer awareness was the New York Islanders' tribute to his mother, Jennifer, who

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 37 of 61

died of the disease just 16 months ago.

The No. 1 pick kissed the ribbon and modestly pointed to the sky, paying a poignant tribute to the woman who raised this boy into the man he'll soon become — and who will accompany him on every step of his bright hockey future.

The Islanders selected the gifted 17-year-old defenseman first overall Friday night, kicking off an NHL draft with a beautiful moment felt across the breadth of the sport.

"I appreciate you taking a chance on me," Schaefer said in a video conference call with the Islanders' front office. "I promise I won't disappoint, but especially I just want to say to my mom and all my family and friends, thanks for everything."

High-scoring forward Michael Misa went second overall to the San Jose Sharks, and the Chicago Blackhawks took Swedish forward Anton Frondell third at the Peacock Theater in downtown Los Angeles.

The Islanders maneuvered their way into three picks in the top 17, but they surprised nobody by using their first No. 1 selection since 2009 on Schaefer. The 6-foot-2 blueliner from Hamilton, Ontario, with exceptional puck-moving ability and strong defensive skills spent the past two seasons with the Ontario Hockey League's Erie Otters, growing into an irresistible choice for the top pick.

Schaefer persevered through tragedy to reach this moment. Along with the loss of his mother, he also endured the recent deaths of the Otters' owner, Jim Waters, and the mother of his billet family.

The Islanders added the ribbon patch to the ceremonial jersey specifically for Schaefer, along with his mother's initials on the sweater collar.

"Seeing the ribbon on my jersey, and I saw a picture, it has J.S. on my back here," Schaefer said. "You can see just how high-class the organization is. It really means a lot. I wish my mom could be here today. Obviously, she's with me here in spirit. ... Cancer sucks, and it's not fun. She didn't feel the best, but she was always the happiest in the family. She would do anything for us."

Schaefer scored 22 points while playing in only 17 games last season before breaking his collarbone in December. His acumen on both ends of the ice still propelled him to the top of nearly all draft boards.

Schaefer is just the fifth defenseman picked No. 1 overall in the NHL draft since 2000, and the first since Owen Power went to Buffalo in 2021. Schaefer also is the second Erie product to go No. 1, joining Connor McDavid in 2015.

"First and foremost, we drafted him because he's an unbelievable hockey player," Isles general manager Mathieu Darche said. "Obviously, the human being is exceptional. (For) a 17-year-old to have that resilience, maturity with everything that he's gone through is beyond impressive, honestly. I haven't met many 17-year-old kids that act like him. But at the end of the day, we're drafting him because he's a hell of a hockey player."

Schaefer got two new teammates when the Islanders used the 16th pick on Swedish forward Victor Eklund and nabbed defenseman Kashawn Aitcheson with the 17th selection.

Both Pennsylvania teams also were busy in Los Angeles. The Philadelphia Flyers grabbed forward Porter Martone sixth overall before trading up for the 12th selection to get forward Jack Nesbitt, while the Pittsburgh Penguins maneuvered up and down the draft to control three picks in the top 24, swinging two trades while drafting forwards Benjamin Kindel, Bill Zonnon and William Horcoff.

Misa tore up the OHL last season as the captain of the Saginaw Spirit, scoring 62 goals and 134 points in just 65 games. While wearing a teal jersey for the first time, he repeated his desire to play in the NHL next season if he can crack the roster of a struggling Sharks organization that chose Will Smith fourth overall in 2023 and got center Macklin Celebrini with the first overall pick a year ago.

"He's an ultra-competitive kid who's been playing up a level, up a birth year his whole life," Sharks general manager Mike Grier said about Misa. "He wants to be the best. He wants to play against the best, so I'm sure this is what he wants to do, but you know we're not going to hand him anything. He's got to come into training camp and try and take a job."

Frondell excelled as a 17-year-old forward last season with Djurgården in Sweden's second division, showing off a two-way game that allowed him to push Misa on some draft boards. At 6-2, he could provide a large complement to Connor Bedard.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 38 of 61

Fronnell is the eighth Swedish player to be a top-three selection, joining elite company including Victor Hedman, Mats Sundin and the Sedin twins.

Center Caleb Desnoyers went fourth to the Utah Mammoth, who moved up 10 spots in the draft lottery.

The Nashville Predators chose physical forward Brady Martin with the fifth pick before trading up for the 21st selection to get Kitchener defenseman Cameron Reid. Martin skipped the draft, staying home on his family farm in Ontario.

Fans of the host Los Angeles Kings inside the theater got fired up for their club to make the 24th selection — which the Kings promptly traded to Pittsburgh for the 31st and 59th selections, prompting groans from the crowd. Los Angeles eventually chose defenseman Henry Brzustewicz from the Memorial Cup champion London Knights in general manager Ken Holland's first selection for his new team.

The Penguins created the majority of the surprises in the first round, first by choosing Calgary Hitmen center Kindel with the 11th pick — much higher than many prognosticators expected.

Pittsburgh then traded the 12th pick, which originally belonged to the New York Rangers, to Philadelphia for the 22nd and 31st picks. The Flyers wanted the 6-foot-4 Nesbitt, a fast-rising center from the OHL's Windsor Spitfires last season.

The Penguins also gave a second-round pick to the Kings and swapped first-rounders so they could move up for Horcoff — the son of NHL veteran Shawn Horcoff — with the 24th pick.

The Anaheim Ducks took a chance on forward Roger McQueen with the 10th selection. The 6-foot-5 McQueen is widely thought to have enough talent to become an elite center, but the Saskatchewan native has been slowed by a back injury that scared off some teams.

Two goalies were chosen in the first round for the first time since 2021 and only the third time in 13 years. Columbus grabbed Russia's Pyotr Andreyanov with the 20th pick, making him the highest-picked European goalie in fourth years, while San Jose added goalie Joshua Ravensbergen with the 30th selection.

The Boston Bruins used the seventh overall pick on Boston College center James Hagens, the consensus top prospect for this draft a year ago.

Hagens, a Long Island native coveted by many Islanders fans, slid down the board just enough to reach the Bruins, whose pick was announced by a video of Adam Sandler in character as Happy Gilmore, complete with his signature Bruins jersey.

"I'm so excited to be back in Boston, and to have Adam Sandler make the pick, that was special," said Hagens, who cites "Happy Gilmore" as his favorite movie. "I love to win, and I'm really glad that I'm in Boston."

The Islanders won the lottery to pick first in a draft that is packed with talent — while missing a few staples of recent drafts.

There was no prohibitive lock of a No. 1 pick in this field, unlike the past two drafts, although Schaefer clearly came out on top.

The draft also lacked the centralized structure that has long been a staple of this annual exercise. The 32 teams' various executives are mostly at home, not strewn across the draft floor. The majority of the picks were taken to a video room just behind the stage to exchange televised pleasantries with their new front offices through video conferencing.

While reviews of the new format seemed largely negative from television viewers and fans, many hockey executives praised the format afterward.

Sudan's military accepts UN proposal of a weeklong ceasefire in El Fasher for aid distribution

CAIRO (AP) — Sudan's military agreed to a proposal from the United Nations for a weeklong ceasefire in El Fasher to facilitate U.N. aid efforts to the area, the army said Friday.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres called Sudanese military leader Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan and asked him for the humanitarian truce in El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur province, to allow aid delivery.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 39 of 61

Burhan agreed to the proposal and stressed the importance of implementing relevant U.N. Security Council resolutions, but it's unknown whether the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces would agree and comply with the ceasefire.

"We are making contacts with both sides with that objective, and that was the fundamental reason for that phone contact. We have a dramatic situation in El Fasher," Guterres told reporters on Friday.

No further details were revealed about the specifics of the ceasefire, including when it could go into effect.

Sudan plunged into war in April 2023 when simmering tensions between the Sudanese army and the rival RSF escalated into battles in the capital, Khartoum, and spread across the country, killing more than 20,000 people.

The war has also driven more than 14 million people from their homes and pushed parts of the country into famine. UNICEF said earlier this year that an estimated 61,800 children have been internally displaced since the war began.

Guterres said on Friday that a humanitarian truce is needed for effective aid distribution, and it must be agreed upon several days in advance to prepare for a large-scale delivery in the El Fasher area, which has seen repeated waves of violence recently.

El-Fasher, more than 800 kilometers (500 miles) southwest of Khartoum, is under the control of the military. The RSF has been trying to capture El Fasher for a year to solidify its control over the entire Darfur region. The paramilitary's attempts included launching repeated attacks on the city and two major famine-stricken displacement camps on its outskirts.

Mudslide along West Virginia highway strands thousands for more than 8 hours

By JOHN RABY Associated Press

Thousands of motorists were stranded for more than eight hours along a section of rural interstate highway in southern West Virginia early Friday after a mudslide caused by heavy rains blocked a storm drain the previous night, flooding the northbound lanes.

Traffic backed up for 12 miles (about 19 kilometers) along the West Virginia Turnpike about 20 miles (32 kilometers) south of Charleston, the state capital. Traffic was not rerouted, and many motorists along the mountainous route had no choice but to remain in their vehicles overnight.

Motorists posted on social media that they had no information on why the standstill occurred, that they had nothing to drink in their vehicles or that their children needed to use the bathroom.

Nicky Walters said in a telephone interview that she felt fortunate while she was stuck because she is healthy, did not need medicine and had nobody she was responsible for caring for.

"But I felt desperate because I knew that other people needed help," said Walters, who became stranded while returning to Charleston from a pro wrestling event in Mount Hope. "People needed, at minimum, water bottles passed out and some snacks, much less information. They needed any lifeline to the outside world, and there was none."

Chuck Smith, executive director of the West Virginia Parkways Authority, said one lane reopened Friday morning but traffic remained at a standstill for hours.

"Traffic should have been detoured to allow drivers an alternate route around the mudslide," Smith said in a statement. "The Parkways Authority takes full responsibility for the failure to reroute traffic, and would like to assure the public that this will never happen again."

No injuries were reported.

By the time Brittany Lemon and her family finally got home to Parkersburg, 24 hours had passed since they began returning from their vacation in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

In a video posted to Facebook, Lemon said she had no water and her children needed to use the bathroom. They were able to get an hour's sleep while stuck on the highway.

"Definitely next year when I go back, I'll be prepared for an emergency in the vehicle," she said.

Mitch Carmichael, a former cabinet secretary of the Department of Economic Development, said on

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 40 of 61

Facebook that he was on the turnpike "for hours with no relevant or timely info as to when issue will be cleared."

He called it "incredibly unprofessional" for the public to be left in the dark and said it gives West Virginia "a terrible image."

Gov. Patrick Morrisey said in a statement that the shutdown "was completely unacceptable. I have directed the Parkways Authority to immediately conduct an investigation and revise its procedures as necessary as a result of this incident."

Shutdowns of the turnpike have happened before. In 2022 a tractor trailer crashed and spilled a chemical along the turnpike, closing all lanes for most of the day.

Justice Department abruptly fires 3 prosecutors involved in Jan. 6 criminal cases, AP sources say

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department on Friday fired at least three prosecutors involved in U.S. Capitol riot criminal cases, the latest moves by the Trump administration targeting attorneys connected to the massive prosecution of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack, according to two people familiar with the matter.

Those dismissed include two attorneys who worked as supervisors overseeing the Jan. 6 prosecutions in the U.S. attorney's office in Washington as well as a line attorney who prosecuted cases stemming from the Capitol attack, the people said. They spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss personnel matters.

A letter that was received by one of the prosecutors was signed by Attorney General Pam Bondi. The letter did not provide a reason for their removal, effective immediately, citing only "Article II of the United States Constitution and the laws of the United States," according to a copy seen by The Associated Press.

A Justice Department spokesperson declined to comment Friday evening.

The terminations marked yet another escalation of norm-shattering moves that have raised alarm over the Trump administration's disregard for civil service protections for career lawyers and the erosion of the Justice Department's independence from the White House. Top leaders at the Justice Department have also fired employees who worked on the prosecutions against Trump and demoted a slew of career supervisors in what has been seen as an effort to purge the agency of lawyers seen as insufficiently loyal.

Trump's sweeping pardons of the Jan. 6 rioters have led to worries about actions being taken against attorneys involved in the massive prosecution of the more than 1,500 Trump supporters who stormed the Capitol as lawmakers met to certify President Joe Biden's election victory. Trump pardoned or commuted the sentences of all of them on his first day back in the White House, releasing from prison people convicted of seditious conspiracy and violent assaults on police.

During his time as interim U.S. attorney in Washington, Ed Martin in February demoted several prosecutors involved in the Jan. 6 cases, including the attorney who served as chief of the Capitol Siege Section. Others demoted include two lawyers who helped secure seditious conspiracy convictions against Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes and former Proud Boys national chairman Enrique Tarrio.

In January, then-acting Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove ordered the firings of about two dozen prosecutors who had been hired for temporary assignments to support the Jan. 6 cases, but were moved into permanent roles after Trump's presidential win in November. Bove said he would not "tolerate subversive personnel actions by the previous administration."

Sean 'Diddy' Combs' lawyer mocks sex trafficking case in closing, calls charges 'badly exaggerated'

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Sean "Diddy" Combs' lawyer implored a jury on Friday to acquit the hip-hop mogul, arguing overzealous federal prosecutors twisted his drug use and swinger lifestyle into a sex trafficking and racketeering case that could put him behind bars for life.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 41 of 61

"He is none of these things. He is innocent," defense attorney Marc Agnifilo said, glancing at Combs during a four-hour closing argument. "He sits there innocent. Return him to his family who have been waiting for him."

Jurors are expected to begin deliberating Monday.

Agnifilo repeatedly mocked the government's case, peppering his presentation with folksy quips and bawdy observations. He said prosecutors "badly exaggerated" the charges, and he belittled federal agents who seized baby oil and lubricant in raids last year at Combs' Los Angeles and Miami-area homes.

"Way to go, fellas," the defense lawyer said.

Agnifilo accused the government of targeting Combs, irritating prosecutors and the judge, and questioned why no one else was charged in what the prosecution alleges was a racketeering conspiracy involving Combs' personal assistants, bodyguards and other employees. Judge Arun Subramanian instructed jurors not to consider why or how the government obtained an indictment.

In a rebuttal, Assistant U.S. Attorney Maurene Comey said Agnifilo spent "a whole lot of energy" trying to distract from Combs' "inexcusable criminal behavior."

"Make no mistake," Comey told jurors, "this trial was about how in Sean Combs' world, 'no' was never an option."

Agnifilo called Combs' prosecution a "fake trial" and ridiculed the notion that the "I'll Be Missing You" singer engaged in racketeering.

"Are you kidding me?" Agnifilo asked. "Did any witness get on that witness stand and say, 'Yes, I was part of a racketeering enterprise — I engaged in racketeering?'" No, those accusations were a figment of the prosecution's imagination, he argued.

Combs, in a sweater and khakis, watched Agnifilo with rapt attention after looking down and slouching during Thursday's prosecution closing. He didn't testify during the seven-week trial, and his lawyers called no witnesses of their own.

Combs' family, including six of his children and his mother, sat behind him. When the day was finished, Combs hugged one of his lawyers and smiled as he conversed with others. As the jury filed out of the courtroom for the last time this week, Combs watched them, but the jurors didn't look his way.

Combs' ex-girlfriends R&B singer Cassie and a woman testifying under the pseudonym "Jane" told jurors that Combs coerced them into participating in "freak-offs" or "hotel nights" — drug-fueled sex marathons with male sex workers while Combs watched, directed, masturbated and sometimes filmed them.

Agnifilo argued prosecutors had invaded Combs' most intimate personal affairs, warning jurors: "Where's the crime scene? The crime scene is your private sex life."

He also mocked the prosecution's assertion that Combs and his underlings engaged in hundreds of racketeering acts, as well as the government's suggestion that many of the sex marathons at the heart of the case were crimes.

If that's so, he said, "we need a bigger roll of crime scene tape," a reference to a famous line from the movie "Jaws."

Agnifilo argued there's another factor at play in the allegations that women have lobbed against him: the prospect of draining him of his wealth through lawsuits.

"This isn't about a crime. This is about money. It's about money," Agnifilo said.

Cassie, whose real name is Casandra Ventura, sued Combs in November 2023 over abuse allegations. He settled with her the next day for \$20 million, but the allegations prompted federal law enforcement to open the criminal investigation that led to his arrest. Dozens of other lawsuits followed.

"If you had to pick a winner in this whole thing, it's hard not to pick Cassie," Agnifilo said.

Agnifilo reiterated that the defense "owns" the fact that Combs was violent but argued that behavior does not justify the grave charges against him.

Combs and Cassie had a "loving, beautiful relationship," albeit a "complicated" one, Agnifilo said.

"If racketeering conspiracy had an opposite, it would be their relationship," Agnifilo said. "They were truly, deeply in love with each other, for real."

Echoing prosecutor Christy Slavik's closing argument on Thursday, Agnifilo showed jurors part of the now-infamous security camera footage of Combs attacking Cassie at a Los Angeles hotel in 2016.

Agnifilo acknowledged that the video clearly shows domestic violence, but he disputed the prosecution's theory that the assault was evidence of sex trafficking by force. He insisted Combs may have been angry not that Cassie was trying to flee a "freak-off," but that she was taking his cellphone.

In her rebuttal, Comey said: "Being a domestic abuser is not a defense to sex trafficking."

Senate rejects effort to restrain Trump on Iran as GOP backs his strikes on nuclear sites

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic efforts in the Senate to prevent President Donald Trump from further escalating with Iran fell short Friday, with Republicans blocking a resolution that marked Congress' first attempt to reassert its war powers following U.S. strikes on Iranian nuclear sites.

The resolution, authored by Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia, aimed to affirm that Trump should seek authorization from Congress before launching more military action against Iran. Asked Friday if he would bomb Iranian nuclear sites again if he deemed necessary, Trump said, "Sure, without question."

The measure was defeated in a 53-47 vote in the Republican-held Senate. One Democrat, Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania, joined Republicans in opposition, while Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky was the only Republican to vote in favor.

Most Republicans have said Iran posed an imminent threat that required decisive action from Trump, and they backed his decision to bomb three Iranian nuclear sites last weekend without seeking congressional approval.

"Of course, we can debate the scope and strategy of our military engagements," said Sen. Bill Hagerty, R-Tenn. "But we must not shackle our president in the middle of a crisis when lives are on the line."

Democrats cast doubt on that justification, arguing the president should have come to Congress first. They also said the president did not update them adequately, with Congress' first briefings taking place Thursday.

"The idea is this: We shouldn't send our sons and daughters into war unless there's a political consensus that this is a good idea, this is a national interest," Kaine said in a Thursday interview with The Associated Press. The resolution, Kaine said, wasn't aimed at restricting the president's ability to defend against a threat, but that "if it's offense, let's really make sure we're making the right decision."

In a statement following Friday's vote, Kaine said he was "disappointed that many of my colleagues are not willing to stand up and say Congress" should be a part of a decision to go to war.

Democrats' argument for backing the resolution centered on the War Powers Resolution, passed in the early 1970s, which requires the president "in every possible instance" to "consult with Congress before introducing United States Armed Forces."

Speaking on the Senate floor ahead of Friday's vote, Paul said he would back the resolution, saying that "despite the tactical success of our strikes, they may end up proving to be a strategic failure."

"It is unclear if this intervention will fully curtail Iran's nuclear aspirations," said Paul.

Trump is just the latest in a line of presidents to test the limits of the resolution — though he's done so at a time when he's often bristling at the nation's checks and balances.

Trump on Monday sent a letter to Congress — as required by the War Powers Resolution — that said strikes on Iran over the weekend were "limited in scope and purpose" and "designed to minimize casualties, deter future attacks and limit the risk of escalation."

But following classified briefings with top White House officials this week, some lawmakers remain skeptical about how imminent the threat truly was.

"There was no imminent threat to the United States," said Rep. Jim Himes, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, after Friday's classified briefings.

"There's always an Iranian threat to the world. But, I have not seen anything to suggest that the threat

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 43 of 61

from the Iranians was radically different last Saturday than it was two Saturdays ago," Himes said.

Despite Democratic skepticism, nearly all Republicans applauded Trump's decision to strike Iran. And for GOP senators, supporting the resolution would have meant rebuking the president at the same time they're working to pass his major legislative package.

Kaine proposed a similar resolution in 2020 aimed at limiting Trump's authority to launch military operations against Iran. Among the eight Republicans who joined Democrats in approving the resolution was Indiana Sen. Todd Young.

After Thursday's classified briefing for the Senate, Young said he was "confident that Iran was prepared to pose a significant threat" and that, given Trump's stated goal of no further escalation, "I do not believe this resolution is necessary at this time."

"Should the Administration's posture change or events dictate the consideration of additional American military action, Congress should be consulted so we can best support those efforts and weigh in on behalf of our constituents," Young said in a statement.

Trump has said that a ceasefire between Israel and Iran is now in place. But he and Ayatollah Ali Khomeini have verbally sparred in recent days, with the ayatollah warning the U.S. not to launch future strikes on Iran.

White House officials have said they expect to restart talks soon with Iran, though nothing has been scheduled.

Supreme Court upholds Texas law aimed at blocking kids from seeing pornography online

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Friday upheld a Texas law aimed at blocking children from seeing online pornography.

Nearly half of the states have passed similar laws requiring adult website users to verify their ages to access pornographic material. The laws come as smartphones and other devices make it easier to access online porn, including hardcore obscene material.

The court split along ideological lines in the 6-3 ruling. It's a loss for an adult-entertainment industry trade group called the Free Speech Coalition, which challenged the Texas law.

The majority opinion, authored by Justice Clarence Thomas, found the measure didn't seriously restrict adults' free-speech rights. "Adults have the right to access speech obscene only to minors ... but adults have no First Amendment right to avoid age verification," he wrote.

In a dissent, Justice Elena Kagan wrote that the court should have used a higher legal standard in weighing whether the law creates free-speech problems for adults. "I would demand Texas show more, to ensure it is not undervaluing the interest in free expression," she wrote.

Pornhub, one of the world's busiest websites, has stopped operating in several states, including Texas, citing the technical and privacy hurdles in complying with the laws.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, a Republican, celebrated the ruling. "Companies have no right to expose children to pornography and must institute reasonable age verification measures," he said. The decision could pave the way for more states to adopt similar laws as one of several steps to prevent children from being exposed to pornography, the group National Center on Sexual Exploitation said.

While the Free Speech Coalition agreed that children shouldn't be seeing porn, it said the law puts an unfair free-speech burden on adults by requiring them to submit personal information that could be vulnerable to hacking or tracking.

Alison Boden, its executive director, called the ruling disastrous. She said that minors have already found ways to find sexual content online despite the law and its "massive chilling effect on adults."

The age verification requirements fall on websites that have a certain amount of sexual material, rather than search engines or social-media sites that can be used to find it.

Samir Jain, vice president of policy at the nonprofit Center for Democracy & Technology, said that age verification requirements raise serious privacy and free-expression concerns. The court's decision "overturns decades of precedent and has the potential to upend access to First Amendment-protected speech on the internet for everyone, children and adults alike."

In 1996, the Supreme Court struck down parts of a law banning explicit material viewable by kids online. A divided court also ruled against a different federal law aimed at stopping kids from being exposed to porn in 2004 but said less restrictive measures like content filtering are constitutional.

Texas argues that technology has improved significantly in the last 20 years, allowing online platforms to easily check users' ages with a quick picture. Those requirements are more like ID checks at brick-and-mortar adult stores that were upheld by the Supreme Court in the 1960s, the state said.

District courts initially blocked laws in Indiana and Tennessee as well as Texas, but appeals courts reversed the decisions and let the laws take effect.

"There has to be a gatekeeper somewhere when it comes to exposure," said Rania Mankarious, a mother of three and CEO of Crime Stoppers of Houston. "While nothing is full proof, we're thankful to see something be done."

California Gov. Gavin Newsom sues Fox News over alleged defamation in story about call with Trump

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — California Gov. Gavin Newsom sued Fox News on Friday over alleged defamation, saying the network knowingly aired false information about a phone call he had with President Donald Trump around the time the National Guard was sent Los Angeles.

The lawsuit alleges Fox News anchor Jesse Watters edited out key information from a clip of Trump talking about calling Newsom, then used the edited video to assert that Newsom had lied about the two talking.

Newsom is asking for \$787 million in punitive damages in the lawsuit filed in Delaware, where Fox is incorporated.

That's the same amount Fox agreed to pay in 2023 to settle a defamation lawsuit by Dominion Voting Systems. The company said Fox repeatedly aired false allegations that its equipment had switched votes from Donald Trump to Joe Biden during the 2020 election, and the discovery process revealed the network's efforts not to alienate conservatives in its audience in the wake of Biden's victory.

"If Fox News wants to lie to the American people on Donald Trump's behalf, it should face consequences — just like it did in the Dominion case," Newsom said in a statement. "I believe the American people should be able to trust the information they receive from a major news outlet."

He asked a judge to order Fox to stop broadcasting "the false, deceptive, and fraudulent video and accompanying statements" that Newsom said falsely say he lied about when he spoke to Trump regarding the situation in Los Angeles, where protests erupted on June 6 over Trump's immigration crackdown.

Fox News said in a statement that it would fight the lawsuit "vigorously" and looks forward to it being dismissed.

"Gov. Newsom's transparent publicity stunt is frivolous and designed to chill free speech critical of him," it said.

Newsom's suit centers on the details of the phone call with the president.

Both Newsom and the White House have said the two spoke late at night June 6 in California, which was already June 7 on the East Coast. Though the content of the call is not part of the lawsuit, Newsom has said they never discussed Trump's plan to deploy the National Guard, which he announced the next day. Trump said the deployment was necessary to protect federal buildings from people protesting increased immigration arrests.

Trump later announced that he would also deploy Marines to the area.

On June 10, when 700 Marines arrived in the Los Angeles area, Trump told reporters he had spoken to

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 45 of 61

Newsom "a day ago" about his decision to send troops. That day Newsom posted on the social platform X that there had been no call.

"There was no call. Not even a voicemail," Newsom wrote.

On the evening of June 10, Fox's Jesse Watters Primetime show played a clip of Trump's statement about his call with Newsom but removed Trump's comment that the call was "a day ago," the lawsuit said. Watters also referred to call logs another Fox News reporter posted online showing the phone call the two had on June 6.

"Why would Newsom lie and claim Trump never called him? Why would he do that?" Watters said on air, according to the lawsuit. The segment included text across the bottom of the screen that said "Gavin Lied About Trump's Call."

Newsom's suit argues that by editing the material, Fox "maliciously lied as a means to sabotage informed national discussion."

Precise details about when the call happened are important because the days when Trump deployed the Guard to Los Angeles despite Newsom's opposition "represented an unprecedented moment," Newsom's lawyers wrote in a letter to Fox demanding a retraction and on-air apology.

"History was occurring in real time. It is precisely why reporters asked President Trump the very question that prompted this matter: when did he last speak with Governor Newsom," the letter said.

The law makes it difficult to prove defamation, but some cases result in settlements and, no matter the outcome, can tie up news outlets in expensive legal fights.

Trump, particularly since taking office a second time, has been aggressive in going after news organizations he feels has wronged him.

He is in settlement talks over his lawsuit against CBS News about a "60 Minutes" interview last fall with Democratic opponent Kamala Harris.

And this week Trump's lawyers threatened to sue CNN and The New York Times over their reporting of an initial assessment of damage to Iran's nuclear program from a U.S. bombing.

The Senate is working to put Trump's big bill back on track but hurdles remain

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republicans appeared Friday to push President Donald Trump's big bill back on track after a flurry of last-minute revisions, including deep cuts to food stamps, but there's still a long way to go ahead of expected weekend votes.

Trump himself at first gave Congress some breathing room as senators race to meet his Fourth of July deadline, declaring, "It's not the end all," during a press conference at the White House. But he reversed course a short while later, insisting Republicans in the House ensure it's done by the Independence Day holiday.

"We can get it done," Trump said in a post. "It will be a wonderful Celebration for our Country."

As the party in majority power, Republicans are grinding through a punch-list of still-unsettled issues as they try to push the package to passage over unified Democratic opposition. Republicans are relying on steep cuts to health care, food stamps and green energy investments to help pay for \$3.8 trillion in tax breaks, their top priority. Any one of the roadblocks could doom the sprawling package.

The proposed Medicaid cuts, in particular, have raised stark concerns among some GOP senators worried that millions in their states will lose access to the health care program. At the same time, a tentative deal between the White House and House GOP lawmakers from New York and other high-tax districts over the size of a state and local tax deduction, called SALT, needs broader agreement.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, who sent his lawmakers home for the weekend with plans to be on call to return swiftly to Washington, said they are "very close" to finishing up.

"We would still like to meet that July 4th, self-imposed deadline," said Johnson, R-La.

Johnson and Senate Majority Leader John Thune have stayed close to the White House throughout the

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 46 of 61

process of drafting the big package, which they stress is needed to avoid a massive tax hike at the end of the year when current tax rates expire. The GOP leadership is relying on Trump to pressure holdout lawmakers to push it to passage.

"My expectation is at some point tomorrow we'll be ready to go," Thune said. He was referring to the start of what is expected to be a multi-day process of speeches and voting in the days ahead, before a final roll call vote.

The speaker made the walk across the Capitol to join Senate Republicans for lunch, where they also met with Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent over the emerging SALT deal.

But it's not a done deal yet, Bessent said afterward. He acknowledged the Senate's reaction to the latest offer was "varied."

The White House and House Republicans had narrowed on a plan to keep the SALT provision on the House-passed terms of a \$40,000 cap on deductions — but for five years, instead of 10.

The SALT deduction has been a key holdup as lawmakers from New York and other high-tax states negotiate. They want to quadruple what's now a \$10,000 cap. Senate Republicans argued that it's too generous, costing hundreds of billions of dollars for the benefit of a few lawmakers' home regions.

With their narrow majorities in the House and Senate, they need almost every lawmaker on board with the package to ensure passage. One GOP holdout, Rep. Nick LaLota of New York, says he can't support the compromise.

But other provisions were being shored up after a series of setbacks when the Senate parliamentarian advised they would not pass the chamber's strict "Byrd Rule" that largely bars policy matters from inclusion in budget bills, unless they can pass the 60-vote threshold that GOP leaders want to avoid.

The Republican proposal to shift the costs of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP, has been accepted by the Senate parliamentarian.

Sen. John Boozman of Arkansas, the chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, said provisions to make certain immigrants ineligible for food aid were also accepted.

"This paves the way for important reforms that improve efficiency and management of SNAP," he said.

But the panel's top Democrat, Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota, said her party will "keep fighting these proposals that raise grocery costs and take food away from millions of people, including seniors, children, and veterans."

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has said some 10.9 million more people will go without health care and at least 3 million fewer would qualify for food aid under the House-passed bill. CBO has not yet publicly assessed the Senate draft, which has proposed steeper reductions.

The top income earners would see about a \$12,000 tax cut under the House-passed bill, while the poorest Americans would see a \$1,600 tax hike, the CBO said.

The parliamentarian also accepted a revised proposal from the Senate Banking Committee to cut, rather than gut, the funding structure for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The entity was set up in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, but Trump has downsized the bureau and its staff.

Still, a range of GOP provisions have been found to be out of compliance with Senate rules — including shielding certain firearms silencers from taxes and creating a national school voucher program.

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said Republicans are rushing to finish the bill before the public fully knows what's in it.

"There's no good reason for Republicans to chase a silly deadline," Schumer said.

US stocks close at an all-time high just months after plunging on tariff fears

By DAMIAN J. TROISE and ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writers

U.S. stocks closed at an all-time high Friday, another milestone in the market's remarkable recovery from a springtime plunge caused by fears that the Trump administration's trade policies could harm the economy.

The S&P 500 rose 0.5%, finishing above its previous record set in February. The key measure of Wall

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 47 of 61

Street's health fell nearly 20% from February 19 through April 8.

The market's complete turnaround from its deep swoon happened in about half the time that it normally takes, said Sam Stovall, chief investment strategist at CFRA.

"Investors will breathe a sigh of relief," he said.

The Nasdaq composite gained 0.5% and set its own all-time high. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 1%.

President Donald Trump's decision Friday to halt trade talks with Canada threatened to derail Wall Street's run to a record, but the market steadied after the S&P 500 briefly turned negative.

The gains on Friday were broad, with nearly every sector within the S&P 500 rising. Nike soared 15.2% for the biggest gain in the market, despite warning of a steep hit from tariffs.

The broader market has seemingly shaken off fears about the Israel-Iran war disrupting the global supply of crude oil and sending prices higher. A ceasefire between the two nations is still in place.

The price of crude oil in the U.S. rose 0.4% to \$65.52 a barrel. Prices have fallen back to pre-conflict levels.

Investors are also monitoring potential progress on trade conflicts between the U.S. and its trading partners, specifically China. The two countries have signed a trade deal that will make it easier for American firms to obtain magnets and rare earth minerals from China that are critical to manufacturing and microchip production, U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said Friday.

China's Commerce Ministry also said that the two sides had "further confirmed the details of the framework" for their trade talks. But its statement did not explicitly mention an agreement to ensure U.S. access to rare earths, and instead said it will review and approve "eligible export applications for controlled items."

An update on inflation Friday showed prices ticked higher in May, though the rate mostly matched economists' projections.

Inflation remains a big concern for businesses and consumers. Trump's on-again-off-again tariff policy has made it difficult for companies to make financial forecasts. It has also put more pressure on consumers worried about already stubborn inflation. A long list of businesses from carmakers to retailers have warned that higher import taxes will likely hurt their revenues and profits.

The U.S. has 10% baseline tariffs on all imported goods, along with higher rates for Chinese goods and other import taxes on steel and autos. The economy and consumers have remained somewhat resilient, though analysts and economists expect to see the impact grow as import taxes continue to work their way through businesses to consumers.

"While we also would have expected to already be seeing a bit more passthrough into the inflation statistics, we still expect these impacts to show up in a more meaningful way in the next few months," said Greg Wilensky, head of U.S. fixed income and portfolio manager at Janus Henderson.

The threat of more severe tariffs continues to hang over the economy. The current pause on a round of retaliatory tariffs against a long list of nations is set to expire in July. Failure to negotiate deals or further postpone the tariffs could once again rattle investors and consumers.

The Federal Reserve is monitoring the tariff situation with a big focus on inflation. The rate of inflation has been stubbornly sitting just above the central bank's target of 2%. In a report Friday, its preferred gauge, the personal consumption expenditures index, rose to 2.3% in May. That's up from 2.2% the previous month.

The Fed cut interest rates three times in late 2024 following a historic series of rate hikes to cool inflation. The PCE was as high as 7.2% in 2022 while the more commonly used consumer price index hit 9.1%.

The Fed hasn't cut rates so far in 2025 over worries that tariffs could reignite inflation and hamper the economy. Economists still expect at least two rate cuts before the end of the year.

Bond yields held relatively steady. The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.27% from 4.24% late Thursday. The two-year Treasury yield, which more closely tracks expectations for what the Federal Reserve will do, edged up to 3.74% from late Thursday.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 32.05 points to 6,173.07. The Dow gained 432.43 points to 43,819.27, and the Nasdaq added 105.55 points to 20,273.46.

Stocks in Europe were mostly higher, while stocks in Asia finished mixed.

Supreme Court limits nationwide injunctions, but fate of Trump birthright citizenship order unclear

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A united conservative majority of the Supreme Court ruled Friday that federal judges lack the authority to grant nationwide injunctions, but the decision left unclear whether President Donald Trump's restrictions on birthright citizenship could soon take effect in parts of the country.

The outcome represented a victory for Trump, who has complained about judges throwing up obstacles to his agenda. Nationwide, or universal, injunctions had emerged as an important check on the Republican president's efforts to expand executive power and remake the government and a source of mounting frustration to him and his allies.

But the court left open the possibility that the birthright citizenship changes could remain blocked nationwide. Trump's order would deny citizenship to U.S.-born children of people who are in the country illegally or temporarily.

The cases now return to lower courts, where judges will have to decide how to tailor their orders to comply with the high court ruling, which was written by Justice Amy Coney Barrett. Enforcement of the policy can't take place for another 30 days, Barrett wrote.

Even then it's unclear whether the court's decision could produce a confusing patchwork of rules that might differ in the 22 states that sued over the Trump order and the rest of the country.

The justices agreed with the Trump administration, as well as President Joe Biden's Democratic administration before it, that judges are overreaching by issuing orders that apply to everyone instead of just the parties before the court. Judges have issued more than 40 such orders since Trump took office for a second term in January.

The administration has filed emergency appeals with the justices of many of those orders, including the ones on birthright citizenship. The court rarely hears arguments and issues major decisions on its emergency, or shadow, docket, but it did so in this case.

Federal courts, Barrett wrote, "do not exercise general oversight of the Executive Branch; they resolve cases and controversies consistent with the authority Congress has given them. When a court concludes that the Executive Branch has acted unlawfully, the answer is not for the court to exceed its power, too."

The president, speaking in the White House briefing room, said that the decision was "amazing" and a "monumental victory for the Constitution," the separation of powers and the rule of law.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York wrote on X that the decision is "an unprecedented and terrifying step toward authoritarianism, a grave danger to our democracy, and a predictable move from this extremist MAGA court."

Justice Sonia Sotomayor, writing in dissent for the three liberal justices, called the decision "nothing less than an open invitation for the government to bypass the Constitution." This is so, Sotomayor said, because the administration may be able to enforce a policy even when it has been challenged and found to be unconstitutional by a lower court.

The administration didn't even ask, as it has in other cases, for the lower-court rulings to be blocked completely, Sotomayor wrote. "To get such relief, the government would have to show that the order is likely constitutional, an impossible task," she wrote.

But the ultimate fate of the changes Trump wants to make were not before the court, Barrett wrote, just the rules that would apply as the court cases continue.

Rights groups that sued over the policy filed new court documents following the high court ruling, taking up a suggestion from Justice Brett Kavanaugh that judges still may be able to reach anyone potentially affected by the birthright citizenship order by declaring them part of "putative nationwide class." Kavanaugh was part of the court majority on Friday but wrote a separate concurring opinion.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 49 of 61

States that also challenged the policy in court said they would try to show that the only way to effectively protect their interests was through a nationwide hold.

"We have every expectation we absolutely will be successful in keeping the 14th Amendment as the law of the land and of course birthright citizenship as well," said Attorney General Andrea Campbell of Massachusetts.

Birthright citizenship automatically makes anyone born in the United States an American citizen, including children born to mothers in the country illegally. The right was enshrined soon after the Civil War in the Constitution's 14th Amendment.

In a notable Supreme Court decision from 1898, *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, the court held that the only children who did not automatically receive U.S. citizenship upon being born on U.S. soil were the children of diplomats, who have allegiance to another government; enemies present in the U.S. during hostile occupation; those born on foreign ships; and those born to members of sovereign Native American tribes.

The U.S. is among about 30 countries where birthright citizenship — the principle of *jus soli* or "right of the soil" — is applied. Most are in the Americas, and Canada and Mexico are among them.

Trump and his supporters have argued that there should be tougher standards for becoming an American citizen, which he called "a priceless and profound gift" in the executive order he signed on his first day in office.

The Trump administration has asserted that children of noncitizens are not "subject to the jurisdiction" of the United States, a phrase used in the amendment, and therefore are not entitled to citizenship.

But states, immigrants and rights groups that have sued to block the executive order have accused the administration of trying to unsettle the broader understanding of birthright citizenship that has been accepted since the amendment's adoption.

Judges have uniformly ruled against the administration.

The Justice Department had argued that individual judges lack the power to give nationwide effect to their rulings.

The Trump administration instead wanted the justices to allow Trump's plan to go into effect for everyone except the handful of people and groups that sued. Failing that, the administration argued that the plan could remain blocked for now in the 22 states that sued. New Hampshire is covered by a separate order that is not at issue in this case.

The justices also agreed that the administration may make public announcements about how it plans to carry out the policy if it eventually is allowed to take effect.

Supreme Court says Maryland parents can pull their kids from public school lessons using LGBTQ books

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court ruled on Friday that Maryland parents who have religious objections can pull their children from public school lessons using LGBTQ storybooks.

With the six conservative justices in the majority, the court reversed lower-court rulings in favor of the Montgomery County school system in suburban Washington. The high court ruled that the schools likely could not require elementary school children to sit through lessons involving the books if parents expressed religious objections to the material.

The lack of an "opt-out," Justice Samuel Alito wrote for the court, "places an unconstitutional burden on the parents' rights to the free exercise of their religion."

Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote in dissent for the three liberal justices that exposure to different views in a multicultural society is a critical feature of public schools. "Yet it will become a mere memory if children must be insulated from exposure to ideas and concepts that may conflict with their parents' religious beliefs," Sotomayor wrote. "Today's ruling ushers in that new reality."

The decision was not a final ruling in the case, but the justices strongly suggested that the parents will

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 50 of 61

win in the end. The court ruled that policies like the one at issue in the case are subjected to the strictest level of review, nearly always dooming them.

The school district introduced the storybooks, including "Prince & Knight" and "Uncle Bobby's Wedding," in 2022 as part of an effort to better reflect the district's diversity. In "Uncle Bobby's Wedding," a niece worries that her uncle won't have as much time for her after he gets married to another man.

The justices have repeatedly endorsed claims of religious discrimination in recent years, and the case is among several religious-rights cases at the court this term. The decision also comes amid increases in recent years in books being banned from public school and public libraries.

Many of the removals were organized by Moms for Liberty and other conservative organizations that advocate for more parental input over what books are available to students. Soon after President Donald Trump, a Republican, took office in January, the Education Department called the book bans a "hoax" and dismissed 11 complaints that had been filed under Trump's predecessor, President Joe Biden, a Democrat.

The writers' group PEN America said in a court filing in the Maryland case that the objecting parents wanted "a constitutionally suspect book ban by another name." PEN America reported more than 10,000 books were banned in the last school year.

"By allowing parents to pull their children out of classrooms when they object to particular content, the justices are laying the foundation for a new frontier in the assault on books of all kinds in schools," said Elly Brinkley, a lawyer for the group's U.S. Free Expression Programs. "In practice, opt outs for religious objections will chill what is taught in schools and usher in a more narrow orthodoxy as fear of offending any ideology or sensibility takes hold."

Lawyer Eric Baxter, who represented the Maryland parents at the Supreme Court, said the decision was a "historic victory for parental rights."

"Kids shouldn't be forced into conversations about drag queens, pride parades, or gender transitions without their parents' permission," Baxter said.

Parents initially had been allowed to opt their children out of the lessons for religious and other reasons, but the school board reversed course a year later, prompting protests and eventually a lawsuit.

At arguments in April, a lawyer for the school district told the justices that the "opt outs" had become disruptive. Sex education is the only area of instruction in Montgomery schools that students can be excused from, lawyer Alan Schoenfeld said.

The case hit unusually close to home, as three justices live in the county, though they didn't send their children to public schools.

Trump says Iran must open itself to inspection to verify it doesn't restart its nuclear program

By DAVID RISING and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump said on Friday that he expects Iran to open itself to international inspection to verify that it doesn't restart its nuclear program.

Asked during a White House news conference if he would demand during expected talks with Iran that the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N. nuclear watchdog, or some other organization be authorized to conduct inspections, Trump responded that the Islamic Republic would have to cooperate with the group "or somebody that we respect, including ourselves."

Earlier, Iran's top diplomat said that the possibility of new negotiations with the United States on his country's nuclear program has been "complicated" by the American attack on three of the sites, which he conceded caused "serious damage."

The U.S. was one of the parties to the 2015 nuclear deal in which Iran agreed to limits on its uranium enrichment program in exchange for sanctions relief and other benefits.

Nuclear talks

That deal unraveled after Trump unilaterally pulled out the U.S. during his first term. Trump has sug-

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 51 of 61

gested he's interested in new talks with Iran and said the two sides would meet next week.

In an interview on Iranian state television broadcast late Thursday, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi left open the possibility that his country would again enter talks on its nuclear program, but suggested it wouldn't be anytime soon.

"No agreement has been made for resuming the negotiations," he said. "No time has been set, no promise has been made, and we haven't even talked about restarting the talks."

The American decision to intervene militarily "made it more complicated and more difficult" for talks on Iran's nuclear program, Araghchi said.

Friday prayers

Many imams, during Friday prayers, stressed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's message from Thursday that the war had been a victory for Iran.

Cleric Hamzeh Khalili, who is also the deputy chief justice of Iran, vowed during a prayer service in Tehran that the courts would prosecute people accused of spying for Israel "in a special way."

During the war with Israel, Iran hanged several people whom it already had in custody on espionage charges, sparking fears from activists that it could conduct a wave of executions after the conflict ended. Authorities reportedly have detained dozens in various cities on the charge of cooperating with Israel.

Israel relentlessly attacked Iran beginning on June 13, targeting its nuclear sites, defense systems, high-ranking military officials and atomic scientists.

In 12 days of strikes, Israel said that it killed around 30 Iranian commanders and 11 nuclear scientists, while hitting eight nuclear-related facilities and more than 720 military infrastructure sites. More than 1,000 people were killed, including at least 417 civilians, according to the Washington-based Human Rights Activists group.

Iran fired more than 550 ballistic missiles at Israel, most of which were intercepted, but those that got through caused damage in many areas and killed 28 people.

Israeli military spokesperson Brig. Gen Effie Defrin said Friday that in some areas, it had exceeded its operational goals, but needed to remain vigilant.

"We are under no illusion, the enemy has not changed its intentions," he said.

The U.S. stepped in on Sunday to hit three of Iran's nuclear sites with bunker busters dropped by B-2 bombers — explosives designed to penetrate deep into the ground to damage the heavily fortified targets. Iran, in retaliation, fired missiles at a U.S. base in Qatar on Monday, but caused no known casualties.

Trump and Khamenei claims

Trump said that the American attacks "completely and fully obliterated" Iran's nuclear program. However, Khamenei on Thursday accused the U.S. president of exaggerating the damage, saying the strikes didn't "achieve anything significant."

In response, Trump told reporters Friday that the sites were "bombed to hell." He even directed a message to the supreme leader: "Look you're a man of great faith. A man who's highly respected in his country. You have to tell the truth. You got beat to hell."

A senior Israeli military official said Friday that their intelligence shows that Israel's strikes on various targets neutralized Iran's ability to enrich uranium to 90% for "a prolonged period." It was unclear whether that contradicted a preliminary U.S. report that suggested the program had been set back months.

There has been speculation that Iran moved much of its highly-enriched uranium before the strikes, something that it told the IAEA that it planned to do.

Even if that turns out to be true, IAEA Director-General Rafael Mariano Grossi told Radio France International that the damage done to the Fordo site, which was built into a mountain, "is very, very, very considerable."

Among other things, he said, centrifuges are "quite precise machines," and it's "not possible" that the concussion from multiple 30,000-pound bombs wouldn't have caused "important physical damage."

"These centrifuges are no longer operational," he said.

Araghchi himself acknowledged "the level of damage is high, and it's serious damage."

He added that Iran hadn't yet decided whether to allow in IAEA inspectors to assess the damage, but they would be kept out "for the time being."

What to know about prisoners crafting clemency petitions to capture Trump's attention

By JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

ASHLAND, Ky. (AP) — Clemency has come early and often in President Donald Trump's second term, prompting nearly 10,000 convicts to request pardons or commutations of their prison sentences.

Trump has been criticized for wiping away convictions of political allies, former Republican officeholders and hundreds of people charged in the Capitol riot.

In issuing such pardons and commutations, Trump has largely cast aside a process that historically has been overseen by nonpolitical personnel at the Justice Department who spent their days poring over clemency applications — thick packets filled with character references attesting to applicants' atonement and good deeds. Only those meeting strict criteria were then passed along to the White House.

That approach has given prisoners like Chad Scott, a disgraced federal agent serving a 13-year sentence for corruption, hope at earning clemency by tailoring petitions to capture Trump's attention. Scott claimed, for example, that both he and the Republican president were victims of "political persecution." The former U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agent also noted that he and the president have survived gunshot wounds to the ear.

Here are some key things to know about how Trump's approach is changing the world of clemency:

Trump's approach to clemency has upended norms

Legal experts say the flurry of petitions has been sparked by Trump's frequent grants of clemency since retaking office in January.

The president has pardoned or commuted the sentences of more than 1,600 people. Many of those granted mercy have been the president's political allies, campaign donors and fraudsters who claimed they were victims of a "weaponized" Justice Department. Among those receiving clemency are a pair of reality TV stars, a straw donor who gave \$900,000 to Trump's first inaugural committee and a Virginia sheriff sentenced to 10 years for deputizing several businessmen in exchange for cash payments.

It's just part of the way the president has upended how clemency is handled. In the past, career Justice Department lawyers weighed remorse, the severity of the crime and the amount of time a prisoner has already served. Then they passed along recommendations to the White House.

The process at the Justice Department is being overseen by a vocal Trump supporter: The president tapped Ed Martin Jr. to be the Justice Department's pardon attorney. Martin is a former defense lawyer who represented Jan. 6, 2021, rioters and promoted false claims that the 2020 election had been stolen by Democrats.

That approach — and Trump's flurry of clemency grants — has created "a free-for-all" for those seeking pardons and commutations, said Liz Oyer, the Justice Department's former pardon attorney, who was fired in March. "The traditional process and practices," she told The Associated Press, "all seem to have fallen by the wayside."

Convicts believe Trump might hear them out

Optimism behind bars has never been higher, says Eric Sanchez Chaparro, a prisoner seeking a commutation for a drug and weapons conviction that carried a 19-year sentence.

"In many ways I feel like he has the same point of view that we've got," Chaparro told the AP, noting both he and the president were convicted felons. Trump was convicted last year on New York state charges of falsifying business records related to hush money payments to a porn star.

Jonathan E. Woods, an early Trump supporter and former Arkansas state senator, is seeking a commutation of his 18-year sentence for a bribery conviction.

"President Trump is viewed as someone as having a big heart, nonjudgmental and someone who has

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 53 of 61

been put through hell by a very imperfect legal system," Woods wrote to the AP. "Inmates view him as someone who will listen to them in hopes of going home early to their loves ones."

Scott, the former DEA agent, raises and trains service and therapy dogs behind bars in Kentucky. He named one of his most recent canines, a Labradane, Trump.

The White House says Trump is acting 'reasonably' and righting 'many wrongs'

Trump is hardly the first president to generate controversy over how he handled such powers. President Joe Biden, a Democrat, prompted bipartisan outrage in December when he pardoned his son Hunter, sparing him a possible prison sentence for felony gun and tax convictions.

Biden also was sharply criticized — mainly by Republicans — for issuing preemptive pardons to protect lawmakers, former officials and his family members from what he described as a potentially vindictive Trump administration.

Administration officials say Trump decides on clemency requests after they're vetted by the White House Counsel's Office, the White House pardon czar and the Justice Department. Reviewers have been focusing on nonviolent, rehabilitated criminals with compelling references, the officials said.

The White House is also considering petitions from those serving unjustified sentences and what the administration deems "over-prosecution."

"President Trump doesn't need lectures from Democrats about his use of pardons, especially from those who supported a president who pardoned his corrupt son, shielded Dr. Fauci from accountability for the millions who suffered under his failed COVID leadership and backed the infamous 'kids-for-cash' judge who profited from incarcerating children," White House spokesperson Harrison Fields said in an email. "President Trump is using his pardon and commutation powers to right many wrongs, acting reasonably and responsibly within his constitutional authority."

Legal experts see it much differently.

"What these pardons signal — together with everything else — is that all bets are now off," said Frank Bowman, a legal historian and professor emeritus at the University of Missouri School of Law who's writing a book on pardons. "It's a grotesque misuse of constitutional authority of a kind that has never been seen in American history."

Deal with Beijing will speed China's export of minerals to the US, treasury secretary says

By ELAINE KURTENBACH and WILL WEISSERT AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — Washington and Beijing have signed a trade agreement that will make it easier for American firms to obtain magnets and rare earth minerals from China that are critical to manufacturing and microchip production, U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said Friday.

The agreement comes after China retaliated against steep import tariffs imposed by the Trump administration on Chinese goods and moved to slow export of rare earth minerals and magnets much-needed by U.S. industrial interests.

Bessent said on Fox Business Network's "Mornings with Maria" that Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping "had a phone call" previously "and then our teams met in London, ironed this out, and I am confident now that we, as agreed, the magnets will flow."

"Part of the agreement was tariffs coming down and rare earth magnets starting to flow back to the U.S.," Bessent said. "They formed the core of a lot of our industrial base. They were not flowing as fast as previously agreed."

His comments follow President Donald Trump announcing two weeks earlier an agreement with China that he said would ease exportation of magnets and rare earth minerals.

That pact cleared the way for the trade talks to continue. The U.S. has previously suspended some sales to China of critical U.S. technologies like components used for jet engines and semiconductors. It has also agreed to stop trying to revoke visas of Chinese nationals on U.S. college campuses.

Bessent added of critical mineral exports: "What we're seeing here is a de-escalation."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 54 of 61

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick told Bloomberg TV that the deal was signed earlier this week.

China's Commerce Ministry said Friday that the two sides had "further confirmed the details of the framework," when responding to a question about if China was to speed up exports of rare earths to the U.S. and if the U.S. was to remove some restrictions on China.

"China will, in accordance with the law, review and approve eligible export applications for controlled items. In turn, the United States will lift a series of restrictive measures it had imposed on China," the ministry said.

Initial talks in Geneva in early May led both sides to postpone massive tariff hikes that were threatening to freeze much trade between the two countries. Later talks in London set a framework for negotiations and the deal mentioned by Trump appeared to formalize that agreement — setting the stage for Bessent's comments on Friday.

In London, export controls of the minerals eclipsed tariffs in the trade negotiations after China in April imposed permitting requirements on seven rare earth elements, per a Chinese law that applies to all exports, not just those bound for the U.S. market.

With the permitting process taking 45 days, the new requirement has caused a pause in shipments, threatening to disrupt production of cars, robots, wind turbines and other high-tech products in the U.S. and around the world. The U.S., meanwhile, took restrictive measures on exports of high tech to China.

By the latest agreement, China does not remove the permitting requirement on rare earths but retains the flexibility to dial up or down the approval process as needed.

Sun Yun, director of the China program at the Washington-based think tank Stimson Center, said Beijing has only tightened its overall policy on rare earths but has the discretion on how to implement it. "That's the Chinese style," she said. "If all goes well, permit happens. If things go in a wrong direction, like U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, permits gone with wind."

China also has taken steps recently on the fentanyl issue, announcing last week that it would designate two more substances as precursor chemicals for fentanyl, making them subject to production, transport and export regulations. Trump has demanded that Beijing do more to stop the flow of such precursor ingredients to Mexican drug cartels, which use them to make fentanyl for sale in the U.S. He imposed 20% tariffs on Chinese imports over the fentanyl issue, the biggest part of current 30% across-the-board taxes on Chinese goods.

The agreement struck in May in Geneva called for both sides to scale back punitive tariff hikes imposed as Trump escalated his trade war and sharply raised import duties. Some higher tariffs, such as those imposed by Washington related to the trade in fentanyl and duties on aluminum and steel, remain in place.

The rapidly shifting policies are taking a toll on both of the world's two largest economies.

The U.S. economy contracted at a 0.5% annual pace from January through March, partly because imports surged as companies and households rushed to buy foreign goods before Trump could impose tariffs on them.

In China, factory profits sank more than 9% from a year earlier in May, with automakers suffering a large share of that drop. They fell more than 1% year-on-year in January-May.

Trump and other U.S. officials have indicated they expect to reach trade deals with many other countries, including India.

"We're going to have deal after deal after deal," Lutnick said.

Japan executes man convicted of murder for killing and dismembering 9 people in his apartment

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — A man convicted of murder for killing and dismembering nine people in his apartment near Tokyo was executed Friday, Japan's Justice Ministry said.

Takahiro Shiraishi, known as the "Twitter killer," was sentenced to death in 2020 for the killings in 2017

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 55 of 61

of the nine victims, most of whom had posted suicidal thoughts on social media. He was also convicted of sexually abusing female victims.

Police arrested him later that year after finding the bodies of eight teenage girls and women as well as one man in cold-storage cases in his apartment.

Investigators said Shiraishi approached the victims via Twitter, offering to assist them with their suicidal wishes. He killed the three teenage girls and five women after raping them. He also killed the boyfriend of one of the women to silence him.

"The case caused extremely serious outcomes and dealt a major shockwave and unease to the society," Justice Minister Keisuke Suzuki told an emergency news conference. He said he signed the execution earlier this week, but did not witness Shiraishi's hanging.

The execution was carried out as calls grow to abolish capital punishment or increase transparency in Japan after the acquittal of the world's longest-serving death row inmate Iwao Hakamada last year.

Suzuki justified the need for the execution in Japan, noting a recent government survey shows an overwhelming majority of the public still supports capital punishment, though opposition has somewhat increased.

"I believe it is not appropriate to abolish execution," Suzuki said, adding there is growing concern about serious crime.

Shiraishi was hanged at the Tokyo Detention House in secrecy with nothing disclosed until the execution was done.

Japan now has 105 people on death row, including 49 seeking retrials, Suzuki said.

Executions are carried out in secrecy in Japan, where prisoners are not even informed of their fate until the morning of their hanging.

Since 2007, Japan has begun disclosing the names of those executed and some details of their crimes, but disclosures are still limited.

Japan and the U.S. are the only two countries in the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations that retain capital punishment.

Japan's most recent execution, in July 2022, was of a man who killed seven people in a vehicle crash and stabbing rampage in a crowded Tokyo shopping district of Akihabara in 2018.

Japan's crime rate is relatively low, but it has seen some high-profile mass killings in recent years.

6 Americans detained in South Korea for trying to send rice and Bibles to North Korea by sea

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Six Americans were detained Friday in South Korea for trying to send 1,600 plastic bottles filled with rice, miniature Bibles, \$1 bills and USB sticks toward North Korea by sea, police said.

The Americans were apprehended on front-line Gwanghwa Island before throwing the bottles into the sea so they could float toward North Korean shores on the tides, two Gwanghwa police officers said. They said the Americans are being investigated on allegations they violated the law on the management of safety and disasters.

The officers, who requested anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak to media on the issue, refused to provide personal details of the Americans in line with privacy rules.

Gwanghwa police said they haven't found what is on the USB sticks.

The U.S. Embassy in South Korea had no immediate public comment.

For years, activists have sought to float plastic bottles or fly balloons across the border carrying anti-North Korea propaganda leaflets and USB thumb drives carrying South Korean dramas and K-pop songs, a practice that was banned from 2021-2023 over concerns it could inflame tensions with the North.

North Korea has responded to previous balloon campaigns with fiery rhetoric and other shows of anger, and last year the country launched its own balloons across the border, dumping rubbish on various South

Korean sites including the presidential compound.

In 2023, South Korea's Constitutional Court struck down a controversial law that criminalized the sending of leaflets and other items to North Korea, calling it an excessive restriction on free speech.

But since taking office in early June, the new liberal government of President Lee Jae Myung is pushing to crack down on such civilian campaigns with other safety-related laws to avoid a flare-up tensions with North Korea and promote the safety of frontline South Korean residents.

On June 14, police detained an activist for allegedly flying balloons toward North Korea from Gwanghwa Island.

Lee took office with a promise to restart long-dormant talks with North Korea and establish peace on the Korean Peninsula. Lee's government halted frontline anti-Pyongyang propaganda loudspeaker broadcasts to try to ease military tensions. North Korean broadcasts have not been heard in South Korean front-line towns since then.

But it's unclear if North Korea will respond to Lee's conciliatory gesture after vowing last year to sever relations with South Korea and abandon the goal of peaceful Korean reunification. Official talks between the Koreas have been stalled since 2019, when U.S.-led diplomacy on North Korean denuclearization derailed.

An Israeli strike kills 18 Palestinians in central Gaza as turmoil mounts over food distribution

By WAFAA SHURAF, KAREEM CHEHAYEB and SAM METZ Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — An Israeli strike hit a street in central Gaza on Thursday where witnesses said a crowd of people was getting bags of flour from a Palestinian police unit that had confiscated the goods from gangs looting aid convoys. Hospital officials said 18 people were killed.

The strike was the latest violence surrounding the distribution of food to Gaza's population, which has been thrown into turmoil over the past month. After blocking all food for 2 1/2 months, Israel has allowed only a trickle of supplies into the territory since mid-May.

Efforts by the United Nations to distribute the food have been plagued by armed gangs looting trucks and by crowds of desperate people offloading supplies from convoys.

The strike in the central town of Deir al-Balah on Thursday appeared to target members of Sahm, a security unit tasked with stopping looters and cracking down on merchants who sell stolen aid at high prices. The unit is part of Gaza's Hamas-led Interior Ministry, but includes members of other factions.

A horrific scene

Witnesses said the Sahm unit was distributing bags of flour and other goods confiscated from looters and corrupt merchants, drawing a crowd when the strike hit.

Video of the aftermath showed bodies, several torn, of multiple young men in the street with blood splattering on the pavement and walls of buildings. The dead included a child and at least seven Sahm members, according to the nearby Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital where casualties were taken.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military. Israel has accused the militant Hamas group of stealing aid and using it to prop up its rule in the enclave. Israeli forces have repeatedly struck Gaza's police, considering them a branch of Hamas.

An association of Gaza's influential clans and tribes said Wednesday they have started an independent effort to guard aid convoys to prevent looting. The National Gathering of Palestinian Clans and Tribes said it helped escort a rare shipment of flour that entered northern Gaza that evening.

It was unclear, however, if the association had coordinated with the U.N. or Israeli authorities. The World Food Program did not immediately respond to requests for comment by The Associated Press.

"We will no longer allow thieves to steal from the convoys for the merchants and force us to buy them for high prices," Abu Ahmad al-Gharbawi, a figure involved in the tribal effort, told the AP.

Accusations from Israel

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Israel Katz in a joint statement Wednes-

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 57 of 61

day accused Hamas of stealing aid that is entering northern Gaza, and called on the Israeli military to plan to prevent it.

The National Gathering slammed the statement, saying the accusation of theft was aimed at justifying the Israeli military's "aggressive practices." It said aid was "fully secured" by the tribes, which it said were committed to delivering the supplies to the population.

The move by tribes to protect aid convoys brings yet another player in an aid situation that has become fragmented, confused and violent, even as Gaza's more than 2 million Palestinians struggle to feed their families.

Throughout the more than 20-month-old war, the U.N. led the massive aid operation by humanitarian groups providing food, shelter, medicine and other goods to Palestinians despite the fighting. U.N. and other aid groups say that when significant amounts of supplies are allowed into Gaza, looting and theft dwindle.

Israel, however, seeks to replace the U.N.-led system, saying Hamas has been siphoning off large amounts of supplies from it, a claim the U.N. and other aid groups deny.

Israel has backed an American private contractor, the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, which has started distributing food boxes at four locations, mainly in the far south of Gaza for the past month.

Thousands of Palestinians walk for hours to reach the hubs, moving through Israeli military zones where witnesses say Israeli troops regularly open fire with heavy barrages to control the crowds.

Health officials say hundreds of people have been killed and wounded. The Israeli military says it has only fired warning shots.

A trickle of aid

Israel has continued to allow a smaller number of aid trucks into Gaza for U.N. distribution. The World Health Organization said on Thursday it had been able to deliver its first medical shipment into Gaza since March 2, with nine trucks bringing blood, plasma and other supplies to Nasser Hospital, the biggest hospital still functioning in southern Gaza.

In Gaza City, large crowds gathered Thursday at an aid distribution point to receive bags of flour from the convoy that arrived the previous evening, according to photos taken by a cameraman collaborating with the AP.

Hiba Khalil, a mother of seven, said she can't afford looted aid that is sold in markets for astronomical prices and was relieved to get flour for the first time in months.

"We've waited for months without having flour or eating much and our children would always cry," she said.

Another woman, Umm Alaa Mekdad, said she hoped more convoys would make it through after struggling to deal with looters.

"The gangs used to take our shares and the shares of our children who slept hungry and thirsty," she said.

Separately, Israeli strikes overnight and early Thursday killed at least 28 people across the Gaza Strip, according to the territory's Health Ministry. More than 20 dead arrived at Gaza City's Shifa Hospital, while the bodies of eight others were taken to Nasser Hospital in the south.

Pardon applications are being carefully crafted with one man in mind: Donald Trump

By JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

ASHLAND, Ky. (AP) — Pounding away on a prison typewriter, Chad Scott seemed worlds apart from President Donald Trump.

But when the disgraced narcotics agent wrote the White House seeking clemency for his corruption conviction, Scott sought to draw Trump's attention to what they have in common.

Both men had survived a bullet wound to the ear, Scott wrote, and had been convicted of falsifying records. They were also each a victim of "political persecution," the type of catchphrase the former agent hoped would resonate with a man who has long complained of witch hunts.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 58 of 61

By helping him, Scott argued, Trump would be showing he had “the back of law enforcement.”

“Chad Scott is a hero in this country’s war on drugs,” his attorney wrote in a clemency petition reviewed by The Associated Press, adding it would be a “gross waste of taxpayer money” to house and feed the former U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agent for six more years.

Scott’s application is hardly unique, according to prisoners, defense attorneys and officials. The White House and the Justice Department have received a wave of such requests — all carefully crafted to capture the attention and fancy of Trump or those who know his inclinations.

The flurry, legal experts said, has been sparked by Trump’s frequent and eyebrow-raising grants of clemency since retaking office in January. The Republican president has pardoned and commuted the sentences of more than 1,600 people, including many political allies, former GOP officeholders and hundreds charged or convicted in the 2021 Capitol riot. He even pardoned a pair of reality TV stars who were serving time for bank fraud and tax evasion.

In doing so, Trump has largely cast aside a process that historically has been overseen by nonpolitical personnel at the Justice Department who spent their days poring over clemency applications — thick packets filled with character references attesting to applicants’ atonement and good deeds. Only those meeting strict criteria were then passed along to the White House.

Those procedures appear to have been replaced by the caprice of a president known for his transactional approach to governance, his loyalty to supporters and his disdain for perceived enemies.

It’s created “a free-for-all” for those seeking clemency, said Liz Oyer, the Justice Department’s former pardon attorney, who was fired in March. “The traditional process and practices,” she told the AP, “all seem to have fallen by the wayside.”

Inmates believe Trump might hear them out

That has left an opening for prisoners like Eric Sanchez Chaparro, who is seeking a commutation for a drug and weapons conviction that carries a 19-year prison sentence. The optimism, he said, has never been higher for those behind bars.

“In many ways I feel like he has the same point of view that we’ve got,” Chaparro said in a telephone interview, noting that both he and the president were convicted of felonies. Trump was convicted last year on New York state charges of falsifying business records related to hush money payments to a porn star but was sentenced to no punishment.

“Even though people try to put him down,” Chaparro added, “he kept on pushing for his goal.”

The Trump administration did not disclose how many people have reached out to Trump or White House officials to seek clemency, though some have boasted of doing so in colorful ways. Last week, Joe Exotic, the former zookeeper known as the “Tiger King,” posted a song he said he wrote for Trump on social media, claiming he was “paying the time for a crime I didn’t do.” He’s serving a 21-year sentence for the failed murder-for-hire of an animal-welfare activist.

Wave of pardon applications lands at Justice Department

Since Trump retook office five months ago, his Justice Department has received more than 9,300 petitions seeking commutations of sentences or pardons. At that pace, the tally would blow past the approximately 15,000 petitions filed during the four years of President Joe Biden’s Democratic administration. The Justice Department received about 12,000 petitions in Trump’s first term.

Clemency is perhaps the most unchecked power enjoyed by a president, as actions cannot be undone by courts or other officials. Presidents can commute sentences — reducing or eliminating them — or bestow a pardon that wipes away convictions or criminal charges.

Trump is hardly the first president to generate controversy over how he has handled such powers. Biden prompted bipartisan outrage in December when he pardoned his son Hunter, sparing him a possible prison sentence for felony gun and tax convictions. And Biden was sharply criticized — mainly by Republicans — for issuing preemptive pardons to protect lawmakers, former officials and his family members from what he described as a potentially vindictive Trump administration.

Trump’s handling of pardons is unprecedented, experts say

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 59 of 61

Even so, legal scholars say, Trump's approach to clemency has veered into unprecedented territory.

The president, for example, tapped a vociferous political supporter, Ed Martin Jr., to be the Justice Department's pardon attorney. Martin is a former defense lawyer who represented Jan. 6 rioters and promoted false claims that the 2020 election had been stolen by Democrats. Trump gave Martin the post after pulling his nomination to be the U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia in the face of bipartisan concerns over his divisive politics. Martin did not respond to requests for comment.

Much of Trump's mercy has gone to political allies, campaign donors and fraudsters who claimed they were victims of a "weaponized" Justice Department. The pardons that have drawn the most attention include one issued to a tax cheat whose mother raised millions of dollars for Republican causes.

There was the pardon of a prolific straw donor for foreign contributions who gave \$900,000 to Trump's first inaugural committee. Trump voided the conviction of Scott Jenkins, a Virginia sheriff and vocal Trump supporter, sentenced to 10 years for deputizing several businessmen in exchange for cash payments.

"What these pardons signal — together with everything else — is that all bets are now off," said Frank Bowman, a legal historian and professor emeritus at the University of Missouri School of Law who is writing a book on pardons. "It's a grotesque misuse of constitutional authority of a kind that has never been seen in American history."

Administration officials say Trump decides on clemency requests after they're vetted by the White House Counsel's Office, the White House pardon czar and the Justice Department. Reviewers have been focusing on nonviolent, rehabilitated criminals with compelling references, the officials said. The White House is also considering petitions from those serving unjustified sentences and what the administration deems "over-prosecution."

"President Trump doesn't need lectures from Democrats about his use of pardons, especially from those who supported a president who pardoned his corrupt son, shielded Dr. Fauci from accountability for the millions who suffered under his failed COVID leadership and backed the infamous 'kids-for-cash' judge who profited from incarcerating children," White House spokesperson Harrison Fields said in an email. "President Trump is using his pardon and commutation powers to right many wrongs, acting reasonably and responsibly within his constitutional authority."

Felons say they have a kinship with Trump, a fellow felon

All the while, Trump's approach has spread hope among lesser-connected prisoners who long ago exhausted their appeals, a half dozen federal prisoners told the AP in interviews.

A remedy long likened to winning the lottery seems more attainable in an administration that has dispensed with many of the traditional criteria considered in clemency, including remorse, the severity of the crime and the amount of time a prisoner has already served.

Jonathan E. Woods, an early Trump supporter and former Arkansas state senator, is serving an 18-year sentence for a bribery conviction.

The former legislator believes he has a legitimate shot at winning a commutation because, he wrote to the AP, "President Trump is viewed as someone as having a big heart, nonjudgmental and someone who has been put through hell by a very imperfect legal system."

"Inmates view him as someone who will listen to them in hopes of going home early to their loved ones," Woods added.

Woods, who is serving time in a prison in Texas, has also raised allegations he hopes will resonate with the president: evidence of misconduct by an FBI agent who investigated the former state senator. That agent pleaded guilty to "corruptly destroying" his government hard drive in Woods' case.

Trump spent years blasting the FBI, particularly for how it investigated him over allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 campaign and its role in the Justice Department's ill-fated prosecutions of Trump in the Capitol riot and his retention of classified documents at his Florida resort.

Pardon czar is playing a key role

Less political appeals have also been fruitful — thanks to the president's advisers.

Those working to land pardons for Eddie and Joe Sotelo didn't give up after Biden rejected their ap-

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 60 of 61

plication. Instead, advocates turned to help from Alice Marie Johnson, whom Trump recently tapped as his pardon czar after commuting her sentence for federal drug and money laundering charges in 2018.

It was Johnson who intervened on behalf of the brothers, who had been serving life prison terms for a drug-trafficking conspiracy, said Brittany Barnett, founder of the Buried Alive Project, a nonprofit advocacy group that took up the Sotelos' case. The brothers were freed late last month.

Johnson "knows firsthand the weight of a life sentence," Barnett said. "These men were serving the same sentence as the Unabomber — on drug charges."

Trump's open-mindedness has sent "shock waves of hope through the prison walls for the thousands of people still serving extreme sentences," Barnett said.

No commutation seems out of the question in prisons like FCI Ashland, the Kentucky lockup where Scott, the former DEA agent, has been held nearly four years.

Once hotshot DEA agent fell from grace

Scott, 57, was exercising in March with Brian Kelsey, when the former Tennessee state senator received word he had been pardoned just two weeks into a 21-month sentence for campaign finance fraud. Kelsey called his release a "victory for every American who believes in one impartial justice system for all."

Last month, the president pardoned another former Ashland prisoner, P.G. Sittenfeld, a former Cincinnati city councilman who not only won office as a Democrat but sharply criticized Trump. It is unclear why Trump pardoned Sittenfeld, who also seemed surprised by the grant of clemency. "I was as stunned as I suspect you were," he wrote supporters this month, according to the Cincinnati Business Courier.

In his own application for a commutation, Scott sought to draw Trump's attention not only to his ear wound — sustained in a shooting that predated his law enforcement career — but also the prosecutor who handled his case. That prosecutor went on to work for special counsel Jack Smith, whose team twice indicted Trump. The charges were dropped after Trump won the November election.

"Though I do not claim to be a saint, I DID NOT commit the crimes for which I have been convicted," Scott wrote to the president, even using all caps like Trump does on social media.

Scott had been among the most prolific narcotics agents in the country during his 17-year career at the DEA and won several awards for his work.

His downfall began in 2016, when two members of his New Orleans-based task force were arrested for stealing and using drugs, prompting a yearslong FBI inquiry. A federal jury convicted Scott in 2019 of orchestrating false testimony against a trafficker. He also was found guilty of falsifying DEA paperwork to acquire a pickup truck and, following a separate trial, stealing money and property from suspects.

Scheduled for release in 2031, he has exhausted every possible appeal. Clemency from Trump, Scott told the AP, is his "last resort."

By all accounts, Scott has been a model prisoner and has been awarded sought-after privileges. He spends his days as FCI Ashland's "town driver," chauffeuring newly released prisoners to bus stops, half-way houses, hospitals and doctors' offices in nearby cities.

And he has participated in a program called Pawsibilities Unleashed, in which he raises and trains service and therapy dogs behind bars.

He named one of his most recent canines, a Labradane, Trump.

Today in History: June 28, Franz Ferdinand assassinated

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, June 28, the 179th day of 2025. There are 186 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On June 28, 1914, in an act that sparked World War I, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife, Sophie, were shot to death in Sarajevo by Serb nationalist Gavrilo Princip.

Also on this date:

In 1863, during the Civil War, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln appointed Maj. Gen. George G. Meade as

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, June 28, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 368 ~ 61 of 61

the new commander of the Army of the Potomac, following the resignation of Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker.

In 1919, the Treaty of Versailles was signed in France, ending the First World War.

In 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Alien Registration Act, also known as the Smith Act, which required adult foreigners residing in the U.S. to be registered and fingerprinted.

In 1969, riots broke out following a police raid at the Stonewall Inn, an LGBTQ+ bar in New York's Greenwich Village neighborhood, leading to six days of violent protests that served as a watershed moment in the LGBTQ+ rights movement.

In 1997, boxer Mike Tyson was disqualified from his rematch with heavyweight titleholder Evander Holyfield after Tyson bit Holyfield twice in the third round, including biting off a portion of Holyfield's right ear.

In 2000, seven months after he was found adrift in the Straits of Florida, Elian Gonzalez was returned to his native Cuba.

In 2017, a man armed with a shotgun attacked the offices of The Capital newspaper in Annapolis, Maryland, killing four journalists and a staffer before police stormed the building and arrested him; authorities said Jarrod Ramos had a long-running grudge against the newspaper for its reporting of a harassment case against him. (Ramos would be convicted and sentenced to six life sentences plus 345 years in prison.)

In 2019, avowed white supremacist James Alex Fields, who deliberately drove his car into a crowd of counterprotesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, killing a young woman and injuring dozens, apologized for his actions before being sentenced to life in prison on federal hate crime charges.

In 2022, Ghislaine Maxwell was sentenced to 20 years in prison for helping the wealthy financier Jeffrey Epstein sexually abuse teenage girls.

Today's Birthdays: Filmmaker-comedian Mel Brooks is 99. Diplomat and politician Hans Blix is 97. Actor Bruce Davison is 79. Actor Kathy Bates is 77. Football Hall of Famer John Elway is 65. Actor John Cusack is 59. Actor Mary Stuart Masterson is 59. Actor Tichina Arnold is 56. Filmmaker-actor Mike White is 55. Business executive Elon Musk is 54. Actor Alessandro Nivola is 53. Country singer-TV personality Kellie Pickler is 38. Olympic track gold medalist Elaine Thompson-Herah is 33.