

Groton Daily Independent

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Thursday, July 3

Senior Menu: Teryaki chicken breast, wild rice, winter blend, pears, whole wheat bread.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

Friday, July 4

Firecracker Couples Golf Tourney, 10 a.m.

Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



Sunday, July 6

United Methodist: Worship with communion at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.

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.; Worship, 11 a.m.

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

Amateurs at Faulkton, 4 p.m.

Monday, July 7

Senior Menu: Goulash, corn, baked apples, bread-stick.

Legion at Webster 5:30 p.m. (DH)

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

U10 B&W at Clark, 5:30 p.m. (DH)

Softball: U12 hosts Milbank, 6 p.m. (DH); U8B at Mellette, 6 p.m. (DH)

T-Ball: Gold practice, 6 p.m.

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

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1440

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

Happy Birthday (Eve), America

Tomorrow marks 249 years since the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence. Founding Father and second president John Adams expected it would be celebrated on July 2—the day delegates voted to break from Great Britain—but the idea didn't catch on. Today, the Fourth of July is synonymous with fireworks and barbecues, though some celebrate in more peculiar ways.

Since July 4, 1776, the US has grown from 13 colonies with 2.5 million people to 50 states and 14 territories with over 342 million people connected by roughly 5,000 airports, 4 million miles of roads, 140,000 miles of train tracks, and 5.5 million miles of power lines.

The economy has prospered to nearly \$30T. Public health advances have dwindled the child mortality rate to under 1%, and Americans live over three decades longer on average. Meanwhile, homegrown scientific achievements have delivered everything from the light bulb and modern flight to the internet and air conditioning. We've also sent over 300 citizen astronauts to space—the most of any country.

Since last Independence Day, an American infant was successfully treated with a novel gene-editing technique, computers are becoming exponentially faster problem solvers, and the James Webb Telescope photographed its first new planet.

America's story is still unfolding, with new milestones to reach and new challenges to overcome. Tomorrow invites us to reflect on our progress and draw inspiration for the next 249 years.

Diddy's Split Verdict

Sean "Diddy" Combs was found guilty of two of five counts against him yesterday, capping his week-long, high-profile sex crimes trial. The hip-hop mogul was acquitted of all sex trafficking and racketeering charges, which carried sentences of life in prison. He was convicted of two lesser counts of transportation to engage in prostitution: one involving an anonymous woman and another involving his ex-girlfriend, Cassandra "Cassie" Ventura Fine. Combs faces up to 20 years in prison, with sentencing to come at a later date.

Thirty-four witnesses testified for the prosecution, including former partners, employees, and rapper Kid Cudi—who accused Combs of breaking into his home and firebombing his Porsche. At the center of the case were allegations Combs led a criminal enterprise, with prosecutors highlighting hundreds of Combs' "freak off" parties, where he was accused of engaging in abuse and coercion. Combs maintains all encounters were consensual.

Paramount Pays President

Paramount Global has agreed to pay \$16M to settle President Donald Trump's lawsuit with subsidiary CBS News. The deal ends the dispute over an October 2024 "60 Minutes" interview in which CBS edited then-Vice President Kamala Harris' comments on Gaza.

Trump contends CBS edited the interview to favor Harris—then a presidential candidate—by excluding a wordy response and promoting two separate clips as responses to the same question. Trump alleges the edits amount to election interference and violate a Texas law on deceptive acts in commerce. CBS maintains it edited the interview for concision and clarity. The company did not apologize as part of yesterday's settlement but committed to releasing transcripts of interviews with future presidential candidates after they air, and will pay the fee to Trump's presidential library.

The settlement comes as Paramount pursues a \$8.4B merger with Skydance Media, pending approval from the Federal Communications Commission.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

British band Oasis' reunion tour kicks off tomorrow after nearly 16-year hiatus; band is set to play 41 dates across the UK, Ireland, and North America.

NHL to allow players to compete in 2026 Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics; will mark first time NHL players participate since 2014.

The 112th Tour de France begins this weekend from Lille, France; see a stage-by-stage breakdown of the 23-day bicycle race.

Star-Spangled Banner: Saturday's 1440 Society & Culture covers the origins of America's national anthem. Sign up here to receive!

Science & Technology

First complete human genome from Ancient Egypt sequenced; 4,800-year-old DNA reveals ancestry was 80% North African, 20% Mesopotamian.

New study reveals how plants heal damage to their protective outer layer; oxygen and ethylene in the wound trigger cellular repair mechanism; findings may lead to new varieties of resilient crops.

Air pollution and other environmental factors, including some traditional herbal medicines, may lead to lung cancer in never-smokers; heavy pollution linked to 400% increase in the same mutations seen in smokers.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.5%, Dow -0.0%, Nasdaq +1.0%); S&P 500 hits new record. Robinhood shares close up 6%, with stock topping \$100 in intraday trading for the first time.

Tesla reports 384,122 vehicle deliveries in Q2, a 14% decline from a year ago and the second consecutive quarterly drop.

Rivian reports 10,661 vehicle deliveries in Q2, a 23% year-over-year drop.

Microsoft to lay off roughly 9,000 employees, or about less than 4% of its global workforce; action comes after the company eliminated 6,000 roles in May.

Politics & World Affairs

Bryan Kohberger pleads guilty to one count of burglary, four counts of first-degree murder over fatal stabbing of University of Idaho students in 2022, avoiding possible death penalty; Kohberger faces up to four consecutive life sentences and maximum 10 years in prison for burglary when he is sentenced July 23.

US Defense Department halts shipments of promised weapons to Ukraine amid reports US' overall stockpiles are too low.

Iran suspends cooperation with the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, blocking inspectors from monitoring nuclear activities without approval.

Trump administration strikes tariff deal with Vietnam including 20% levy on imports of Vietnamese-made goods.

Wisconsin Supreme Court strikes down 1849 abortion ban, allowing most procedures until 20 weeks of pregnancy to continue.

Education Department withholds over \$6B for summer and after-school programs for low-income Americans.

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Jeslyn and I had to take a little stop in Belle Fourche at the "center" of the United States. According to ChatGPT, the actual center is 13 miles north on US85 from Belle Fourche and about eight miles west on a gravel road where an American Flag marks the spot.

Fatal Drowning Incident

Sheriff Jerred Schreur and the Day County Sheriff's Office are releasing information involving a fatal drowning incident on June 29th, 2025, in Day County.

In the early evening hours of June 29th, 2025, the Day County Sheriff's Office received a call for service regarding a female that had been boating on Waubay Lake. The female had gone into the water and was unable to be located at that time of the call. The following agencies of the South Dakota Game Fish & Parks, Codington County Search & Rescue, and the Day County Sheriff's Office provided swift response to the call. During an initial search of the area, authorities were unable to locate the female, and with the incoming possibility of severe weather and also the difficulty of resuming the search during nighttime hours, the search was postponed until the early morning hours of June 30th, 2025. In the early morning hours of June 30th, 2025, the body of a female was recovered and identified as the missing female; further identified as Mollie McClure of Saint Joseph, MN. McClure was a current State Trooper for the Minnesota State Patrol.

Through investigation it has been determined that McClure was in a boat in the northeast part of Waubay Lake on June 29th, 2025, and had gotten off the boat to go swimming in the lake. At that point, McClure was unable to remain swimming and had gone under the water before rescue efforts could save her. Investigation will continue to attempt to gain answers as to why McClure was unable to remain above water, however no criminal charges have been filed in relation to this incident and all parties have been cooperative with the investigation.

It is with heavy hearts that we send this release of the Passing of Trooper Mollie McClure, and our deepest sympathies go out to the family and friends, along with the Law Enforcement family of McClure. It is evident through our investigation that McClure had a great impact with the communities that she served and her dedication to public service will be greatly missed. We ask that all respect the privacy of the McClure family during this difficult time.

-Day County Sheriff Jerred Schreur

MAYO
CLINIC



How to prevent and treat Lyme disease

By Mayo Clinic Health Letter Editors

Lyme disease is caused by bacteria that are transmitted by the small black-legged tick, also called the deer tick. Lyme disease is most common in the upper Midwestern and Northeastern regions of the U.S. but can sometimes happen in other regions, too.

Experts believe that as many as 476,000 Americans are infected with Lyme disease yearly. This number has grown significantly in the past decade. The disease also is often found in some parts of Europe and Asia. An estimated 14% of the world's population will get it at some point.



What are the symptoms of Lyme disease?

A bull's-eye rash at the bite site is the classic, characteristic sign of early Lyme disease, but not everyone gets the rash. It typically appears between 7 and 14 days after the tick has bitten you. The infection also can cause headache, fever, joint pain and other flu-like symptoms.

If you have any combination of those symptoms that linger and you've been in an area prone to ticks — with woods or tall grass or brush — check in with your healthcare team. This also is true if you see a tick attached to your skin. Deer ticks are tiny, but they can expand dramatically in size once latched on.

Look for ticks on your back, groin, armpit and lower legs. The bite might resemble a mosquito bite and feel irritated. A tick bite by itself doesn't mean you have Lyme disease, however.

If you live in an area where Lyme disease is common, the bull's-eye rash might be enough for a diagnosis. Your healthcare team may order blood tests to identify antibodies to the Lyme-causing bacteria.

Lyme disease can be treated successfully with oral antibiotics. The illness can cause lingering pain and inflammation in the joints, heart palpitations and irregular heart rhythms and various neurological problems. In rare cases it can cause brain and nervous system infection.

If not caught early, it's possible for some of these symptoms to linger even after the infection is treated.

How to remove a tick

If you're in a tick habitat, you can prevent ticks from latching on to your skin by wearing long sleeves and pants, shoes, and long socks. Apply tick repellent and remember to check yourself, your loved ones and your pets after being in areas where ticks thrive.

If you find a tick attached to the skin, remove it quickly using these tips:

Grasp the tick close to the skin's surface, using tweezers if available.

Pull the tick upward with a steady, continuous motion. Try not to twist. If a small part of the tick remains in the skin, leave it alone and let the skin heal.

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Clean the bite with an antiseptic, such as rubbing alcohol or soap and water.
Call your healthcare team. Preserve the tick in a container, if possible, in case your care team recommends bringing it to an appointment.

FAQs about Lyme disease

Bobbi Pritt, M.D., is director of the Clinical Parasitology Laboratory and co-director of the vector-borne diseases laboratory service at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. These are her answers to some questions about Lyme disease.

Q: Can you describe how the understanding or treatment of Lyme has changed in the last decade or so?

A: Our understanding of Lyme disease has expanded significantly with the large investments in clinical research and funding. We have learned that most people can be treated effectively with oral antibiotics and that early treatment prevents the spread of infection throughout the body.

Unfortunately, 10% to 20% of people with Lyme disease will experience symptoms that can take weeks to months to subside. This range of symptoms is referred to as post-treatment Lyme disease syndrome. Although the cause of this syndrome is not yet known, studies have shown that long-term antibiotic therapy does not have a sustained benefit for these people and isn't recommended.

Q: What do you wish people better understood about Lyme disease?

A: It's important to note that ticks transmit a variety of pathogens, including the bacteria that cause Lyme disease. Some infections can be life-threatening, so I urge people to take tick bite prevention seriously.

It's also important to perform tick checks frequently so that ticks can be removed quickly from the body. A tick must be attached for at least 36 hours to transmit Lyme disease, so removal before this time will prevent that particular infection. However, other tick-borne pathogens can be transmitted in less time — possibly within a few minutes to hours. There are Lyme vaccines for humans in clinical trials, and hopefully these will be available soon.

This article originally appeared in the Mayo Clinic Health Letter.



- Wheeling Back to Doland 5K Run/Walk
- Pancake breakfast
- Classic Car and Tractor Show
- Bouncy houses, splash pad, basketball, bean bag tournament
- Storybook Land Theatre
- School tours and class reunions
- Parade
- Dueling Duo Piano Entertainment

For details, find Back to Doland on Facebook or visit <https://sites.google.com/view/backtodoland2025>.

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Second-Inning Spurt Lead Groton Jr. Legion Past Big Stone City

By GameChanger Media

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion scored 11 runs in the second inning, which helped them defeat Big Stone City 19-1 on Wednesday. Braeden Fliehs drew a walk, scoring one run, Tristin McGannon drew a walk, scoring one run, Alex Abeln drew a walk, scoring one run, Lincoln Krause singled, scoring two runs, T.C Schuster drew a walk, scoring one run, Ethan Kroll doubled, scoring two runs, Jordan Schwan tripled, scoring two runs, and an error scored one run.

Big Stone City were the first to get on the board in the first when an error scored one run.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion flipped the game on its head in the bottom of the first, scoring eight runs on five hits to take the lead, 8-1. The biggest blow in the inning was a double by Schuster that drove in two.

Schuster earned the win for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. The starting pitcher allowed zero hits and zero runs over two and one-third innings, striking out four and walking none. #8 took the loss for Big Stone City. The pitcher went one-third of an inning, surrendering five runs (four earned) on three hits, striking out none and walking four. #3 led things off on the bump for Big Stone City. The pitcher gave up five hits and 10 runs over one and one-third innings, striking out none and walking five.

Schuster and Abeln each drove in three runs for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. Kroll led Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion with two hits in three at bats. McGannon led Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion with three walks. Overall, the team had a strong eye at the plate, piling up 13 walks for the game.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion will travel to Miller for their next game on Monday.

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Brevin Fliehs Drives In 6 To Lead Groton Legion Post 39 Past Badgers 2025

By GameChanger Media

Brevin Fliehs drove in six runs on three hits to lead Groton Legion Post 39 past Badgers 2025 20-0 on Wednesday at Groton. Fliehs tripled in the second scoring three, tripled in the first scoring two, and singled in the first scoring one.

Groton Legion Post 39 won thanks in part to 11 runs in the second inning. Jarrett Erdmann drew a walk, scoring one run, Alex Abeln singled, scoring one run, Avier Hughes induced Teylor Diegel to hit into a fielder's choice, but two runs scored, Fliehs tripled, scoring three runs, an error scored one run, Braxton Imrie singled, scoring one run, an error scored one run, and Karsten Fliehs drew a walk, scoring one run.

Groton Legion Post 39 got on the board in the bottom of the first inning after Fliehs tripled, scoring two runs, Gavin Englund doubled, scoring one run, Nick Morris doubled, scoring one run, Nick Groeblichhoff singled, scoring one run, Diegel singled, scoring three runs, and Fliehs singled, scoring one run.

Korbin Kucker earned the win for Groton Legion Post 39. The righty gave up one hit and zero runs over two innings, striking out five and walking one. Kirby Olson took the loss for Badgers 2025. The hurler went one inning, surrendering nine runs on seven hits, striking out none and walking four. Diegel tossed one inning of shutout ball for Groton Legion Post 39 in relief. The right-handed pitcher allowed zero hits, striking out two and walking one.

Groton Legion Post 39 amassed 12 hits in the game. Morris collected two hits for Groton Legion Post 39 in two at bats. Groton Legion Post 39 had patience at the plate, piling up 10 walks for the game. Erdmann and Kucker led the team with two free passes each. Kucker threw an immaculate inning in the first, striking out the side on nine pitches. Groton Legion Post 39 were sure-handed in the field and didn't commit a single error. Fliehs had the most chances in the field with seven.

Hughes went 1-for-1 at the plate to lead Badgers 2025 in hits.

Groton Legion Post 39 will travel to Webster for their next game on Monday.

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Big Stone City 1 - 19 Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion

📍 Home 📅 Wednesday July 02, 2025

	1	2	3	R	H	E
BGST	1	0	0	1	0	2
GRTN	8	11	X	19	8	2

BATTING

Big Stone City	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
#8 (CF)	1	0	0	0	0	0
#3 (P)	1	1	0	0	0	0
#24 (1B)	1	0	0	0	0	0
#99 (C)	1	0	0	0	0	0
#13 (3B)	1	0	0	0	0	0
#12 (SS)	1	0	0	0	0	1
#5 (2B)	1	0	0	0	0	1
#23 (RF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
B Lee #13 (LF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
#30	1	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	10	1	0	0	0	4

HBP: #8, **SB:** #3, **LOB:** 1

PITCHING

Big Stone City	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
#3	1.1	5	10	10	5	0	0
#24	0.1	0	4	4	4	1	0
#8	0.1	3	5	4	4	0	0
Totals	2.0	8	19	18	13	1	0

L: #8, **P-S:** #24 27-8, #8 34-12, #3 45-16, **WP:** #24, #3, **HBP:** #3, **BF:** #24 5, #8 9, #3 14

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
A Abeln #5 (SS)	2	2	1	3	2	0
L Krause #2 (C)	2	2	1	2	1	0
N Groebl... #13 (1B)	0	2	0	0	2	0
T Schuster #3 (P)	1	3	1	3	2	0
E Kroll #14 (2B)	3	3	2	2	0	0
J Schwan #11 (CF)	3	1	1	2	0	1
R Schelle #8 (3B)	1	2	1	1	2	0
I Scepta... #20 (3B)	0	0	0	0	0	0
B Fliehs #19 (RF)	1	2	1	2	1	0
X Ellen... #21 (RF)	1	0	0	0	0	0
T McGan... #22 (LF)	0	2	0	1	3	0
Totals	14	19	8	16	13	1

2B: T Schuster, E Kroll, B Fliehs, A Abeln, **3B:** J Schwan, **TB:** T Schuster 2, E Kroll 3, R Schelle, J Schwan 3, B Fliehs 2, L Krause, A Abeln 2, **HBP:** N Groebelinghoff, **SB:** E Kroll, R Schelle, L Krause, A Abeln, **LOB:** 3

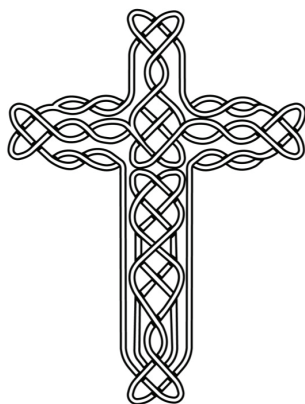
Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion	IP	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
T Schust... #3	2.1	0	0	0	4	0
Totals	3.0	0	1	0	4	0

W: T Schuster, **P-S:** T Schuster 31-19, **BF:** T Schuster 8

Golden Threads

“Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than jewels.

Proverbs 8:10-11



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Ladies Luncheon

Bethesda Lutheran Church, Bristol

Wednesday, July 16, 2025

By Bethesda Women of the ELCA

Silent Auction opens at 10:30

Guest Speaker: Melinda Eikamp,
“Weaving Threads of our Heritage”

Luncheon at Noon

Tickets: \$15.00

Deadline to purchase tickets is Friday, July 11

Kay Espeland 605-492-3507

Jane Goehring 605-290-1420

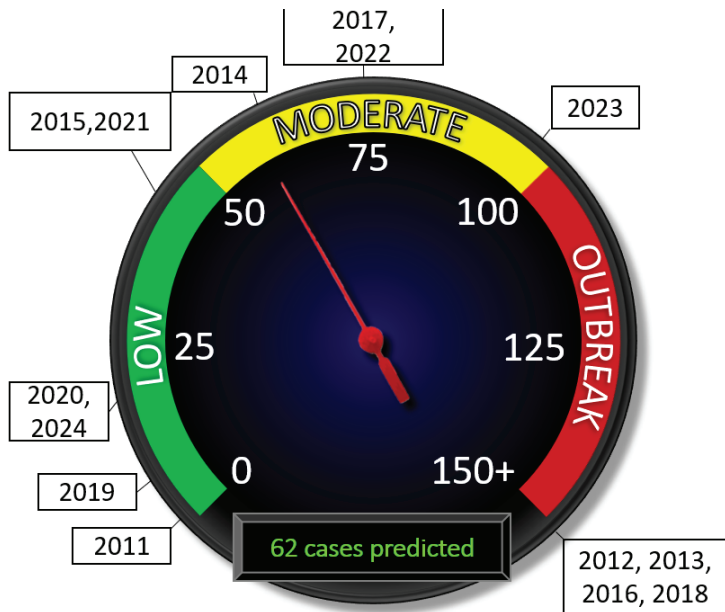
Or contact any WELCA member



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South Dakota Mosquito



SD WNV (as of July 2nd):

No human cases reported.
1 human viremic blood donor (Brown)
3 counties with positive mosquito pools (Brown, Lincoln, Minnehaha)

US WNV (as of June 17): 24 cases (AL, AR, AZ, CA, GA, LA, MS, ND, NE, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA)

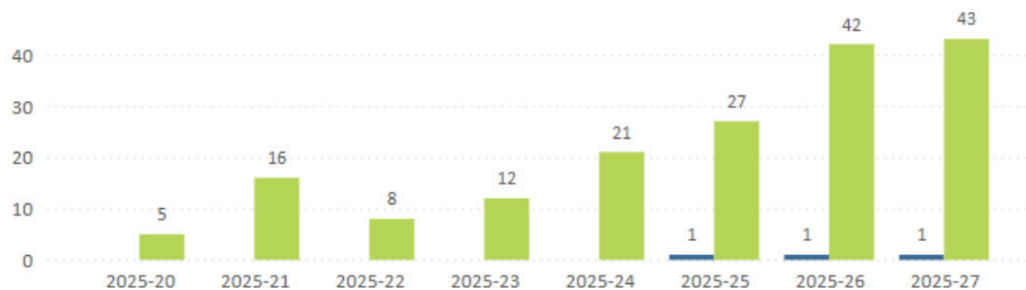
WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2025, South Dakota (as of July 2nd)

Mosquito Surveillance Summary for 2025

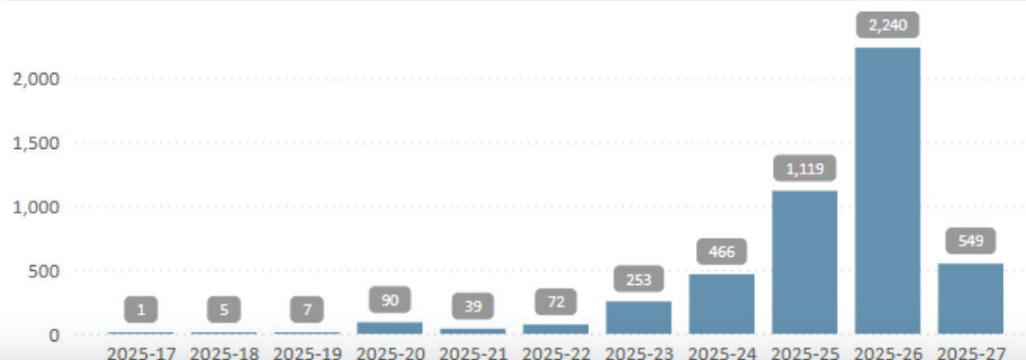
Total sites collecting mosquitoes: 47
Total mosquito pools tested: 42,123
% positivity: 1.69%

Number of Mosquito Pools Tested by MMWR Week and Status

Test Status: ● Positive ● Negative



Culex Mosquitoes Collected by MMWR Week





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Wearing a 'Make Towers Great Again' hat, FCC chairman unveils 'Build America Agenda' in South Dakota

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JULY 2, 2025 3:50 PM



Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr wears a "Make Towers Great Again" hat during an event to announce his "Build America Agenda" on July 2, 2025, in Sioux Falls. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

SIOUX FALLS — Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr picked South Dakota as the place to unveil what he called a "Build America Agenda," aimed at cutting regulations and revitalizing the telecommunications industry.

Carr delivered a speech Wednesday at the wireless infrastructure construction company VIKOR, surrounded by construction workers, American flags and Toby Keith country music playing from loudspeakers.

Before the event, Carr climbed a 200-foot KELO-TV tower. At the event, he wore and handed out red hats emblazoned with the slogan "Make Towers Great Again," similar to hats at President Donald Trump's political rallies that say "Make America Great Again."

South Dakota, Carr said, symbolizes what's possible when "we get our regulatory policies right."

"I imagine that the 'other S.F.' — San Francisco — might seem like a more natural pick to most when outlining a tech or telecom agenda," Carr said. "But I can't think of a more appropriate place for me to announce the agenda that will guide much of the FCC's upcoming work than right here in the real S.F."

Carr was originally nominated to the FCC by Trump in 2017, and then renominated by President Joe Biden in 2023 and confirmed by the U.S. Senate both times. This year, Trump picked Carr to serve as FCC chairman.

Prior to Trump's election win last year, Carr authored a chapter about the FCC in the controversial Project 2025 report, a policy roadmap for a second Trump term published by The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank.

On Wednesday, Carr praised Trump's second-term priorities and Republican leadership in South Dakota, including Republican U.S. Senate Majority Leader John Thune. Carr previously joined Thune to visit a broadband internet construction site in Colton in June 2023, spotlighting the value of federal investments in internet infrastructure.

Speech highlights

FCC Chairman Brendan Carr announced several goals of his Build America Agenda, including:

- Accelerating the shift from aging copper lines to high-speed internet.
- Encouraging greater collaboration and more concrete timelines to fix "slow, cumbersome" delays when telecom crews are stringing new fiber-optic lines across utility poles.
- Using legal powers to override local siting delays and permit faster infrastructure deployment.
- Revisiting how the FCC complies with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), in light of recent Supreme Court rulings relaxing requirements for environmental review.
- Selling off unused airwaves that companies can use to build new wireless networks.
- Eliminating rules slowing the space satellite industry, to "inject rocket fuel into our licensing process by standardizing our reviews through more objective metrics."
- Eliminating decades-old rules governing outdated technologies like telegraphs and phone booths.
- Implementing workforce reforms aimed at "making it harder for foreign, fly-by-night crews to sweep in and undercut the safety and security of our networks."

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.

Lawmakers look for ways to deliver on support for 'essential' ambulance service

State law does not guarantee access to emergency medical services

BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 2, 2025 5:29 PM

Back in February, South Dakota lawmakers recognized emergency medical services as an "essential service."

Sort of.

"Essential service" typically means the government has to guarantee access to said service by providing or funding it.

The majority of states don't affix that designation to ambulance services.

South Dakota lawmakers voted unanimously in favor of a non-binding resolution that says the Legislature "supports efforts to prioritize emergency medical service as an essential public service."

There were other efforts in Pierre that didn't get quite so warm a reception.

Two days after the passage of that resolution, lawmakers shot down a bill that would've required counties and municipalities to provide ambulance services. Eight days after that, they shot down a similar bill that would've created a state fund to divert some money from criminal fines to help pay for services.

Instead of backing those bills, they chartered a committee to study the issue and stocked it with five



Susan Shumaker, a paramedic for Humboldt Fire and Ambulance, pictured in November 2022. (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

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senators and six representatives.

On Monday, that group of lawmakers convened in Pierre to talk about long-term survival for the ambulance services now provided by a mix of paid and volunteer response teams across the state.

The Emergency Medical Services Interim Committee heard testimony on low passage rates for emergency medical technician exams, a decline in volunteerism and the difficulty of setting up an ambulance district, a legal entity.

But one issue loomed over all others.

"The biggest thing I want to get across is that somebody has got to be responsible for funding us," said Maynard Konechne, director of the South Dakota Emergency Medical Services Association and a presenter during the Monday meeting.

The study group, which reconvenes on July 23, is tasked with producing a report for lawmakers on the sustainability of ambulance services in South Dakota, with a focus on three areas:

Staff recruitment, training and retention.

Access to care in rural areas far from trauma care centers.

Efficiencies in operations.

Citizens expect an ambulance to show up regardless of how far they live from the nearest hospital, said Sen. Tim Reed, R-Brookings, one of the committee's two leaders. That means the group — and the Legislature as a whole — has to be ready to change the way it thinks about emergency medical services (EMS).

"We have to be willing to have a conversation about how we recognize, support and potentially restructure EMS as an essential part of our public safety system, just like law enforcement or fire services," said Sen. Tim Reed, R-Brookings, co-chair of the committee.

Rural areas, declining volunteers, low reimbursement rates

The average emergency medical technician in South Dakota is 51 years old, according to survey data collected by the state Department of Health.

The department regulates and offers technical support to the state's 121 licensed ambulance services. It also offers training, collects data, and, for the past three years, has been in the process of disbursing \$20 million in COVID-era funding to modernize and bolster ambulance services across the state.

Marty Link, the director of the department's Emergency Medical Services and Trauma Program, told the committee that South Dakota has 28 active emergency medical technicians (EMTs) between 70 and 75 years old — and two in their 80s.

"They're doing great work, and I love them dearly," said Link, himself a longtime service provider, but aging providers are part of the reason the state urged ambulance services to apply for grants to buy "power cots." The cots lift and push patients into place without the aid of paramedic muscle, which allows older providers to stay on duty a few more years.

The trouble is that fewer people are signing on to be volunteer technicians, Link said, and more stringent testing requirements have become a hurdle in recent years.

Just 56% of the South Dakotans who took their paramedic test with the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians passed on the first try this year. EMTs aren't as highly trained as paramedics, but also must pass a test, often after completing a 190-hour certification course. The passage rate for South Dakota EMT hopefuls in 2025 thus far is 72%.

Paramedic and state Rep. Eric Emery, D-Rosebud, told the committee his first emergency medical course lasted eight hours. Increasing professionalization has meant a more skilled response team, he said, but it's also put some people off.

Twenty-eight ambulance services in South Dakota are all volunteer. Another 24 have a mix of paid staff and volunteers, and still more are paid per-call.

Training can be "four, five, six months of their life for something that they may not even be compensated for," Emery said.

Jerome Harvey of Pennington County, a volunteer firefighter, told the committee he doesn't see the

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volunteer model as workable long-term.

"The number one issue is steady state funding and realizing the fact that it is a profession," he said. "We have to recognize that we're on the other side of the mountain, on the other side of the pyramid, on the downhill slide in terms of volunteerism."

Recruitment and retention were the number one needs identified in health department surveys of ambulance agencies, part of a 2023 sustainability assessment.

On Monday, Link and Health Secretary Melissa Magstadt trumpeted the department's "Telemedicine in Motion" program, which has equipped 84% of South Dakota ambulance agencies with tablets that connect to doctors who can advise EMTs on how to best deal with traumatic issues.

Reimbursement troubles

Lemmon, in far northwestern South Dakota, is among the more rural of the state's rural enclaves. Its nearest hospital is 26 miles away in Hettinger, North Dakota.

Some of Lemmon's ambulance services are delivered on a pay-per-call basis, but the call cost often outpaces the pay. Medicare covers about \$650, Lemmon EMT Association Treasurer Carrie Derschan said, and Medicaid reimbursements pay around \$400.

"That's about 56%," of the cost to run a patient from the Lemmon nursing home to the nearer hospital.

"We have to write the rest of that off," she said.

A "Big, Beautiful Bill" packed with President Trump's policy prescriptions is currently up for debate in Congress. The bill's provisions have been revised multiple times so far, but Konechne, the EMS Association leader, said he worries that its proposed cuts to Medicaid will exacerbate the issues facing the mobile medical teams.

"We're struggling the way it is," said Konechne. "And now we're going to take another hit. They're not doing that for police and firefighters."

Next steps

An increase to the base rate paid by Medicare and Medicaid in South Dakota for ambulance rides is among the funding options listed by the health department in its Monday presentation. Also suggested was funding help for training courses from the state, more investment from local communities for operational needs, and additional fees for "super speeders" or drunken drivers, earmarked to fund medical services.

Community buy-in is already part of the funding puzzle for rural ambulance services.

Spearfish pitches in \$50,000 a year, that city's EMS director said. In Buffalo, a northwestern city near the Montana border, financial support for the Harding County service's 2,500-square-mile coverage area comes from local businesses.

"They realize that we are health care," said Annette Slaba, Harding County's EMS director.

Emery sponsored one of the bills to require counties and cities to fund ambulance services that failed to earn support back in February.

His included a plan to siphon some of the money the state collects in criminal fines into an EMS fund, from which localities could pull grants for their operations. It would have started with \$1 million from the state general fund, but Emery said during debate on the measure that the fund would probably need \$50 million a year to meet the state's needs.

Committee member Sen. Tamara Grove, R-Lower Brule, said Monday that she feels like citizens wouldn't balk at paying additional taxes for emergency medical services, as long as they understood where their money was going.

"We want quality people in those ambulances," Grove said. "We want people who know what they're doing and are willing to show up at our worst moments."

Sen. Reed suggested that lawmakers could simplify the process of starting an ambulance district, around 20 of which exist today as multi-county, or multi-community partnerships. If state law makes it too difficult to set up those districts, Reed said, it might make sense to simplify the process to let communities

take the lead.

"I don't think we want the state starting to draw lines," Reed said. "It's best for communities to work together and figure this out. A taxing district would be a way of doing that."

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.

Grant funds bolster rural ambulances with training, equipment

Last of \$20 million in federal funds from 2022 funneled to local agencies

BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 2, 2025 5:28 PM



A Humboldt ambulance in November 2022. (John Hult/South

Dakota Searchlight)

Motorized cots and chairs, emergency medical technician training and life support dummies are among the purchases made by local ambulance services through two rounds of grant awards from the South Dakota Department of Health.

Some of those items came up during the first meeting of the Legislature's Emergency Medical Services Interim Committee this week in Pierre. That body is studying ways maintain the viability of the state's ambulance services, which operate without state funding through a hodgepodge of paid, paid-per-call and volunteer frameworks.

The \$7.5 million in grants for local agencies originated with federal COVID relief funding. Former Gov. Kristi Noem asked lawmakers to set aside \$20 million of that money in

2022 to bolster local ambulance services.

In the second phase, the state purchased and distributed LIFEPAK 15 patient monitors and defibrillators, along with training for their use, at a cost of \$11.6 million.

The third step involved \$7.5 million in grants to individual ambulance providers. Those were made available after the completion of a statewide assessment of sustainability for emergency medical services, paid for during the second funding phase. To apply, applicants were required to read the assessment and ask for items that could fill the gaps identified by the report.

"We said, 'If you want to apply for a grant, you have to be able to read the study, to read what was done statewide,'" Marty Link, the Health Department's director of emergency medical services, told the committee on Monday. "We didn't want that just sitting on the shelf."

Equipment, training purchased through grant awards

Among other things, the sustainability report cited recruitment and retention, an aging volunteer base and funding for equipment as major needs.

To that end, dozens of local agencies applied for grants to purchase motorized "power cots" and stair

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chairs, which allow medics to transfer patients without the physical strain.

Fifteen of the 44 grants in round one, awarded in July 2024, included one or more power cots and chairs, distributed across 14 communities. Some of those grants also included money for instructor training, training classes, medical simulation mannequins and software.

Another 18 of the round two grants awarded last November involved the purchase of mobile people-movers.

"With an aging workforce and patients who are getting larger and larger, it helps us get people safely in and out of the house," said Alan Perry, who heads up the ambulance service in Lennox and is the president of the South Dakota Emergency Medical Services Association.

Perry's agency bought one power cot and one stair chair with a \$45,000 grant, awarded last July. The agency got another \$25,200 in the second round to produce a strategic planning report for Lennox, and to buy bright, wearable lights for use by those who respond to incidents on highways at night.

Training was also a focus area. In Spink County, the ambulance service was able to hire two emergency medical technicians and put on a training course for other technician hopefuls. Twelve of the 17 people who qualified to take the national exam passed and were certified, according to the Department of Health's presentation to lawmakers on Monday.

Grant money for patient transfer database

The largest single grant went to the South Dakota Association of Health Care Organizations for a project that aims to boost efficiencies statewide.

The group is using its \$500,000 grant to set up an interfacility transfer system that it hopes will create "a single portal where neighboring ambulance services can view and select available transfers" by November 2026.

Link pointed to that project during the study committee's first meeting.

Ambulances that move patients without emergency needs from one facility to another – like a patient who needs to ride from a nursing home in Chamberlain to an orthopedic hospital in Sioux Falls – can create hazards for their own communities by doing so, he said.

"There's a lot of concern with 'How do we maintain that ambulance presence within our local community when we have an ambulance going over the road?'" Link said.

As a result, local ambulance services may decline to give the ride or ask that the patient wait for a ride, according to Tim Rave, director of the association. On any given day, Rave told South Dakota Searchlight, there are up to 80 people in the state who are in a hospital that ought to be somewhere else.

That's the kind of information the association's collected with its grant funding, Rave said, as it looks to find out how prevalent the issue is. The database the association aims to build would make it easier to alert ambulance services in any given area to patients in need of a ride, Rave said.

In the future, he said, such a database could help ambulances do things like pick up patients from the hospital to which they've just delivered a different patient and bring them home.

That would allow a service to "get paid both ways."

"That's the sweet spot we'd love to get to, but that feels a little bit like a stretch goal at this point," Rave said.

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.

US House GOP struggles to advance megabill against Freedom Caucus resistance

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT, ASHLEY MURRAY AND ARIANA FIGUEROA - JULY 2, 2025 3:15 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republican efforts to pass the “big, beautiful bill” hit a roadblock Wednesday, when leaders left the chamber in a holding pattern for more than seven hours before calling a procedural vote that stalled amid opposition from hard-right members and others.

The House must adopt the rule in order to set up floor debate and a final passage vote for the tax break and spending cut package. But with four Republicans voting against it and nine withholding their votes, the House remained at a standstill around 11 p.m. Eastern.

GOP Reps. Andrew Clyde of Georgia, Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania, Keith Self of Texas and Victoria Spartz of Indiana had cast votes against approving the rule, though they could flip since leadership hadn’t closed the vote. Freedom Caucus Chairman Andy Harris of Maryland was among the members withholding their votes in protest.

Far-right members of the House GOP objected strongly to the Senate version passed Tuesday, which reflected changes made during the past month compared to an earlier version passed in the House. Members of the House Freedom Caucus opposed provisions dealing with immigration and the repeal of clean energy tax credits, as well as the measure’s increase in the deficit.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office released an analysis after the Senate voted, showing the bill would increase deficits by \$3.4 trillion during the next decade compared to current law.

‘We can’t make everyone 100% happy’

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said earlier in the day he felt “very positive about the progress” made during ongoing negotiations, but didn’t commit to having the necessary votes.

“The thing about it is, when you have a piece of legislation that is this comprehensive and with so many agenda items involved, you’re going to have lots of different priorities and preferences among people because they represent different districts and they have different interests,” Johnson said. “But we can’t make everyone 100% happy. It’s impossible.”

Johnson said he would never ask lawmakers to “compromise core principles, but preferences must be yielded for the greater good.”

South Dakota Republican Rep. Dusty Johnson told reporters before the delay that “the rule going down would be a very unfortunate development.”



Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, R-La., talks with reporters before heading to the House chamber for a procedural vote on the “One, Big, Beautiful Bill Act” at the U.S. Capitol on July 2, 2025 in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

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But he expressed confidence in Speaker Johnson's ability to bring holdouts on board eventually, potentially by making commitments tied to future bills.

"Speaker Johnson has not made any promises. He has been really good about talking about legislative vehicles that will exist in the months to come," Dusty Johnson said. "Reconciliation is not the only tool in the Republican, or I should say in the congressional toolbox. Mike Johnson's done a good job of making people understand there are other ways we can get things done."

Texas Republican Rep. Chip Roy said a few hours before the rule vote began that holdouts were "exploring all of the options legislatively and through the executive."

"We were not happy with what the Senate produced," Roy said. "We thought there was a path forward as of late last week, even though I had concerns. I've been public about them. But then they jammed it through at the last minute in a way that we're not overly excited about."

Roy said that "everything is on the table at the moment," when asked by States Newsroom if he hoped to get concessions from leaders on this package or deals struck for future bills.

Trump presses House GOP

Several House GOP lawmakers traveled to the White House earlier in the day to meet with President Donald Trump, who was also attempting to assuage concerns through several social media posts.

"It looks like the House is ready to vote tonight," Trump posted minutes before the rule vote began. "We had GREAT conversations all day, and the Republican House Majority is UNITED, for the Good of our Country, delivering the Biggest Tax Cuts in History and MASSIVE Growth. Let's go Republicans, and everyone else – MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!"

House Rules Chairwoman Virginia Foxx, R-N.C., urged support for approving the rule during floor debate, arguing it was essential for GOP lawmakers to deliver on campaign promises.

"This legislation is the embodiment of the America First agenda and we would all do well to remember that," Foxx said. "Failure at this critical juncture is not an option. This clock is ticking, the president and the American people are waiting."

Massachusetts Democratic Rep. Jim McGovern, ranking member on the panel, railed against the dozens of provisions Senate Republicans bundled together in the 870-page package, including some added just Tuesday.

"This process — an abomination, legislative malpractice," McGovern said. "Final text of this bill came out less than 24 hours ago. We met in committee an hour after it was posted and now we're here considering a rule that only allows for one hour of debate."

"This bill is within the jurisdiction of 12 different committees. One hour is ridiculous. And every minute we're finding out new things that were snuck into the bill: a tax cut for whalers and now we're learning about a gambling tax."

Tax cuts favor higher incomes

The bill — which underwent weeks of revisions in the Senate after a prior version barely passed the House in May — will extend and expand the 2017 GOP tax law while overhauling several safety-net programs and slashing spending on Medicaid.

Those tax cuts skew toward wealthier income earners. The top 1% would receive a cut three times the size of those with incomes in the bottom 60% of after-tax income, according to analysis from the left-leaning Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. It also makes permanent some tax breaks on business investments and research and development costs.

The package makes substantial changes to Medicaid, including requiring some people on the program to work, participate in community service, or attend an educational program for at least 80 hours a month.

It will block any Medicaid funding from going to Planned Parenthood for one year, essentially requiring enrollees to find other health care options for routine appointments such as cancer screenings, birth control and sexually transmitted infections treatment and screening. Using federal taxpayer dollars for abortion

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coverage has been restricted for decades, with limited exceptions.

The legislation requires state governments to pay for a portion of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for the first time if they cannot get error payment rates under a certain percentage. SNAP is the primary federal nutrition program that feeds low-income people and roughly 42 million rely on it.

It bolsters spending on border security and defense by hundreds of billions of dollars, including line items for the "golden dome" missile defense system and additional barriers along the southern border.

The measure would provide a substantial funding increase to federal immigration enforcement for detention and removal of people without permanent legal status, aiding the president in carrying out his campaign promise of mass deportations.

The bill would raise the debt limit by \$5 trillion, a figure designed to get Congress past next year's mid-term elections before the country would once again bump up against the borrowing limit.

Protesters milled about and held signs on street corners outside the U.S. Capitol as Republicans worked to pass the megabill. Several spoke out against cuts to Medicaid and SNAP, as well as rollbacks to clean energy tax credits contained in the budget reconciliation package.

Senate turmoil

The House voted 215-214 mostly along party lines to approve the first version of the package in late May. Senate Republicans spent much of the last month reading through that, trying to determine what proposals their members supported and which elements would need to come out to comply with the strict rules that go along with writing a budget reconciliation bill.

The parliamentarian, that chamber's referee, continued to issue rulings on whether various policies in the legislation were in bounds for days before the Senate officially began debating the measure and even after they launched into vote-a-rama Monday morning.

That "Byrd bath" process eventually wrapped up, allowing Senate GOP leaders to release updated text of the package shortly before the chamber took its final vote.

Even with near-constant negotiations among Senate Republicans, Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., was unable to get everyone on board.

3 Senate Republicans voted no

Maine Sen. Susan Collins, Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul and North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis opposed the measure, which the Senate approved on Tuesday with Vice President JD Vance casting the tie-breaking vote.

Collins wrote in a statement that while she supported "extending the tax relief for families and small businesses," her opposition to the legislation "stems primarily from the harmful impact it will have on Medicaid, affecting low-income families and rural health care providers like our hospitals and nursing homes."

Collins also cited "additional problems" with how the legislation addressed tax credits for certain forms of energy production, which she wrote "should have been gradually phased out so as not to waste the work that has already been put into these innovative new projects and prevent them from being completed."

Tillis spoke about his opposition to the bill's changes to Medicaid during a floor speech before the Senate's vote, arguing its cuts to spending to the state-federal health program for low-income people and some people with disabilities weren't in the best interest of GOP voters.

"I'm telling the president that you have been misinformed," Tillis said. "You supporting the Senate mark will hurt people who are eligible and qualified for Medicaid."

Tillis said he supports a policy change in the bill that would require people on Medicaid to work, participate in community service, or attend an educational program. But he was critical of other changes implemented by his Senate colleagues, and announced he won't seek reelection hours after voting against advancing the package.

"I love the work requirement. I love the other reforms in this bill. They are necessary and I appreciate the leadership of the House for putting it in there," Tillis said. "In fact, I like the work of the House so much that I wouldn't be having to do this speech if we simply started with the House mark."

Paul said he decided to vote against the legislation because it will increase federal deficits during the next few years.

"To me the most pertinent question is, how will the bill affect the deficit in the next year?" Paul said. "Currently our deficit is estimated to be a little under \$2 trillion this year. What will happen to the (deficit) in 2026 if this bill passes? Well, using the math most favorable to the supporters of the bill, referred to as the policy baseline, the deficit in 2026 will still be \$270 billion more than this year."

Paul added "that's just not good if you profess to be fiscally conservative."

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.

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

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

Radiation exposure compensation for SD and other states included in 'big, beautiful bill'

BY: KYLE DUNPHEY, UTAH NEWS DISPATCH - JULY 2, 2025 2:02 PM

The federal government's program that gives payments to people sickened by nuclear weapons testing or uranium mining and milling — including in South Dakota — is one step closer to being reauthorized and expanded.

On Tuesday, Senate Republicans passed their massive tax and spending package, nicknamed the "big, beautiful bill" — among its many provisions is an expansion of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act, or RECA, which expired more than a year ago.

If the bill clears the final vote needed from the House, downwinders in all of Utah will now receive compensation for their medical bills, marking a significant change to the program that advocates say was too narrow to begin with.

People exposed to radiation from uranium mining and milling in South Dakota — primarily decades ago in the Edgemont area at the southern end of the Black Hills — were previously eligible for compensation and would remain eligible under the reauthorization. Seventy-nine claims from people residing in South Dakota have been awarded by the program since its inception, totaling \$6.76 million.

Here are the RECA highlights, found in the final pages of the Senate's 887-page bill:

Downwinders in all of Utah, New Mexico and Idaho would now be eligible for payments. Coverage would



A sign identifies a repository near Edgemont where 4 million tons of radioactive tailings from a former uranium mill have been buried since the 1980s. (Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)

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also be widened in Arizona to include all of Coconino, Yavapai, Navajo, Apache, Gila, and Mohave counties. Residents who lived in certain parts of Missouri, Tennessee, Alaska and Kentucky who were sickened due to the Manhattan Project would also receive coverage.

The program's new expiration date would be Dec. 31, 2028.

In some cases, people who lived in affected areas for just one year would be eligible for compensation — the program previously required they live there at least two years.

The compensation amount — originally \$50,000 to \$75,000 — would be increased to \$100,000 in most cases.

Uranium miners and workers based in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Wyoming, South Dakota, Washington, Utah, Idaho, North Dakota, Oregon and Texas would be covered. The timeframe of eligibility would also be extended from 1971 to 1990.

"RECA is generational legislation for Missouri and will finally deliver justice for survivors in the St. Louis region," said Missouri GOP Sen. Josh Hawley, who sponsored the provision. "I call on the House to quickly pass this legislation and send it to President Trump's desk."

RECA expired in June 2024 after Congress failed to reauthorize it, and in the year since, downwinders who were just recently diagnosed with cancer or who didn't know about the program were left without compensation.

The program had been in place since 1990, but downwinders have long said it should be expanded. Despite studies suggesting the entire West was blanketed by dangerous levels of radiation during nuclear tests, downwinders in just 10 counties in Utah, as well as a handful of counties in Nevada and Arizona, were covered.

News that RECA was one step closer to revival was met with mixed reactions on Tuesday from Utah downwinder Mary Dickson. A longtime advocate for RECA expansion, Dickson said it was "bittersweet" — if the bill passes the House, she'll finally be eligible for coverage, after being diagnosed with thyroid cancer in 1985.

But Dickson and other advocates hoped a RECA expansion would be broader, covering all of Nevada, Arizona, Montana, Guam and other places impacted by Cold War weapons testing.

"Obviously I'm happy to see more downwinders covered. I'm very happy to see that. But I'm also heart-sick to see that so many others that we've been fighting with in this battle for so long are left out," she said. "It feels a bit like a hollow victory to me."

Last year, Hawley sponsored a bill that would expand the program to cover much of the West, and parts of the St. Louis area, where creek water was contaminated by radiation during nuclear weapons development. The bill passed the Senate but stalled in the House, mostly over spending concerns.

It's not yet clear whether RECA has the support needed in the House to withstand the final vote. The New York Times estimates that the current proposed expansion will cost about \$7.7 billion.

The staff of South Dakota Searchlight contributed to this report.

Kyle Dunphey covers politics, public safety and the environment for Utah News Dispatch. He was named Best Newspaper Reporter by the Utah Society of Professional Journalists in 2023 for his work on crime and immigration at the Deseret News. Kyle moved to Utah in 2013 from his home state of Vermont and has degrees from Salt Lake Community College and the University of Utah.

Gun suicides in US reached record high in 2023

Firearm homicides have continued to decline from their pandemic-era peak

BY: AMANDA HERNÁNDEZ - JULY 2, 2025 11:32 AM

More people in the United States died by gun suicide in 2023 than any year on record — more than by gun homicide, accidental shootings and police shootings combined.

A new report analyzing federal mortality data found that suicides involving firearms made up 58% of all gun deaths in 2023 — the latest year with available data. In total, 27,300 people died by gun suicide in 2023, according to the report from the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions and the Johns Hopkins Center for Suicide Prevention.

The findings are based on finalized data from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In all, 46,728 people died from gun-related injuries in 2023, according to the CDC's Wonder database.

Gun homicides fell for the second year in a row, dropping from 20,958 in 2021 to 19,651 in 2022 and 17,927 in 2023. Despite the decline, the 2023 total ranks as the fifth highest on record for gun homicides, according to the report.

Rural, less populated states recorded the highest gun suicide rates in 2023. Wyoming led the nation with about 19.9 gun suicide deaths per 100,000 residents — nearly 10 times the rate of Massachusetts, which had the lowest at about 2.1 per 100,000.

"People are just using guns when it comes to considering suicide because it's highly lethal and it's easily accessible," said Rose Kim, the lead author of the report and the assistant policy adviser at the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions. "That's really a deadly combination, and it's really driving the suicide epidemic in our country."

Suicide has remained the leading category of gun death in the U.S. for nearly three decades, according to the report. That trend has continued even as public attention and legislative action have largely focused on gun homicides and mass shootings.

More than a handful of both Republican-led and Democratic-led states have passed or enacted new gun policies this year, ranging from permitless carry in North Carolina and a statewide ban on "red flag" or extreme risk protective orders in Texas to bans on assault-style weapons in Rhode Island to rapid-fire devices in Oregon.

This week, the Michigan Senate approved legislation that would ban bump stocks and ghost guns. In Washington state, a new law set to take effect in May 2027 will require prospective gun buyers to obtain a five-year permit through the Washington State Patrol.

Alabama Republican Gov. Kay Ivey in March signed into law a bill that made Alabama the 26th state to outlaw gun conversion devices, also known as auto sears, which can turn semiautomatic firearms into fully automatic weapons. In April, she signed into law a measure that allows people experiencing suicidal thoughts to surrender a firearm to a licensed gun dealer.

Kim said some state policies can help reduce gun deaths, such as safe storage laws, firearm purchaser



Guns on display in February 2023 at Caso's Gun-A-Rama in Jersey City, New Jersey. (Aristide Economopoulos/NJ Monitor)

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licensing and extreme risk protection orders. "It's also important to recognize that there are public health interventions, evidence based, that can really address gun suicides and save lives," she said in an interview.

Men were nearly seven times more likely than women to die by gun suicide in 2023, according to the Johns Hopkins report. The highest rate of firearm suicide was among men 70 and older.

For the fourth consecutive year, firearms remained the leading cause of death among youth under 17 in 2023, with 2,581 deaths recorded.

Among young people aged 10 to 19, gun suicide totals remained relatively unchanged year over year — 1,252 in 2023 compared with 1,238 in 2022 — but racial and ethnic breakdowns showed stark disparities.

Since 2014, the gun suicide rate for Black youth 10 to 19 had more than tripled, rising from 1 death per 100,000 people to 3.3 in 2023. In contrast, the rate for white youth in the same age group increased more gradually, from 2.6 to 3 per 100,000 people. It was the second consecutive year that Black youth had a higher rate than their white peers.

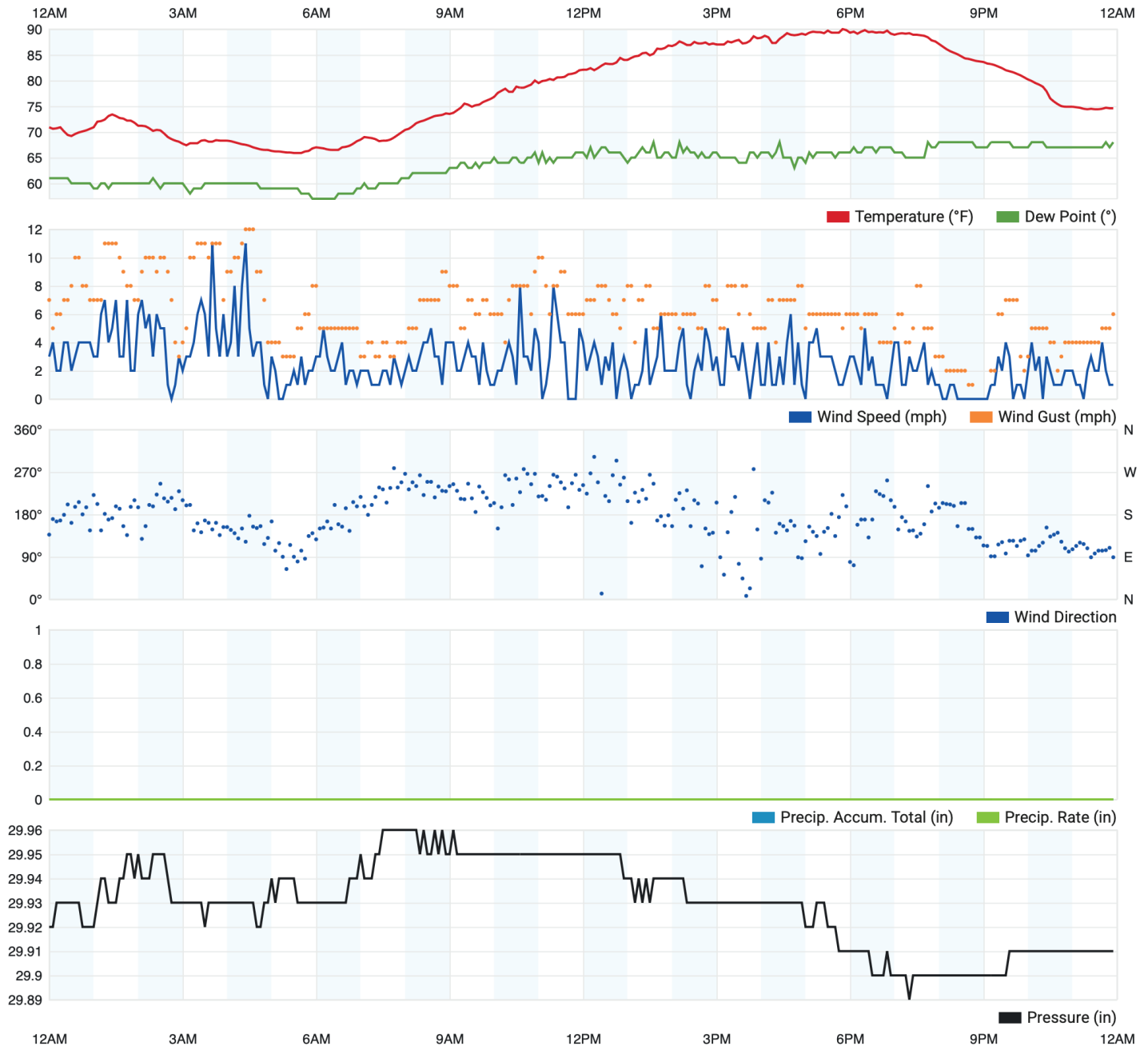
Gun suicides among Hispanic youth 10 to 19 also nearly doubled from 2014 to 2023, according to the CDC's data.

Amanda Hernández covers criminal justice for Stateline. She has reported for both national and local outlets, including ABC News, USA Today and NBC4 Washington.

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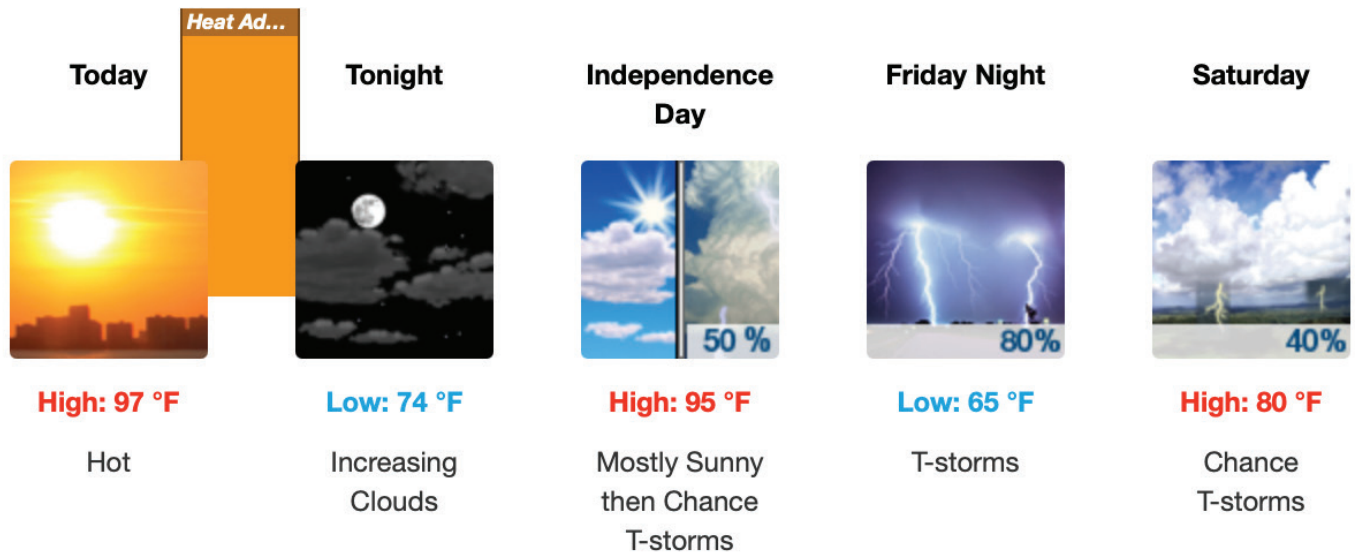
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Heat and Humidity Increase Today

- Heat indices will top out around **100 degrees** across portions of north central/northeast SD and west central MN.

Risk of Heat-Related Impacts

Little to None

- Little to no risk from expected heat.

Minor

- This level of heat affects primarily those individuals extremely sensitive to heat, especially when outdoors without effective cooling and/or adequate hydration.

Moderate

- This level of heat affects most individuals sensitive to heat, especially those without effective cooling and/or adequate hydration.
- Impacts possible in some health systems and in heat-sensitive industries.

Major

- This level of heat affects anyone without effective cooling and/or adequate hydration.
- Impacts likely in some health systems, heat-sensitive industries and infrastructure.

Extreme

- This level of rare and/or long-duration extreme heat with little to no overnight relief affects anyone without effective cooling and/or adequate hydration.
- Impacts likely in most health systems, heat-sensitive industries and infrastructure.

Today - Heat Advisory in effect

Heat Headlines in Effect Today

Valid: 3 PM - 8 PM CDT

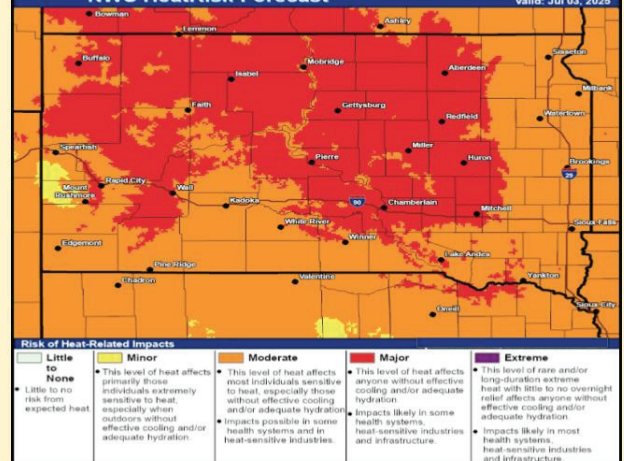
Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Jul 03, 2025 3:48 AM CDT



Today's Heat Risk Potential

NWS HeatRisk Forecast

Experimental
Valid: Jul 03, 2025

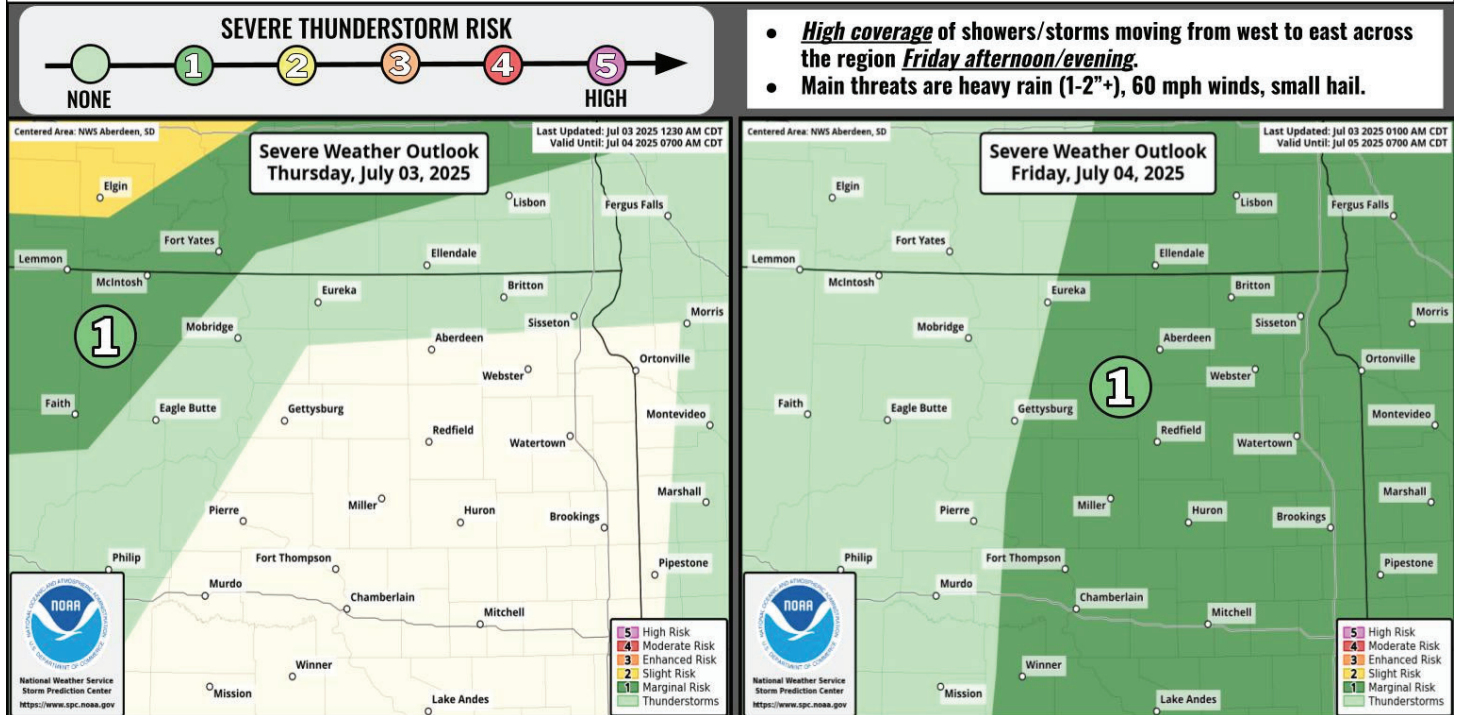


Today will see heat and humidity on the increase across the region, as highs soar into the 90s to around 100 degrees. A humid air mass will allow heat indices to rise to around 100 degrees. A Heat Advisory is in effect today for portions of north central/northeast SD and west central MN.

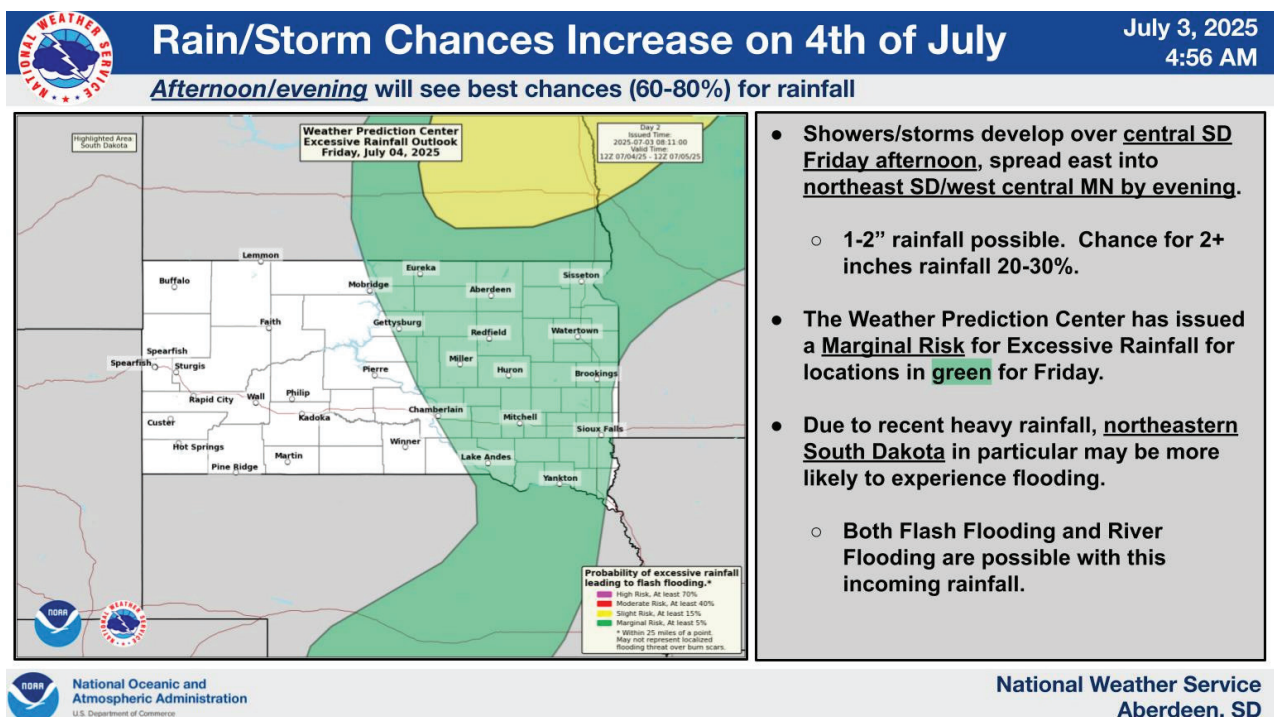
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Risk For Locally Strong Storms Today and Friday



Rather quiet today in terms of thunderstorms, with the threat for severe storms from Corson county northward and westward. On Friday, focus shifts to central/eastern SD and west central MN. Strong to severe storms are possible initially across central SD in the afternoon, then pushing towards the James River and points east by evening. Heavy rain (1-2"+) is possible, along with winds around 60 mph and small hail.



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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 90 °F at 5:52 PM

Heat Index: 94 °F at 6:00 PM

Low Temp: 66 °F at 5:22 AM

Wind: 13 mph at 4:25 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 38 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 107 in 1949

Record Low: 39 in 1917

Average High: 84

Average Low: 59

Average Precip in July.: 0.35

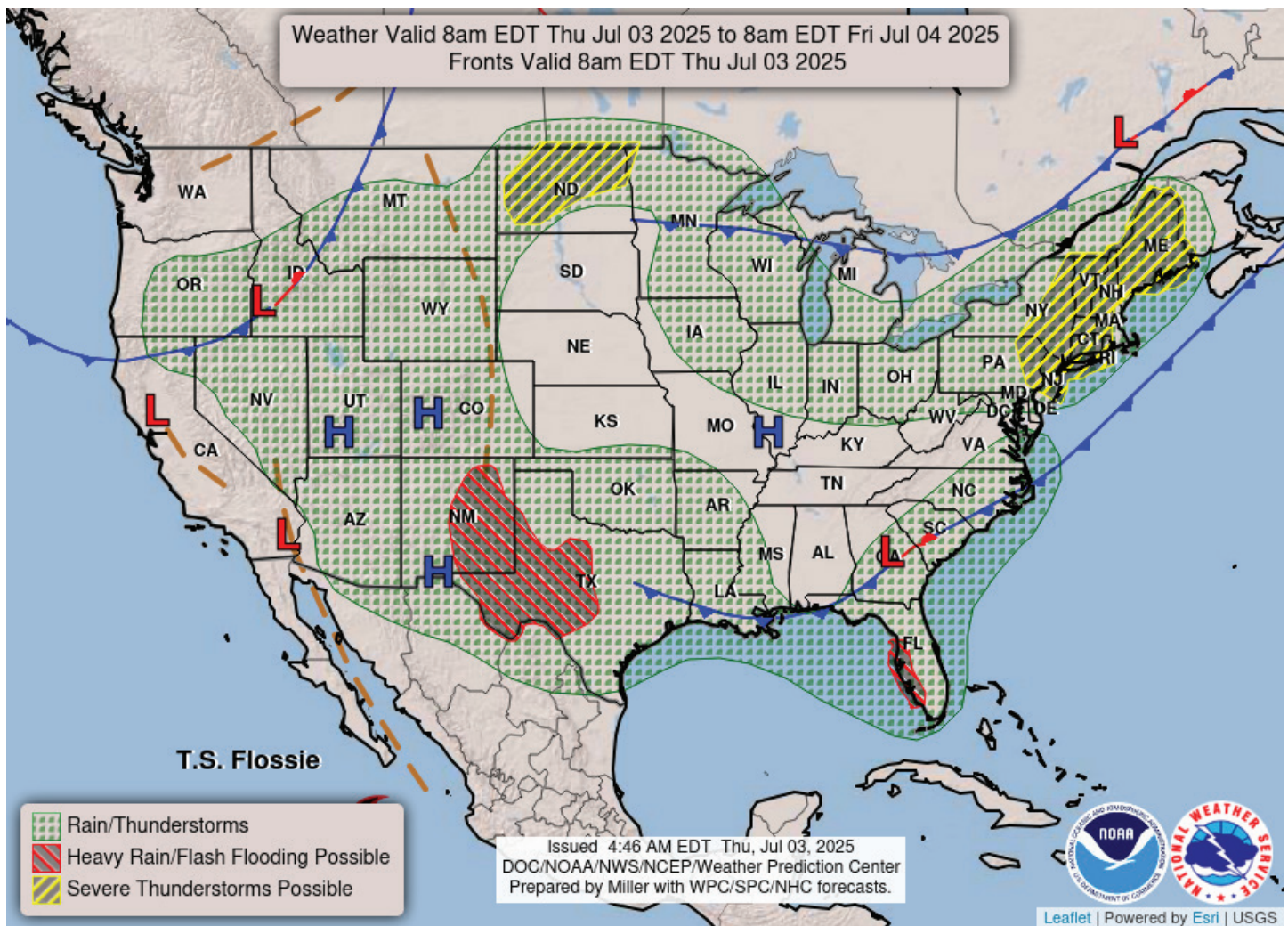
Precip to date in July: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 11.36

Precip Year to Date: 9.36

Sunset Tonight: 9:25:53 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:48:18 am



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Today in Weather History

July 3, 1959: An estimated F2 tornado moved northeast after destroying a farm building at the western edge of Java, Walworth County. Elsewhere in the area, high straight line winds caused property damage while hail damaged crops. The largest hailstone was 2.75 inches in diameter and was observed 9 miles NNW of Timber Lake.

July 3, 2003: A supercell thunderstorm moved southeastward across western Jackson County and Bennett County. The storm dropped up to golf ball sized hail and produced an F2 tornado north of Tuthill in Bennett County. The tornado touched down about a mile north of the junction of highways 18 and 73, where it destroyed a garage. The tornado moved south-southeast and destroyed a mobile home just to the southeast of the highway intersection and then dissipated just north of Tuthill. No one was injured.

Also on this day, a line of severe thunderstorms with hail up to the size of golf balls and winds over 80 mph at times brought widespread property and crop damage to far northeast Brown, across Marshall and Roberts counties. The wind and hail caused the most damage to crops in a 20 mile to a 70-mile long area from north of Britton over to Sisseton and into west central Minnesota. Much of the plants were shredded to the ground. In fact, approximately 30 percent (70,000 acres) of Marshall County's 227,000 acres of crops were damaged or destroyed. Cities receiving the most damage from the line of storms were, Hecla, Andover, Britton, Kidder, Veblen, Roslyn, Langford, Lake City, Claire City, Sisseton, Waubay, Rosholt, and Wilmot. Storm damage mostly included trees and branches down, power lines and poles down, roof and siding damage from hail and fallen trees, some farm outbuildings damaged or destroyed, and many windows broke out of homes and vehicles. Also, many boats, docks, and campers received some damage in the path of the storms. An aerial crop spraying plane at the Sisseton airport was picked up and thrown 450 feet and landed upside down. In Claire City, a 55,000-bushel grain bin was blown off of its foundation and flattened. On a farm five miles north of Amherst, three large grain bins were blown over and damaged.

July 3, 2010: Severe thunderstorms brought damaging winds to parts of central South Dakota, especially to Lyman County. Eighty mph winds moved a building off the foundation at the Presho Municipal Airport. Eighty mph winds also destroyed or damaged many grain bins and caused damage to several other buildings in and around Presho. A large sign, twenty power poles, along with many trees were downed in Presho. There were also several broken houses and car windows from hail and high winds. Seventy mph winds tore a garage door loose, bent a flagpole over, and downed many large tree branches in Kennebec. The winds also caused some damage to homes, sheds, and grain bins in Kennebec.

1873: A tornado in Hancock County, in far west central Illinois, destroyed several farms. From a distance, witnesses initially thought the tornado was smoke from a fire. A child was killed after being carried 500 yards; 10 other people were injured. Click [HERE](#) for more information from Illinois Genealogy Trails.

1975: Up to 3 inches of rain caused flash flooding throughout Las Vegas, NV. The main damage occurred to vehicles at Caesars Palace with approximately 700 damaged or destroyed with several cars found miles away. North Las Vegas was hardest hit with \$3.5 million in damage. Two people drowned in the flood waters.

2000: There is a certain irony about one of the driest places getting the greatest rainfall, and yet that is what happened at usually rain-sparse Vanguard, Saskatchewan on July 3 when a carwash-like down-pour flooded the community of 200 people, some 65 km southeast of Swift Current. As much as 375 mm (14.76") of rain fell in eight hours, the greatest storm for that duration on the Canadian Prairies and one of the most substantial rainfall intensities ever recorded in Canada.

The spectacular thunderstorm produced more cloud-to-ground lightning strikes than that part of southern Saskatchewan would expect in two years. A year's amount of rain left crops in the field drowning and rotting, and roads and rail lines under water. The force of the water crushed cars and farm implements swept away grain bins and soaked large bales. Stranded residents had to be rescued by boat, which rapidly became the carrier of choice on the main street in Vanguard. The flash flood also carried away herds of cattle and drowned dozens of deer and antelope. Some further irony, when millions of liters of contaminated water submerged the water-treatment plant and backed up into homes and businesses, officials had to ship in bottled water from Swift Current.

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Crowns have a fascinating role in history.

In the ancient world, crowns came in many shapes and forms and were made of the costliest materials available. They symbolized royalty and sovereignty. When David fought and conquered the King of the Amorites, he took his crown to celebrate his victory. It was made with precious stones and gold, and the gold in that crown weighed one hundred ten pounds. In today's market the gold in that crown would be worth \$3,004,870.00. The power and might of the king were represented by the size and value of his crown.

"A wife of noble character is her husband's crown," wrote Solomon, "but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones." We read in Genesis that God created woman to be man's helper. As God reviewed His creation, He realized that Adam could not do what He wanted him to do by himself. He needed help. So, God created a helper for him: Eve.

The word helper, however, does not capture the depth of the meaning of that word. A helper, as used in this verse, is one who assists another to reach their full potential, to fill up or complement the other person. Eve, Adam's wife, was created to make him complete.

A wife of noble character can bring her husband esteem and honor, recognition and respect. But he must first earn it! If the husband does his part in becoming the man God created him to be, then the wife can do her part and represent him well. She will be able to complete and complement her husband and receive her crown.

Today's Prayer: Bless, encourage, and empower those wives, Father, who complement and complete their husband's calling. And, may husbands love, honor, and respect their wives always. Amen.

Today's Scripture: "A wife of noble character is her husband's crown but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones." Proverbs 12:4

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

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Winning numbers

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.01.25

19 28 31 39 54 5

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$60,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 21 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.02.25

8 19 20 21 39 7

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,550,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 36 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.02.25

3 6 16 22 42 17

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 51 Mins 56 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.02.25

1 6 20 25 27

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$46,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 51 Mins 56 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.02.25

10 18 21 37 40 10

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 20 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.02.25

7 19 21 54 63 21

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$190,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 20 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

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

Liverpool player Diogo Jota and his brother were killed in a car accident in Spain, police say

By TALES AZZONI and JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Liverpool player Diogo Jota and his brother were killed in a car accident in Spain when the Lamborghini they were in veered off a road and burst into flames, police said Thursday.

The Spanish Civil Guard confirmed to The Associated Press that the 28-year-old Jota and his 25-year-old brother, André Silva, were found dead near the northwestern city of Zamora.

Police were investigating the causes of the accident that happened past midnight local time. They said there were no other vehicles involved. The bodies were undergoing forensic analysis.

Firefighters were called in as the fire spread into the nearby vegetation, authorities said.

It wasn't clear who was driving the car. Police were looking into the hypothesis that the accident happened because of a blown tire while they tried to overtake another vehicle.

The accident occurred while they were driving eastward along an isolated stretch of highway about an hour west of Zamora.

Video images of the aftermath published by Spanish media showed braking tire marks veering off the road toward torn-apart guardrails. The burnt-up car was seen several meters ahead, with some of the local vegetation around it destroyed by the fire.

Jota and Silva, both Portuguese players, were the only ones in the car, police said.

Jota's death comes weeks after he married Rute Cardoso and in a social media post wrote, "Yes to forever." They had three children, the youngest born last year.

Jota also played for Portugal's national team and helped it win the Nations League last month.

Silva played with Portuguese club Penafiel in the lower divisions.

Liverpool said the club was "devastated by the tragic passing."

"Liverpool FC will be making no further comment at this time and request the privacy of Diogo and André's family, friends, teammates and club staff is respected as they try to come to terms with an unimaginable loss. We will continue to provide them with our full support."

Jota joined Liverpool from Wolves in 2020 and won three major trophies with the Merseyside club — including the Premier League title last season.

The Portuguese soccer federation released a statement lamenting the deaths. Federation president Pedro Proença said Portuguese soccer was "completely devastated."

"More than a fantastic player, with almost 50 appearances for the national team, Diogo Jota was an extraordinary person, respected by all his colleagues and opponents. He had a contagious joy and was a reference in his community," Proença said in the statement.

The Portuguese federation said it has requested a minute of silence before Thursday's match between Portugal and Spain at the Women's European Championship being played in Switzerland.

"We lost two champions," Proença said. "Their deaths represent an irreparable loss for Portuguese soccer and we will all do our best to honor their legacy daily."

Portugal's Prime Minister Luís Montenegro commented on the "unexpected and tragic" deaths. He said Jota was "an athlete who greatly honored Portugal's name."

"I extend my deepest condolences to their family," he said. "It is a sad day for soccer and for national and international sports."

Reaction also started pouring in from across the world, including from non-soccer players such as NBA star LeBron James — a minority owner at Liverpool — and tennis legend Rafael Nadal.

"It doesn't make any sense," Jota's Portugal teammate Cristiano Ronaldo said. "Just now we were together in the national team, just now you had gotten married. My condolences to your family, to your wife and to your children. I wish them all the strength in the world. I know that you will always be with them. Rest

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in peace, Diogo and André. We will all miss you."

Former club Porto and former teammates lamented the deaths and sent condolences, as did other clubs, federations and leagues.

The Premier League said it was "shocked and devastated."

"Our sincerest condolences go to Diogo's family, friends, Liverpool FC, and all their supporters at this heartbreaking time," it said. "Football has lost a champion who will be forever missed. We will continue to support our friends and colleagues at the club."

UEFA said its thoughts were with relatives, friends and teammates affected "by this heartbreaking loss." It said a moment of silence will be observed at Euro 2025 matches on Thursday and Friday.

94 Palestinians killed in Gaza, including 45 people waiting for aid, authorities say

By MELANIE LIDMAN and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Airstrikes and shootings killed 94 Palestinians in Gaza overnight, including 45 who were attempting to get much-needed humanitarian aid, hospitals and the Health Ministry said Thursday.

Israel's military did not immediately comment on the strikes.

Five people were killed while outside sites associated with the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, the newly-created, secretive American organization backed by Israel to feed the Gaza Strip's population, while 40 others were killed waiting for aid in other locations across the Gaza Strip.

On Thursday, human rights organization Amnesty International issued a report claiming Israel and the GHF use starvation tactics against Palestinians to continue to commit genocide in the Gaza Strip.

Dozens of people were killed in airstrikes that pounded the Strip Wednesday night and Thursday morning, including 15 people killed in strikes that hit tents in the sprawling Muwasi zone, where many displaced Palestinians are sheltering. A separate strike on a school in Gaza City sheltering displaced people also killed 15 people.

Rising toll in Gaza as possible ceasefire looms

Gaza's Health Ministry said the number of Palestinians killed in Gaza has passed 57,000 since the war began on Oct. 7, 2023. The toll includes 223 people who had been missing but have now been declared dead. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its death count but says that more than half of the dead are women and children.

The deaths come as Israel and Hamas inch closer to a possible ceasefire that would end the 21-month war.

Trump said Tuesday that Israel had agreed on terms for a 60-day ceasefire in Gaza and urged Hamas to accept the deal before conditions worsen. But Hamas' response, which emphasized its demand that the war end, raised questions about whether the latest offer could materialize into an actual pause in fighting.

The Israeli military blames Hamas for the civilian casualties because it operates from populated areas. The military said it targeted Hamas militants and rocket launchers in northern Gaza that launched rockets toward Israel on Wednesday.

Amnesty says controversial aid distribution amounts to 'genocide'

The U.K.-based human rights group Amnesty International condemned both Israel and the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, which the U.S. and Israel have tapped to take over aid distribution in Gaza from a network led by the United Nations.

The Amnesty report said Israel has "turned aid-seeking into a booby trap for desperate starved Palestinians" through GHF's militarized hubs. The conditions have created "a deadly mix of hunger and disease pushing the population past breaking point," it said.

Israel's foreign minister denounced the Amnesty report, saying the organization has "joined forces with Hamas and fully adopted all of its propaganda lies."

Gaza's Health Ministry says more than 500 Palestinians have been killed at or near GHF distribution centers over the past month, including five overnight between Wednesday and Thursday in Khan Younis. The centers are guarded by private security contractors and located near Israeli military positions. Palestinian

officials and witnesses have accused Israeli forces of opening fire at crowds of people moving near the sites. The war began when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking roughly 250 hostages.

The war has left the coastal Palestinian territory in ruins, with much of the urban landscape flattened in the fighting. More than 90% of Gaza's 2.3 million population has been displaced, often multiple times. And the war has sparked a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, leaving hundreds of thousands of people hungry.

Kurdish fighters in northern Iraq to hand over weapons in first step toward disarmament

By SALAR SALIM and QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

IRBIL, Iraq (AP) — A Kurdish militant group that has waged a long-running insurgency in Turkey announced Thursday its fighters in northern Iraq will begin handing over their weapons, marking the first concrete step toward disarmament as part of a peace process.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, announced in May it would disband and renounce armed conflict, ending four decades of hostilities. The move came after PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, who has been imprisoned on an island near Istanbul since 1999, urged his group in February to convene a congress and formally disband and disarm.

Ocalan, 76, continues to wield significant influence in the Kurdish movement despite his 25-year imprisonment. His call to end the fighting marked a pivotal step toward ending the decades-long conflict that has claimed tens of thousands of lives since the 1980s.

In the latest development, "a group of guerrilla fighters will come down from the mountains and will bid farewell to their arms in an effort to declare their good will for peace and democratic politics," the PKK said in a statement Thursday.

The ceremony, which is expected to take place between July 10 and July 12 in the city of Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region, will be the first concrete move toward disarmament.

An Iraqi Kurdish official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly, said around 40 PKK members are expected to hand over their light weapons to the regional government.

The regional government is dominated by two parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, with the KDP overseeing the regional capital, Irbil, and the city of Dohuk. The PUK governs Sulaymaniyah.

The KDP has good relations with Turkey and has been at odds with the PKK, while the PUK is closer to the PKK.

In Turkey on Monday, Omer Celik, a spokesperson for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party, or AKP, said the PKK could begin handing over arms "within days," but did not provide details. Celik added that Erdogan would meet with members of the pro-Kurdish party next week to discuss the peace effort.

There was no immediate statement from Turkey's government on Thursday's announcement.

The PKK has long maintained bases in the mountains of northern Iraq. Turkish forces have launched offensives and airstrikes against the PKK in Iraq and have set up bases in the area. Scores of villages have emptied as a result.

The Iraqi government in Baghdad last year announced an official ban on the separatist group, which has long been prohibited in Turkey.

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House Republicans are pushing Trump's big bill to the brink of passage

By LISA MASCARO, MARY CLARE JALONICK and LEAH ASKARINAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans are ready to vote on President Donald Trump's \$4.5 trillion tax breaks and spending cuts bill early Thursday, up all night as GOP leaders and the president himself worked to persuade skeptical holdouts to drop their opposition by his Fourth of July deadline.

Final debates began in the predawn hours after another chaotic day, and night, at the Capitol. House Speaker Mike Johnson insisted the House would meet the holiday deadline after the Senate approved Trump's signature domestic policy package on the narrowest vote.

"Our way is to plow through and get it done," Johnson said, emerging in the middle of the night from a series of closed-door meetings. "We will meet our July 4th deadline."

The outcome would be a milestone for the president and his party, a longshot effort to compile a long list of GOP priorities into what they call his "one big beautiful bill," an 800-plus page package. With Democrats unified in opposition, the bill will become a defining measure of Trump's return to the White House, with the sweep of Republican control of Congress.

Tax breaks and safety net cuts

At its core, the package's priority is \$4.5 trillion in tax breaks enacted in Trump's first term, in 2017, that would expire if Congress failed to act, along with new ones. This includes allowing workers to deduct tips and overtime pay, and a \$6,000 deduction for most older adults earning less than \$75,000 a year.

There's also a hefty investment, some \$350 billion, in national security and Trump's deportation agenda and to help develop the "Golden Dome" defensive system over the U.S.

To help offset the costs of lost tax revenue, the package includes \$1.2 trillion in cutbacks to the Medicaid health care and food stamps, largely by imposing new work requirements, including for some parents and older people, and a massive rollback of green energy investments.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates the package will add \$3.3 trillion to the deficit over the decade and 11.8 million more people will go without health coverage.

"This was a generational opportunity to deliver the most comprehensive and consequential set of conservative reforms in modern history, and that's exactly what we're doing," said Rep. Jodey Arrington, R-Texas, the House Budget Committee chairman.

Democrats united against 'ugly bill'

Democrats unified against the bill as a tax giveaway to the rich paid for on the backs of the most vulnerable in society, what they called "trickle down cruelty."

"Have you no shame?" said Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn. "Have the moral courage to oppose this bill."

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries invoked the powerful history of the nation's Independence Day holiday, and asked: "What does any of that have to do with this one, big ugly bill?"

He read for nearly two hours from a binder of letters, written by people across the country explaining how the health care programs have helped their families — and how devastating cuts would hurt.

Hauling the package this far in Congress has been difficult from the start. Republicans have struggled mightily with the bill nearly every step of the way in the House and Senate, often succeeding only by the narrowest of margins: just one vote. In the Senate, Vice President JD Vance broke the tie vote. The slim 220-212 majority in the House leaves Republicans little room for defections.

Political costs of saying no

But few GOP lawmakers have been fully satisfied with the final product. Several more moderate Republicans had reservations about the cuts to Medicaid health care and the loss of green energy credits that could derail solar, wind and other renewable projects in their districts.

At the same time, conservatives, including those from the House Freedom Caucus, held out for steeper reductions. Republicans had warned the Senate against making changes to the House-passed bill, but senators put their own stamp on the final draft.

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The House ground to a standstill Wednesday as a handful of holdouts refused to move so quickly. A morning roll call dragged for about seven hours, while an evening vote stalled for more than five, and Trump himself worked the phones and lashed out on social media.

"What are the Republicans waiting for??? What are you trying to prove???" Trump railed in a post-midnight vote.

Johnson, who has pulled close to Trump, relied on White House officials — including Cabinet secretaries, lawyers and others — to work skeptical Republicans through the details. Lawmakers were being told the administration could provide executive actions, projects or other provisions they needed in their districts back home.

"The president's message was, 'We're on a roll,'" said Rep. Ralph Norman, R-S.C. "He wants to see this."

And the alternative, of bucking the president on his signature second-term package, carried grave political risks.

Trump has publicly threatened to campaign against the defectors. One House Republican who has staked out opposition to the bill, Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky, is being targeted by Trump's well-funded political operation.

And Senate Republican Thom Tillis of North Carolina, who had been on the receiving end of Trump's lashings, announced he would not seek reelection shortly before voting against the bill.

Rollback of past presidential agendas

In many ways, the package is a repudiation of the agendas of the last two Democratic presidents, a chiseling away at the Medicaid expansion from Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act, and a pullback of Joe Biden's climate change strategies in the Inflation Reduction Act.

Democrats have described the bill in dire terms, warning that cuts to Medicaid, which some 80 million Americans rely on, would result in lives lost. Food stamps that help feed more than 40 million people would "rip food from the mouths of hungry children, hungry veterans and hungry seniors," Jeffries said.

Republicans say the tax breaks will prevent a tax hike on households and grow the economy. They maintain they are trying to rightsize the safety net programs for the population they were initially designed to serve, mainly pregnant women, the disabled and children, and root out what they describe as waste, fraud and abuse.

The Tax Policy Center, which provides nonpartisan analysis of tax and budget policy, projected the bill would result next year in a \$150 tax break for the lowest quintile of Americans, a \$1,750 tax cut for the middle quintile and a \$10,950 tax cut for the top quintile. That's compared with what they would face if the 2017 tax cuts expired.

Drive-by shooting in Chicago leaves 4 dead and 14 others wounded, police say

CHICAGO (AP) — Four people have died from gunshot wounds and 14 others have been hospitalized following a drive-by shooting in Chicago, police said Thursday. At least three were in critical condition.

The shooting happened late Wednesday in Chicago's River North neighborhood. Several media outlets said it happened outside a restaurant and lounge that had hosted an album release party for a rapper.

Someone opened fire into a crowd standing outside, police said, and the vehicle immediately drove away.

No one was in custody, police said.

Preliminary information from police said 13 women and five men ranging in age from 21 to 32 were shot, and that the dead included two men and two women. Those shot were taken to multiple hospitals, police said.

Chris King, a spokesperson for Northwestern Medicine, said the emergency department was evaluating several people injured in the shooting. He could not provide the number of people sent to the hospital or their conditions.

Closely watched US jobs report likely to show hiring slowed in June

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

The steady slowdown in U.S. hiring likely continued in June as President Donald Trump's trade wars, federal hiring freeze and immigration crackdown weighed on the American job market.

When the Labor Department on Thursday releases job numbers for last month, they're expected to show that businesses, government agencies and nonprofits added 115,000 jobs in June, down from 139,000 in May, according to a survey of forecasters by the data firm FactSet.

The unemployment rate is expected to have ticked up to 4.3%, which would be the highest since October 2021 but still low enough to suggest that most American workers continue to enjoy job security.

The U.S. job market has cooled considerably from red-hot days of 2021-2023 when the economy bounced back with unexpected strength from COVID-19 lockdowns and companies were desperate for workers. So far this year employers have added an average 124,000 jobs a month, down from 168,000 in 2024 and an average 400,000 from 2021 through 2023.

Hiring decelerated after the Federal Reserve raised its benchmark interest rate 11 times in 2022 and 2023. But the economy did not collapse, defying widespread predictions that the higher borrowing costs would cause a recession. Companies kept hiring, just at a more modest pace.

But the job market increasingly looks under strain. A survey released Wednesday by the payroll processor ADP found that private companies cut 33,000 jobs last month. "Though layoffs continue to be rare, a hesitancy to hire and a reluctance to replace departing workers led to job losses last month," said ADP chief economist Nela Richardson. (The ADP numbers frequently differ from the Labor Department's official job count.)

Employers are now contending with fallout from Trump's policies, especially his aggressive use of import taxes — tariffs.

Mainstream economists say that tariffs raise prices for businesses and consumers alike and make the economy less efficient by reducing competition. They also invite retaliatory tariffs from other countries, hurting U.S. exporters.

The erratic way that Trump has rolled out his tariffs — announcing and then suspending them, then coming up with new ones — has left businesses bewildered.

Manufacturers responding to a survey released this week by the Institute for Supply Management complained that they and their customers were reluctant to make decisions until they understood where Trump's tariffs would end up. "That whiplash has to stop and it has to stay stopped," said Susan Spence, chair of the ISM's manufacturing survey committee.

Trump's assault on the federal bureaucracy could also show up in June's job report. Nancy Vanden Houten, lead U.S. economist at Oxford Economics, expects federal jobs dropped by 20,000 last month, "reflecting a hiring freeze, voluntary quits and retirements." For now, she wrote in a commentary Wednesday, court rulings "have put massive federal layoffs on hold."

The president's deportations — and the threat of them — also are likely to start having an impact on the job market by driving immigrants out of the job market. In May, the U.S. labor force — those working and looking for work — fell by 625,000, the biggest drop in a year and a half.

Indonesia rescuers find 31 survivors in ongoing search after ferry sinks near Bali

By FIRDIA LISNAWATI, EDNA TARIGAN and NINIEK KARMINI Associated Press

GILIMANUK, Indonesia (AP) — Rescuers were searching Thursday for 29 people who were missing after a ferry sank and five people died the previous night near Indonesia's resort island of Bali.

As of Thursday afternoon, 31 people had been rescued from the ferry's 53 passengers and 12 crew members, the National Search and Rescue Agency said in a statement.

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"The condition of this ship is fully submerged, so there is a possibility that there are people inside the ferry. But right now we are focusing on the surface of the water first," Surabaya Search and Rescue head Nanang Sigit said.

The five bodies located by rescuers will be taken to their families in Banyuwangi, Sigit said.

The KMP Tunu Pratama Jaya sank almost half an hour after leaving Ketapang port in the East Java town of Banyuwangi late Wednesday for a trip of about 5 kilometers (3.1 miles) to Bali's Gilimanuk port, authorities said.

A helicopter and 15 boats searched for survivors with assistance from fishermen and people onshore.

Weather was a significant factor in the search effort. Strong waves up to 2 meters (6.5 feet) high and darkness hampered emergency responders overnight. While conditions improved Thursday morning, Indonesia's Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency indicated waves reached up to 2.5 meters (8.2 feet) with strong currents and winds Thursday afternoon.

"For today's search we are focusing on searching on the water, as the initial victims were found in the water between the location of the accident toward Gilimanuk port," Sigit said in a statement Thursday morning.

An officer at the port witnessed the sinking before rescuers could be alerted.

"The ferry could not be contacted via radio from the beginning. Then it could be contacted by other ships from the same company. But the ship was already in a tilting condition," Sigit said.

Many of those rescued were unconscious after drifting in choppy waters for hours, Banyuwangi Police Chief Rama Samtama Putra said.

Indonesian authorities are investigating the cause of the accident. Survivors told rescuers there appeared to be a leak in the engine room of the ferry, which was carrying 22 vehicles including 14 trucks.

Some family members arrived at the port in a panic or weeping as they sought information about their loved ones.

Survivors were taken to nearby medical facilities including Jembrana Regional Hospital in Bali.

"When the ferry started to tilt, I initially intended to jump into the sea, but the ship quickly sank, so I did not jump any more but sank with the water entering the ship, maybe about 7 meters (23 feet) deep, so I immediately climbed up to the top," said Supardi, 64, a survivor at the hospital.

He and three other people grouped together in the water and used life jackets to stay afloat, he said.

Ferry tragedies are common in Indonesia, an archipelago of more than 17,000 islands, where ferries are often used as transport and safety regulations can lapse.

Denmark launches its EU presidency facing war in Ukraine and Trump tariff chaos

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

AARHUS, Denmark (AP) — Denmark launched its presidency of the European Union on Thursday with a call for Europe to unite to take on war in Ukraine and chaos caused by U.S. President Donald Trump's global tariff hike which are likely to mark the Nordic country's six-month term at the helm of the world's biggest trading bloc.

"We have war on European soil. We face trade wars, and new tariffs, and we have our closest ally, in the United States, turning increasingly inward," said Danish European Affairs Minister Marie Bjerre. "Europe can no longer be in the shadow of the United States. We need now to stand on our own two feet."

Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen were in the western city of Aarhus for a day of celebratory events as Denmark started its eighth EU presidency since joining in 1973.

Presidencies rotate between the 27 EU member countries every six months. The nation in charge sets policy priorities and organizes the bloc's working agenda. It's supposed to act as an "honest broker," setting aside national interests to foster consensus.

Denmark is entering its term with the motto "A Strong Europe in a Changing World." Its aim is to help

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ensure the EU can take responsibility for its own security, boost economic competitiveness and tackle climate change.

The ceremony was held as large parts of Europe sweltered in high temperatures.

Russia's war on Ukraine, now in its fourth year, is seen as an existential challenge in Europe and will weigh heavily on most policy debate. Economic turmoil also lies ahead. Trump's 90-day tariff pause ends on July 9 with no EU-U.S. trade deal in place as yet.

Getting defense on track and gunning for 5%

NATO has warned that Russia could be ready to attack another European country in 3-5 years. To prepare, the military alliance — most of whose members are EU countries — has agreed that national military and defense-related investment should rise to 5% of GDP.

Denmark's priority will be to set Europe on track to properly defend itself by 2030. That will require laying the groundwork for countries to buy the military equipment needed to execute NATO's defense plans with Trump's security priorities lying outside Europe.

That will mean wrapping up negotiations on proposals that will help countries purchase and make military equipment together.

Enlargement and another defense front

Helping Ukraine, but also Moldova, to join the EU soon is another security priority. Moldova has been shaken by Russian meddling in the form of energy coercion, election interference and disinformation campaigns.

Denmark says it aims to keep the two moving toward membership together, but Hungary is blocking Ukraine's path. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán insists that Ukraine should remain a buffer zone between Russia and NATO countries.

With fresh elections in Moldova in September, pressure is mounting for the EU to "decouple" their accession tracks. Bjerre said "all political and practical means" will be used first to persuade Hungary — a small EU country and the only one standing in Ukraine's way — to lift its veto.

She said it's important to send clear signals to Balkans countries. Most have waited many years to join.

Honing a competitive edge

As Trump wages tariff war, trade has changed drastically. The EU has sought new trade agreements with other countries, such as India, while other trade pacts are being revamped. Denmark says it's important to accelerate that process.

The government in Copenhagen says it's also seeking to cut more bureaucratic red tape in order to speed up innovation.

A major challenge looms in the form of the EU's next long-term budget. Von der Leyen plans to unveil the commission's blueprint for the seven-year spending package, which should enter force in 2028, on July 16.

With defense spending increases weighing heavily on national purses, member countries are unlikely to want to stump up more funds for European priorities. Denmark's aim is to get the debate — which could run for two years — off on the right track.

Managing climate change

Despite some backsliding, the EU still holds to its goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050, by cutting greenhouse gases and compensating for any remaining emissions. Denmark will lead work on setting a 2040 target to guide climate action and investment to keep the bloc on track.

Part of that will be the transition away from fossil fuels to green energy forms. Russia's war on Ukraine has highlighted the dangers of energy dependence on any one supplier.

Sanctions and political pressure have not stopped some EU countries of getting their oil and gas from Russia, although the level of dependency has dropped markedly since 2022. Denmark says the continued phase out remains a priority.

Copenhagen also says it should be easier for farmers to respect EU rules. It wants the bloc's agricultural policy to be simple and business friendly. One goal is to finalize negotiations on a rule simplification package.

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Migration policy, outsourcing continues

In 2021, Frederiksen spoke of a vision of “zero asylum-seekers,” and her government will continue down the EU track of seeking “innovative solutions” to better manage migrants.

Unable to agree how best to cope, EU countries have mostly focused on deporting people. They’ve tried to establish “return hubs” in countries outside the bloc where rejected asylum-seekers could be sent. That approach will continue. Denmark says it’s important to persuade people not to set out for Europe in the first place.

Work will also continue on preparing the vast asylum and migration policy pact to come into force next year. The pact was seen as the answer to Europe’s migration woes, but countries still differ on how best to tackle the challenge.

Under international law, people have a right to asylum if they fear for their lives, safety or persecution.

Some education grants in limbo were used for ‘leftwing agenda,’ Trump administration says

By BIANCA VÁZQUEZ TONESS AP Education Writer

The Trump administration has accused states and schools of using federal education grants earmarked for immigrants’ children and low-income students to help fund “a radical leftwing agenda.”

The administration this week withheld more than \$6 billion intended for after-school and summer programs, English language instruction, adult literacy and more, saying it would review the grants to ensure they align with President Donald Trump’s priorities. The freeze sent schools and summer camp providers scrambling to determine whether they can still provide programs like day camps this summer or after-hours child care this fall.

On Wednesday, the Office of Management and Budget said an initial review showed schools used some of the money to support immigrants in the country illegally or promote LGBTQ+ inclusion. The administration said it hadn’t made any final decisions about whether to withhold or release individual grants.

“Many of these grant programs have been grossly misused to subsidize a radical leftwing agenda,” the Office of Management and Budget said in a statement.

It said New York schools had used money for English language instruction to promote organizations that advocate for immigrants in the country illegally. Washington state used the money to direct immigrants without legal status toward scholarships the Trump administration says were “intended for American students.” Grant funds also were used for a seminar on “queer resistance in the arts,” the office said.

Officials from New York and Washington state didn’t immediately respond to requests for comment.

Advocates for low-income and immigrant children connected the grant freeze to the Trump administration’s larger crackdown on immigrants. Two of the federal programs put on hold were appropriated by Congress to help support English proficiency of students still learning the language and migrant children who move with their parents to follow agricultural and other jobs.

School districts use the \$890 million earmarked for English learners in a wide range of purposes, from training teachers’ aides who work with English learners, to running summer schools designed for them, to hiring family liaisons who speak the parents’ native languages. The \$375 million appropriated for migrant education is often used to hire dedicated teachers to travel close to where students live.

By “cherry-picking extreme examples,” the administration is seeking to conflate all students learning English with people who are in the country illegally, said Amaya Garcia, who directs education research at New America, a left-leaning think tank in Washington, D.C.

In reality, the majority of English learners in public schools were born in the United States, according to data from the Migration Policy Institute.

“The way they’re framing it is that we’re using this money for undocumented students and families,” said Margarita Machado-Casas, president of the National Association of Bilingual Educators. “It’s a distraction. A distraction from what’s actually happening: that 5.3 million English learners who speak lots of different

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languages, not just Spanish, will suffer.”

Even if the students lack legal status, states may not deny public education to children in the country illegally under a 1982 Supreme Court decision known as Plyler v. Doe. Conservative politicians in states such as Oklahoma, Texas and Tennessee have pursued policies that question whether immigrants without legal residency should have the right to a public education, raising the possibility of challenges to that landmark ruling.

Meanwhile, states and school districts are still trying to understand what it will mean for their students and their staff if these funds never arrive.

In Oregon, eliminating grants for English learners and migrant students would “undermine the state’s efforts to increase academic outcomes for multilingual students, promote multilingualism, close opportunity gaps and provide targeted support to mobile and vulnerable student groups,” said Liz Merah, spokeswoman for the state’s Department of Education.

House GOP struggles to win over holdouts on Trump’s tax bill in late-night session

By KEVIN FREKING, LISA MASCARO and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans strained through a day of starts and stops trying to advance President Donald Trump’s tax and spending cuts package, GOP leaders working almost around the clock to persuade skeptical holdouts to send the bill to his desk by the Fourth of July deadline.

A procedural roll call that started late Wednesday night was held open into Thursday morning as several Republicans refused to give their votes. With few to spare from their slim majority, the outcome was in jeopardy. House Speaker Mike Johnson had recalled lawmakers to Washington, eager to seize on the momentum of the bill’s passage the day before in the Senate, and he vowed to press ahead.

“Our way is to plow through and get it done,” Johnson said, emerging in the middle of the night from a series of closed-door meetings. He expected votes later Thursday morning. “We will meet our July 4th deadline.”

But as voting stalled Trump, who hosted lawmakers Wednesday at the White House and spoke with some by phone, lashed out in a midnight post: “What are the Republicans waiting for??? What are you trying to prove???” He also warned starkly of political fallout from the delay “COSTING YOU VOTES!!!”

The idea of quickly convening to for a vote on the more than 800-page bill was a risky gambit, one designed to meet Trump’s demand for a holiday finish. Republicans have struggled mightily with the bill nearly every step of the way, often succeeding by the narrowest of margins — just one vote. Their slim 220-212 majority leaves little room for defections.

Several Republicans are balking at being asked to rubber-stamp the Senate version less than 24 hours after passage. A number of moderate Republicans from competitive districts have objected to the Senate bill’s cuts to Medicaid, while conservatives have lambasted the legislation as straying from their fiscal goals.

It falls to Johnson and his team to convince them that the time for negotiations is over. They will need assistance from Trump to close the deal, and lawmakers headed to the White House for a two-hour session Wednesday to talk to the president about their concerns.

“The president’s message was, ‘We’re on a roll,’” said Rep. Ralph Norman, R-S.C. “He wants to see this.”

Republicans are relying on their majority hold of Congress to push the package over a wall of unified Democratic opposition. No Democrats voted for bill in the Senate and none were expected to do so in the House.

“Hell no!” said House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, flanked by fellow Democrats outside the Capitol.

In an early warning sign of Republican resistance, a resolution setting up terms for debating Trump’s bill barely cleared the House Rules Committee on Wednesday morning. As soon as it came to the full House, it stalled out as GOP leadership waited for lawmakers who were delayed coming back to Washington and conducted closed-door negotiations with holdouts.

By nightfall, as pizzas and other dinners were arriving at the Capitol, the next steps were uncertain.

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Trump pushes Republicans to do 'the right thing'

The bill would extend and make permanent various individual and business tax breaks from Trump's first term, plus temporarily add new ones he promised during the 2024 campaign. This includes allowing workers to deduct tips and overtime pay, and a \$6,000 deduction for most older adults earning less than \$75,000 a year. In all, the legislation contains about \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts over 10 years.

The bill also provides about \$350 billion for defense and Trump's immigration crackdown. Republicans partially pay for it all through less spending on Medicaid and food assistance. The Congressional Budget Office projects the bill will add about \$3.3 trillion to the federal debt over the coming decade.

The House passed its version of the bill in May by a single vote, despite worries about spending cuts and the overall price tag. Now it's being asked to give final passage to a version that, in many respects, exacerbates those concerns. The Senate bill's projected impact on the nation's debt, for example, is significantly higher.

"Let's go Republicans and everyone else," Trump said in a late evening post.

The high price of opposing Trump's bill

Johnson is intent on meeting Trump's timeline and betting that hesitant Republicans won't cross the president because of the heavy political price they would have to pay.

They need only look to Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., who announced his intention to vote against the legislation over the weekend. Soon, the president was calling for a primary challenger to the senator and criticizing him on social media. Tillis quickly announced he would not seek a third term.

One House Republican who has staked out opposition to the bill, Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky, is being targeted by Trump's well-funded political operation.

Democrats

target vulnerable Republicans to join them in opposition

Flanked by nearly every member of his caucus, Democratic Leader Jeffries of New York delivered a pointed message: With all Democrats voting "no," they only need to flip four Republicans to prevent the bill from passing.

Jeffries invoked the "courage" of the late Sen. John McCain giving a thumbs-down to the GOP effort to "repeal and replace" the Affordable Care Act, and singled out Republicans from districts expected to be highly competitive in 2026, including two from Pennsylvania.

"Why would Rob Bresnahan vote for this bill? Why would Scott Perry vote for this bill?" Jeffries asked.

Democrats have described the bill in dire terms, warning that Medicaid cuts would result in lives lost and food stamp cuts would be "literally ripping the food out of the mouths of children, veterans and seniors," Jeffries said Monday.

Republicans say they are trying to right-size the safety net programs for the population they were initially designed to serve, mainly pregnant women, the disabled and children, and root out what they describe as waste, fraud and abuse.

The package includes new 80-hour-a-month work requirements for many adults receiving Medicaid and applies existing work requirements in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, to more beneficiaries. States will also pick up more of the cost for food benefits.

The driving force behind the bill, however, is the tax cuts. Many expire at the end of this year if Congress doesn't act.

The Tax Policy Center, which provides nonpartisan analysis of tax and budget policy, projected the bill would result next year in a \$150 tax break for the lowest quintile of Americans, a \$1,750 tax cut for the middle quintile and a \$10,950 tax cut for the top quintile. That's compared with what they would face if the 2017 tax cuts expired.

Man charged with killing former Minnesota House speaker is due back in court after delay

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — The man charged with killing former Minnesota House Speaker Melissa Hortman and her husband, and wounding a state senator and his wife, is due back in federal court Thursday for a hearing that was put on hold after his lawyer said his client had been unable to sleep while on suicide watch.

The hearing is expected to address whether Vance Boelter should remain in custody without bail and affirm that there is probable cause to proceed with the case. He's not expected to enter a plea. Prosecutors need to secure a grand jury indictment first, before his arraignment, which is when a plea is normally entered.

An unshaven Boelter, 57, of Green Isle, was wearing a green padded suicide prevention suit and orange slippers when he was brought into court last Friday. Federal defender Manny Atwal then asked Magistrate Judge Douglas Micko to continue the hearing. She said Boelter had been sleep deprived due to harsh conditions in the Sherburne County Jail, making it difficult for them to communicate.

"Your honor, I haven't really slept in about 12 to 14 days," Boelter told the judge then. And he denied being suicidal. "I've never been suicidal and I am not suicidal now."

Sherburne County Sheriff Joel Brott, whose jail houses both county and federal prisoners, rejected Boelter's claims of poor conditions as absurd. "He is not in a hotel. He's in jail, where a person belongs when they commit the heinous crimes he is accused of committing," Brott said in a statement Friday.

Boelter faces separate cases in federal and state court on charges of murder and attempted murder for what the state's chief federal prosecutor, Acting U.S. Attorney Joe Thompson, has called "a political assassination" and "a chilling attack on our democracy." The feds are going first.

Authorities say Hortman and her husband, Mark, were shot to death in their home in the Minneapolis suburb of Brooklyn Park in the early hours of June 14 by a man disguised as a police officer who was driving a fake squad car.

Boelter also allegedly shot and seriously wounded state Sen. John Hoffman, and his wife, Yvette, earlier that morning at their home in nearby Champlin. The Hoffmans are recovering, but Hortman's golden retriever, Gilbert, was seriously injured and had to be euthanized.

Boelter surrendered near his home the night of June 15 after what authorities called the largest search in Minnesota history, a hunt of around 40 hours.

Atwal told the court last week that Boelter had been kept in what's known as a "Gumby suit," without undergarments, ever since his first court appearance June 16. She said the lights were on in his area 24 hours a day, doors slammed frequently, the inmate in the next cell would spread feces on the walls, and the smell would drift to Boelter's cell.

The attorney said transferring him to segregation instead, and giving him a normal jail uniform, would let him get some sleep, restore some dignity, and let him communicate better. The judge granted the delay.

Boelter's lawyers have declined to comment on the charges themselves, which could carry the federal death penalty. Thompson has said no decision has been made whether to seek it. Minnesota abolished its death penalty in 1911. But Attorney General Pam Bondi has said from the start that the Trump administration will be more aggressive in seeking capital punishment.

Prosecutors allege Boelter also stopped at the homes of two other Democratic lawmakers. They also say he listed dozens of other Democrats as potential targets, including officials in other states. Friends described Boelter as an evangelical Christian with politically conservative views. But prosecutors have declined so far to speculate on a motive.

Former President Joe Biden and former Vice President Kamala Harris joined the mourners at the Hortmans' funeral last Saturday. Gov. Tim Walz, Harris's running mate on the 2024 Democratic presidential ticket, eulogized Hortman as "the most consequential speaker in Minnesota history."

Hortman served as speaker from 2019 until January. She then yielded the post to a Republican in a power-sharing deal after the House became tied in the 2024 elections, and became speaker emerita.

Company's carbon credits raise questions about unproven ocean technology to fight global warming

By HELEN WIEFFERING Associated Press

The startup Gigablue announced with fanfare this year that it reached a historic milestone: selling 200,000 carbon credits to fund what it describes as a groundbreaking technology in the fight against climate change.

Formed three years ago by a group of entrepreneurs in Israel, the company says it has designed particles that when released in the ocean will trap carbon at the bottom of the sea. By "harnessing the power of nature," Gigablue says, its work will do nothing less than save the planet.

But outside scientists frustrated by the lack of information released by the company say serious questions remain about whether Gigablue's technology works as the company describes. Their questions showcase tensions in an industry built on little regulation and big promises — and a tantalizing chance to profit.

Jimmy Pallas, an event organizer based in Italy, struck a deal with Gigablue last year. He said he trusts the company does what it has promised him — ensuring the transportation, meals, and electricity of a recent 1,000-person event will be offset by particles in the ocean.

Gigablue's service is like "an extra trash can" where Pallas can discard his unwanted emissions, he said. "Same way I use my trash can — I don't follow where the truck that comes and picks up my trash brings it to," he said. "I'll take their word for it."

'Hundreds of thousands of carbon credits'

Gigablue has a grand vision for the future of carbon removal. It was originally named "Gigaton" after the one billion metric tons of carbon dioxide most scientists say will be necessary to remove from the atmosphere each year to slow global warming.

The company began trials in the South Pacific Ocean last year, and says it will work with country authorities to create a "sequestration field" — a dedicated part of the ocean where "pulses" of particles will be released on a seasonal basis.

Gigablue says its solution is affordable, too — priced to attract investors.

"Every time we go to the ocean, we generate hundreds of thousands of carbon credits, and this is what we're going to do continuously over the upcoming years and towards the future, in greater and greater quantities," co-founder Ori Shaashua said.

Carbon credits, which have grown in popularity over the last decade, are tokens that symbolize the removal of one metric ton of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. On paper, companies that buy credits achieve a smaller carbon footprint without needing to reduce their own emissions — for instance, by paying another vendor to plant trees or capture carbon dioxide from the air.

Only a few countries have required local industries to purchase carbon credits. Most companies that buy them, including Microsoft and Google, do so voluntarily.

The credits have helped fund a band of startups like Gigablue that are eager to tackle the climate crisis, but they are also unevenly regulated, scientifically complex, and have in some cases been linked to fraud.

Gigablue's 200,000 credits are pledged to SkiesFifty, a newly formed company investing in greener practices for the aviation industry. It's the largest sale to date for a climate startup operating in the ocean, according to the tracking site CDR.fyi, making up more than half of all ocean-based carbon credits sold last year.

And it could beckon a rapid acceleration of the company's work. Gigablue hopes to reach a goal this year of capturing 10 metric tons of carbon dioxide for each ton of particles it deploys, Shaashua said. At that rate, Gigablue would disperse at least 20,000 tons of particles in the ocean.

Gigablue wouldn't reveal what it earned in the sale, and SkiesFifty's team declined to be interviewed for this story. Most credits are sold for a few hundred dollars each — but a chart on Gigablue's website suggests its prices are lower than almost any other form of carbon capture on the market.

A mission to save the world

The startup is the brainchild of four entrepreneurs hailing from the tech industry. According to their

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LinkedIn profiles, Gigablue's CEO previously worked for an online grocery startup, while its COO was vice president of SeeTree, a company that raised \$60 million to provide farmers with information on their trees.

Shaashua, who often serves as the face of Gigablue, said he specializes in using artificial intelligence to pursue positive outcomes in the world. He co-founded a data mining company that tracked exposure risks during the COVID-19 pandemic, and led an auto startup that brokered data on car mileage and traffic patterns.

"Three years ago, I decided to take the same formula, so to say, to climate," Shaashua said.

Under his guidance, he said, Gigablue created an AI-driven "digital twin" of the ocean based on dozens of metrics to determine where to release the particles.

Chief technology officer Sapir Markus-Alford earned a bachelor's degree in earth and environmental sciences from Israel's Ben-Gurion University in 2021, shortly before founding Gigablue.

Markus-Alford said she began her studies and eventual path to Gigablue after seeing bleached coral reefs and other impacts of warming waters on a series of diving trips around the world.

"I understood that the best thing we could do for the ocean is to be able to remove CO2," Markus-Alford said.

A spokesperson for Gigablue did not answer whether the other co-founders have graduate degrees in oceanography or environmental science, but said the company's broader team holds a total of 46 Ph.D.s with expertise in biology, chemistry, oceanography, and environmental science. Markus-Alford said that figure includes outside experts and academics and "everyone that supports us."

The company's staffing has expanded from Israel to hubs in New York and New Zealand, Shaashua said.

In social media posts advertising open jobs, Gigablue employees encouraged applicants to "Join Our Mission to Save the World!"

Trapping carbon at the bottom of the ocean

The particles Gigablue has patented are meant to capture carbon in the ocean by floating for a number of days and growing algae, before sinking rapidly to the ocean floor.

"We are an elevator for carbon," Shaashua said. "We are exporting the carbon from the top to the bottom."

Algae — sometimes referred to as phytoplankton — has long been attractive to climate scientists because it absorbs carbon dioxide from the surrounding water as it grows. If the algae sinks to the deep sea or ocean floor, Gigablue expects the carbon to be trapped there for hundreds to thousands of years.

The ultimate goal is to lower carbon dioxide levels so drastically that the ocean rebalances with the atmosphere by soaking up more CO2 from the air. It's a feat that would help slow climate change, but one that is still under active study by climate scientists.

Gigablue's founders have said the company's work is inspired by nature and "very, very environmentally safe." The company's particles and sinking methods simply recreate what nature has been doing "since forever," Shaashua said.

Gigablue ran its first trial sinking particles in the Mediterranean in March last year.

Later, on two voyages to the South Pacific, the company released 60 cubic meters — about two shipping containers — of particles off the coast of New Zealand.

Materials kept a mystery

While Gigablue has made several commercial deals, it has not yet revealed what its particles are made of. Partly this is because the company says it will build different particles tailored to different seasons and areas of the ocean.

"It's proprietary," Markus-Alford said.

Documents provide a window into the possible ingredients. According to information on the permit, Gigablue's first New Zealand trial last year involved releasing particles of pure vermiculite, a porous clay often used in potting soil.

In the second New Zealand trial, the company released particles made of vermiculite, ground rock, a plant-based wax, as well as manganese and iron.

A patent published last year hints the particles could also be made of scores of other materials, includ-

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ing cotton, rice husks or jute, as well as synthetic ingredients like polyester fibers or lint. The particles contain a range of possible binding agents, and up to 18 different chemicals and metals, from iron to nickel to vanadium.

Without specifying future designs, Markus-Alford said Gigablue's particles meet certain requirements: "All the materials we use are materials that are natural, nontoxic, nonhazardous, and can be found in the ocean," she said. She wouldn't comment on the possible use of cotton or rice, but said the particles won't include any kind of plastic.

When asked about vermiculite, which is typically mined on land and heated to expand, Markus-Alford said rivers and erosion transport most materials including vermiculite to the ocean. "Almost everything, basically, that exists on land can be found in the ocean," she said.

The company said it had commissioned an environmental institute to verify that the particles are safe for thousands of organisms, including mussels and oysters. Any materials in future particles, Gigablue said, will be approved by local authorities.

Shaashua has said the particles are so benign that they have zero impact on the ocean.

"We are not changing the water chemistry or the water biology," Shaashua said.

Ken Buesseler, a senior scientist with the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution who has spent decades studying the biological carbon cycle of the ocean, says that while he's intrigued by Gigablue's proposal, the idea that the particles don't alter the ocean is "almost inconceivable."

"There has to be a relationship between what they're putting in the ocean and the carbon dioxide that's dissolved in seawater for this to, quote, work," Buesseler said.

Buesseler co-leads a nonprofit group of scientists hoping to tap the power of algae in the ocean to capture carbon. The group organizes regular forums on the subject, and Gigablue presented in April.

"I left with more questions than answers," Buesseler said.

Scientists raise questions

Several scientists not affiliated with Gigablue interviewed by The Associated Press said they were interested in how a company with so little public information about its technology could secure a deal for 200,000 carbon credits.

The success of the company's method, they said, will depend on how much algae grows on the particles, and the amount that sinks to the deep ocean. So far, Gigablue has not released any studies demonstrating those rates.

Thomas Kiørboe, a professor of ocean ecology at the Technical University of Denmark, and Philip Boyd, an oceanographer at the University of Tasmania who studies the role of algae in the Earth's carbon cycle, said they were doubtful algae would get enough sunlight to grow inside the particles.

It's more likely the particles would attract hungry bacteria, Kiørboe said.

"Typical phytoplankton do not grow on surfaces, and they do not colonize particles," Kiørboe said. "To most phytoplankton ecologists, this would just be, I think, absurd."

The rates at which Gigablue says its particles sink — up to a hundred meters (yards) per hour — might shear off algae from the particles in the quick descent, Boyd said.

It's likely that some particles would also be eaten by fish — limiting the carbon capture, and raising the question of how the particles could impact marine life.

Boyd is eager to see field results showing algae growth, and wants to see proof that Gigablue's particles cause the ocean to absorb more CO₂ from the air.

"These are incredibly challenging issues that I don't think, certainly for the biological part, I don't think anyone on the planet has got solutions for them," he said.

James Kerry, a senior marine and climate scientist for the conservation group OceanCare and senior research fellow at Australia's James Cook University, has closely followed Gigablue's work.

"What we've got is a situation of a company, a startup, upfront selling large quantities of credits for a technology that is unproven," he said.

In a statement, Gigablue said that bacteria does consume the particles but the effect is minimal, and its measurements will account for any loss of algae or particles as they sink.

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The company noted that a major science institute in New Zealand has given Gigablue its stamp of approval. Gigablue hired the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research, a government-owned company, to review several drafts of its methodology.

In a recent letter posted to Gigablue's website, the institute's chief ocean scientist said his staff had confidence the company's work is "scientifically sound" and the proposed measurements for carbon sequestration were robust.

Whether Gigablue's methods are deemed successful, for now, will be determined not by regulators — but by another private company.

A new market

Puro.earth is one of several companies known as registries that serve the carbon credit market.

Amid the lack of regulation and the potential for climate startups to overstate their impact, registries aim to verify how much carbon was really removed.

The Finnish Puro.earth has verified more than a million carbon credits since its founding seven years ago. But most of those credits originated in land-based climate projects. Only recently has it aimed to set standards for the ocean.

In part, that's because marine carbon credits are some of the newest to be traded. Dozens of ocean startups have entered the industry, with credit sales catapulting from 2,000 in 2021 to more than 340,000, including Gigablue's deal, last year.

But the ocean remains a hostile and expensive place in which to operate a business or monitor research. Some ocean startups have sold credits only to fold before they could complete their work. Running Tide, a Maine-based startup aimed at removing carbon from the atmosphere by sinking wood chips and seaweed, abruptly shuttered last year despite the backing of \$50 million from investors, leaving sales of about 7,000 carbon credits unfulfilled.

In June, Puro.earth published a draft methodology that will be used to verify Gigablue's work, which it designed in consultation with Gigablue. Once finalized, Gigablue will pay the registry for each metric ton of carbon dioxide that it claims to remove.

Marianne Tikkanen, head of standards at Puro.earth, said that although this methodology was designed with Gigablue, her team expects other startups to adopt the same approach.

"We hope that there will be many who can do it and that it stimulates the market," she said.

The road ahead

It remains to be seen whether New Zealand officials will grant permission for the expanded "sequestration field" that Gigablue has proposed creating, or if the company will look to other countries.

New Zealand's environmental authority has so far treated Gigablue's work as research — a designation that requires no formal review process or consultations with the public. The agency said in a statement that it could not comment on how it would handle a future commercial application from Gigablue.

But like many climate startups, Gigablue was involved in selling carbon credits during its research expeditions — not only inking a major deal, but smaller agreements, too.

Pallas, the Italian businessman, said he ordered 22 carbon credits from Gigablue last year to offset the emissions associated with his event in November. He said Gigablue gave them to him for free — but says he will pay for more in the future.

Pallas sought out carbon credits because he sees the signs of climate change all around him, he says, and expects more requirements in Italy for businesses to decarbonize in coming years. He chose Gigablue because they are one of the largest suppliers: "They've got quantity," he said.

How authorities view Gigablue's growing commercial activity could matter in the context of an international treaty that has banned certain climate operations in the ocean.

More than a decade ago, dozens of countries including New Zealand agreed they should not allow any commercial climate endeavor that involves releasing iron in the ocean, a technique known as "iron fertilization." Only research, they said, with no prospect of economic gain should be allowed.

Iron is considered a key ingredient for spurring algae growth and was embedded in the particles that Gigablue dispersed in October in the Pacific Ocean. Several scientific papers have raised concerns that

spurring iron-fueled algae blooms on a large scale would deplete important nutrients in the ocean and harm fisheries.

The startup denies any link to iron dumping on the basis that its particles don't release iron directly into the water and don't create an uncontrolled algae bloom.

"We are not fertilizing the ocean," Markus-Alford said.

"In fact, we looked at iron fertilization as an inspiration of something to avoid," Shaashua said.

But the draft methodology that Puro.earth will use to verify Gigablue's work notes many of the same concerns that have been raised about iron fertilization, including disruptions to the marine food web.

Other scientists who spoke with AP see a clear link between Gigablue's work and the controversial practice. "If they're using iron to stimulate phytoplankton growth," said Kerry, the OceanCare scientist, "then it is iron fertilization."

For now, scientific concerns don't seem to have troubled Gigablue's buyers. The company has already planned its next research expedition in New Zealand and hopes to release more particles this fall.

"They mean well, and so do I," said Pallas, of his support for Gigablue. "Sooner or later, I'll catch a plane, go to New Zealand, and grab a boat to see what they've done."

A Q-tip and spotless car were key evidence linking Bryan Kohberger to murders of 4 Idaho students

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — The lead prosecutor tasked with finding justice for four University of Idaho students killed in a grisly quadruple stabbing more than two years ago laid out his key evidence Wednesday at a court hearing for Bryan Kohberger, who agreed to plead guilty earlier this week to avoid the death penalty.

The evidentiary summary — recited by lead prosecutor Bill Thompson before Kohberger entered his pleas — spun a dramatic tale that included a DNA-laden Q-tip plucked from the garbage in the dead of the night, a getaway car stripped so clean of evidence that it was "essentially disassembled inside" and a fateful early-morning Door Dash order that may have put one of the victims in Kohberger's path.

These details offered new insights into how the crime unfolded on Nov. 13, 2022, and how investigators ultimately solved the case using surveillance footage, cell phone tracking and DNA matching. But the synopsis leaves hanging key questions that could have been answered at trial — including a motive for the stabbings and why Kohberger picked that house, and those victims, all apparent strangers to him.

The small farming community of Moscow, in the northern Idaho panhandle, had not had a homicide in about five years when Kaylee Goncalves, Ethan Chapin, Xana Kernodle and Madison Mogen were found dead at a rental home near campus.

Kohberger, now 30, had begun a doctoral degree in criminal justice at nearby Washington State University — across the state line from Moscow, Idaho — months before the crimes.

"The defendant has studied crime," Thompson said, as the victims' family members dabbed at their tears. "In fact, he did a detailed paper on crime scene processing when he was working on his Ph.D., and he had that knowledge skillset."

What we learned from the hearing

Kohberger's cell phone began connecting with cell towers in the area of the crime more than four months before the stabbings, Thompson said, and pinged on those towers 23 times between the hours of 10 p.m. and 4 a.m. in that time period.

A compilation of surveillance videos from neighbors and businesses also placed Kohberger's vehicle — known to investigators because of a routine traffic stop by police in August — in the area.

On the night of the killings, Kohberger parked behind the house and entered through a sliding door to the kitchen at the back of the house shortly after 4 a.m., Thompson said. He moved to the third floor, where Madison Mogen and Kaylee Goncalves were sleeping.

After killing both of them with a knife, Kohberger left a knife sheath next to Mogen's body. Both victims'

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blood was later found on the sheath, along with DNA from a single male that ultimately helped investigators pinpoint Kohberger as the only suspect.

On the floor below, another student was still awake. Xana Kernodle had ordered Door Dash not long before, and as Kohberger was leaving, he crossed paths with her and killed her with a large knife, Thompson said. He then killed her boyfriend, Ethan Chapin, who was sleeping in Kernodle's bedroom.

Kohberger left two others in the house alive, including one roommate who was expected to testify at trial that sometime before 4:19 a.m. she saw an intruder there with "bushy eyebrows," wearing black clothing and a ski mask.

Roughly five minutes later, the car could be seen on the next-door neighbor's surveillance camera. speeding away so fast "the car almost loses control as it makes the corner," Thompson said.

What did Kohberger do next?

After Kohberger fled the scene, Thompson said, his cover-up was elaborate.

Prosecutors believe he drove backroads to his apartment in Pullman, Washington, to avoid surveillance cameras on the major roads and didn't turn his cell phone back on until 4:48 a.m. By 5:26 a.m., he was back in Pullman, Thompson said.

Later, Kohberger changed his car registration from Pennsylvania to Washington State — significant for investigators who were combing through surveillance camera footage because Pennsylvania law doesn't require a front license plate, making it harder to identify the vehicle.

And by the time investigators did catch up with him weeks later, his apartment and office in nearby Pullman were scrubbed clean.

"Spartan would be a kind characterization. There was nothing there, nothing of evidentiary value was found," Thompson said of Kohberger's apartment.

The car, too, "had been essentially disassembled inside," he added. "It was spotless. The defendant's car had been meticulously cleaned inside."

The Q-tip that broke the case

Investigators had honed in on Kohberger, but they needed to prove he was their suspect.

With the DNA of a single mystery male on the knife sheath, they worked with the FBI and the local sanitation department to secretly retrieve garbage from the Pennsylvania home of Kohberger's parents, seeking a DNA match to their suspect.

"They conducted what's called a trash pull during the nighttime hours," Thompson said, and "took trash that had been set out on the street for collection" and sent it to Idaho's forensics lab.

The pile of garbage yielded investigative gold: A Q-tip that contained DNA identified "as coming from the father of the person whose DNA was found on the knife sheath that was found by Madison Mogen's body on the bed," he said.

With that, Kohberger was arrested at his parents' home in Pennsylvania, where he had gone for the holidays, and ultimately was extradited to Idaho for prosecution.

The mysteries that remain

Even while prosecutors detailed that night, a key question remains: Why did Kohberger target that house and those victims? Did he know them? And what was his motive?

"We do not have evidence that the defendant had direct contact with 1122 or with residents in 1122, but we can put his phone in the area on those times," Thompson said, referring to the house number where the murders took place.

Some of that evidence may have come out at trial, and may yet be contained in documents related to the case that have been sealed by the court until after a July 23 sentencing hearing. A gag order in place for all attorneys in the case is still in effect as well.

Those documents include witness lists, a list of exhibits, an analysis of the evidence, requests for additional discovery, filings about mitigating factors and various unsuccessful defense motions that sought to introduce alternative suspects, among other things.

The families of the victims are split over the plea deal

With the case solved, families remain divided over its resolution.

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The deal stipulates that Kohberger will be spared execution in exchange for four consecutive life sentences. He also waived his right to appeal and to challenge the sentence.

Chapin's and Mogen's families support the deal.

"We now embark on a new path. We embark on a path of hope and healing," Mogen's family said in a statement.

The family of Kaylee Goncalves publicly denounced the plea deal ahead of Wednesday's hearing and her father refused to attend the proceedings.

Goncalves 18-year-old sister, Aubrie Goncalves, said in a Facebook post that "Bryan Kohberger facing a life in prison means he would still get to speak, form relationships, and engage with the world."

"Meanwhile, our loved ones have been silenced forever," she wrote.

7 missing after explosion at California fireworks warehouse sets off massive blaze

ESPARTO, Calif. (AP) — Seven people were missing Wednesday following an explosion at a fireworks warehouse in rural Northern California that caused a massive fire that spread to farm fields and forced evacuations in the surrounding community, authorities said.

Two people were injured and received medical care, Esparto Fire Chief Curtis Lawrence said at a news conference Wednesday. Lawrence provided no further information other than to say the two were "OK," and it wasn't known if the victims worked at the facility.

Emergency crews and investigators were working with the property's owner and monitoring the area using drones to find the missing individuals, said the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. It was not immediately clear if those missing worked at the warehouse or lived nearby.

People were urged to avoid the area after the Tuesday night blast, which set off a barrage of fireworks and caused a blaze that led to other spot fires and collapsed the building near Esparto in Yolo County about 40 miles (64 kilometers) northwest of Sacramento.

The cause of the explosion was under investigation.

"The fire will take time to cool, and once it does, explosive experts must safely enter the site to assess and secure the area," the Yolo County Sheriff's Office said in a statement late Tuesday.

Syanna Ruiz, 18, told the Sacramento Bee that her boyfriend, Jesus Ramos, and two of his brothers were missing. Tuesday was Ramos's first day on the job at the warehouse, she said.

"They were all three incredible men who had so much coming for them, that had so much coming their way," Ruiz said. "I'm just praying to God that some way, somehow, they're OK."

The fire was held at nearly 80 acres (33 hectares) after scorching surrounding agricultural fields, officials said.

The property is owned by "an active pyrotechnic license holder," Cal Fire said in a statement Wednesday. "This type of incident is very rare, as facilities like this are required to not only follow our stringent California pyrotechnic requirements, but also federal explosive storage requirements."

The state fire marshal's website listed the license for the facility as belonging to Blackstar Fireworks. The owner who was listed did not respond to an email from The Associated Press requesting comment.

Gov. Gavin Newsom's office said it was tracking what happened and that state ground and air resources were deployed.

"The State Fire Marshal has sent an arson and bomb investigation team, and stands ready to provide additional support as needed," the governor's office said on the social site X.

Officials in nearby Sutter and Yuba counties announced Wednesday that they were exploring alternatives for Fourth of July celebrations after their fireworks were destroyed in the blast.

Sean 'Diddy' Combs is denied bail after mixed verdict clears him of top charges in sex crimes case

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Sean "Diddy" Combs dropped to his knees and prayed in the courtroom after he was acquitted Wednesday of sex trafficking and racketeering charges that could have put one of hip-hop's celebrated figures behind bars for life. The rapper was convicted of lesser prostitution-related offenses and denied bail as he awaits sentencing.

His lawyer Marc Agnifilo called the verdict a "great victory" and said the jury "got the situation right — or certainly right enough" as he stood outside Manhattan federal court at a stand of microphones. "Today is a victory of all victories."

The mixed verdict capped a sordid legal odyssey that shattered Combs' affable "Puff Daddy" image and derailed his career as a Grammy-winning artist and music executive, fashion entrepreneur, brand ambassador and reality TV star.

"I'll see you when I get out," Combs told family members including his mother and children just before leaving the courtroom to return to jail. "We're going to get through this."

Combs stands convicted of two counts of a crime — transportation to engage in prostitution — that carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. But jurors cleared him of three charges, two of which carried a mandatory 15 years and a maximum of life.

He was convicted of flying people around the country, including his girlfriends and male sex workers, to engage in sexual encounters, a felony violation of the federal Mann Act.

Combs' lawyers said that under federal sentencing guidelines, he would likely face about two years in prison. Prosecutors, citing Combs' violence and other factors, said the guidelines would call for at least four to five years. Locked up since his September arrest, Combs has already served nine months.

"We fight on and we're going to win," Agnifilo said. "And we're not going to stop until he walks out of prison a free man to his family."

Acquittal on the most serious charges

In a triumph for Combs, the jury of eight men and four women acquitted him of racketeering conspiracy and sex trafficking charges related to allegations that he used his money, power and frightening physical force to manipulate girlfriends into hundreds of drug-fueled sex marathons with men.

Combs' defense team argued that the women were willing participants and that none of his violence justified the severity of the charges.

Agnifilo asked that Combs be released on bond immediately to await sentencing, saying the acquittals changed the calculus about whether he needed to be held.

"He's not going to flee. He's been given his life back," Agnifilo said.

Judge Arun Subramanian denied it, saying Combs — for now — had not met the burden of showing by clear and convincing evidence a "lack of danger to any person or the community."

Combs, 55, sat stoic as he heard the bond decision, then snapped his head toward Agnifilo and wrote several notes as the lawyer spoke. Finally Combs raised his hand and waved to get the judge's attention. But he ultimately did not speak after consulting with Agnifilo.

Leaving the courtroom for a final time, he paused to address relatives packed into rows of wooden benches who supported him throughout the eight-week trial.

"Be strong. I love you," he added, putting his hands to his lips and pushing a dramatic kiss toward loved ones.

Earlier in the day, when he heard the jury foreperson announce "not guilty" three times, Combs pumped his fist, looked toward the jurors and held his hands up in a prayer motion. Supporters in the audience could barely contain their relief despite the judge's admonition to avoid outbursts: When the first "not guilty" was read aloud, someone shouted, "Yeah!"

The judge will decide Combs' punishment and suggested Oct. 3 as a sentencing date, but a defense

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request to have it sooner prompted him to schedule a virtual hearing Tuesday on the matter.

Verdict follows weeks of harrowing testimony

Federal officials involved in the case responded to the outcome by noting that sex crimes “are all too present in many aspects of our society.”

“New Yorkers and all Americans want this scourge stopped and perpetrators brought to justice,” Manhattan-based U.S. Attorney Jay Clayton and Ricky J. Patel, who heads federal Homeland Security Investigations’ New York office, said in a statement.

Jurors deliberated for about 13 hours over three days before announcing their verdict. It came after they said late Tuesday that they had decided on four counts but were stuck on the racketeering one. At that point the judge told them to keep deliberating and keep the partial verdict under wraps.

Combs did not testify at his trial, which featured 34 witnesses as well as video of the rapper attacking his former girlfriend Cassie, the R&B singer born Casandra Ventura.

Her lawyer, Douglas Wigdor, said in a statement after the verdict that “by coming forward with her experience, Cassie has left an indelible mark on both the entertainment industry and the fight for justice.”

Later he asked the judge in a letter to deny Combs bail, saying, “Ms. Ventura believes that Mr. Combs is likely to pose a danger to the victims who testified in this case, including herself, as well as to the community.”

Cassie testified for four days about her turbulent, 11-year relationship with Combs, which began after she signed with his Bad Boy record label.

Cassie said Combs became obsessed with voyeuristic encounters, arranged with the help of his staff, that involved sex workers and copious amounts of baby oil. During the sex events, called “freak-offs” or “hotel nights,” Combs would order Cassie to do things with other men that she found humiliating, she testified.

When things did not go Combs’ way, he would beat her, she said.

Another ex-girlfriend, testifying under the pseudonym “Jane,” told the jury she repeatedly told Combs she didn’t want to have sex with the men hired for their trysts.

“I’m not an animal. I need a break,” she told him. Nevertheless, she said, she felt “obligated” to comply with his demands, in part because he paid her rent.

The AP does not typically name people who say they have been sexually abused unless they come forward publicly, as Cassie has.

Defense calls case an invasion of privacy

The trial’s most famous witness, rapper Kid Cudi, said Combs broke into his home in late 2011 after learning that he and Cassie were dating. After his car was firebombed a few weeks later, Cudi — whose real name is Scott Mescudi — said he knew Combs “had something to do” with it. Combs denied it.

Combs’ defense team acknowledged that he could be violent but argued that prosecutors were intruding in his personal life. In closing remarks to the jury, Agnifilo said it was not illegal for Combs to make “homemade porn” with girlfriends.

Rapper, entrepreneur and criminal defendant

Combs was at the center of the East Coast-West Coast hip-hop battles of the 1990s and became one of the most influential hip-hop producers and executives of the past three decades, diversifying his interests with the Sean John fashion label, Ciroc vodka, a cable TV channel and a film and TV studio.

In 2001 he was at the center of one of the biggest hip-hop trials of its era, stemming from a Manhattan nightclub shooting that injured three people in 1999. Combs was acquitted of charges that he took an illegal gun into the club and tried to bribe his driver to take the fall.

His career recovered quickly that time.

Combs’ reputation may have suffered irreparable damage, though, after Cassie sued him in November 2023, alleging years of sexual and physical abuse. He settled the next day for \$20 million, but more lawsuits by other women and men followed.

Most are still pending.

US contractors say their colleagues are firing live ammo as Palestinians seek food in Gaza

By JULIA FRANKEL and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

BEERSHEBA, Israel (AP) — American contractors guarding aid distribution sites in Gaza are using live ammunition and stun grenades as hungry Palestinians scramble for food, according to accounts and videos obtained by The Associated Press.

Two U.S. contractors, speaking to the AP on condition of anonymity because they were revealing their employers' internal operations, said they were coming forward because they were disturbed by what they considered dangerous and irresponsible practices. They said the security staff hired were often unqualified, unvetted, heavily armed and seemed to have an open license to do whatever they wished.

They said their colleagues regularly lobbed stun grenades and pepper spray in the direction of the Palestinians. One contractor said bullets were fired in all directions — in the air, into the ground and at times toward the Palestinians, recalling at least one instance where he thought someone had been hit.

"There are innocent people being hurt. Badly. Needlessly," the contractor said.

He said American staff on the sites monitor those coming to seek food and document anyone considered "suspicious." He said they share such information with the Israeli military.

Videos provided by one of the contractors and taken at the sites show hundreds of Palestinians crowded between metal gates, jostling for aid amid the sound of bullets, stun grenades and the sting of pepper spray. Other videos include conversation between English-speaking men discussing how to disperse crowds and encouraging each other after bursts of gunfire.

The testimonies from the contractors — combined with the videos, internal reports and text messages obtained by the AP — offer a rare glimpse inside the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, the newly created, secretive American organization backed by Israel to feed the Gaza Strip's population. Last month, the U.S. government pledged \$30 million for the group to continue operations — the first known U.S. donation to the group, whose other funding sources remain opaque.

Journalists have been unable to access the GHF sites, located in Israeli military-controlled zones. The AP cannot independently verify the contractors' stories.

A spokesperson for Safe Reach Solutions, the logistics company subcontracted by GHF, told the AP that there have been no serious injuries at any of their sites to date. In scattered incidents, security professionals fired live rounds into the ground and away from civilians to get their attention. That happened in the early days at the "the height of desperation where crowd control measures were necessary for the safety and security of civilians," the spokesperson said.

Aid operation is controversial

Gaza's more than 2 million Palestinians are living through a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. Since Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, setting off the 21-month war, Israel has bombarded and laid siege to the strip, leaving many teetering on the edge of famine, according to food security experts.

For 2 1/2 months before GHF's opening in May, Israel blocked all food, water and medicine from entering Gaza, claiming Hamas was stealing the aid being transported under a preexisting system coordinated by the United Nations. It now wants GHF to replace that U.N. system. The U.N. says its Gaza aid operations do not involve armed guards.

Over 57,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed since the war erupted, according to the territory's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and militants.

GHF is an American organization, registered in Delaware and established in February to distribute humanitarian aid during the ongoing Gaza humanitarian crisis. Since the GHF sites began operating more than a month ago, Palestinians say Israeli troops open fire almost every day toward crowds on roads heading to the distribution points, through Israeli military zones. Several hundred people have been killed and hundreds more wounded, according to Gaza's Health Ministry and witnesses.

In response, Israel's military says it fires only warning shots and is investigating reports of civilian harm. It denies deliberately shooting at any innocent civilians and says it's examining how to reduce "friction

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with the population” in the areas surrounding the distribution centers.

AP’s reporting for this article focuses on what is happening at the sites themselves. Palestinians arriving at the sites say they are caught between Israeli and American fire, said the contractor who shared videos with the AP.

“We have come here to get food for our families. We have nothing,” he recounted Palestinians telling him. “Why does the (Israeli) army shoot at us? Why do you shoot at us?”

A spokesperson for the GHF said there are people with a “vested interest” in seeing it fail and are willing to do or say almost anything to make that happen. The spokesperson said the team is composed of seasoned humanitarian, logistics and security professionals with deep experience on the ground. The group says it has distributed the equivalent of more than 50 million meals in Gaza in its food boxes of staples.

GHF says that it has consistently shown compassionate engagement with the people of Gaza.

Throughout the war, aid distribution has been marred by chaos. Gangs have looted trucks of aid traveling to distribution centers and mobs of desperate people have also offloaded trucks before they’ve reached their destination. Earlier this month, at least 51 Palestinians were killed and more than 200 wounded while waiting for the U.N. and commercial trucks to enter the territory, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry and a local hospital. Israel’s military acknowledged several casualties as soldiers opened fire on the approaching crowd and said authorities would investigate.

Videos, texts, internal reports document havoc at food sites

AP spoke to the two contractors for UG Solutions, an American outfit subcontracted to hire security personnel for the distribution sites. They said bullets, stun grenades and pepper spray were used at nearly every distribution, even if there was no threat.

Videos of aid being dispensed at the sites seen by the AP appear to back up the frenetic scenes the contractors described. The footage was taken within the first two weeks of its distributions — about halfway into the operations.

In one video, what appear to be heavily armed American security contractors at one of the sites in Gaza discuss how to disperse Palestinians nearby. One is heard saying he has arranged for a “show of force” by Israeli tanks.

“I don’t want this to be too aggressive,” he adds, “because this is calming down.”

At that moment, bursts of gunfire erupt close by, at least 15 shots. “Whoo! Whoo!” one contractor yelps.

“I think you hit one,” one says.

Then comes a shout: “Hell, yeah, boy!”

The camera’s view is obscured by a large dirt mound.

The contractor who took the video told AP that he saw other contractors shooting in the direction of Palestinians who had just collected their food and were departing. The men shot both from a tower above the site and from atop the mound, he said. The shooting began because contractors wanted to disperse the crowd, he said, but it was unclear why they continued shooting as people were walking away.

The camera does not show who was shooting or what was being shot at. But the contractor who filmed it said he watched another contractor fire at the Palestinians and then saw a man about 60 yards (meters) away — in the same direction where the bullets were fired — drop to the ground.

This happened at the same time the men were heard talking — effectively egging each other on, he said.

In other videos furnished by the contractor, men in grey uniforms — colleagues, he said — can be seen trying to clear Palestinians who are squeezed into a narrow, fenced-in passage leading to one of the centers. The men fire pepper spray and throw stun grenades that detonate amid the crowd. The sound of gunfire can be heard. The contractor who took the video said the security personnel usually fire at the ground near the crowds or from nearby towers over their heads.

During a single distribution in June, contractors used 37 stun grenades, 27 rubber-and-smoke “scat shell” projectiles and 60 cans of pepper spray, according to internal text communications shared with the AP.

That count does not include live ammunition, the contractor who provided the videos said.

One photo shared by that contractor shows a woman lying in a donkey cart after he said she was hit in the head with part of a stun grenade.

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An internal report by Safe Reach Solutions, the logistics company subcontracted by GHF to run the sites, found that aid seekers were injured during 31% of the distributions that took place in a two-week period in June. The report did not specify the number of injuries or the cause. SRS told the AP the report refers to non-serious injuries.

More videos show frenzied scenes of Palestinians running to collect leftover food boxes at one site. Hundreds of young men crowd near low metal barriers, transferring food from boxes to bags while contractors on the other side of the barriers tell them to stay back.

Some Palestinians wince and cough from pepper spray. "You tasting that pepper spray? Yuck," one man close to the camera can be heard saying in English.

SRS acknowledged that it's dealing with large, hungry populations, but said the environment is secure, controlled, and ensures people can get the aid they need safely.

Verifying the videos with audio analysis

To confirm the footage is from the sites, AP geolocated the videos using aerial imagery. The AP also had the videos analyzed by two audio forensic experts who said they could identify live ammunition — including machine-gun fire — coming from the sites, in most cases within 50 to 60 meters of the camera's microphone.

In the video where the men are heard egging each other on, the echo and acoustics of the shots indicate they're fired from a position close to the microphone, said Rob Maher, a professor of electrical and computer engineering at Montana State University and an author and research expert in audio forensic analysis. Maher and the other analyst, Steven Beck, owner of Beck Audio Forensics, said there was no indication that the videos' audio had been tampered with.

The analysts said that the bursts of gunfire and the pop sequences in some of the videos indicated that guns were panning in different directions and were not repeatedly aimed at a single target. They could not pinpoint exactly where the shots were coming from nor who was shooting.

GHF says the Israeli military is not deployed at the aid distribution sites. Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani, an army spokesman, said the army is not stationed at the sites or within their immediate proximity, especially during operating hours. He said they're run by an American company and have their own security.

One of the contractors who had been on the sites said he'd never felt a real or perceived threat by Hamas there.

SRS says that Hamas has openly threatened its aid workers and civilians receiving aid. It did not specify where people were threatened.

American analysts and Israeli soldiers work side by side, contractors say

According to the contractor who took the videos, the Israeli army is leveraging the distribution system to access information.

Both contractors said that cameras monitor distributions at each site and that American analysts and Israeli soldiers sit in a control room where the footage is screened in real time. The control room, they said, is housed in a shipping container on the Israeli side of the Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza.

The contractor who took the videos said some cameras are equipped with facial recognition software. In live shots of the sites seen by the AP, some videos streams are labeled "analytics" — those were the ones that had the facial recognition software, said the contractor.

If a person of interest is seen on camera — and their information is already in the system — their name and age pops up on the computer screen, said the contractor. Israeli soldiers watching the screens take notes and cross-check the analysts' information with their own drone footage from the sites, he said.

The contractor said he did not know the source of the data in the facial recognition system. The AP could not independently verify his information.

An internal SRS report from June seen by the AP said that its intel team would circulate to staff a "POI Mugs Card," that showed photos of Palestinians taken at the sites who were deemed persons of interest.

The contractor said he and other staff were told by SRS to photograph anyone who looked "out of place." But the criteria were not specified, he said. The contractor said the photos were also added to the facial

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recognition database. He did not know what was done with the information.

SRS said accusations that it gathers intelligence are false and that it has never used biometrics. It said it coordinates movements with Israeli authorities, a requirement for any aid group in Gaza.

An Israeli security official who was not named in line with the army's protocol, said there are no security screening systems developed or operated by the army within the aid sites.

It was a rushed rollout, the contractors say

The several hundred contractors hired by UG Solutions landed in Israel in mid-May, not long before the first GHF site opened on May 26.

The rollout was jumbled and lacked leadership, the two contractors told the AP. Some of the men had been recruited only days prior via email asking if they wanted to work in Gaza. Many had no combat experience and were not properly trained in offensive weapons, they said.

SRS did not provide the staff with draft rules of engagement until three days after distributions started, they said. The draft rules, seen by the AP, say deadly force may be used only under extreme necessity and non-lethal weapons may be used in an extreme situation on unarmed individuals who are physically violent.

The Palestinians seen in the videos don't appear to be physically aggressive. SRS says there have been occasional altercations at the sites between aid seekers, but none have involved its staff.

Each contractor was equipped with a pistol, stun grenades, tear gas and an Israeli-made automatic rifle capable of firing dozens of rounds within seconds, said the contractor who took the videos.

In an email from May shared with the AP by a third party, one high-ranking contractor wrote to the head of UG Solutions and called the operation "amateur hour." He wrote that the sites did not have enough staff or resources making them "not sustainable" and "not safe," according to the email, seen by the AP.

The two contractors said none of the men in Israel working for UG Solutions were tested to see if they could handle a gun safely. One said the rushed rollout also meant not everyone could "zero" their weapon — adjust it to one's personal specifications to ensure proper aim. Military experts say not zeroing a weapon poses a significant risk.

A spokesperson for UG Solutions, Drew O'Brien, said UG has an extensive recruiting and training process, including "a detailed application process, screening by experts, reference checks, background checks and weapons proficiency." The group said it prides itself on repeated quality control checks once missions are underway.

O'Brien said the group was unaware of video showing gunfire from someone believed to be a UG Solutions contractor. He said he couldn't comment on the allegations without seeing the videos.

The two contractors warned that if the organization continues as is, more lives will be at risk. "If operations continue in this manner, innocent aid seekers will continue to be needlessly injured," said the contractor who took the videos. "And possibly killed."

FDA vaccine official restricted COVID vaccine approvals against the advice of agency staff

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government's top vaccine official working under Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. recently restricted the approval of two COVID-19 vaccines, disregarding recommendations from government scientists, according to federal documents released Wednesday.

The new memos from the Food and Drug Administration show how the agency's vaccine chief, Dr. Vinay Prasad, personally intervened to place restrictions on COVID shots from vaccine makers Novavax and Moderna.

Both vaccines were approved by the FDA in May after months of analysis by rank-and-file FDA reviewers.

But internal correspondence show Prasad disagreed with staffers who planned to approve the shots for everyone 12 and older, similar to previous COVID vaccines. The scientists had concluded the benefit

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from the vaccines and the risk of COVID-19 outweighed the risk of possible side effects, which are rare. Instead Prasad decided the shots should be limited to those who face special risks from the virus— seniors or children and adults with underlying medical issues.

Prasad explained that the COVID vaccine benefits must be reconsidered in light of falling rates of death and hospitalization and the possibility for vaccine side effects. It's the latest in a series of vaccine restrictions imposed by officials working under Kennedy, who has long questioned the benefits of vaccines.

"Even rare vaccination related harms both known and unknown now have higher chance of outweighing potential benefits" Prasad wrote in a five-page memo explaining his decision.

COVID-19 remains a public health threat, resulting in 32,000 to 51,000 U.S. deaths and more than 250,000 hospitalizations since last fall, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Most at risk for hospitalization are seniors and children under 2 — especially infants under 6 months.

Top FDA leaders are typically not involved in the review of individual products. Officials like Prasad can overrule staffers, but such cases are rare and often controversial.

News of the FDA documents was first reported by the New York Times.

Prasad was hired to lead the FDA's vaccine center in May, after the previous director, Dr. Peter Marks, was forced to resign over disagreements with Kennedy. An academic researcher specializing in cancer therapies, Prasad came to prominence during the pandemic for criticizing public health measures, including the FDA's approval of COVID boosters for healthy adults and children.

Since arriving at the agency he has worked with FDA Commissioner Mark Makary on new guidelines that will limit approvals of future COVID boosters to higher-risk Americans, mainly seniors and those with medical conditions like asthma and obesity.

Those limits match the terms FDA recently approved for Novavax's shot, Nuvaxovid and Moderna's mNexspike. Novavax's vaccine is the only protein-based coronavirus vaccine available in the U.S. Moderna's vaccine is an updated, lower-dose version of its existing mRNA-based vaccine.

The review team for the Novavax vaccine pointed to data from a study in 30,000 adults, concluding that "the risk-benefit assessment for this vaccine technology remains favorable."

FDA staff reached a similar conclusion for the Moderna vaccine, deeming it similar in safety and effectiveness to the company's original shot.

Last week, the FDA finalized new warning labeling about the risk of myocarditis, a rare form of heart inflammation, on shots from Moderna and Pfizer, the other maker of an mRNA-based shot for COVID.

In his "override memo," reversing FDA staff's decision on the Moderna shot, Prasad pointed to the ongoing risk of myocarditis and questions about its frequency. The agency ordered Moderna to conduct further studies of the risk as a condition for the approving its updated shot.

A spokesman for the administration said Prasad "has raised serious concerns" about the issue.

"We will not ignore these risks and will ensure that the gold standard of science is used for any decisions," said Andrew Nixon, in an emailed statement.

Outside researchers have noted that cases of the heart condition tend to resolve quickly and are less severe than those associated with COVID infection itself, which can also cause myocarditis.

Tesla sales plunge again as anti-Musk boycott shows staying power and rivals pounce on the weakness

By BERNARD CONDON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Sales of Tesla electric cars fell sharply in the last three months as boycotts over Elon Musk's political views continue to keep buyers away.

The 13% plunge in global sales over a year earlier suggests the damage to Tesla's brand from Musk's embrace of U.S. President Donald Trump and far-right European politicians is much deeper, widespread and lasting than some investors had expected. The figures reported by Tesla on Wednesday also signal that its quarterly earnings report due later this month could disappoint as rival electric-vehicle makers pounce on its weakness and steal market share. v

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Sales fell to 384,122 in April through June, down from 443,956 in the same three months last year.

During the latest period, Musk formally left the Trump administration as a cost-cutting czar, and hopes rose that sales would recover. The Tesla CEO himself recently said the company was in the midst of a "major rebound" in sales, a statement contradicted by the latest figures.

Still, some parts of the report were encouraging. Sales of the Models 3 and Y totaled 373,728, above the estimate of 356,000 from Wall Street analysts. Tesla shares rose 5% on the news.

"The numbers weren't as bad as thought with all the analyst forecast cuts we saw over the past week," said Morningstar's Seth Goldstein, though he added the report overall showed the company faces big challenges. "The current product lineup is at market saturation and Tesla will need the new affordable vehicle to grow deliveries."

Musk has promised a cheaper EV model would be coming this year that would boost sales.

It's not clear yet if Musk's latest feud with Trump will help lure back buyers who have been angry at the billionaire's political positions. After Musk once again took to social media to criticize Trump's budget bill, the president threatened Tuesday to use the power of his office to hurt his companies, including Tesla, pushing its stock down more than 5%.

A June AP-NORC poll showed about half of U.S. adults have an unfavorable opinion of Tesla, including 30% of Republicans.

The new figures come as Tesla is focusing less on new models and more on robots, self-driving technology and robotaxis ferrying passengers around without anyone behind the wheel.

Tesla is in the midst of a test run of robotaxis in Austin, Texas, that seems to have gone smoothly for the most part. But it also has drawn the scrutiny of federal car safety regulators because of a few mishaps, including one case in which a Tesla cab was shown on a video heading down an opposing lane.

The competition from rival EV makers is especially fierce in Europe where China's BYD has taken a bite out of its market share. Tesla sales fell 28% in May in 30 European countries even as the overall market for electric vehicles expanded sharply, according to the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association.

Musk has acknowledged that his work as head of the Department of Government Efficiency and his embrace of European far-right candidates have hurt the company. But he said earlier this year that much of the sales plunge is due to customers holding off while they waited for an upgrade to Tesla's best selling Model Y. That new version has been out for months now.

Tesla reports second quarter financial results on July 23. In the first quarter, net income fell 71%.

Bryan Kohberger admits to killing 4 Idaho students but motive remains unclear

By JESSE BEDAYN and GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — A criminal justice student who avoided a potential death sentence by pleading guilty Wednesday to the brutal stabbing deaths of four University of Idaho students carefully planned the attack for months and took multiple steps to cover his tracks, the lead prosecutor said.

Bryan Kohberger, who was a graduate student at nearby Washington State University, pleaded guilty to murder in the killings that terrified the Idaho campus and set off a nationwide search, which ended weeks later when he was arrested in Pennsylvania.

Kohberger remained impassive as he admitted to breaking into a rental home through a kitchen sliding door and killing the four friends who appeared to have no connection with him. Prosecutors did not reveal a motive behind the slayings.

The killings initially baffled law enforcement and unnerved the rural college town of Moscow, which hadn't seen a murder in five years until Kaylee Goncalves, Ethan Chapin, Xana Kernodle and Madison Mogen were found dead near campus on Nov. 13, 2022. Autopsies showed each was stabbed multiple times.

In the two years since Kohberger's arrest, his attorneys unsuccessfully attempted to bar prosecutors from seeking the death penalty and challenged DNA evidence, leaving a plea deal their final alternative to spare his life before the start of a trial in August.

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At least one of the families opposed the plea deal that calls for Kohberger to serve four life sentences and removes his ability to appeal. But others supported the agreement, saying they were ready to begin healing.

Emotional scene in Boise courtroom

Family members became increasingly emotional as Idaho Fourth Judicial District Judge Steven Hippler explained each charge to Kohberger, naming each victim individually. Some cried into tissues, while other wiped tears away with their hands.

As Kohberger pleaded guilty, some in the family section looked down and others craned to see him. The judge set the official sentencing for July 23.

Hippler said as the hearing began that he would not take into account public opinion when deciding whether to accept the agreement.

"This court cannot require the prosecutor to seek the death penalty, nor would it be appropriate for this court to do that," he said.

The families left the courthouse without directly speaking to media gathered outside.

One of the Idaho victims was awake

The plea hearing provided a few new details about the killings but key questions remained, including why Kohberger spared two other roommates.

After breaking into the home, he climbed to the third floor where he first killed Mogen and Goncalves together, Latah County Prosecuting Attorney Bill Thompson said Wednesday.

He then ran into Kernodle, who was still awake after getting a Door Dash order, and stabbed her and her boyfriend, Chapin, who was still asleep, Thompson said. There were no signs of sexual assault, he said.

Police have said they used genetic genealogy to identify Kohberger as a possible suspect and accessed cellphone data to pinpoint his movements the night of the killings.

At the time, Kohberger had just completed his first semester at Washington State and was a teaching assistant in the criminology program.

Kohberger was arrested in Pennsylvania, where his parents lived, weeks later. Thompson said investigators recovered a Q-tip from the garbage at his parents' house to match Kohberger's DNA to genetic material from a knife sheath found at the crime scene.

Murder weapon still not found

Online shopping records showed that Kohberger had purchased a military-style knife months earlier — as well as a sheath like the one found at the scene.

The county prosecutor said the murder weapon has not been found and revealed new details about how Kohberger tried to cover up the killings.

He bought another knife sheath to replace the one left at the home and scrubbed his apartment and office, Thompson said. His car had been "pretty much disassembled" and he changed its registration, Thompson said.

"The defendant has studied crime," Thompson said. "In fact, he did a detailed paper on crime scene processing when he was working on his Ph.D., and he had that knowledge skill set."

Motive remains unclear

There was no indication he had a relationship with any of the victims, who all were friends and members of the university's Greek system.

Authorities have said cellphone data and surveillance video show that Kohberger visited the victims' neighborhood at least a dozen times before the killings, and that he traveled in the same area that night.

Kohberger's lawyers had said he was simply on a long drive by himself around the time the four were killed.

Families split on plea deal

Although the Goncalves family opposed the agreement and sought to stop it, they also argued that any deal should have required Kohberger to make a full confession, detail the facts of what happened and provide the location of the murder weapon.

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"We deserve to know when the beginning of the end was," they wrote in a Facebook post.

Kaylee Goncalves' father, Steve Goncalves, left the courthouse before Kohberger entered the courtroom. "I'm just getting out of this zoo," he told reporters.

The family of Chapin — one of three triplets who attended the university together — supports the deal, their spokesperson, Christina Teves, said this week.

Attorney Leander James read a statement from Mogen's mother and stepfather after the guilty pleas that said they supported the agreement.

"While we know there are some who do not support it, we ask that they respect our belief that this is the best outcome for the victims, their families and the state of Idaho," the family said.

"We now embark on a new path," they said. "We embark on a path of hope and healing."

What is the Mann Act? Here's what to know about the law used to convict Sean 'Diddy' Combs

By JONATHAN MATTISE Associated Press

Sean "Diddy" Combs was convicted Wednesday of prostitution-related offenses under the federal Mann Act, an anti-sex trafficking law with a century-old history.

Though he was acquitted of more serious charges, Combs was still convicted of flying people around the country, including his girlfriends and male sex workers, to engage in paid sexual encounters.

Over the years, the law has been applied to prominent convictions, including R&B superstar R. Kelly, British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell, musician Chuck Berry and more than a century ago, boxer Jack Johnson.

Its broad wording and a subsequent Supreme Court interpretation once allowed prosecutors to bring cases against interracial couples, and eventually many others in consensual relationships, according to Cornell Law School's Legal Information Institute.

The law was amended in the 1980s and today it is primarily used for prosecuting interstate prostitution crimes or people accused of taking underage children across state lines for sexual purposes.

Here's what to know about the law.

Why is it called the Mann Act?

In 1910, Congress passed the bill, which was named after Republican U.S. Rep. James Robert Mann of Illinois.

It's also known as the "White-Slave Traffic Act" of 1910.

How does it apply to Combs' case?

Combs was convicted of counts involving two former girlfriends: the R&B singer Cassie and a woman who testified under the pseudonym Jane.

Both women said at trial that Combs had pressured them into degrading sex marathons with strangers, who were paid for the sexual performances. Jane said she was once beaten by Combs for declining to participate. Cassie said that when she tried to walk out of one such event, Combs beat her and dragged her down a hotel hallway.

Combs was acquitted of sex trafficking and racketeering charges but convicted of transporting people to engage in prostitution.

What's the history behind it?

The 1910 law originally prohibited the interstate or foreign commerce transport of "any woman or girl for the purpose of prostitution or debauchery, or for any other immoral purpose." It followed a 1907 congressionally appointed commission to look into the issue of immigrant sex workers, with the view that a girl would only enter prostitution if drugged or held captive, according to Cornell's Legal Information Institute.

The law was used to secure a conviction against Jack Johnson, who became the first Black boxer to win a world heavyweight title in 1910. Johnson was convicted in 1913 by an all-white jury for traveling with his white girlfriend, who worked as a sex worker, in violation of the Mann Act.

(President Donald Trump posthumously pardoned Johnson in 2018, saying Johnson had served 10 months

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in prison “for what many view as a racially motivated injustice.”)

How has the law changed since 1910?

In a 1917 Supreme Court case, the justices ruled that “illicit fornication,” even when consensual, amounted to an “immoral purpose,” according to Cornell’s Legal Information Institute.

A 1986 update made the law gender-neutral and effectively ended the act’s role in trying to legislate morality by changing “debauchery” and “immoral purpose” to “any sexual activity for which any person can be charged with a criminal offense.”

The act received additional amendments in 1978 and 1994 to address issues of sexual exploitation of children.

Nevertheless, Combs’ legal team made a motion last February to dismiss a Mann Act charge, writing that the law “has a long and troubling history as a statute with racist origins.”

Prosecutors said there was nothing racist about pursuing charges under the act. Most of Combs’ accusers are people of color.

Knicks offer coaching job to Mike Brown and are working on a deal, AP source says

By BRIAN MAHONEY AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The New York Knicks have offered their coaching job to Mike Brown and are working to finalize a deal with the two-time NBA Coach of the Year, a person with knowledge of the details said Wednesday.

Brown would replace Tom Thibodeau, who was fired last month despite leading the Knicks to the Eastern Conference finals for the first time in 25 years.

Brown had his second interview with the Knicks on Tuesday before the job was offered, the person told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because details of the search were to remain private.

The plan to hire Brown was first reported by ESPN.

Brown earned his second award as the NBA’s top coach after leading Sacramento to the playoffs in 2022-23 — ending what was the league’s longest postseason drought with its first appearance since 2006 — but the Kings fired him nearly halfway through last season.

He would take over a Knicks team that believes it can contend for the NBA title and made it clear that was the only goal when it made the surprising decision to fire Thibodeau, who like Brown is a two-time winner of the NBA’s Coach of the Year award.

The Knicks quickly identified Brown as a candidate they wanted to speak with, while also discussing the job with former Memphis coach Taylor Jenkins and current assistants James Borrego of New Orleans and Micah Nori of Minnesota before offering the position to Brown.

Brown was honored with his first coaching award when he coached the Cleveland Cavaliers, the team he led to the NBA Finals in 2007 during his first stint with the organization. He also coached the Los Angeles Lakers and is 454-304 in his career.

Brown also won four championships as an assistant coach, three with the Golden State Warriors and one under Gregg Popovich in San Antonio.

His coaching staff will be discussed in the coming days, the person told AP.

Thibodeau led the Knicks to their only sustained success of the 2000s, with four playoff appearances in his five seasons. They reached at least the East semifinals each of the last three seasons and reached 50 wins in both of the last two.

Hamas is open to a ceasefire. But Netanyahu says there's no room for Hamas in postwar Gaza

By FATMA KHALED, SAMY MAGDY and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Hamas and Israel staked out their positions Wednesday ahead of expected talks on a Washington-backed ceasefire proposal, with the militant group suggesting it was open to an agreement while the Israeli prime minister vowed that “there will be no Hamas” in postwar Gaza.

Both sides stopped short of accepting the proposal announced Tuesday by U.S. President Donald Trump. Hamas insisted on its longstanding position that any deal bring an end to the war in Gaza.

Trump said Israel had agreed on terms for a 60-day ceasefire in Gaza and urged Hamas to accept the deal before conditions worsen. The U.S. leader has been increasing pressure on the Israeli government and Hamas to broker a ceasefire and hostage agreement.

Trump said the 60-day period would be used to work toward ending the war — something Israel says it won't accept until Hamas is defeated. He said a deal might come together as soon as next week.

But Hamas' response, which emphasized its demand that the war end, raised questions about whether the latest offer could materialize into an actual pause in fighting.

Hamas official Taher al-Nunu said the militant group was “ready and serious regarding reaching an agreement.” He said Hamas was “ready to accept any initiative that clearly leads to the complete end to the war.”

A Hamas delegation was expected to meet Wednesday with Egyptian and Qatari mediators in Cairo to discuss the proposal, according to an Egyptian official. The official spoke on condition of anonymity, because he wasn't authorized to discuss the talks with the media.

Disagreement on how the war should end

Throughout the nearly 21-month-long war, ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas have repeatedly faltered over whether the war should end as part of any deal.

Hamas said in a brief statement Wednesday that it had received a proposal from the mediators and was holding talks with them to “bridge gaps” to return to the negotiating table.

Hamas has said it's willing to free the remaining 50 hostages, less than half of whom are said to be alive, in exchange for a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and an end to the war.

Israel says it will only agree to end the war if Hamas surrenders, disarms and exiles itself, something the group refuses to do.

“I am announcing to you — there will be no Hamas,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said during a speech Wednesday.

An Israeli official said the latest proposal calls for a 60-day deal that would include a partial Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and a surge in humanitarian aid to the territory. The mediators and the U.S. would provide assurances about talks to end the war, but Israel isn't committing to that as part of the latest proposal, the official said.

The official wasn't authorized to discuss the details of the proposed deal with the media and spoke on condition of anonymity.

It wasn't clear how many hostages would be freed as part of the agreement, but previous proposals have called for the release of about 10.

“I'm holding my hands and praying that this will come about,” said Idit Ohel, mother of Israeli hostage Alon Ohel. “I hope the world will help this happen, will put pressure on whoever they need to, so the war will stop and the hostages will return.”

On Monday, Trump is set to host Netanyahu at the White House, days after Ron Dermer, a senior Netanyahu adviser, held discussions with top U.S. officials about Gaza, Iran and other matters.

Trump issues another warning

On Tuesday, Trump wrote on social media that Israel had “agreed to the necessary conditions to finalize” the 60-day ceasefire, “during which time we will work with all parties to end the War.”

“I hope, for the good of the Middle East, that Hamas takes this Deal, because it will not get better — IT WILL ONLY GET WORSE,” he said.

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Trump's warning may find a skeptical audience with Hamas. Even before the expiration of the war's longest ceasefire in March, Trump had repeatedly issued dramatic ultimatums to pressure Hamas to agree to longer pauses in the fighting that would see the release of more hostages and a return of more aid for Gaza's civilians.

Still, Trump views the current moment as a potential turning point in the brutal conflict that has left more than 57,000 dead in the Palestinian territory.

Gaza's Health Ministry said the death toll passed the 57,000 mark Tuesday into Wednesday, after hospitals received 142 bodies overnight. The ministry does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its death count, but says that more than half of the dead are women and children.

Since dawn Wednesday, Israeli strikes killed a total of 40 people across the Gaza Strip, the ministry said. Hospital officials said four children and seven women were among the dead.

The Israeli military, which blames Hamas for the civilian casualties because it operates from populated areas, was looking into the reports.

The war began on Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking roughly 250 hostages.

The fighting has left the coastal Palestinian territory in ruins, with much of the urban landscape flattened in the fighting. More than 90% of Gaza's 2.3 million population has been displaced, often multiple times. And the war has sparked a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, pushing hundreds of thousands of people toward hunger.

Hospital director killed

The director of the Indonesian Hospital, Dr. Marwan al-Sultan, was killed in an apartment in an Israeli strike west of Gaza City, a hospital statement said. The hospital is the Palestinian enclave's largest medical facility north of Gaza City and has been a critical lifeline since the start of the war.

The hospital was surrounded by Israeli troops last month and evacuated alongside the other two primary hospitals in northern Gaza.

The bodies of the doctor, his wife, daughter and son-in-law, arrived at Shifa Hospital torn into pieces, according to Issam Nabhan, head of the nursing department at the Indonesian Hospital.

"Gaza lost a great man and doctor," Nabhan said. "He never left the hospital one moment since the war began and urged us to stay and provide humanitarian assistance. We don't know what he did to deserve getting killed."

In central Gaza, the Al Awda Hospital said an Israeli strike near the entrance of a school housing displaced Palestinians killed eight people, including three children, and wounded 30 others. The hospital also said Israel struck a group of Palestinians who gathered near the entrance of the hospital's administration building in Nuseirat refugee camp.

In other developments, Israel said an airstrike last week killed two Hamas members who allegedly took part in a June 24 attack in which seven Israeli soldiers were killed when a Palestinian attacker attached a bomb to their armored vehicle.

In a big bill that hurts clean energy, residential solar likely to get hit fast

By MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As Republicans in Congress rushed forward with a massive tax and spending cut bill, a North Carolina renewable energy executive wrote to his 190 employees with a warning: Deep cuts to clean energy tax credits were going to hurt.

"(The changes) would almost certainly include the loss of jobs on our team," wrote Will Etheridge, CEO of Southern Energy Management in Raleigh. "I'm telling you that because you deserve transparency and the truth — even if that truth is uncomfortable."

The bill now in the House takes an ax to clean energy incentives, including killing a 30% tax credit for

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rooftop residential solar by the end of the year that the Biden administration's Inflation Reduction Act had extended into the next decade. Trump has called the clean energy tax credits in the climate law part of a "green new scam" that improperly shifts taxpayer subsidies to help the "globalist climate agenda" and energy sources like wind and solar.

Businesses and analysts say the GOP-backed bill will likely reverse the sector's growth and eliminate jobs. "The residential solar industry is going to be absolutely creamed by this," said Bob Keefe, executive director of E2, a business group that advocates for pro-environment policies.

President Donald Trump's "Big Beautiful Bill" takes aim at renewables broadly, including phasing out tax credits enjoyed by utility-scale solar and wind. But cutting the residential solar credit will happen sooner.

Companies have announced more than \$20 billion in clean-energy investments in North Carolina in recent years. Etheridge, whose company installs solar panels and helps ensure buildings are energy efficient, was among many in the sector to lobby Republican U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina for changes in the bill.

Tillis ultimately was one of three Republicans to vote against the measure, but in a sign of Trump's power over legislators to pass it, Tillis said he wouldn't seek reelection after Trump said he'd likely support a primary challenger.

Now, Etheridge says losing the tax credit will likely mean laying off 50 to 55 of his workers. He called the elimination of residential tax credits a "bait and switch."

"I made a decision from being an employee to taking out a loan from my grandmother to buy into my business and put my house on the line" in part because of the stability of the tax credits, he said. He said he'll scramble now to figure out ways to diversify his business.

"If you require a money-spigot from Washington to make your business viable, it probably shouldn't have been in business in the first place," said Adam Michel, director of tax policy studies at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

Michel said he doubted many clean energy companies would go out of business, but "I think that they will be right sized for the market and that the people that are employed with them will find better jobs and more stable jobs in industries that are actually viable and don't require billions of dollars of federal subsidies."

Even ahead of debate over the bill, experts at E2 said in May that \$14 billion in clean energy investments across the country had been postponed or cancelled this year.

The bill the Senate passed Tuesday removes a tax on some wind and solar projects that was proposed in a previous version and gives utility-scale projects some time to begin construction before phasing out those tax credits.

Karl Stupka, president of Raleigh-based NC Solar Now that employs about 100 people, said the Senate's bill eased the impact on commercial projects "while destroying the residential portion of the tax credits." Roughly 85% of his business is residential work.

"They took it away from every average American normal person and gave it to the wealthier business owners," he said.

Stupka said if the bill becomes law, companies will rush to finish as many solar jobs as they can before the credit ends. He expected to lay off half his employees, with "trickle-down" job losses elsewhere.

"It would cause a pretty severe shock wave," he said.

Judge blocks order barring asylum access at border and gives administration two weeks to appeal

By REBECCA SANTANA AND ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge said Wednesday that an order by President Donald Trump suspending asylum access at the southern border was unlawful, throwing into doubt one of the key pillars of the president's plan to crack down on migration at the southern border. But he put the ruling on hold for

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two weeks to give the government time to appeal.

In an order Jan. 20, Trump declared that the situation at the southern border constitutes an invasion of America and that he was "suspending the physical entry" of migrants and their ability to seek asylum until he decides it is over.

U.S. District Judge Randolph Moss in Washington said his order blocking Trump's policy will take effect July 16, giving the Trump administration time to appeal.

Moss wrote that neither the Constitution nor immigration law gives the president "an extra-statutory, extra-regulatory regime for repatriating or removing individuals from the United States, without an opportunity to apply for asylum" or other humanitarian protections.

The Homeland Security Department did not immediately respond to a request but an appeal is likely. The president and his aides have repeatedly attacked court rulings that undermine his policies as judicial overreach.

Moss, who was appointed by President Barack Obama, acknowledged that the government faces "enormous challenges" at the southern border and an "overwhelming backlog" of asylum claims. But he returned several times in his 128-page ruling to his opinion that the president is not entitled to prohibit asylum.

Lee Gelernt, who argued the case for the American Civil Liberties Union, called the ruling a significant win. "The decision means there will be protection for those fleeing horrific danger and that the president cannot ignore laws passed by Congress simply by claiming that asylum seekers are engaged in an invasion," he said.

The ruling comes after illegal border crossings have plummeted. The White House said Wednesday that the Border Patrol made 6,070 arrests in June, down 30% from May to set a pace for the lowest annual clip since 1966. On June 28, the Border Patrol made only 137 arrests, a sharp contrast to late 2023, when arrests topped 10,000 on the busiest days.

Arrests dropped sharply when Mexican officials increased enforcement within their own borders in December 2023 and again when then-President Joe Biden introduced severe asylum restrictions in June 2024. They plunged more after Trump became president in January, deploying thousands of troops to the border under declaration of a national emergency.

Trump and his allies say the asylum system has been abused. They argue that it draws people who know it will take years to adjudicate their claims in the country's backlogged immigration courts during which they can work and live in America.

But supporters argue that the right to seek asylum is guaranteed in U.S. law and international commitments — even for those who cross the border illegally. They say that asylum is a vital protection for people fleeing persecution — a protection guaranteed by Congress that even the president doesn't have the authority to ignore.

People seeking asylum must demonstrate a fear of persecution on a fairly narrow grounds of race, religion, nationality, or by belonging to a particular social or political group.

In the executive order, Trump argued that the Immigration and Nationality Act gives presidents the authority to suspend entry of any group that they find "detrimental to the interests of the United States."

Groups that work with immigrants — the Arizona-based Florence Project, the El Paso, Texas-based Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center and the Texas-based RAICES — filed the lawsuit against the government, arguing that the president was wrong to equate migrants coming to the southern border with an invasion.

And they argued that Trump's proclamation amounted to the president unilaterally overriding "... the immigration laws Congress enacted for the protection of people who face persecution or torture if removed from the United States."

But the government argued that because both foreign policy and immigration enforcement fall under the executive branch of government, it was entirely under the president's authority to declare an invasion.

"The determination that the United States is facing an invasion is an unreviewable political question," the government wrote in one argument.

Paramount will pay \$16 million in settlement with Trump over '60 Minutes' interview

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — In a case that became a closely-watched test of whether a corporation would back its journalists and stand up to President Donald Trump, Paramount Global decided to pay Trump \$16 million to settle a lawsuit regarding editing at CBS' storied "60 Minutes" news program.

Aftereffects of the deal are likely to linger. Journalists were infuriated Wednesday and a senator wants to investigate whether bribery laws were broken. The company was hoping to put the issue to rest as it seeks administration approval of a merger.

Paramount, which owns CBS, says the money will go to Trump's future presidential library and to pay his legal fees, and it is not apologizing or expressing regret about the story. The company announced the deal overnight, before a Wednesday morning shareholders meeting.

Trump's lawyers claimed he suffered "mental anguish" following the "60 Minutes" interview in October with his Democratic opponent, then-Vice President Kamala Harris, and sued for \$20 billion.

Case highlights decision by editors in putting news show together

At issue was the broadcast's editing. Harris was shown giving two different answers to a question about Israel by correspondent Bill Whitaker in clips aired on "60 Minutes" and "Face the Nation." Both responses came as part of a long-winded answer that Harris gave to Whitaker.

Editing for brevity's sake is commonplace in television. What was jarring was hearing different words from Harris directly after Whitaker spoke. Trump said CBS was trying to make his opponent look better; CBS said that claim had no merit in trying to get the case thrown out. Many legal experts dismissed the president's claim.

But the Trump-appointed head of the Federal Communications Commission launched an investigation — a complication for Paramount as it seeks administration approval of its proposed merger with Skydance Media.

In Wednesday's shareholders meeting, Paramount co-CEO George Cheeks said companies often settle litigation to avoid high legal costs and the unpredictability of a trial. Settlement allows a company to focus on its objectives "rather than being mired in uncertainty and distraction," Cheeks said. But it was received by Trump's legal team with excitement. With the settlement, a spokesman said, Trump "delivers another win for the American people."

"This settlement is a cowardly capitulation by the corporate leaders of Paramount, and a fundamental betrayal of '60 Minutes' and CBS News," said Rome Hartman, who helped produce the Harris interview for the show. "The story that was the subject of this lawsuit was edited by the book and in accordance with CBS News standards."

CBS journalists stood united against the deal, seemingly in the works for months. CBS News President and CEO Wendy McMahon and "60 Minutes" executive producer Bill Owens, who both opposed a settlement, resigned this spring. In a letter to Paramount's leadership in early May, the "60 Minutes" correspondents said they were troubled by reports that Paramount might settle the case "in a way that acknowledges some sort of wrongdoing on our part."

The correspondents, in the letter obtained by The Associated Press, said that "if our parent company caves in to his pressure and lies, it will leave a shameful stain and undermine the First Amendment." It was signed by Whitaker, Lesley Stahl, Scott Pelley, Anderson Cooper, Sharyn Alfonsi, Jon Wertheim and Cecilia Vega.

"Paramount's decision to capitulate to Trump threatens journalists' ability to do their job reporting on powerful public figures," the Writers Guild of America East, which represents "60 Minutes" journalists, said in a statement.

Since the transcript and video of the Harris interview showed no evidence of wrongdoing, Paramount would have prevailed on the facts and law if it had pursued the case, said Anna M. Gomez, an FCC commissioner and Democrat. "But instead of standing on principle, Paramount opted for a payout," Gomez said.

The deal "could be bribery in plain sight," said Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass. She called for an inves-

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tigation and new rules to restrict donations to presidential libraries.

Paramount agreed that '60 Minutes' transcripts will be released

As part of the deal, Paramount said that "60 Minutes" will in the future promptly release full transcripts of interviews with presidential candidates. That's a significant change in the broadcast's practices. It has traditionally kept its editing decisions to itself and didn't release a transcript of the Harris interview until well after the election.

Indeed, the settlement is a blow to a program widely considered the best in broadcast journalism for decades. Following Owens' departure, "60 Minutes" is leaderless and may not have a clearer view of its future until after the merger goes through.

In its letter to Paramount, the "60 Minutes" correspondents urged that interim leader Tanya Simon, daughter of the late correspondent Bob Simon, be given the job permanently. "As much as we will miss Bill Owens, we believe — no, we know — that his long-term successor must come from within," they wrote.

In December, ABC News settled a defamation lawsuit by Trump over statements made by anchor George Stephanopoulos, agreeing to pay \$15 million toward Trump's presidential library rather than engage in a public fight. Meta reportedly paid \$25 million to settle Trump's lawsuit against the company over its decision to suspend his social media accounts following the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol.

Left uncertain is whether these settlements will encourage further Trump lawsuits. The president last week threatened CNN and The New York Times with lawsuits stemming from their reporting of a preliminary assessment of damage from the U.S. bombing of Iran's nuclear program.

The Freedom of the Press Foundation, a media advocacy group that says it is a Paramount shareholder, has said that it would file a lawsuit in protest if a settlement was reached. Its advocacy director, Seth Stern, said Wednesday was "a dark day for Paramount and for press freedom," but had no details on any potential lawsuit.

Wisconsin Supreme Court's liberal majority strikes down 176-year-old abortion ban

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — The Wisconsin Supreme Court's liberal majority struck down the state's 176-year-old abortion ban on Wednesday, ruling 4-3 that it was superseded by newer state laws regulating the procedure, including statutes that criminalize abortions only after a fetus can survive outside the womb.

The ruling came as no surprise given that liberal justices control the court. One of them went so far as to promise to uphold abortion rights during her campaign two years ago, and they blasted the ban during oral arguments in November.

Ban outlawed destroying 'an unborn child'

The statute Wisconsin legislators adopted in 1849, widely interpreted as a near-total ban on abortions, made it a felony for anyone other than the mother or a doctor in a medical emergency to destroy "an unborn child."

The ban was in effect until 1973, when the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion nationwide nullified it. Legislators never officially repealed it, however, and conservatives argued that the U.S. Supreme Court's 2022 decision to overturn Roe reactivated it.

Ruling: Post-Roe laws effectively replaced ban

Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul, a Democrat, filed a lawsuit that year arguing that abortion restrictions enacted by Republican legislators during the nearly half-century that Roe was in effect trumped the ban. Kaul specifically cited a 1985 law that essentially permits abortions until viability. Some babies can survive with medical help after 21 weeks of gestation.

Lawmakers also enacted abortion restrictions under Roe requiring women to undergo ultrasounds, wait 24 hours before having the procedure and provide written consent, and receive abortion-inducing drugs only from doctors during an in-person visit.

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"That comprehensive legislation so thoroughly covers the entire subject of abortion that it was clearly meant as a substitute for the 19th century near-total ban on abortion," Justice Rebeca Dallet wrote for the majority.

Sheboygan County District Attorney Joel Urmanski, a Republican, defended the ban in court, arguing that it can coexist with the newer abortion restrictions.

Dane County Circuit Judge Diane Schlipper ruled in 2023 that the 1849 ban outlaws feticide — which she defined as the killing of a fetus without the mother's consent — but not consensual abortions. Abortions have been available in the state since that ruling, but the state Supreme Court decision gives providers and patients more certainty that abortions will remain legal in Wisconsin.

Urmanski had asked the state Supreme Court to overturn Schlipper's ruling without waiting for a decision from a lower appellate court.

Liberal justices signaled repeal was imminent

The liberal justices all but telegraphed how they would rule. Justice Janet Protasiewicz stated on the campaign trail that she supports abortion rights. During oral arguments, Dallet declared that the ban was authored by white men who held all the power in the 19th century. Justice Jill Karofsky likened the ban to a "death warrant" for women and children who need medical care.

A solid majority of Wisconsin voters in the 2024 election, 62%, said abortion should be legal in all or most cases, according to AP VoteCast. About one-third said abortion should be illegal in most cases and only 5% said it should be illegal in all cases.

In a dissent, Justice Annette Ziegler called the ruling "a jaw-dropping exercise of judicial will." She said the liberal justices caved in to their Democratic constituencies.

"Put bluntly, our court has no business usurping the role of the legislature, inventing legal theories on the fly in order to make four justices' personal preference the law," Ziegler said.

Urmanski's attorney, Andrew Phillips, didn't respond to an email. Kaul told reporters during a news conference that the ruling is a "major victory" for reproductive rights.

Heather Weininger, executive director of Wisconsin Right to Life, called the ruling "deeply disappointing." She said that the liberals failed to point to any statute that explicitly repealed the 1849 ban.

"To assert that a repeal is implied is to legislate from the bench," she said.

Court dismisses constitutional challenge

Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin asked the Supreme Court in February 2024 to decide whether the ban was constitutional. The court dismissed that case with no explanation Wednesday.

Michelle Velasquez, chief strategy officer for Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin, said Wednesday's ruling creates stability for abortion providers and patients, but she was disappointed the justices dismissed the constitutional challenge. She hinted that the organization might look next to challenge the state's remaining abortion restrictions.

Kaul said he has no plans to challenge the remaining restrictions, saying the Legislature should instead revisit abortion policy.

Democratic-backed Susan Crawford defeated conservative Brad Schimel for an open seat on the court in April, ensuring liberals will maintain their 4-3 edge until at least 2028. Crawford has not been sworn in yet and was not part of Wednesday's ruling.

Abortion fight figures to play in 2026 court race

Abortion figures to be a key issue again next spring in another race for a state Supreme Court seat. Chris Taylor, a state appellate judge who served as Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin's policy director before a stint as a Democratic legislator, is challenging conservative Justice Rebecca Bradley.

Taylor's campaign sent out an email Wednesday calling the ruling a "huge victory" and asking for donations. She issued a statement calling the decision the correct one and blasting Bradley's dissent as "an unhinged political rant."

Bradley wrote that the four liberal justices fancy themselves "super legislators" and committed "an affront to democracy."

Trump administration withholds over \$6 billion for after-school, summer programs and more

By COLLIN BINKLEY, BIANCA VÁZQUEZ TONESS, SHARON LURYE and ANNIE MA AP Education Writers
WASHINGTON (AP) — Day camp providers and schools are warning that a Trump administration funding freeze could wreck summer for low-income American families and wipe out some after-school programming next year.

The administration is withholding more than \$6 billion in federal grants for after-school and summer programs, English language instruction, adult literacy and more as part of a review to ensure grants align with President Donald Trump's priorities.

The move leaves states and schools in limbo as they budget for programs this summer and in the upcoming school year, introducing new uncertainty about when — or if — they will receive the money. It also sets the stage for a clash with Democrats, who say the administration is flouting the law by holding back money Congress appropriated.

Without the money, schools say they won't be able to provide free or affordable after-school care for low-income kids while their parents work, and they may not be able to hire staff to teach children who are learning English. Even classes or camps underway this summer could be in jeopardy.

For instance, the Boys and Girls Clubs of America depend on some of the withheld money to run camps and other summer programming for low-income students. If funding isn't restored soon, the programming may end mid-season, said Boys and Girls Club President Jim Clark.

After-school programming in the fall could also take a hit. "If these funds are blocked, the fallout will be swift and devastating," Clark said. As many as 926 Boys and Girls Clubs could close, affecting more than 220,000 kids, the group said.

Programs that rely on the money were expecting it to be distributed July 1, but an Education Department notice issued Monday announced the money would not be released while the programs are under review. The department did not provide a timeline and warned that "decisions have not yet been made" on grants for the upcoming school year.

"The Department remains committed to ensuring taxpayer resources are spent in accordance with the President's priorities and the Department's statutory responsibilities," Education Department officials wrote in the notice, which was obtained by The Associated Press.

The department referred questions to the Office of Management and Budget, which did not respond to a request for comment.

After-school child care at risk

In Gadsden City Schools in Alabama, officials say they'll have no choice but to shutter their after-school program serving more than 1,200 low-income students if federal funds aren't released. There's no other way to make up for the frozen federal money, said Janie Browning, who directs the program.

Families who rely on after-school programs would lose an important source of child care that keeps children safe and engaged while their parents work. The roughly 75 employees of the district's after-school programs may lose their jobs.

"Those hours between after school and 6 o'clock really are the hours in the day when students are at the most risk for things that may not produce great outcomes," Browning said. "It would be devastating if we lost the lifeline of afterschool for our students and our families."

Jodi Grant, executive director of the Afterschool Alliance, said withholding the money could cause lasting damage to the economy.

Some advocates fear the grants are being targeted for elimination, which could force schools to cut programs and teachers. Trump's 2026 budget proposal called for Congress to zero out all of the programs under review, signaling the administration sees them as unnecessary.

Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., pressed the administration to spend the money as Congress intended.

"Every day that this funding is held up is a day that school districts are forced to worry about whether they'll have to cut back on afterschool programs or lay off teachers instead of worrying about how to

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make sure our kids can succeed," Murray said in a statement.

What the money funds

The six grant programs under review include one known as 21st Century Community Learning Centers. It's the primary federal funding source for after-school and summer learning programs and supports more than 10,000 local programs nationwide, according to the Afterschool Alliance. Every state runs its own competition to distribute the grants, which totaled \$1.3 billion this fiscal year.

Also under review are \$2 billion in grants for teachers' professional development and efforts to reduce class size; \$1 billion for academic enrichment grants, often used for science and math education and accelerated learning; \$890 million for students who are learning English; \$376 million to educate the children of migrant workers; and \$715 million to teach adults how to read.

These programs account for over 20% of the federal money the District of Columbia receives for K-12 education, according to an analysis by the Learning Policy Institute, a think tank. California alone has at least \$800 million in limbo, while Texas has more than \$660 million.

"Trump is illegally impounding billions of dollars appropriated by Congress to serve students this fiscal year," said Tony Thurmond, California's state superintendent, in a statement. "The Administration is punishing children when states refuse to cater to Trump's political ideology.

The loss of funds could "put several more school districts in extreme financial distress," said Chris Reykdal, superintendent of public instruction in Washington state. Districts have already adopted budgets, planned programming and hired staff, assuming they'd receive the money, Reykdal said.

If the funding freeze remains, children learning English and their parents would be especially affected. Some districts use the money to pay for summer programming designed for English learners, family engagement specialists who can communicate with parents and professional development training for staff. Rural districts would be hit the hardest.

"They're trying to send a message," said Amaya Garcia, who oversees education research at New America, a left-leaning think tank. "They don't believe that taxpayer funding should be used for these children."

Umatilla School District in rural eastern Oregon — with a sizable population of migrant families and students learning English — relies heavily on federal funding for its after-school and summer school programs. Superintendent Heidi Sipe says she is meeting with state officials soon to find out if the district will have to plan an early end to summer school, an option 20% of students are using. Come this fall, if federal money stays frozen, she'll have to lay off staff and eliminate after-school programs attended by around half the district's students.

"It's an essential service in our community because we don't have any licensed child care centers for school-age children," she said.

Sipe said it's particularly frustrating to deal with these funds being put into limbo because the school district was in the middle of a five-year grant period.

"It feels preventable," she said, "and it feels as though we could have done a better job planning for America's children."

Ukraine looks to jointly produce weapons with allies as the US halts some shipments

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine is forging ahead with early plans for joint weapons production with some international allies, top officials said, while warning Wednesday of potential consequences of the U.S. decision to halt some arms shipments promised to help Kyiv fight off Russia's invasion.

"Any delay or hesitation in supporting Ukraine's defense capabilities will only encourage the aggressor to continue war and terror, not seek peace," Ukraine's Foreign Ministry said.

A renewed Russian push to capture more land has put Ukraine's short-handed defenses under severe strain in the all-out war launched by Moscow nearly 3½ years ago. Russian missiles and drones are battering Ukrainian cities. U.S.-led diplomatic efforts to find a peace settlement have stalled.

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Ukraine's Defense Ministry said it hadn't received any official U.S. notification of a suspension or revision of agreed arms delivery schedules. Officials have requested a phone call with their U.S. counterparts to verify the status of specific items in the pipeline, it said in a statement.

As Washington — Ukraine's biggest military backer — has distanced itself from Ukraine's war efforts under President Donald Trump, a bigger onus has fallen on European countries.

French President Emmanuel Macron and Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday held their first direct telephone call in almost three years. Macron's office said that during their two-hour conversation, the French leader underlined France's "unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity" and called for a ceasefire.

Washington's decision could remove some of the most formidable weapons in Ukraine's battlefield arsenal, including some air defense missiles, precision-guided artillery and other weapons, according to AP sources.

The U.S. decision should prompt European Union countries to spend more on developing Ukraine's defense industry, Danish Defense Minister Troels Lund Poulsen said.

"It just underlines the need for Europe to do more, and also to invest more in Ukraine," Lund Poulsen told reporters. "We could do even more, to give them a stronger way of fighting back."

Denmark on Tuesday took over the EU's rotating presidency for six months. It is already investing directly in Ukraine's defense industry, which can produce arms and ammunition more quickly and cheaply than elsewhere in Europe.

Denmark is also allowing companies from Ukraine to set up shop in Denmark and manufacture military equipment on safer ground. Lund Poulsen said the first companies could start work as soon as September, and he urged European partners to follow suit.

Ukraine prepares for joint investments in defense

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in his daily address on Tuesday evening said officials are preparing with a sense of urgency for upcoming meetings with EU countries and other partners to talk about cooperation in weapons manufacturing.

Defense Minister Rustem Umerov announced that draft legislation on joint weapons production with allies is expected to be put to a vote in the Ukrainian parliament later this month. The proposed laws were shown to national defense companies on Tuesday, Umerov said.

The program includes plans to create a special legal and tax framework to help Ukrainian defense manufacturers scale up and modernize production, including building new facilities at home and abroad, according to Umerov.

Earlier this week, German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul said during a visit to Kyiv that Germany aims to help Ukraine manufacture more weapons more quickly. He was accompanied on the trip by German defense industry representatives.

Washington concerned about reduced stockpiles

The U.S. is halting some weapons deliveries to Ukraine out of concern that its own stockpiles have declined too far, officials said Tuesday. Certain munitions were longer-term commitments promised to Ukraine under the Biden administration, though the Defense Department didn't provide details on what specific weapons were being held back.

The details on the weapons in some of the paused deliveries were confirmed by a U.S. official and former national security official familiar with the matter. Both requested anonymity to discuss what is being held up as the Pentagon has yet to provide details. The halt includes some shipments of Patriot missiles, precision-guided GMLRS, Hellfire missiles and Howitzer rounds.

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry summoned the U.S. chargé d'affaires, John Hinkel, on Wednesday to discuss ongoing defense cooperation.

Deputy Foreign Minister Maryana Betsa thanked the U.S. for its continued support, but emphasized the "critical importance" of maintaining previously allocated defense packages, especially for bolstering Ukraine's air defense.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the Pentagon's decision will help bring a settlement closer, because "the fewer weapons supplied to Ukraine, the closer the end of the (war) is."

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Europe can't fill all the gaps

Under Trump, there have been no new announcements of U.S. military or weapons aid to Ukraine. Between March and April, the United States allocated no new aid to Ukraine, according to Germany's Kiel Institute, which tracks such support.

Russia launched its full-scale invasion of its neighbor on Feb. 24, 2022. For the first time since June 2022, European countries surpassed the U.S. in total military aid, totaling 72 billion euros (\$85 billion) compared with 65 billion euros (\$77 billion) from the U.S., the institute said last month.

Analysts say Ukraine's European allies can fill some of the gaps and provide artillery systems. But they don't possess alternatives to the U.S.-made HIMARS missiles and air defense systems, especially Patriots, which are crucial to help defend Ukrainian cities.

It's not clear how much weaponry Ukraine possesses or what its most urgent needs are.

Yale's law school dean will be the Ford Foundation's new president

By JAMES POLLARD Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The Ford Foundation has settled on its next leader.

Yale Law School Dean Heather Gerken will succeed Darren Walker as the president of one of the largest U.S. charitable organizations, the Ford Foundation announced Monday. A leading expert on constitutional law and democracy, Gerken takes the helm of its \$16 billion endowment as the philanthropic sector navigates challenges to the tax-exempt status of nonprofits opposed by President Donald Trump's administration and its sweeping orders targeting trillions of dollars in federal funding for civil society groups.

"I am deeply grateful for this opportunity and look forward to working with Ford staff and the board of trustees to protect democracy and the rule of law and further our mission to create a more just and fair world for everyone," Gerken said in a statement.

Gerken brings an extensive legal background that includes voting rights experience at Washington, DC law firm Jenner & Block and clerkships with Supreme Court justices. The Ford Foundation noted that she prioritized increasing access for underrepresented students as the dean of Yale Law School. The American Bar Association appointed her to a task force that aimed to fortify democracy amid threats to election processes. She is also a trustee of Princeton University, where she completed her bachelor's degree, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Her tenure begins in November, making good on Walker's promise to exit the stage by the end of 2025. She called it a "profound honor" to build upon the legacy of those who preceded her, "particularly the astonishing Darren Walker." Since 2013, Walker has focused the foundation's mission around social justice and overseen major investments in gender equity and disability rights.

"Her experience and dedication to philanthropy and the field of law will undoubtedly propel the foundation's mission forward," Walker said in a statement.

The Ford Foundation was created in 1936 by the father-son duo Henry and Edsel Ford, pioneers of the automobile, and funded with stock in the Ford company. It supported civil rights litigation starting in the late 1960s and helped seed the field of public interest law in the United States.

Then-Sen. J.D. Vance called out the Ford Foundation specifically for supporting progressive causes back before he became vice president, accusing officials of using charitable funds for partisan ends.

Anticipation over who might shape the influential foundation's priorities only grew in recent months as the Trump administration took aim at the very issues of inequality that Walker had championed. The board of trustees and executive search firm Russell Reynolds Associated began looking for Walker's replacement after he announced his departure last July, according to the Ford Foundation.

Walker was an internal promotion at Ford who honed his financial skills and knowledge of the inner workings of philanthropy at the Abyssinian Development Corp. and Rockefeller Foundation, while Gerken is an outside hire from the world of academia. Politico featured her in a 2017 list of the people behind ideas shaping American politics. The magazine highlighted her long push for "progressive federalism," or the idea that democracies should empower local governments to pursue innovative social reforms.

Support for Gerken's selection came Monday from scholars, nonprofit leaders and legal professionals who,

in statements shared by the Ford Foundation, touted her clear-eyed approach to upholding civil rights, sharp thinking around safeguarding democratic norms and ability to find common ground.

"In a moment when constitutional democracy needs urgent attention and engagement, I cannot imagine a better president for the Ford Foundation," said Princeton University President Christopher L. Eisgruber.

Tensions are rising between Russia and Azerbaijan. Why is this happening now?

By The Associated Press undefined

Deaths of ethnic Azerbaijanis rounded up by police for decades-old murders in a Russian city. The crash of an Azerbaijan Airlines passenger jet that Baku blamed on Moscow. Growing ties between Azerbaijan and Turkey, along with waning Russian influence in the troubled South Caucasus region.

These are among the factors that have led to the escalating tensions between Russia and Azerbaijan, the oil-rich Caspian Sea country where President Ilhan Aliyev has been in power since 2003 -- almost as long as the 25-year rule of Vladimir Putin in Russia.

Here is a look at the previously warm relationship between Russia and Azerbaijan and what has happened:

Economic ties between Russia and Azerbaijan

Russia and Azerbaijan developed strong economic and cultural ties after 1993 when Aliyev's father, Heydar, who also was Azerbaijan's Soviet-era Communist boss, became president. Like Putin, the younger Aliyev has suppressed political foes and restricted independent media.

Azerbaijan has bought oil and natural gas from Russia to meet internal demand while exporting its own energy riches to the West. Russia also has been the main market for Azerbaijan's fruit and vegetable exports. It also is a key transport corridor for Russia's trade with Iran and other partners in the Middle East.

Azerbaijani businessmen control significant assets in construction, real estate, trade and other sectors of the Russian economy.

Russia is home to a sizable Azerbaijani diaspora. A 2021 census listed about a half-million ethnic Azerbaijanis living in Russia, but unofficial estimates put that number as high as 2 million.

Relations with Baku have become increasingly important for the Kremlin since it sent troops into Ukraine in 2022, especially as Turkey has become a key economic partner for Russia as it faced sweeping Western sanctions.

The Karabakh separatist conflict

Just before the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, an open confrontation erupted between two of its former republics in the South Caucasus — Azerbaijan and its neighbor, Armenia. After years of fighting, Armenian-backed separatists won control of Azerbaijan's region of Karabakh and nearby territories.

Russia claimed neutrality in the conflict even though it provided economic assistance and supplied weapons to Armenia that hosted its military base. Moscow cosponsored peace talks under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, but they didn't produce a deal.

In 2020, Azerbaijan's military, bolstered by weapons supplied by ally Turkey, recaptured broad swaths of territory that were held for nearly three decades by Armenian forces. Russia brokered a truce and deployed about 2,000 peacekeepers to the region.

Azerbaijan reclaimed full control of Karabakh in September 2023 after a lightning military campaign. Russia, busy with its war in Ukraine, didn't intervene, angering Armenia's leadership that responded by scaling down its ties with Moscow and bolstering relations with the West.

The victory in Karabakh has fueled Azerbaijan's ambitions and prompted Aliyev to take a more assertive stand in relations with his neighbors.

The crash of an Azerbaijan Airlines flight

On Dec. 25, 2024, an Azerbaijan Airlines passenger jet crashed while on a flight from Baku to Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya. Azerbaijani authorities said the jet was accidentally hit by fire from Russian air defenses, then tried to land in western Kazakhstan when it crashed, killing 38

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of 67 people aboard.

Putin apologized to Aliyev for what he called a "tragic incident" but stopped short of acknowledging responsibility. Aliyev, meanwhile, criticized Moscow for trying to "hush up" the incident.

In May, Aliyev declined to attend Russia's Victory Day parade in Moscow alongside other leaders of ex-Soviet nations. Later that month, a Ukrainian foreign minister visited Baku, a sign of closer ties with Kyiv.

Police raids lead to heightened tensions

On June 27, police raided the homes of several ethnic Azerbaijanis in Yekaterinburg, Russia's fourth-largest city, in what authorities said was part of an investigation into murders dating back decades. Brothers Huseyn and Ziyaddin Safarov died and several other ethnic Azerbaijanis were seriously injured.

The bodies were sent to Azerbaijan, where authorities attributed the deaths to "post-traumatic shock caused by multiple injuries." The Prosecutor General's Office said the brothers were subjected to beatings and other physical abuse by Russian police.

Azerbaijan responded by calling off previously scheduled Russian official visits and cultural events.

On Monday, masked police stormed the Baku offices of Sputnik Azerbaijan, a Kremlin-funded media outlet, and arrested seven of its employees. Police also rounded up eight other Russian IT experts and other professionals, who were accused of drug trafficking and cybercrime. Images of the detainees, who didn't have any known criminal record, showed their faces were badly bruised. The images caused outrage in Russia where many hawkish commentators accused Azerbaijan of treating Russians as hostages and urged a tough response.

Russia on Tuesday briefly detained the leader of the Azerbaijani community in Yekaterinburg for interrogation. A video on Russian social media showed special forces breaking the windows of his vehicle, dragging him and his son out, and making them lie face down on the pavement. A prominent member of the Azerbaijani diaspora also was arrested in Voronezh in southern Russia.

Tough talk from Baku and Moscow

Azerbaijan strongly condemned what it called "the demonstrative and deliberate acts of extrajudicial killing and violence" by Russian police following the deaths in Yekaterinburg.

After the arrests of the Sputnik employees and other Russians in Baku, the Russian Foreign Ministry summoned Azerbaijan's ambassador to protest "the recent unfriendly actions of Baku and the intentional steps of the Azerbaijani side aimed to dismantle bilateral relations."

Azerbaijan shot back by summoning the Russian ambassador to demand a probe into the deaths, punishment for those responsible and compensation for the victims — steps it said were "crucial for eliminating the negative atmosphere in bilateral relations." It shrugged off Moscow's complaints about the arrests of Russians in Baku.

Aliyev discussed the tensions with Russia in a call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, an act that seemed designed to rile the Kremlin. Zelenskyy said he expressed support for Baku "in a situation where Russia is bullying Azerbaijani citizens and threatening the Republic of Azerbaijan."

Asked about the call, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Wednesday that "Ukraine will do everything possible to add fuel to the fire and provoke the Azerbaijani side to continue emotional actions."

Peskov noted that the head of Russia's top investigative agency has been in contact with Azerbaijan's chief prosecutor. He wouldn't say if Putin would speak to Aliyev to defuse the crisis.

Democrats wrestle with how to conduct oversight as Trump officials crack down

By MATT BROWN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Just hours after she pleaded not guilty to federal charges brought by the Trump administration, New Jersey Rep. LaMonica McIver was surrounded by dozens of supportive Democratic colleagues in the halls of the Capitol. The case, they argued, strikes at the heart of congressional power.

"If they can break LaMonica, they can break the House of Representatives," said New York Rep. Yvette Clarke, chair of the Congressional Black Caucus.

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Federal prosecutors allege that McIver interfered with law enforcement during a visit with two other House Democrats to an Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility in Newark, New Jersey. She calls the charges "baseless."

It's far from the only clash between congressional Democrats and the Republican administration as officials ramp up deportations of immigrants around the country.

Sen. Alex Padilla of California was forcibly removed by federal agents while attempting to speak at a news conference for Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem. At least six groups of House Democrats have recently been denied entry to ICE detention centers. In early June, federal agents entered the district office of Rep. Jerry Nadler, D-N.Y., and briefly detained a staffer.

Congressional Republicans have largely dismissed Democrats' behavior as inflammatory and inappropriate, and some have publicly supported the prosecution of McIver.

Often in the dark about the Trump administration's moves, congressional Democrats are wrestling with how to perform their oversight duties at a time of roiling tensions with the White House and new restrictions on lawmakers visiting federal facilities.

"We have the authority to conduct oversight business, and clearly, House Republicans are not doing that oversight here," said New Jersey Rep. Rob Menendez, one of the House Democrats who went with McIver to the Newark ICE facility.

"It's our obligation to continue to do it on site at these detention facilities. And even if they don't want us to, we are going to continue to exert our right."

Democrats confront a stark new reality

The prospect of facing charges for once routine oversight activity has alarmed many congressional Democrats who never expected to face criminal prosecution as elected officials. Lawmakers in both parties were also unnerved by the recent targeted shootings of two Minnesota lawmakers and the nation's tense political atmosphere.

"It's a moment that calls for personal courage of members of Congress," said Rep. Summer Lee of Pennsylvania. "I wish that we had more physical protection. I think that's one of those harsh realities that members of Congress who are not in leadership recognize: that oftentimes, we do this job at our own peril, and we do it anyway."

The arrests and detentions of lawmakers have led some Democrats to take precautionary measures. Several have consulted with the House general counsel about their right to conduct oversight. Multiple lawmakers also sought personal legal counsel, while others have called for a review of congressional rules to provide greater protections.

"The Capitol Police are the security force for members of Congress. We need them to travel with us, to go to facilities and events that the president may have us arrested for," said Rep. Jonathan Jackson of Illinois.

'There's not a lot of transparency'

As the minority party in the House, Democrats lack the subpoena power to force the White House to provide information. That's a problem, they say, because the Trump administration is unusually secretive about its actions.

"There's not a lot of transparency. From day to day, oftentimes, we're learning about what's happening at the same time as the rest of the nation," said Rep. Lucy McBath, D-Ga., who led a prayer for McIver at the Capitol rally.

Democrats, to amplify their concerns, have turned to public letters, confronted officials at congressional hearings and digital and media outreach to try to create public pressure.

"We've been very successful when they come in before committees," said Rep. Lauren Underwood of Illinois, who added that she believed the public inquiries have "one hundred percent" resonated with voters.

Tapping into the information pipeline

Congressional Democrats say they often rely on local lawmakers, business leaders and advocates to be their eyes and ears on the ground.

A handful of Democrats say their best sources of information are across the political aisle, since Repub-

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licans typically have clearer lines of communication with the White House.

"I know who to call in Houston with the chamber. I think all of us do that," said Texas Rep. Sylvia Garcia of how business leaders are keeping her updated.

Garcia said Democrats "need to put more pressure" on leading figures in the agriculture, restaurant and hospitality sectors to take their concerns about the immigrant crackdown to Trump's White House.

"They're the ones he'll listen to. They're the ones who can add the pressure. He's not going to listen to me, a Democrat who was an impeachment manager, who is on the bottom of his list, if I'm on it at all," Garcia said.

Rep. Jason Crow, D-Colo., for instance, had a working relationship with a for-profit ICE facility in his district until DHS in February ended reports as part of an agency-wide policy change. Crow's office now sometimes waits weeks for a written response from staff at the Aurora facility. His team has regularly toured the facility this year, with ICE agents sometimes present alongside the facility's private staff.

Democrats say 'real oversight' requires winning elections

Still, many House Democrats concede that they can conduct little of their desired oversight until they are back in the majority.

Rep. Marc Veasey, D-Texas, said that "real oversight power and muscle" only comes "when you have a gavel."

"Nothing else matters. No rousing oratory, no tours, no speeches, no social media or entertainment, none of that stuff," Veasey said. "Because the thing that keeps Trump up at night more than anything else is the idea he's going to lose this House and there'll be real oversight pressure applied to him."

Analysis shows Trump's tariffs would cost US employers \$82.3 billion

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An analysis finds a critical group of U.S. employers would face a direct cost of \$82.3 billion from President Donald Trump's current tariff plans, a sum that could potentially be managed through price hikes, layoffs, hiring freezes or lower profit margins.

The analysis by the JPMorganChase Institute is among the first to measure the direct costs created by the import taxes on businesses with \$10 million to \$1 billion in annual revenue, a category including roughly a third of private-sector U.S. workers. These companies are more dependent than other businesses on imports from China, India and Thailand — and the retail and wholesale sectors would be especially vulnerable to the import taxes being levied by the Republican president.

The findings show clear trade-offs from Trump's import taxes, contradicting his claims foreign manufacturers would absorb the costs of the tariffs instead of U.S. companies that rely on imports. While the tariffs launched under Trump have yet to boost overall inflation, large companies such as Amazon, Costco, Walmart and Williams-Sonoma delayed the potential reckoning by building up their inventories before the taxes could be imposed.

The analysis comes just ahead of the July 9 deadline by Trump to formally set the tariff rates on goods from dozens of countries. Trump imposed that deadline after the financial markets panicked in response to his April tariff announcements, prompting him to schedule a 90-day negotiating period when most imports faced a 10% baseline tariff. China, Mexico and Canada face higher rates, and there are separate 50% tariffs on steel and aluminum.

Had the initial April 2 tariffs stayed in place, the companies in the JPMorganChase Institute analysis would've faced additional direct costs of \$187.6 billion. Under the current rates, the \$82.3 billion would be equivalent on average to \$2,080 per employee, or 3.1% of the average annual payroll. Those averages include firms that don't import goods and those that do.

Asked Tuesday how trade talks are faring, Trump said simply: "Everything's going well."

The president has indicated he'll set tariff rates given the logistical challenge of negotiating with so many

nations. As the 90-day period comes to a close, only the United Kingdom has signed a trade framework with the Trump administration. Trump announced Wednesday he'd reached a deal with Vietnam, while India has signaled it's close to agreeing on a trade framework.

Trump said on his social media site Vietnam will pay the U.S. a 20% tariff on all goods sent "into our Territory" and a 40% tariff on any transshipping, which usually means exports that come from China but pass through Vietnam to dodge tariffs on Chinese goods.

In return, Vietnam will grant the U.S. "TOTAL ACCESS" to its market for trade, Trump said, meaning "we will be able to sell our product into Vietnam at ZERO Tariff." He added he thinks SUVs "will be a wonderful addition to the various product lines within Vietnam."

There's a growing body of evidence suggesting more inflation could surface. The investment bank Goldman Sachs said in a report it expects companies to pass 60% of their tariff costs onto consumers. The Atlanta Federal Reserve has used its survey of businesses' inflation expectations to say companies could on average pass along roughly half their costs from a 10% tariff or a 25% tariff without reducing consumer demand.

The JPMorganChase Institute findings suggest the tariffs could cause some domestic manufacturers to strengthen their roles as suppliers of goods. But it noted companies need to plan for a range of possible outcomes and wholesalers and retailers already operate on such low profit margins they might need to spread the tariffs' costs to their customers.

The outlook for tariffs remains highly uncertain. Trump had stopped negotiations with Canada, only to restart them after the country dropped its plan to tax digital services. He similarly on Monday threatened more tariffs on Japan unless it buys more rice from the U.S.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said on Fox News Channel's "Fox & Friends" on Tuesday the concessions from the trade talks have impressed career officials at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative and other agencies.

The treasury secretary said the Trump administration plans to discuss the contours of trade deals next week, prioritizing the tax cuts package passed on Tuesday by the Republican majority in the Senate. Trump has set a Friday deadline for passage of the multitrillion-dollar package, the costs of which the president hopes to offset with tariff revenues.

The Dalai Lama says he plans to reincarnate, ensuring the institution will continue

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

DHARAMSHALA, India (AP) — Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama on Wednesday said the centuries-old Tibetan Buddhist institution will continue after his death, ending years of speculation that started when he indicated that he might be the last person to hold the role.

Speaking at prayer celebrations ahead of his 90th birthday on Sunday, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning spiritual head of Tibetan Buddhism said that the next Dalai Lama should be found and recognized as per past Buddhist traditions, while signalling that China should stay away from the process of identifying his successor.

The Dalai Lama's succession plan is politically consequential for most Tibetans who oppose China's tight control of Tibet and have struggled to keep their identity alive, in their homeland or in exile. It is also profound for Tibetan Buddhists who worship him as a living manifestation of Chenrezig, the Buddhist god of compassion.

The decision, however, is expected to irk China, which has repeatedly said that it alone has the authority to approve the next religious leader. It insists the reincarnated figure must be found in China's Tibetan areas, giving Communist authorities power over who is chosen.

Many observers believe there eventually will be rival Dalai Lamas — one appointed by Beijing, and one by senior monks loyal to the current Dalai Lama.

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Tenzin Gyatso became the 14th reincarnation of the Dalai Lama in 1940. He fled Tibet when Chinese troops crushed an uprising in the Tibetan capital Lhasa in 1959 and has been living in the town of Dharamshala in India since then, helping establish a democratic government-in-exile while also traveling the world to advocate autonomy for the Tibetan people.

Tibetan Buddhists believe the Dalai Lama can choose the body into which he is reincarnated, as has happened on 14 occasions since the creation of the institution in 1587. He has reiterated in the past that his successor would be born outside China.

The Dalai Lama laid out his succession plan in a recorded statement that was televised at a religious gathering of Buddhist monks in Dharamshala. He said the process of finding and recognizing his reincarnation lies solely with the Gaden Phodrang Trust — a non-profit he founded in 2015 that oversees matters related to the spiritual leader and the institute of the Dalai Lama.

"No one else has any such authority to interfere in this matter," he said, adding that the search for a future Dalai Lama should be carried out in "accordance with past tradition."

Asked Wednesday about the Dalai Lama's announcement, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning at a daily news briefing said "the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama must adhere to the principles of domestic search in China" and "approval by the central government."

Mao said the process must "follow religious rituals and historical settings, and be handled in accordance with national laws and regulations."

Separately, Amnesty International's China Director, Sarah Brooks, in a statement Wednesday said the efforts by Chinese authorities to control the selection of the next Dalai Lama was a "direct assault" on the right to freedom of religion.

"Tibetan Buddhists, like all faith communities, must be able to choose their spiritual leaders without coercion or interference by the authorities," Brooks said.

The Dalai Lama has often urged his followers to reject anyone chosen by Beijing. The self-proclaimed Tibetan government-in-exile he once headed before relinquishing his political role in 2011 also supports this stance.

Penpa Tsering, the president of the government-in-exile, said Tibetans from around the world made "an earnest request with single-minded devotion" that the position of the Dalai Lama should continue "for the benefit of all sentient beings in general and Buddhist in particular."

"In response to this overwhelming supplication, His Holiness has shown infinite compassion and finally agreed to accept our appeal on this special occasion of his 90th birthday," he said at a press conference.

Tsering, however, warned China not to meddle in the process of the Dalai Lama's succession, saying it is a "unique Tibetan Buddhist tradition."

"We not only strongly condemn the People's Republic of China's usage of reincarnation subject for their political gain, and will never accept it," he said.

The search for a Dalai Lama's reincarnation begins only upon the incumbent's death.

In the past, the successor has been identified by senior monastic disciples, based on spiritual signs and visions, and it can take several years after the next Dalai Lama is identified as a baby and groomed to take the reins.

Today in History: July 3, Union wins Battle of Gettysburg

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, July 3, the 184th day of 2025. There are 181 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 3, 1863, the pivotal three-day Civil War Battle of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania ended in a major victory for the North as Confederate troops failed to breach Union positions during an assault known as Pickett's Charge.

Also on this date:

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In 1775, Gen. George Washington took command of the Continental Army at Cambridge, Massachusetts.
In 1944, during World War II, Soviet forces recaptured Minsk from the Germans.
In 1950, the first carrier strikes of the Korean War took place as the USS Valley Forge and the HMS Triumph sent fighter planes against North Korean targets.

In 1971, singer Jim Morrison of The Doors died in Paris at age 27.

In 1979, Dan White, convicted of voluntary manslaughter in the shooting deaths of San Francisco Mayor George Moscone (mahs-KOH'-nee) and Supervisor Harvey Milk, was sentenced to seven years and eight months in prison.

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan presided over a gala ceremony in New York Harbor that saw the re-lighting of the renovated Statue of Liberty.

In 1988, the USS Vincennes shot down an Iran Air jetliner over the Persian Gulf, killing all 290 people aboard.

In 2011, Novak Djokovic (NOH'-vak JOH'-kuh-vich) won his first Wimbledon, beating defending champion Rafael Nadal.

In 2012, Andy Griffith who made homespun American Southern wisdom his trademark as the wise sheriff in "The Andy Griffith Show," died at his North Carolina home at age 86.

Today's Birthdays: Playwright Tom Stoppard is 88. Attorney Gloria Allred is 84. Actor Kurtwood Smith is 82. Country singer Johnny Lee is 79. Humorist Dave Barry is 78. Actor Betty Buckley is 78. Talk show host Montel Williams is 69. Country singer Aaron Tippin is 67. Rock musician Vince Clarke (Depeche Mode, Yaz, Erasure) is 65. Actor Tom Cruise is 63. Actor Thomas Gibson is 63. Actor Connie Nielsen is 60. Actor Yeardley Smith is 61. Actor-singer Audra McDonald is 55. Hockey Hall of Famer Teemu Selanne is 55. WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is 54. Actor Patrick Wilson is 52. Former mixed martial artist Wanderlei Silva is 49. Actor Olivia Munn is 45. Formula One driver Sebastian Vettel is 38. Rock singer-songwriter Elle King is 36.