

Groton Daily Independent

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Thursday, July 17

Senior Menu: Taco salad with chips, Mexican rice with black beans, fruit, breadstick.

Jr. Legion hosts Milbank, 5:30 p.m. (DH)

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

Friday, July 18

Senior Menu: Ham salad sandwich, tomato spoon salad, acini de pepe salad, cookie.

State U10 at Webster

Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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



Saturday, July 19

Jr. Legion at Clear Lake, 3 p.m.

Jr. Teeners at Clear Lake, 1 p.m.

State U10 at Webster

U10 and U12 Softball Tourney in Groton

Sunday, July 20

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

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

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

Amateurs host Redfield, 4 p.m.

State U10 at Webster

U10 and U12 Softball Tourney in Groton

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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.

Syria Hostilities

Syria's government and Druze leaders reached a new ceasefire yesterday. The announcement came after Israel launched dozens of airstrikes into the country, striking the military headquarters in Damascus and an area near the presidential palace.

Israel says its campaign aims to defend Syria's Druze population and keep Syria's military and Islamist militants from its borders. Tit-for-tat attacks between Druze militias and Bedouin fighters in Syria's southern Sweida province have killed more than 300 people in recent days, according to a local war monitor. The fighting among religious minorities—and Israel's involvement—poses the greatest threat to date for Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa.

Separately, an Israeli-backed aid group accused Hamas of spurring a stampede yesterday that killed at least 20 Palestinians near a food distribution site in central Gaza. Hamas denied the allegations.

Mars Rock Breaks Record

The largest piece of Mars on Earth sold for nearly \$5.3M at Sotheby's yesterday—the most valuable meteorite ever auctioned.

The segment was discovered in November 2023 by a meteorite hunter in Niger's Agadez region of the Sahara Desert. The rock has a distinct Martian reddish hue and is partially composed of glass (21.2% by volume), believed to have been forged from the heat and pressure applied to Mars' surface when an asteroid struck it, propelling the chunk 140 million miles through space. It has the scientific name NWA 16788, referencing its discovery in Northwest Africa, and was validated as a Martian rock in the leading journal for meteoritic science earlier this year.

Martian meteorites are rare, composing roughly 400 of the more than 77,000 officially recognized meteorites. Most meteors burn up as they enter Earth's atmosphere, with remnants largely landing in the ocean.

Epstein Files Pushback

Several House Republicans yesterday signed on to a measure directing the Justice Department to release classified documents pertaining to Jeffrey Epstein's sex trafficking ring. The push—which would require a House majority to succeed—comes after President Donald Trump addressed mounting calls over the files, criticizing Republicans who supported their release and defending Attorney General Pam Bondi's handling of the case.

The Justice Department last week released a two-page memo saying Epstein left no "client list" of those involved in his abuse of underage girls. The department also said no further evidence would be released and no additional charges would be brought against third parties. The announcement sparked frustration among Trump's base, many of whom have long awaited a list.

A poll released Tuesday found 3% of Americans are satisfied with the government's handling of the files. A separate running average of top polls measures Trump's net approval rating at -7.6, down nearly two points from the beginning of the month.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

The 153rd British Open kicks off today at Royal Portrush Golf Club in Northern Ireland; see preview and opening-round tee times.

Main stage of Belgium's Tomorrowland music festival destroyed by fire just two days before the event was set to begin.

Robin Kaye, longtime "American Idol" executive, shot and killed at age 70 alongside her husband at Los Angeles home.

Audun Groenvold, Olympic bronze medal-winning skier, dies at age 49 after being struck by lightning.

Science & Technology

Researchers confirm a slight difference in the decay of certain types of subatomic particles, a phenomenon known as breaking charge-parity symmetry; may help explain why the universe is filled with matter instead of antimatter.

The brain utilizes channels in the lining of its blood vessels to direct blood flow to regions requiring more energy, depending on the task; new study may lead to preventive treatments for neurodegenerative diseases.

Toxic algae blooms release "antivitamins" into the surrounding environment, inhibiting the growth of other algae species and allowing them to spread more quickly.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.3%, Dow +0.5%, Nasdaq +0.3%) after President Donald Trump denied reports he was planning to fire Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell.

Meta begins trial over \$8B privacy lawsuit filed by shareholders.

Scale AI to lay off 200 full-time employees, or about 14% of its global staff, and cut ties with 500 contractors; comes a month after Meta invested \$14.3B in the startup.

The US plans to send letters to 150 countries, notifying their leaders of tariffs expected to go into effect Aug. 1.

Politics & World Affairs

Department of Homeland Security expands third-country deportation program, sending five immigrant detainees from various countries to the southern African nation of Eswatini.

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. fires two top deputies at the Department of Health and Human Services, reason not immediately clear.

Senate advances \$9B package of spending cuts to foreign aid and public broadcasting; package spares \$400M global AIDS relief program.

Volcano erupts in southwestern Iceland, forcing more than 100 to evacuate; officials say the molten rock isn't threatening infrastructure.

First Human West Nile Virus Case of 2025 Reported in Brookings Co.

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, the South Dakota Department of Health confirmed the first human West Nile virus (WNV) case of the 2025 season in a resident of Brookings County. South Dakota has reported more than 2,864 human cases and 54 deaths since WNV was first reported in 2002.

“West Nile virus is an infection most commonly spread through mosquito bites,” said Dr. Joshua Clayton, state epidemiologist. “The rate of severe infection that includes swelling of the brain and spinal cord with symptoms of stiff neck, confusion, and muscle weakness is highest in South Dakota and other Midwest states. Raising awareness of human cases can ensure residents and visitors alike take action to reduce their risk.”

Individuals and families can reduce their risk by taking the following actions:

Apply mosquito repellents (DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, 2-undecanone, param-menthane-diol, or IR3535) to clothes and exposed skin. Limit exposure by wearing pants and long sleeves in the evening; Limit time outdoors from dusk to midnight when mosquitoes are most active. *Culex tarsalis* are the primary carrier of WNV in South Dakota;

Remove standing water that gives mosquitoes a place to breed. Regularly change the water in birdbaths, outside pet dishes, and drain water from other flowerpots and garden containers and stay away from areas near standing water; and

Support local mosquito control efforts.

These precautions are especially important for people at high risk for WNV, including individuals over 50, pregnant women, organ transplant patients, individuals with cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure or kidney disease, and those with a history of alcohol abuse. People with severe or unusual headaches should see their physicians.

For more information about West Nile virus, visit the South Dakota DOH website. The department’s surveillance page also provides updated data, including which counties have reported human cases.

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

Arts tourism keeps getting better—and more patriotic

By Jim Speirs, Executive Director, Arts South Dakota

The State Tourism Department has long realized that art drives tourism—and exciting programs are available to capitalize on our statewide creative energy. From exciting new video productions to innovative advertising to the popular State of Create Passport, SD Tourism is sharing their pride in our state's artistic destinations.

The free, mobile-exclusive digital South Dakota State of Create Passport guides travelers to discoveries they've always wanted to see or never knew existed, including new patriotic-themed stops with the South Dakota Stars & Stripes Passport: Celebrating 250 Years of America. The Stars & Stripes Passport invites local residents and visitors alike to discover destinations across the state that showcase American heritage and South Dakota culture. Learn more at TravelSouthDakota.com/Passports to explore the patriotic spirit of the Stars & Stripes Passport.

With the State of Create Passport, travelers can include artistic stops across the state to earn discounts, prizes and more. No app is required and the range of attractions is limited only by your imagination. The program turns everyday travel into a purposeful adventure, highlighting off-the-beaten-path experiences, rewarding curiosity and strengthening connections between people and places. Check out TravelSouthDakota.com for details on your passport to arts adventures.

Again this year, the Tourism Department has a goal to make South Dakota one of the top ten travel destinations in the U.S. We believe the arts are a key element in that strategy—in fact, arts and culture created the gateway to our state's unique destinations. The South Dakota arts community and the State Tourism Department are working together to shine the spotlight on cultural attractions in every corner of South Dakota and spread our state's visitors throughout the state.

More than ever, tourists from inside and outside South Dakota are being encouraged to seek out arts destinations as part of their summertime fun. Please visit www.ArtsSouthDakota.org or TravelSouthDakota.com for more about places to go and things to see!



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Medicaid cuts in federal budget could hit rural health hard in SD

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

Wade Erickson doesn't want to seem like an alarmist.

But Erickson, CEO of Horizon Health in South Dakota, has serious concerns about how the Medicaid cuts embedded in the giant taxation and budget law signed by President Trump will affect the health of South Dakotans, especially in rural areas.

Horizon provides medical care to people across a 28,000 square-mile area of the state. Each year, about 26,000 patients are treated in 80,000 appointments at 27 Horizon Health clinics, dental offices and mental-health centers in South Dakota.

Details are still to come on the cuts to Medicaid, the health insurance program for low-income Americans. But early indications are that the law will cut federal aid to health care by \$1 trillion over the next decade.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated that the law will remove 12 million Americans from enrollment in the Medicaid program, many due to new work requirements.

From Erickson's standpoint, that would impact rural health in two ways.

First, patients who lose Medicaid coverage and are not able to afford medical care from their own pockets will be more likely to delay preventive care or may avoid getting needed medical treatments altogether.

"If people are afraid to access health care because they can't afford to pay for it, or they stop taking care of their wellness and are no longer catching chronic diseases early to where they can be managed,



Wade Erickson, CEO of Horizon Health, is shown in his system's clinic in Martin, S.D. in May 2024. (Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota

News Watch)

GROTON COMMUNITY APPRECIATION MEAL



Walking Tacos!

TUES., JULY 22

11 AM - 2:00 PM

7 E. US Hwy 12 | Groton

DACOTAH BANK

MEMBER
FDIC

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there's a very good possibility that it could lead to people being more sick, and also some more people dying before they would otherwise," Erickson told News Watch.

Secondly, health providers like Horizon, which already run on small or even negative profit margins on some procedures, will see less revenue and could be forced to reduce services.

About 65% of Horizon's annual budget is funded by the federal government, with roughly 20% coming from Medicaid, which sometimes does not cover the full cost of patient treatments and procedures. Other federal funding sources include Medicare and the annual payment made as part of the Federal Qualified Health Center program.

As a federally qualified center, Horizon cannot turn away any patients. If fewer people are covered by Medicaid, Horizon will have to ask them to pay on a sliding scale or simply provide unreimbursed coverage if the patients cannot afford to pay.

"Just because people lose coverage doesn't mean they stop getting sick or they should stop taking care of their wellness and chronic conditions," Erickson said.

"That is super important, that we are able to continue to support that. But without insurance or without a payer source other than themselves, which honestly, people can't afford it if they're on Medicaid so they'll be uninsured," he added. "That will just lead to more uncompensated care and make it really difficult for us to maintain services in rural communities."

Erickson acknowledged that there are many unknowns about how the cuts to Medicaid will play out in the coming years. But he is concerned that reductions in coverage may put rural providers and patients into untenable positions.

"We already have patients who choose whether to get groceries or get their prescriptions, so it's going to land on the most vulnerable people out there," he said. "And we have to figure out, how are we going to serve all these new patients who are uninsured?"

Law's goal is to cut fraud and waste

President Trump and Republican leaders in Congress have said the health care changes in the new budget bill will reduce fraud and waste and ensure that Medicaid is serving those it initially intended: pregnant women, people with disabilities and children.

Cuts in some programs were necessary in order to fund some of Trump's other priorities, such as increasing immigration enforcement, boosting defense and providing tax cuts.

The bill includes a \$50 billion new fund to help rural hospitals offset revenue losses. But the nonpartisan KFF research institute estimates Medicaid spending in rural areas will fall by \$155 billion under the new legislation.

"It's very clear that Medicaid cuts will result in rural hospital closures," Alan Morgan, CEO of the National Rural Health Association, a nonprofit advocacy and research organization, told KFF in July.

A \$1.65 billion program in SD

Medicaid in South Dakota provides medical, dental, vision and pharmaceutical insurance coverage for qualifying low-income adults and children.

The cost of the Medicaid program in South Dakota in calendar year 2024 was about \$1.65 billion, according to data from the Department of Social Services, which administers the program.

DSS officials did not respond to an interview request from News Watch.

Medicaid enrollment and costs in South Dakota rose significantly in July 2023, when voter-approved expanded guidelines kicked in, and both metrics have continued to rise since then.

In June 2025, about 144,300 people were enrolled in Medicaid in South Dakota, with 78,500 children and 65,800 adults covered by the insurance plan. The cost of the program was \$155.5 million that month, with the state paying about 40% and the federal government paying around 60%.

While cuts to Medicaid will affect all health care providers across the state, including large health groups in bigger cities, rural providers and patients have fewer options to adapt to changes and as a result may see more acute impacts.

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Worries arise for long-term care industry

Providers in the long-term care industry in South Dakota are also trying to determine how the recent budget law will affect their ability to provide care or even remain financially viable, said Mark Deak, executive director of the South Dakota Health Care Association.

The association represents about 170 nursing homes, assisted-living and senior-care homes as well as about 90 vendors and suppliers to the long-term care industry in the state. Many of those facilities, particularly in rural areas, have experienced financial challenges in recent years, leading 10% of nursing homes to close during the early 2020s, Deak said.

While the budget bill does not contain direct cuts to long-term care funding, anticipated reductions in Medicaid funding could squeeze revenues for facilities that on average receive 54% of income from Medicaid enrollees, Deak said.

As a result, care facilities could be hit with revenue challenges, especially in rural areas where workforce is limited and costs can be higher, he said. Meanwhile, potential residents with limited financial resources could find it harder to obtain long-term care.

"Given how tight the margins are, and how tight the budget could get, it just ratchets up the level of anxiety," Deak said. "Given the overall fiscal pressures, we're just thinking about what the impacts could be."

Another less-prominent piece of the legislation, Deak said, will shorten by a month the time period long-term care facilities have to process and be reimbursed for new residents, which also could make it less likely they will take in new low-income residents.

The bill did include one big win for long-term care facilities.

It paused a federal staffing level requirement that Deak said would have forced facilities in South Dakota to hire 300 new nurses. That was an expensive and potentially impossible directive to meet given the lack of available workforce, he said.

Waiting and watching in Winner

Brian Williams, CEO of Winner Regional Health, said it's too early to know how the Medicaid cuts in the federal budget bill will impact his facility and its patients. But he's staying abreast of funding developments to be prepared if bad news does arrive.

"We do not fully understand how these cuts may or not impact us. But we're very concerned and we're keeping a close eye on how this is going to be implemented," Williams told News Watch. "It could have a negative impact on our ability to get reimbursement for a lot a services we provide."

The small, independent health group that includes a hospital, clinic and long-term care facility in south-central South Dakota's Tripp County has been forced to make tough choices already this year due to revenue challenges.

In February, Winner Regional ended its birthing services, forcing expectant mothers to drive an hour or more to give birth with a doctor present.

Erickson, of Horizon Health, said he plans to contact members of Congress to urge them to modify or soften the cuts to Medicaid.

"That's why we really have to tell our story of the impact of what it's going to do to people across the country, and in our case, the people of South Dakota."

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



"It's very clear that Medicaid cuts will result in rural hospital closures."

Alan Morgan, CEO of the National Rural Health Association,
in an interview with KFF

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2025 Pro-Am Tournament

Gross Scores

75- Tanner Waage
81- Tyler Sperry
82- Kalen Kjellsen
82- Brad Larson

82- Drake Patterson
83- Brandon Stanley
83- Brad Waage
83- Connor Hanson
83- Carter Jondahl
84- Randy Stanley
86- Jake Unzen
87- Mitch Perman
87- Tony Waage
88- Treyton Diegel
89- Scott Vedvei
90- Jason Hill
90- Bailey Schahn
90- Tyler Oliver
91- Tom Mahan
92- Eric Moody
92- Lance Frohling
92- Jeff Christenson
93- Joe Groeblichhoff
95- Austin Schuelke
95- Josh Heupel
98- Collin Jark
99- Steve Dunker
104- Evan Bertsch

Net Scores

69- Brian Carrels
74- Brandon Stanley
74- Blake Ronning
75- Brad Waage
75- Drake Patterson
76- Jake Unzen
77- Randy Stanley
77- Lance Frohling
77- Brad Larson
77- Mitch Perman
77- Tyler Sperry
77- Tony Waage
79- Connor Hanson
79- Carter Jondahl
80- Josh Heupel
81- Jason Hill
81- Bailey Schahn
81- Tyler Oliver
81- Collin Jark
82- Joe Groeblichhoff
83- Eric Moody
84- Tom Mahan
84- Scott Vedvei
85- Treyton Diegel
85- Jeff Christenson
89- Austin Schuelke
89- Evan Bertsch
90- Steve Dunker

Best Ball Points Net

67- Jake Unzen, Mitch Perman, Josh Heupel, Kade Brown

64 Tony Waage, Tanner Waage, Brad Waage, Joe Zewaski

63- Kalen Kjellsen, Brandon Stanley, Scott Vedvei, Ben Van Scoyk

62- Brad Larson, Tyler Sperry, Blake Ronning, Brandon Laker



**Tanner Waage
1st Place- 75**



1st Place Team 67. Jake Unzen, Mitch Perman and Josh Heupel. 67



2nd place Team 64. Scott Vedvei, Kalen Kjellsen and Brandon Stanley.



3rd place Team 63. Tony Waage, Brad Waage and Tanner Waage

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Groton Jr. Teeners Takes Timely Hitting Into Game Against Redfield Flickertails

Groton Jr. Teeners has been able to drive runners home from the base paths this season, hitting 0.337 with runners in scoring position. Groton Jr. Teeners will look to use that to their advantage when they play Redfield Flickertails on Thursday. It's a double header at Redfield starting at 5:30 p.m.

Last Time Out:

Groton Jr. Teeners gave up a comeback to Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen in a 21-11 loss. Redfield Flickertails lost to Miller 15-9.

Player Highlight:

Asher Zimmerman has played five positions for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. Zimmerman's primary position is right field. Zimmerman drove in one run last game as they went 0-2 at the plate. Zimmerman has an on-base percentage of 0.466 this season thanks in part to a 0.279 average and 11 walks.

About Groton Jr. Teeners 14U:

Groton Jr. Teeners has a record of 15-11 this season. TC Schuster's 1.434 OPS leads Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. The right-handed hitter has a 0.615 OBP and a 0.818 slugging percentage this season. Trayce Schelle leads Groton Jr. Teeners with 22 and two-thirds innings pitched. Keegan Kucker leads Groton Jr. Teeners with 150 total fielding chances this season. Kucker's primary position is catcher.

About Redfield Flickertails:

Redfield Flickertails has nine wins against 11 losses this season. Tate Neuharth's 1.394 OPS leads Redfield Flickertails. The right-handed hitter has a 0.667 OBP and a 0.727 slugging percentage this season. Grady Hulscher leads Redfield Flickertails with 27 innings pitched. The starting pitcher has a 3.11 ERA this season. Gentry Puffer leads Redfield Flickertails with 69 total fielding chances this season. Puffer's primary position is catcher.

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Groton Legion Post 39 Walk-Off In Nail-Biter Against Clark/Willow Lake Legion

By GameChanger Media

Groton Legion Post 39 took Wednesday's game in dramatic fashion, with a 5-4 walk-off victory over C/WL Legion at Groton. The game was tied at four in the bottom of the seventh when Jakob Steen induced Braxton Imrie to hit into a fielder's choice, but one run scored.

Groton Legion Post 39 got on the board in the first inning after Carter Simon singled, scoring one run. C/WL Legion captured the lead, 3-1, in the top of the second when an error scored one run, and Waylan Olson singled, scoring two runs.

Karsten Fliehs singled to center field, which helped Groton Legion Post 39 tie the game at three in the bottom of the fourth.

A single by Will Hovde gave C/WL Legion the lead, 4-3, in the top of the fifth.

Groton Legion Post 39 took the lead in the bottom of the seventh inning after Brevin Fliehs singled to center field, and Imrie grounded into a fielder's choice, each scoring one run.

Nick Morris earned the win for Groton Legion Post 39. The hurler surrendered seven hits and four runs (one earned) over seven innings, striking out one and walking three. Jakob Steen took the loss for C/WL Legion. The reliever went three and one-third innings, giving up four runs on seven hits, striking out four and walking one. Cooper Pommer started on the mound for C/WL Legion. The right-handed pitcher gave up three hits and one run over three innings, striking out two and walking two.

Groton Legion Post 39 collected 10 hits in the game. Fliehs led Groton Legion Post 39 with two runs batted in from the number nine spot in the lineup. The catcher went 2-for-3 on the day. Gavin Englund went 3-for-3 at the plate to lead Groton Legion Post 39 in hits. Fliehs and Simon each collected multiple hits for Groton Legion Post 39.

Waylan Olson led C/WL Legion with two runs batted in. The right-handed hitter went 1-for-2 on the day. Jakob Steen, Will Hovde, Josh Kannegieter, Ky Vandersnick, Waylan Olson, Collin Gaikowski, and Jack Helkenn each collected one hit for C/WL Legion.

Groton Legion Post 39 will travel to Region 6B Tournament for their next game on Monday.

First-Inning Burst Enough To Lead Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen Past Groton Jr. Teeners 14U

By GameChanger Media

Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen defeated Groton Jr. Teeners 13-3 on Wednesday thanks in part to 11 runs in the first inning.

Groton Jr. Teeners got on the board in the first inning after Lincoln Shilhanek grounded out, scoring two runs.

Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen flipped the game on its head in the bottom of the first, scoring 11 runs on five hits to take the lead, 11-2. The biggest blow in the inning was a double by Mason D that drove in three.

Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen added two runs in the third after D tripled down the left field line.

Dylan J earned the win for Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen. The righty gave up five hits and three runs (two earned) over four innings, striking out four and walking none. Shilhanek took the loss for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. The starting pitcher went two-thirds of an inning, surrendering 10 runs (three earned) on four hits, striking out none and walking five.

Shilhanek drove the middle of the lineup, leading Groton Jr. Teeners with two runs batted in. Number eight hitter, Wesley Borg, showed the depth of Groton Jr. Teeners 14U's lineup, by leading them with two hits in two at bats. Trayce Schelle stole two bases.

D went 3-for-3 at the plate and led the team with six runs batted in. Sonny S paced Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen with three walks. Overall, the team had patience at the plate, accumulating nine walks for the game. Jackson D stole two bases.

Groton Jr. Teeners Fall Victim To Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen Rally By GameChanger Media

Groton Jr. Teeners lost to Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen 21-11 on Wednesday even though they once led by seven runs.

Groton Jr. Teeners collected 10 hits and Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen had 13 in the high-scoring affair.

Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen got on the board in the first inning after Dylan J grounded out, scoring one run.

Groton Jr. Teeners flipped the game on its head in the top of the second, scoring eight runs on four hits to take the lead, 8-1. The biggest blow in the inning was an error that drove in two.

Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen flipped the game on its head in the bottom of the second, scoring eight runs on five hits to take the lead, 9-8. The biggest blow in the inning was a double by Brody K that drove in three.

Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen added to their early lead in the bottom of the third inning after Brady R walked, Mason D doubled down the right field line, and K singled down the left field line, each scoring two runs.

Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen scored six runs on two hits in the bottom of the fourth inning. Cade T singled, scoring one run, Abe K drew a walk, scoring one run, an error scored one run, Zack V drew a walk, scoring one run, and D doubled, scoring two runs.

K earned the win for Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen. The starting pitcher gave up four hits and seven runs (four earned) over one inning, striking out one and walking none. Tucker Leicht took the loss for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. The hurler went three innings, giving up 15 runs (seven earned) on 11 hits, striking out three and walking three.

Groton Jr. Teeners piled up 10 hits in the game. Sam Crank, the number seven hitter for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U, led the way with two runs batted in. The right-handed hitter went 2-for-3 on the day. Crank, Trayce Schelle, and Lincoln Shilhanek each collected two hits for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U.

Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen collected 13 hits in the game. K drove the middle of the lineup, leading Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen with five runs batted in. The infielder went 2-for-2 on the day. K, T, Sonny S, D, and Dane S each collected two hits for Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen. Smittys 13U 2025 Aberdeen had patience at the plate, tallying six walks for the game.

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

South Dakota schools left 'scrambling' after feds withhold \$25.8 million in funding

Educators, advocates say the federal freeze undermines trust in public education

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JULY 16, 2025 12:39 PM

Teacher contracts were signed in the spring and school district budgets were prepared months ago. But weeks before school starts, South Dakota schools are missing \$25.8 million they planned to use for the upcoming school year, according to the state Education Department.

Distribution of congressionally approved funds were paused indefinitely by the U.S. Department of Education on June 30 for review. The department's decision to withhold \$6.8 billion in funds for education triggered alarms nationwide about how the lack of funding will affect hiring of staff as well as student enrichment, after-school and language-learning services.

The funding freeze affects several programs, including Title II-A (educator training and recruitment), Title III-A (English learner support), Title IV-A (student enrichment and after-school programs), migrant education, and adult education and literacy grants.

Sandra Waltman, director of public affairs for the South Dakota Education Association, said school districts are "scrambling" to figure out their budget without the federal funding. That could mean eliminating vacant positions ahead of the school year or dipping into reserves "as long as they can."

"This undermines the trust the community has in their public schools. This 'we're going to give you money but not give you money' situation makes families question whether their school is going to have the resources to provide an education," Waltman said. "They might wonder if they should look elsewhere. Maybe that's the point: to undermine the ability of the public school system to provide support to students who need them."

Pause could lead to long-term, larger ripple effects

A coalition of Democratic attorneys general and organizations including the National Education Association and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People are challenging the funding freeze in court.

South Dakota Education Secretary Joseph Graves said in an emailed statement to South Dakota Searchlight that the funding could continue "without further interruption" once the federal department completes its review.

"The funding pause means that some schools in South Dakota will need to remain flexible as they prepare for the 2025-26 school year," Graves said. He added that schools still have access to \$57 million in some Title I funds, which are primarily used to support schools with a high percentage of students from low-income families. That available funding is the "lion's share" of federal K-12 education funding in the state.

Waltman said her organization urged South Dakota congressional delegates to "make it clear to the Trump administration that South Dakota schools need these dollars."

She said the funding freeze will lead to larger consequences.

"If those dollars aren't restored and we don't see meaningful investment from the state and federal level, it'll be difficult for our schools to sustain," Waltman said. "They'll look at reducing staff and cutting programs, and some rural schools will struggle to stay open."

Huron Superintendent Kraig Steinhoff said that the fear, uncertainty and concern because of the funding freeze is "unfortunate and unnecessary."

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"It makes people question whether or not education is going to continue to be supported," Stenhoff said, "and whether teaching is an occupation people should consider staying in."

How schools are handling the missing funds

Huron relied on more than \$760,000 in what are now frozen funds last school year, Steinhoff said, making it one of the largest recipients in the state. Sioux Falls, Rapid City, Oglala Lakota County and Todd County also receive large amounts of frozen funding.

Oglala Lakota, Sioux Falls and Huron use many of their funds for teacher, counselor and instructional coach salaries.

Sioux Falls, the largest district in the state by number of students, has up to \$3.5 million in federal funds affected by the pause.

That's the equivalent of up to 40 full-time staff, said Kirk Zeeck, Sioux Falls assistant superintendent of academic achievement. About \$1.5 million of that funding is used for instructional coaches providing professional development for teachers, including behavioral training and engagement strategies.

Most of the funding on pause at Huron goes toward salaries for extra teachers to reduce the student-to-teacher ratio and staff meant to assist and support students – such as migrant liaisons, summer school staff and paraprofessionals. The funding also goes toward transportation for elementary school students and other programs.

Since staff contracts have already been signed, schools are on the hook to pay for those even though the funding isn't readily available, Steinhoff added.

For Oglala Lakota County, the paused funding is mostly used to support salaries of instructional coaches and counselors. That includes retention and recruitment bonuses for teachers in one of the most rural and impoverished districts in the state. The annual \$1,500 retention bonus is paid out the first pay period of August, said Superintendent Connie Kaltenbach.

"Our district is going to do all we can to ensure we maintain all the funding as best as we can," Kaltenbach said. "We'll cinch the belt in other areas."

If funding isn't resumed in time, Kaltenbach said the district would likely stop professional development travel and advertising for vacant staff positions. She said she'll maintain and protect counselor positions in the district "as best we can so students don't bear the brunt of that."

Freeze impacts after-school programs: 'We're a tool to break the cycle of poverty'

Federal funding for some after-school and summer programs throughout the state is included in the \$25.8 million freeze. Those programs, identified as 21st Century Community Learning Centers, are created to provide children, especially low-income students, with a safe place to eat and spend time outside of school areas.

Waltman said families depend on the programs to "fill the gap between after school and when parents can get off work."

Frozen federal funding accounts for about 40% of the Boys and Girls Club of the Missouri River, according to Executive Director Pat Breen. The award is \$246,741 a year, based on fiscal year 2024's grant documents.

The organization operates the summer and after-school care program for the Wagner Community School District and Marty Indian School. Students are offered afternoon snacks and a meal each day, and they can stay until 8 p.m. during the school year or between 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. on weekdays during the summer.

The programs serve a combined 160 students per day, with more than 1,000 students rotating in and out of those slots last year.

"This is a vital mission," Breen said. "We're all about personal accountability and academic enrichment. We're a tool to break the cycle of poverty."

Funding for 21st Century programs will be reimbursed by the state Department of Education through August, according to the department. That's because, since the grant funds cover projects over a five-year period, the department reserved a portion of last year's awards to cover existing projects.

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There are 25 active centers in South Dakota, according to the department.

Sarah Hanson, managing director for children, youth and families at Volunteers of America Dakotas, said the organization's Kids Campus Central in Sioux Falls is "operating as normal" through mid-August because of the remaining funding from last year. In addition to the program, the organization's missing \$197,309 grant funded a dedicated Science, Technology, Engineering and Math tutor and transportation home for students whose families can't pick them up.

Hanson said staff are preparing for the possibility they won't receive funds in time for the new school year. They're helping families seek other tuition assistance to help the program replace the frozen funding, including state Child Care Assistance, or scholarships.

"Our hope is that by starting early and being proactive, we can limit the number of families who are impacted," Hanson said in an emailed statement. "Still, the loss of a funding stream this significant will have real effects."

Hanson said transportation will be offered during the school year regardless of federal funding, because without it, "many families won't be able to attend at all."

Keiz Larson, executive director and CEO of YMCA of Rapid City, said her organization was not granted additional funding through August for two after-school programs in Box Elder and Fall River County because the programs restart in August. The YMCA is missing \$147,695 between the two programs, based on fiscal year 2024 grant documents.

The after-school program in Box Elder serves the Douglas School District and Ellsworth Air Force Base with care, homework support and enrichment for students. YMCA is the only licensed elementary after-school and summer care provider in the rural Fall River County area, serving Edgemont.

If the frozen funding isn't released by the end of the week, it could permanently jeopardize care for over 120 families in both communities.

"It's hard to start something back up after you close it," Larson said.

Searchlight Senior Reporter John Hult contributed to this article.

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

GOP senators including SD's Rounds protest Trump freeze of \$6.8B in school funding

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - JULY 16, 2025 5:10 PM

WASHINGTON — Republican members of the U.S. Senate called on Office of Management and Budget Director Russ Vought in a letter Wednesday to release the \$6.8 billion in funds for K-12 schools that the Trump administration is withholding.

The letter marked a major friction point between President Donald Trump and influential lawmakers in his own party as his administration tests the limits of the executive branch's authority in clawing back federal dollars Congress has already appropriated. Every state has millions in school funding held up as a result of the freeze.

Wednesday's letter came after the Supreme Court temporarily cleared the way earlier this week for the administration to carry out mass layoffs and a plan to dramatically downsize the Department of Education that Trump ordered earlier this year.

Just a day ahead of the July 1 date when these funds are typically disbursed as educators plan for the coming school year, the Education Department informed states that it would be withholding funding for several programs, including before- and after-school programs, migrant education and English-language learning, among other initiatives.

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"Withholding these funds will harm students, families, and local economies," wrote the 10 GOP senators, many of them members of committees that make decisions on spending. Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, a West Virginia Republican and chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies, led the letter.

Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, chair of the broader Senate Appropriations Committee, also signed onto the letter, along with: Sens. Katie Britt of Alabama, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, John Boozman of Arkansas, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, Deb Fischer of Nebraska, John Hoeven of North Dakota, Mike Rounds of South Dakota and Jim Justice of West Virginia.

"The decision to withhold this funding is contrary to President Trump's goal of returning K-12 education to the states," the senators wrote. "This funding goes directly to states and local school districts, where local leaders decide how this funding is spent, because as we know, local communities know how to best serve students and families."

States Newsroom has asked the Office of Management and Budget for comment on the letter.

Meanwhile, a slew of congressional Democrats and one independent — 32 senators and 150 House Democrats — urged Vought and Education Secretary Linda McMahon in two letters sent last week to immediately release the funds they say are being withheld "illegally."

Democratic attorneys general and governors also pushed back on these withheld funds when a coalition of 24 states and the District of Columbia sued the administration earlier this week.

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

Native American radio stations part of funding deal as US Senate takes up cuts to NPR, PBS

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JULY 16, 2025 12:59 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate on Wednesday began debating changes to a bill that will cancel \$9 billion in previously approved spending on public broadcasting and foreign aid — but with a deal for grants to some Native American radio stations that may help offset cuts to public media.

The vote-a-rama, which could extend overnight, represents a prime opportunity for Democrats to force GOP senators to vote on each of the proposed rescissions. And while it's unlikely enough Republicans break with their party to substantially change the bill, key votes will serve as fodder for campaign ads heading into next year's midterm elections.

The Trump administration sent Congress the rescissions request in early June, allowing the White House budget office to legally freeze funding on the programs in the proposal for 45 days.

The House voted mostly along party lines later that month to send the rescissions bill to the Senate, where Republican leaders have spent weeks addressing concerns raised by their own lawmakers.

At the center of the dispute is how cutting foreign aid for dozens of programs, including those addressing global health and democracy, would affect American influence around the globe.

GOP senators also raised qualms during a hearing about how eliminating funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting would impact rural communities and emergency alert systems.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting provides funding for National Public Radio, the Public Broadcasting Service and hundreds of local stations throughout the country. In North Dakota, for example, the president of Prairie Public said he anticipates elimination of federal funding would mean a loss of about \$2 million for his PBS station over the next two years.

South Dakota Republican Sen. Mike Rounds announced Tuesday he's secured an agreement with White House budget director Russ Vought to move \$9.4 million from an account within the Interior Department to at least two dozen Native American radio stations in multiple states.

Those include Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon,

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South Dakota and Wisconsin, according to Rounds' office.

Republican leaders also agreed to keep funding for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR, whole by removing that rescission from the bill. PEPFAR is a global health program to combat HIV/AIDS launched by former President George W. Bush.

But those changes didn't sway every Republican senator to support the bill. Maine's Susan Collins, Kentucky's Mitch McConnell and Alaska's Lisa Murkowski voted against moving forward with debate on Tuesday night.

Vice President JD Vance casting a tie-breaking vote was the only reason the proposal advanced to the vote-a-rama, which began early Wednesday afternoon.

International disaster relief

Amendment debate kicked off with a proposal from Delaware Democratic Sen. Chris Coons to eliminate the \$496 million rescission for international disaster relief funding, which he said "doesn't just save lives around the world," but strengthens American global leadership.

Missouri Republican Sen. Eric Schmitt argued against preserving full funding for that program, saying "many foreign governments and U.N. agencies have become reliant on U.S. emergency funding, using it to avoid investing in their own disaster preparedness."

The amendment was not adopted following a 49-50 vote with Collins, McConnell and Murkowski voting with Democrats to strike the funding cut.

Nevada Democratic Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto tried unsuccessfully to block any cancellation to Corporation for Public Broadcasting funding that would hinder public safety.

"For years public broadcasting has been essential to keeping Americans informed during severe weather and environment threats and broader public safety situations," Cortez Masto said. "Let me give you an example from my home state."

"As the Davis wildfire raged in northern Nevada last summer the local CBS affiliate lost their transmitter in the fire. But thanks to public broadcasting services, CBS was able to air their local newscast and keep Nevadans informed about evacuations, the path of the fire and safety measures."

Schmitt opposed the provision saying it isn't necessary to ensure emergency alerts. The attempt to send the bill back to committee failed following a 48-51 vote, with Collins and Murkowski voting in support.

Congress and the Constitution

In a brief interview before voting began, New Jersey Democrat Cory Booker said the rescissions package undermined what was supposed to be a bipartisan budget and appropriations process.

He also objected to Congress giving away its constitutional authority for spending decisions.

"The reason why this is an assault, in my opinion, on the Constitution right now is because the powers of the Article I branch of government really are the budget, and we should be doing things together," he said. "To rescind money that was approved in a bipartisan way undermines that spirit and that work."

Sen. Thom Tillis, a North Carolina Republican who said he planned to support the bill, also raised objections to the process.

"I'm trying to have a positive view about how this rescission is going to be implemented," he told reporters outside the Senate chamber. "It's not near as prescriptive as I would like for it to be, but if they misstep, it'll definitely influence my posture for future rescissions."

\$2.2 million at stake in South Dakota FROM SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

A congressional decision to claw back funding for public media would cost South Dakota Public Broadcasting \$2.2 million in annual funding.

That amounts to 20% of SDPB's annual budget.

The organization has said it would try to raise the lost funding from sources including donors and business

sponsors. But in the short term, the network would face “immediate and significant impacts on our ability to provide essential services, including production of local news, documentaries, and music programming; and our ability to purchase national programming and maintain broadcast infrastructure.”

Jacob Fischler and Shauneen Miranda contributed to this report.

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.

Midwest farm economies suffered while some Sun Belt states kept rolling in early 2025

Tariffs, deportations threaten economic damage in the still-thriving Southeast United States

BY: TIM HENDERSON, STATELINE - JULY 16, 2025 9:30 AM

Global clashes and trade wars hammered Midwestern states’ agricultural economies early this year, while a continuing boom in Southeastern states’ housing and tech jobs kept their economies humming along.

Some Southeastern states were seeing a strong agricultural economy because of still-rising poultry and egg prices, though small row-crop farmers there were still caught in the crunch of high costs and low profits, and many declared bankruptcy. And the area benefited from gains in real estate and tech.

Overall, 39 states and the District of Columbia saw drops in gross domestic product (GDP) for the first quarter of this year — well above the 22 states and the District of Columbia seeing drops during the same time in 2024, according to a Stateline analysis of preliminary U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis statistics released June 27.

National numbers released late last month show a rare decrease in economic output for the first quarter, the first since 2022, partly because of increased imports as suppliers sought to stock up on imported goods ahead of tariff increases. GDP is calculated by subtracting imported goods from national economic output.

There’s widespread agreement that row-crop farmers are suffering economic pain, especially in the Midwest where the industry dominates the economy. Meanwhile, the booming housing and tech sectors in the South are on a continued winning streak even as storm clouds gather over tariffs and immigrant labor.

Nationwide, more farms filed for Chapter 12 bankruptcy from January through March than in any full year since 2021, driven by higher costs for supplies and lower prices paid for row crops such as corn, soybeans and wheat.

“Crop prices and commodity prices are significantly lower, and fertilizer and equipment prices are higher, so we’re seeing a bit of a struggle right now in the farm economy,” said Abygail Streff, an economist and policy analyst at the Nebraska Farm Bureau.

Meat prices are one of the few bright spots in Nebraska’s farm economy, Streff said. “For a lot of producers who have cattle, this has been a really good year for them.”

Still, Nebraska, along with Iowa, suffered the biggest drop in GDP, according to the analysis. Each state fell 6.1% from the same time a year ago.

The squeeze on farmers from high fertilizer prices and low grain prices means they must produce more and more corn just to pay their fertilizer costs, said Josh Linville, a fertilizer market analyst at StoneX.

Fertilizer supply has been disrupted by sanctions against Russia, and it’s gotten worse this year with the bombing of Iran and the trade war with China, two countries that are also important fertilizer suppliers to American farmers, Linville said.

“We tend to think of the Middle East and the Strait of Hormuz [a shipping channel under threat by conflict] from an oil-slash-energy perspective, but 1 out of every 2 tons of urea fertilizer that gets shipped to the United States comes from the Middle East,” Linville said.

Despite being a drain in the Midwest, agriculture was a positive driver of economies in Alabama, Arkansas and Mississippi, according to Stateline’s analysis.

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That's because Southeastern agriculture includes more poultry and eggs, currently more profitable than the row crops that dominate in the Midwest, said Wendiam Sawadgo, an extension economist at Auburn University. The divergence is expected to last, he said, with row-crop prices continuing to fall and meat and egg prices continuing to rise this year.

But even in the Southeast, row-crop farmers suffered.

Arkansas saw a near-record number of farm bankruptcies this year, for example. And climate change has contributed to lower soybean prices as low water levels in the Mississippi River make barge transportation more difficult and expensive, according to reports this year by the University of Arkansas' Agricultural Economics & Agribusiness Department.

Farm bankruptcies nationally came to 259 in the first three months of this year. That was more than any full year since 2021, when there were 276, according to cases compiled by Ryan Loy, an agricultural economist at the University of Arkansas. Arkansas saw 15 farm bankruptcies in the first quarter, almost as many as in all of 2024, when there were 16.

"We've already outpaced all of last year on a national scale," he said.

Large farms can ride out struggles, but smaller farms are more likely to go bankrupt from increases in costs and lower market prices, a pattern that started in the early 2010s and got sharply worse in the past year, Loy said.

All five of the states with the fastest-growing economies were in the 12-state Southeast region defined by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. Even there, though, the percentages were slight: South Carolina (up 1.7%), Florida (up 1.4%), Alabama (up 1%), North Carolina and Arkansas (each up .8%) had the largest increases in the nation.

The largest drivers in Florida, North Carolina and South Carolina were real estate and tech, while increases in Alabama and Arkansas were mostly in agriculture.

The Carolinas have been magnets for new movers, said Matthew Martin, a Charlotte, North Carolina-based regional executive for the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond. The influx has driven more housing and infrastructure work to supply newcomers, he said.

"Employment in South Carolina is on fire right now and North Carolina is doing well also. They're places that people want to be," Martin said. "Employers want to be there, too, and so there's been population growth. Then you've got to have all the retail and health care. That has got to follow it."

Business owners are uncertain about future federal policy in the Trump administration, Martin said, according to conversations he's had.

They worry about tariffs, whether they'll have to raise prices or accept lower profits, and eventually whether those factors could cause job growth to stall. And some businesses that depend on immigrant labor say they've lost workers despite using the national E-Verify system to make sure employees have legal status to work, Martin said.

Martin hasn't heard of many workplace raids in the Carolinas, but there have been some federal audits of employee forms to check for false statements.

"Some of the workers won't show up from that day forward," Martin said.

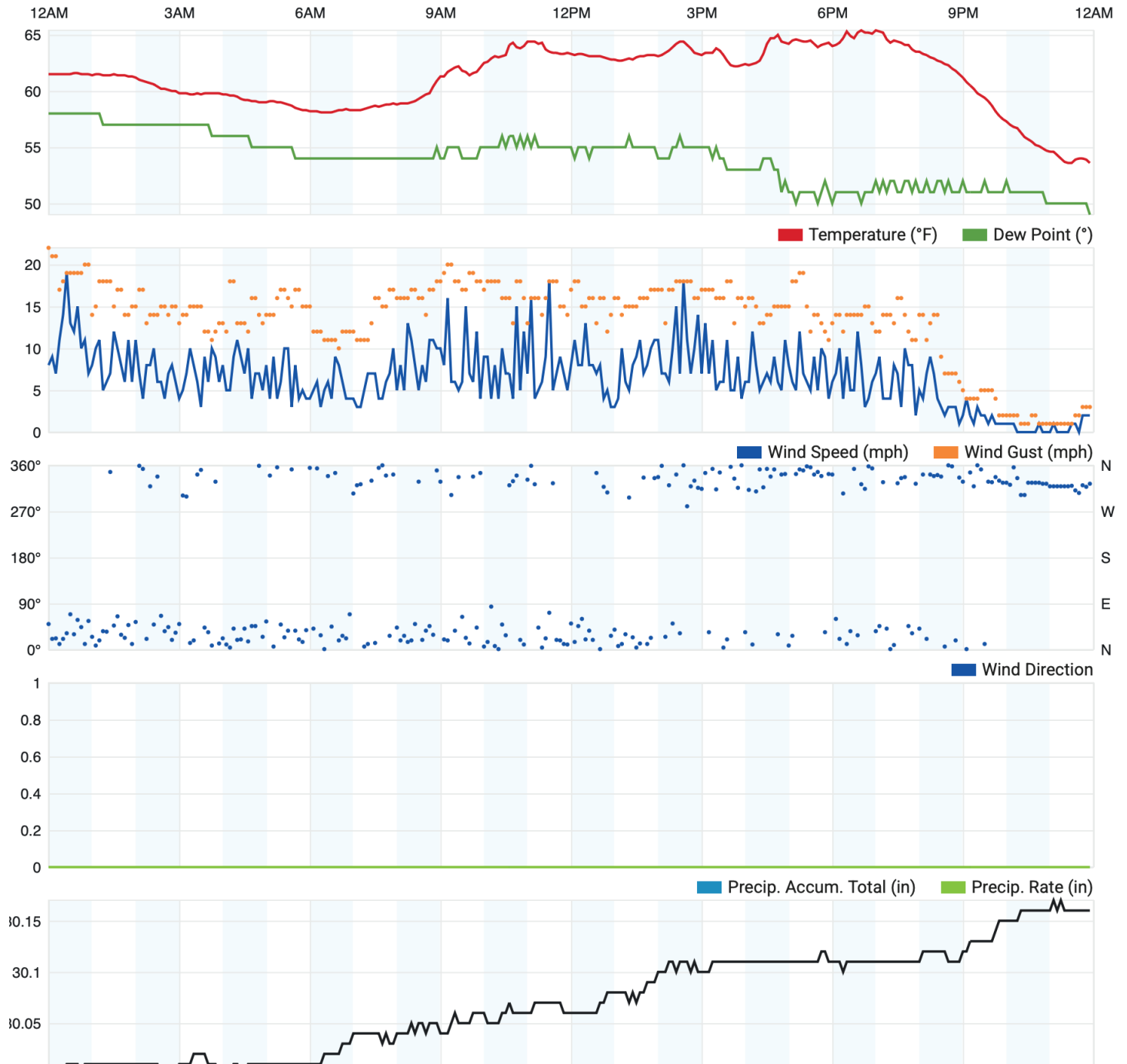
Tim Henderson covers demographics for Stateline. He has been a reporter at the Miami Herald, the Cincinnati Enquirer and The Journal News in suburban New York. Henderson became fascinated with census data in the early 1990s, when AOL offered the first computerized reports. Since then he has broken stories about population trends in South Florida, including a housing affordability analysis included in the 2007 Pulitzer-winning series "House of Lies" for the Miami Herald, and a prize-winning analysis of public pension irregularities for The Journal News. He has been a member and trainer for the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting since its inception 20 years ago, specializing in online data access and visualization along with demographics.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

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Today



High: 72 °F

Patchy Fog
then Mostly
Sunny

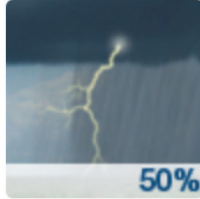
Tonight



Low: 60 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Friday



High: 77 °F

Chance
T-storms

Friday Night



Low: 58 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Saturday



High: 77 °F

Partly Sunny



Through the Weekend

Today



40 to 60% showers and
thunderstorms overnight
- Over north central SD and
portions of northeastern SD

Highs: 70-77°

Friday



40 to 60% chance of showers and
thunderstorms
- East of the Missouri River into
west central MN

Highs: 75-87°

- warmest over south
central SD

Saturday



30 to 45% chance of showers
and thunderstorms along and
west of the Missouri River
through Saturday evening

Highs: 75-83°

Sunday



30 to 45% chance of showers
and thunderstorms through
Sunday night

**Highs: upper 70s
to 90°**

- Warmest along and
west of the Missouri
River



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Another cool day with temperatures running about 10 to 15 degrees below average with highs ranging in the 70s. Temperatures will gradually warm back into the 70s and 80s Friday and Saturday to even around 90, over portions of central SD, on Sunday. An unsettled weather pattern remains with chances of showers and thunderstorms through the weekend.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 65 °F at 6:39 PM

Heat Index: 65 °F at 5:00 PM

Low Temp: 61 °F at 10:13 PM

Wind: 21 mph at 12:03 AM

Precip: : 1.00

Day length: 15 hours, 18 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 111 in 1936

Record Low: 44 in 1895

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 1.90

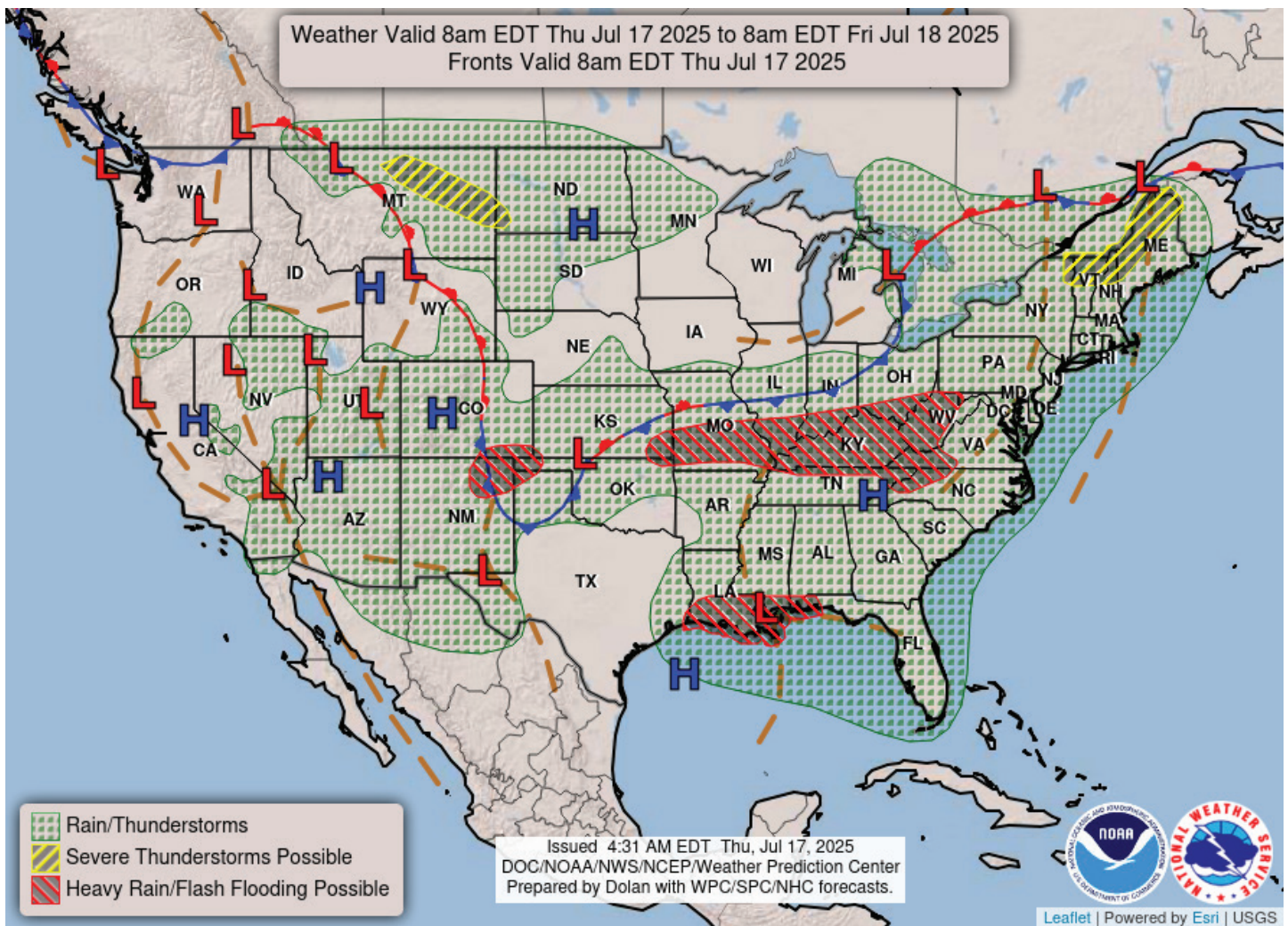
Precip to date in July: 3.72

Average Precip to date: 12.91

Precip Year to Date: 13.84

Sunset Tonight: 9:18:00 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:00:15 am



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Today in Weather History

July 17, 1985: An F1 tornado touched down, ten miles east of Raymond, in Clark County, destroying two cattle sheds and damaged several buildings. A garage was moved off its foundation. Heavy rains, high winds and hail up to 2.75 inches in diameter produced considerable damage to farm buildings between Raymond and Garden City. Rainfall amounts of three to six inches caused additional crop losses from erosion. In the city of Clark, some basement flooding occurred, and water ran across Highway 212 west of Clark. Some storm total rainfall amounts include; 3.77 inches in Clark; 3.15 in Clear Lake; 2.85 in Redfield; and 2.31 inches in 3 miles NE of Raymond. This thunderstorm began near Kennebec, in Lyman County, where winds gusted to 80 mph, and small hail was observed. A few trees were uprooted, and numerous branches were downed. Several car windows were broke from the winds and small hail. A half inch of rain fell in ten minutes, filling ditches. High winds continued into Spink County where extensive damage to a farm estate east of Redfield occurred. Heavy rains of three to five inches caused road and basement flooding. A damage path from wind and hail continued to Clear Lake, to the south of Gary and into Minnesota to the east of Canby. Winds gusted to 70 mph, and hail ranged from one to almost two inches in diameter. In Clear Lake, four businesses were damaged, and power poles were downed. One building had the fiberglass siding and roofing torn off. A second building had a metal roof blown off. Highway 77, south of Clear Lake was impassable due to hail on the ground.

July 17, 1993: Torrential rains of three to seven inches fell in Grant County resulting in the overflow of Lake Farley into the city of Milbank. The dam held, but an emergency dike broke on the evening of the 17th releasing water into residential streets and a trailer court in Milbank. The broken barrier forced the evacuation of at least 200 people. Damage included 120 mobile homes, and 26 houses were affected by floodwaters. Also, a man died when his pickup truck hit a washout on a gravel road south of Milbank and was swept into the floodwaters of a nearby creek.

July 17, 2010: Several supercell thunderstorms moving southeast across the region brought large hail up to softball size along with damaging winds to parts of northeast South Dakota. Numerous homes, vehicles, along with thousands of acres of crops were destroyed. Hail up to the size of softballs occurred near Westport, in Brown County. Golf ball to baseball size hail fell at the National Weather Service office causing damage to several vehicles. The rear window was broken out of one of the vehicles. A supercell thunderstorm was tracking southeast across Clark County produced anywhere from a quarter to baseball size hail along with wind gusts over 70 mph from Crocker to Clark to Naples to Vienna. The large hail and winds caused extensive damage to homes, outbuildings, vehicles, and thousands of acres of crops. Many trees and gardens were also damaged or destroyed by the hail and high winds. The storm entered western Hamlin County. Winds measured at 90 mph in Hayti along with some large hail broke numerous windows out of several homes and vehicles, damaged several roofs, and downed many trees. A concrete silo was also destroyed. The highway shop lost half of its roof along with severe damage to the ceiling of a trucking business in Hayti.

1942: A great flood developed over the Smethport area in Pennsylvania, resulting in an estimated 34.50 inches of rain in just one day, including 30.60 inches in only six hours, setting a world record. The official observing site, Smethport Highway Shed, reported only 13.08 inches for the entire month because the flood consumed the gauge after 6.68" of rain. The total results from the substitution of the officially estimated amount for the amount measured.

1981: Severe thunderstorm winds ripped a 10,000 square foot hole in a 90-foot high pavilion at Sea World in Orlando, FL. The storm panicked a crowd of 550 tourists. One death occurred due to injury and heart attack, and 15 people were injured. The canopy was made of fiberglass and Teflon, designed to withstand 120 mph winds.

1987: Slow moving thunderstorms caused flooding on the Guadalupe River in Texas resulting in tragic loss of life. A bus and van leaving a youth summer camp stalled near the rapidly rising river, just west of the town of Comfort, or about 50 mile northwest of San Antonio. The powerful surge of water swept away 43 persons, mostly teenagers. Ten drowned in the floodwaters. Most of the others were rescued from treetops by helicopter.

1994: Atlanta, Georgia saw a record-tying, 14 straight days come to an end on this day. The entire month of July had 17.71 inches, the wettest month ever in the Georgia capital.

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IN FEAR AND TREMBLING

George Fox is recognized as the founder of the religious movement known as "the Quakers." They were given this name because they would "quake" if they sinned, had a sinful thought, or saw someone who they thought was a sinner. Their reputation for holy living was well known. Once, while appearing before a judge for his beliefs, Fox admonished the judge: "Tremble before the Word of the Lord." The judge mocked him and called him a "Quaker."

In Psalm 4:4 David said, "Stand in awe, and sin not." Another way to translate this phrase is simply, "Tremble, and sin not."

Today, however, many do not understand what sin is or its very real consequences. We live in a culture that does not recognize nor respect the value of life. We live in a world that focuses on pleasure and entertainment, wealth and the abundance of things. The moral compass of many individuals is spinning out of control and has no reference point to direct people to what is right or wrong, good or bad, decent or destructive, helpful or harmful.

In this psalm David uses the word "meditate" – which means "to consider, to reflect." Too often the only time we spend with God is to tell Him what we want. We demand things from Him as though He is our slave. Perhaps if we were willing to "consider" or "reflect" on His Word, we would realize that the sin in our lives separates us from Him, and we need His forgiveness.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to be sensitive to the sin in our lives and our need for forgiveness. May we wait before You patiently as we seek Your blessing. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Psalm 4:4

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: 07.15.25

6 10 24 35 43 1

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$100,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 51 Mins
DRAW: 35 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.16.25

5 35 37 46 50 9

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,850,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 6 Mins
DRAW: 35 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.16.25

17 21 23 25 47 9

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 21 Mins 34
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.16.25

17 23 26 29 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$59,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 21 Mins
DRAW: 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.16.25

8 23 42 56 68 10

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 50
DRAW: Mins 35 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.16.25

4 21 43 48 49 22

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$288,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 50
DRAW: Mins 35 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

Jr. Legion Baseball Region Tournament

Locke/Karst Field, Groton

Monday, July 28 starting at Noon

Sisseton vs. Redfield

Groton vs. Redfield

Clark vs. Groton

Tuesday, July 29 starting at 2 p.m.

Sisseton vs. Groton

Sisseton vs. Clark

Redfield vs. Clark

If no one is undefeated, or there is no clear winner, a formula is used to determine who will advance to state tournament August 8-10 in Milbank.

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Republican senators caution Trump against firing Fed chair Jerome Powell

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell is gaining some key backing on Capitol Hill from GOP senators who fear the repercussions if President Donald Trump follows through with threats to try and remove the politically independent central banker.

As Trump seemingly waffled back and forth this week on trying to dismiss the Fed chair, some Republicans in Congress began to speak up and warn that such a move would be a mistake. Trump would potentially obliterate the Fed's independence from political influence and inject uncertainty into the foundations of the U.S. economy if he fires Powell.

"If anybody thinks it would be a good idea for the Fed to become another agency in the government subject to the president, they're making a huge mistake," GOP North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis said in a floor speech.

The measure of support from GOP members of the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs showed how traditional Republicans are carefully navigating a presidency in which Trump often flirts with ideas — like steep tariffs or firing the Fed chair — that threaten to undermine confidence in the U.S. economy.

Tillis, who recently decided not to seek reelection after clashing with Trump, later told The Associated Press that the economic fallout from Powell's firing would mostly hurt "little guys like me that grew up in trailer parks that may have a few thousand dollars in a 401k."

He also pointed out that the underlying complaint that Trump has with the Fed — its reluctance to cut interest rates — is not controlled by Powell alone, but instead a 12-member committee.

"The markets expect an independent, central bank," said GOP South Dakota Sen. Mike Rounds, who cautioned against firing Powell. "And if they thought for a minute that he wasn't independent, it would cast a spell over the forecasts and the integrity of the decisions being made by the bank."

Still, plenty of other Republicans think that dismissing Powell is a fine idea.

"The most incompetent, worst Federal Reserve chairman in American history should resign," said GOP Ohio Sen. Bernie Moreno.

Trump said he was also encouraged to fire Powell during a meeting with about a dozen far-right House members Tuesday evening.

Do presidents have authority to fire the Fed chair?

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., told reporters that he was "unhappy with the leadership" at the Fed, but added "I'm honestly not sure whether that executive authority exists" to fire Powell.

House Financial Services Committee chair French Hill has underscored that presidents don't have the authority to fire the Fed chair, yet has also been sympathetic to Trump's complaints about Powell's leadership. He and other Republicans have also noted that Powell's term as chair is ending next year anyway, and Trump will have an opportunity to name a new chair then.

When Congress started the Federal Reserve over 100 years ago, it insulated it from political pressure by stipulating that its governors and chair could only be fired "for cause" — a higher bar than most political appointees. However, the Trump administration has maneuvered to meet that standard by accusing Powell of mishandling a \$2.5 billion renovation project at the Fed's headquarters.

"When his initial attempts to bully Powell failed, Trump and Republicans in Congress suddenly decided to look into how much the Fed is spending on building renovations," Sen. Elizabeth Warren, the top Democrat on the Senate Banking Committee, said in a speech Wednesday. "Independence does not mean impunity and I have long pushed for more transparency and accountability at the Fed. But give me a break."

After Powell sent Congress a letter detailing parts of the renovation project, Sen. Tim Scott, the Senate

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Banking Committee chair, released a short statement saying Scott "has continued to call for increased transparency and accountability at the Federal Reserve, and this letter is consistent with improving the communication and transparency he is seeking."

Avoiding a protracted legal battle

Regardless, it would be legally dubious to fire Powell over the renovation.

"That would be litigated and I don't see a reason, for cause or otherwise, to remove him," Sen. John Kennedy, a Republican member of the Senate committee that oversees the Fed, told reporters this week.

He added that he understood the president's "frustration" with the Fed's reluctance to lower interest rates as it tries to tamp down inflation, saying, "I get that, but I think it's very important the Federal Reserve remains independent."

Even those Republicans who argued that the president has grounds to fire Powell and piled criticism on the central banker conceded that it would still be a painful step.

"That's a decision the president will make, and he's being very deliberate about it," said Moreno, the Ohio senator who called for Powell's resignation. "But I don't think we should put the country through any of that."

A fire at a shopping center in eastern Iraq kills more than 60 people

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — A fire engulfed a newly opened shopping center in eastern Iraq, killing more than 60 people, including children, Iraqi officials said Thursday.

Civil defense teams rescued more than 45 people who became trapped when the fire broke out late Wednesday in the city of Kut, the Interior Ministry said in a statement. Others are still missing, according to the state-run Iraqi News Agency.

Photographs and videos on local media showed the Corniche Hypermarket Mall, a five-story shopping center that had opened only a week earlier, fully engulfed in flames.

Poor building standards have often contributed to tragic fires in Iraq. In July 2021, a blaze at a hospital in the Iraqi city of Nasiriyah that killed between 60 to 92 people was determined to have been fueled by highly flammable, low-cost type of "sandwich panel" cladding that is illegal in Iraq.

In 2023, more than 100 people died in a fire at a wedding hall in the predominantly Christian area of Hamdaniya in Nineveh province after the ceiling panels above a pyrotechnic machine burst into flames..

Iraq's Ministry of Interior said in a statement that 61 people died in the shopping center fire, most of them from suffocation. Among the dead were 14 charred bodies that remain unidentified, it said.

Provincial Gov. Mohammed al-Mayyeh in a statement declared three days of mourning. He said the cause of the fire is under investigation but that legal cases were filed against the building owner and shopping center owner. He did not specify what the charges were.

"We assure the families of the innocent victims that we will not be lenient with those who were directly or indirectly responsible for this incident," al-Mayyeh said.

The results of the preliminary investigation will be released within 48 hours, he said.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al-Sudani said in a statement that he had directed the interior minister to go to the site of the fire to investigate and take measures to prevent a recurrence.

Zelenskyy shakes up Ukrainian Cabinet, appointing a new prime minister to reinvigorate war effort

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's economy minister and the key negotiator in the mineral deal with the U.S, Yuliia Svyrydenko, was appointed as its new prime minister Thursday, becoming the country's first new head of government since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

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Svyrydenko is one of a group of officials taking on new roles in Ukraine's government, as President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reshuffles the Cabinet in a bid to energize a war-weary nation and boost domestic weapons production in the face of Russia's grinding invasion.

At home, however, the Cabinet recalibration has not been seen as a major shift, as the Ukrainian leader continues to rely on officials who have proven their effectiveness and loyalty during the war, now in its fourth year.

Zelenskyy submitted nominations on Thursday to shuffle top government positions, including the replacement of Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, the longest-serving head of government in Ukraine's history.

Shmyhal now moves to become defense minister, according to the parliamentary website.

Other changes are expected in the Cabinet, but Svyrydenko's appointment as prime minister is taking center stage.

She played a key role in negotiating a U.S.-Ukraine mineral agreement, ensuring the terms were acceptable to Kyiv. Svyrydenko has frequently represented Ukraine in high-level talks with Western partners, focusing on defense cooperation, economic recovery and reconstruction.

Lawmakers and fellow officials describe her as a diligent executive with a reputation for loyalty to the presidential office.

On Tuesday, Zelenskyy posted a photo with Svyrydenko and Digital Transformation Minister Mykhailo Fedorov, writing that the focus for the next six months would be increasing domestic weapons production, fully contracting all types of drones for Ukraine's defense forces, easing regulations to unlock economic potential, and ensuring delivery of social support programs.

Shmyhal announced his resignation as prime minister on Tuesday. He held the position for more than five years after being appointed on March 4, 2020.

Ukrainian analysts and local media have rarely portrayed Shmyhal as an independent political figure or a counterweight to Zelenskyy. Like Svyrydenko, he is seen as loyal to the president and his team.

His new post as defense minister means he is not leaving government entirely, but instead remains in the cabinet in a powerful role. The defense ministry commands one of the largest budgets and carries critical importance because of the war.

Shmyhal will replace Rustem Umerov, who, although he sought to push reforms, saw his tenure marked by internal turbulence and persistent dysfunction in Ukraine's defense procurement system. Despite his active role on the international stage, critics said the ministry remained plagued by mismanagement.

Syrian forces withdraw from Sweida after ceasefire goes into effect

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and GHAITH ALSAYED Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Syrian government forces largely withdrew from the southern province of Sweida Thursday following days of vicious clashes with militias of the Druze minority.

Under a ceasefire agreement reached the day before, which largely halted the hostilities, Druze factions and clerics have been appointed to maintain internal security in Sweida, Syria's interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa said in an address broadcast early Thursday.

The dayslong fighting threatened to unravel Syria's postwar political transition and brought in further military intervention by its powerful neighbor Israel, which on Wednesday struck the Syrian Defense Ministry headquarters in the heart of Damascus. Israel said it was acting to protect the Druze religious minority.

Druze leaders and Syrian government officials reached a ceasefire deal mediated by the United States, Turkey and Arab countries.

Convoys of government forces started withdrawing from the city of Sweida overnight as Syrian state media said the withdrawal was in line with the ceasefire agreement and the military operation against the Druze factions had ended.

It remained unclear if the ceasefire would hold after the agreement was announced by Syria's Interior Ministry and in a video message by a Druze religious leader. A previous agreement Tuesday quickly broke

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down after being dismissed by prominent Druze cleric Sheikh Hikmat Al-Hijri.

The escalation in Syria began with tit-for-tat kidnappings and attacks between local Sunni Bedouin tribes and Druze armed factions in the southern province of Sweida. Government forces that intervened to restore order clashed with the Druze militias, but also in some cases attacked civilians.

The Syrian government has not issued a casualty count from the clashes, but some rights groups and monitors say dozens of combatants on both sides have been killed, as well as dozens of largely Druze civilians killed in sectarian attacks.

Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, says at least 374 combatants and civilians were killed in the clashes and Israeli strikes, among them dozens of civilians killed in the crossfire or in targeted attacks against the minority group.

Videos circulated on social media showed government forces and allies humiliating Druze clerics and residents, looting homes and killing civilians hiding inside their houses. Syrian Druze from Sweida told The Associated Press that several family members who were unarmed had been attacked or killed.

Al-Sharaa appealed to them in his address and vowed to hold perpetrators to account.

"We are committed to holding accountable those who wronged our Druze brethren," he said, calling the Druze an "integral part of this nation's fabric" who are under the protection of state law and justice, which safeguards the rights of everyone without exception.

The Druze community had been divided over how to approach al-Sharaa's de facto Islamist rule over Syria after largely celebrating the downfall of Bashar Assad and his family's decades-long dictatorial rule. They feared persecution after several attacks from the Islamic State militant group and al-Qaeda-affiliates the Nusra Front during Syria's 14-year civil war.

While it first appeared many Druze hoped to resolve matters diplomatically, with al-Sharaa promising an inclusive Syria for all its different communities, over time they became more skeptical, especially after a counterinsurgency in the coastal province in February turned into targeted attacks against the Alawite religious minority.

The Druze religious sect began as a 10th-century offshoot of Ismailism, a branch of Shiite Islam. More than half of the roughly 1 million Druze worldwide live in Syria. Most of the other Druze live in Lebanon and Israel, including in the Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 Mideast War and annexed in 1981.

Syrian government and Druze minority leaders announce a new ceasefire

By ABDELRAHMAN SHAHEEN and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Syrian government officials and leaders in the Druze religious minority announced a renewed ceasefire Wednesday after days of clashes that have threatened to unravel the country's postwar political transition and drawn military intervention by powerful neighbor Israel.

Convoys of government forces began withdrawing from the city of Sweida, but it was not immediately clear if the agreement, announced by Syria's Interior Ministry and in a video message by a Druze religious leader, would hold. A previous ceasefire announced Tuesday quickly fell apart, and a prominent Druze leader, Sheikh Hikmat Al-Hijri, disavowed the new agreement.

Israeli strikes continued after the ceasefire announcement.

Rare Israeli airstrikes in the heart of Damascus

The announcement came after Israel launched rare airstrikes in the heart of Damascus, an escalation in a campaign that it said was intended to defend the Druze and push Islamic militants away from its border. The Druze form a substantial community in Israel as well as in Syria and are seen in Israel as a loyal minority, often serving in the military.

The escalation in Syria began with tit-for-tat kidnappings and attacks between local Sunni Bedouin tribes and Druze armed factions in the southern province of Sweida. Government forces that intervened to restore order clashed with the Druze militias, but also in some cases attacked civilians.

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The violence appeared to be the most serious threat yet to efforts by Syria's new rulers to consolidate control of the country after a rebel offensive led by Islamist insurgent groups ousted longtime despotic leader Bashar Assad in December, ending a nearly 14-year civil war.

Interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa, in footage on state television early Thursday, called the Druze an integral part of Syria and denounced Israel's actions as sowing division.

"We affirm that protecting your rights and freedoms is among our top priorities," he said, specifically addressing Druze people in Syria. "We reject any attempt — foreign or domestic — to sow division within our ranks. We are all partners in this land, and we will not allow any group to distort the beautiful image that Syria and its diversity represent."

He said Israel sought to break Syrian unity and turn the country into a theater of chaos but that Syrians were rejecting division.

He said Syrians did not fear renewed war but sought the path of Syrian interest over destruction. "We assigned local factions and Druze spiritual leaders the responsibility of maintaining security in (Sweida), recognizing the gravity of the situation and the need to avoid dragging the country" into a new war, he said.

Syria's new, primarily Sunni Muslim, authorities have faced suspicion from religious and ethnic minorities, especially after clashes between government forces and pro-Assad armed groups in March spiraled into sectarian revenge attacks. Hundreds of civilians from the Alawite religious minority, to which Assad belongs, were killed.

No official casualty figures have been released for the latest fighting since Monday, when the Interior Ministry said 30 people had been killed. The U.K.-based war monitor Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said more than 300 people had been killed as of Wednesday morning, including four children, eight women and 165 soldiers and security forces.

Israel threatens further escalation

Israel has launched dozens of strikes targeting government troops and convoys heading into Sweida, and on Wednesday struck the Syrian Defense Ministry headquarters next to a busy square in Damascus that became a gathering point after Assad's fall.

That strike killed three people and injured 34, Syrian officials said. Another Israeli strike hit near the presidential palace in the hills outside Damascus.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said after the initial Damascus airstrike in a post on X that the "painful blows have begun."

Israel has taken an aggressive stance toward Syria's new leaders, saying it doesn't want Islamist militants near its borders. Israeli forces have seized a U.N.-patrolled buffer zone on Syrian territory along the border with the Golan Heights and launched hundreds of airstrikes on military sites in Syria.

Katz said in a statement that the Israeli army "will continue to attack regime forces until they withdraw from the area — and will also soon raise the bar of responses against the regime if the message is not understood."

An Israeli military official who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations said the army was preparing for a "multitude of scenarios" and that a brigade, normally comprising thousands of soldiers, was being pulled out of Gaza and sent to the Golan Heights.

Syria's Defense Ministry had earlier blamed militias in the Druze-majority area of Sweida for violating the ceasefire agreement reached Tuesday.

Druze fear for the lives of relatives in Sweida

Reports of attacks on civilians continued to surface, and Druze with family members in the conflict zone searched desperately for information about their fate.

In Jaramana, near the Syrian capital, Evelyn Azzam, 20, said she feared that her husband, Robert Kiwan, 23, was dead. The newlyweds live in the Damascus suburb, but Kiwan commuted to Sweida for work and was trapped there when the clashes erupted.

Azzam said she was on the phone with Kiwan when security forces questioned him and a colleague about whether they were affiliated with Druze militias. When her husband's colleague raised his voice, she

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heard a gunshot. Kiwan was then shot while trying to appeal.

"They shot my husband in the hip, from what I could gather," she said, struggling to hold back tears. "The ambulance took him to the hospital. Since then, we have no idea what has happened."

A Syrian Druze from Sweida living in the United Arab Emirates said her mother, father and sister were hiding in a basement in their home near the hospital, where they could hear the sound of shelling and bullets outside. She spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear her family might be targeted.

She had struggled to reach them, but when she did, she said, "I heard them cry. I have never heard them this way before."

Another Druze woman living in the UAE with family members in Sweida, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, said a cousin told her that a house where their relatives lived had been burned down with everyone inside it.

It reminded her of when the Islamic State extremist group attacked Sweida in 2018, she said. Her uncle was among many civilians there who had taken up arms to fight back while Assad's forces stood aside. He was killed in the fighting.

"It's the same right now," she told The Associated Press. The Druze fighters, she said, are "just people who are protecting their province and their families."

The Druze religious sect began as a 10th-century offshoot of Ismailism, a branch of Shiite Islam. More than half of the roughly 1 million Druze worldwide live in Syria. Most of the other Druze live in Lebanon and Israel, including in the Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 Mideast War and annexed in 1981.

Reports of killings and looting in Druze areas

Videos surfaced on social media of government-affiliated fighters forcibly shaving the mustaches of Druze sheikhs and stepping on Druze flags and pictures of religious clerics. Other videos showed Druze fighters beating captured government forces and posing by their bodies. AP reporters in the area saw burned and looted houses.

The observatory said at least 27 people were killed in "field executions."

Druze in the Golan gathered along the border fence to protest the violence against Druze in Syria.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Wednesday that Washington is "very concerned" about the Israel-Syria violence, which he attributed to a "misunderstanding," and has been in touch with both sides in an effort to restore calm.

Senate passes \$9 billion in spending cuts to public broadcasting, foreign aid requested by Trump

By KEVIN FREKING and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate has passed about \$9 billion in federal spending cuts requested by President Donald Trump, including deep reductions to public broadcasting and foreign aid, moving forward on one of the president's top priorities despite concerns from several Republican senators.

The legislation, which now moves to the House, would have a tiny impact on the nation's rising debt but could have major ramifications for the targeted spending, from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to U.S. food aid programs abroad.

It also could complicate efforts to pass additional spending bills this year, as Democrats and even some Republicans have argued they are ceding congressional spending powers to Trump with little idea of how the White House Office of Management and Budget would apply the cuts.

The 51-48 vote came after 2 a.m. Thursday after Democrats sought to remove many of the proposed rescissions during 12 hours of amendment votes. None of the Democratic amendments were adopted.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said Republicans were using the president's rescissions request to target wasteful spending. He said it is a "small but important step for fiscal sanity that we all should be able to agree is long overdue."

But Senate Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Susan Collins, R-Maine, said the bill "has a big prob-

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lem — nobody really knows what program reductions are in it.”

Collins and Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, joined Democrats in voting against the legislation. Kentucky Sen. Mitch McConnell, the former Republican leader, had voted against moving forward with the bill in a Tuesday procedural vote, saying he was concerned the Trump White House wanted a “blank check,” but he ultimately voted for final passage.

The effort to claw back a sliver of federal spending comes after Republicans also muscled Trump’s big tax and spending cut bill to approval without any Democratic support. The Congressional Budget Office has projected that measure will increase future federal deficits by about \$3.3 trillion over the coming decade.

Lawmakers clash over cuts to public radio and TV stations

Along with Democrats, Collins and Murkowski both expressed concerns about the cuts to public broadcasting, saying they could affect important rural stations in their states.

Murkowski said in a speech on the Senate floor Tuesday that the stations are “not just your news — it is your tsunami alert, it is your landslide alert, it is your volcano alert.”

Less than a day later, as the Senate debated the bill, a 7.3 magnitude earthquake struck off the remote Alaska Peninsula, triggering tsunami warnings on local public broadcasting stations that advised people to get to higher ground.

The situation is “a reminder that when we hear people rant about how public broadcasting is nothing more than this radical, liberal effort to pollute people’s minds, I think they need to look at what some of the basic services are to communities,” Murkowski said.

The legislation would claw back nearly \$1.1 billion from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which represents the full amount it’s due to receive during the next two budget years.

The corporation distributes more than 70% of the money to more than 1,500 locally operated public television and radio stations, with much of the remainder assigned to National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting Service to support national programming.

Sen. Mike Rounds, R-S.D., said he secured a deal from the White House that some funding administered by the Interior Department would be repurposed to subsidize Native American public radio stations in about a dozen states.

But Kate Riley, president and CEO of America’s Public Television Stations, a network of locally owned and operated stations, said that deal was “at best a short-term, half-measure that will still result in cuts and reduced service at the stations it purports to save, while leaving behind all other stations, including many that serve Native populations.”

Slashing billions of dollars from foreign aid

The legislation would also claw back about \$8 billion in foreign aid spending.

Among the cuts are \$800 million for a program that provides emergency shelter, water and sanitation and family reunification for those who flee their own countries and \$496 million to provide food, water and health care for countries hit by natural disasters and conflicts. There also is a \$4.15 billion cut for programs that aim to boost economies and democratic institutions in developing nations.

Democrats argued the Trump administration’s animus toward foreign aid programs would hurt America’s standing in the world and create a vacuum for China to fill.

Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii, said the amount of money it takes to save a starving child or prevent the transmission of disease is miniscule, even as the investments secure cooperation with the U.S. on other issues. The cuts being made to foreign aid programs through Trump’s Department of Government Efficiency were having life-and-death consequences around the world, he said.

“People are dying right now, not in spite of us but because of us,” Schatz said. “We are causing death.”

After objections from several Republicans, GOP leaders took out a \$400 million cut to PEPFAR, a politically popular program to combat HIV/AIDS that is credited with saving millions of lives since its creation under then-President George W. Bush.

Looking ahead to future spending fights

Democrats say the bill upends a legislative process that typically requires lawmakers from both parties

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to work together to fund the nation's priorities. Triggered by the official rescissions request from the White House, the legislation only needs a simple majority vote instead of the 60 votes usually required to break a filibuster, meaning Republicans can use their 53-47 majority to pass it along party lines.

The Trump administration is promising more rescission packages to come if the first effort is successful. But some Republicans who supported the bill indicated they might be wary of doing so again.

"Let's not make a habit of this," said Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Roger Wicker, who voted for the bill but said he was wary that the White House wasn't providing enough information on what exactly will be cut. Wicker said there are members "who are very concerned, as I am, about this process."

North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis echoed similar concerns and said Republicans will need to work with Democrats to keep the government running later in the year.

"The only way to fund the government is to get at least seven Democrats to vote with us at the end of September or we could go into a shutdown," Tillis said.

Republicans face a Friday deadline

Collins attempted to negotiate a last minute change to the package that would have reduced the cuts by about \$2.5 billion and restored some of the public broadcasting and global health dollars, but she abandoned the effort after she didn't have enough backing from her Republican colleagues in the Senate and the House.

The House has already shown its support for the president's request with a mostly party line 214-212 vote, but since the Senate amended the bill, it will have to go back to the House for another vote.

The bill must be signed into law by midnight Friday for the proposed rescissions to kick in. If Congress doesn't act by then, the spending stands.

Army veteran and US citizen arrested in California immigration raid warns it could happen to anyone

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

A U.S. Army veteran who was arrested during an immigration raid at a Southern California marijuana farm last week said Wednesday he was sprayed with tear gas and pepper spray before being dragged from his vehicle and pinned down by federal agents who arrested him.

George Retes, 25, who works as a security guard at Glass House Farms in Camarillo, said he was arriving at work on July 10 when several federal agents surrounded his car and — despite him identifying himself as a U.S. citizen — broke his window, peppered sprayed him and dragged him out.

"It took two officers to nail my back and then one on my neck to arrest me even though my hands were already behind my back," Retes said.

Massive farm raids led to hundreds being detained

The Ventura City native was detained during chaotic raids at two Southern California farms where federal authorities arrested more than 360 people, one of the largest operations since President Donald Trump took office in January. Protesters faced off against federal agents in military-style gear, and one farmworker died after falling from a greenhouse roof.

The raids came more than a month into an extended immigration crackdown by the Trump administration across Southern California that was originally centered in Los Angeles, where local officials say the federal actions are spreading fear in immigrant communities.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom spoke on the raids at a news conference Wednesday, calling Trump a "chaos agent" who has incited violence and spread fear in communities.

"You got someone who dropped 30 feet because they were scared to death and lost their life," he said, referring to the farmworker who died in the raids. "People are quite literally disappearing with no due process, no rights."

Retes was taken to the Metropolitan Detention Center in downtown Los Angeles, where he said he was put in a special cell on suicide watch and checked on each day after he became emotionally distraught over his ordeal and missing his 3-year-old daughter's birthday party Saturday.

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He said federal agents never told him why he was arrested or allowed him to contact a lawyer or his family during his three-day detention. Authorities never let him shower or change clothes despite being covered in tear gas and pepper spray, Retes said, adding that his hands burned throughout the first night he spent in custody.

On Sunday, an officer had him sign a paper and walked him out of the detention center. He said he was told he faced no charges.

Retes met with silence when seeking explanation

"They gave me nothing I could wrap my head around," Retes said, explaining that he was met with silence on his way out when he asked about being "locked up for three days with no reason and no charges."

Tricia McLaughlin, assistant secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, confirmed Retes' arrest but didn't say on what charges.

"George Retes was arrested and has been released," she said. "He has not been charged. The U.S. Attorney's Office is reviewing his case, along with dozens of others, for potential federal charges related to the execution of the federal search warrant in Camarillo."

A federal judge on Friday ordered the Trump administration to halt indiscriminate immigration stops and arrests without warrants in seven California counties, including Los Angeles. Immigrant advocates accused federal agents of detaining people because they looked Latino. The Justice Department appealed on Monday and asked for the order to be stayed.

The Pentagon also said Tuesday it was ending the deployment of 2,000 National Guard troops in Los Angeles. That's roughly half the number the administration sent to the city following protests over the immigration actions. Some of those troops have been accompanying federal agents during their immigration enforcement operations.

Retes said he joined the Army at 18 and served four years, including deploying to Iraq in 2019.

"I joined the service to help better myself," he said. "I did it because I love this (expletive) country. We are one nation and no matter what, we should be together. All this separation and stuff between everyone is just the way it shouldn't be."

Veteran pledges to sue federal authorities for his ordeal

Retes said he plans to sue for wrongful detention.

"The way they're going about this entire deportation process is completely wrong, chasing people who are just working, especially trying to feed everyone here in the U.S.," he said. "No one deserves to be treated the way they treat people."

Retes was detained along with California State University Channel Islands professor Jonathan Caravello, also a U.S. citizen, who was arrested for throwing a tear gas canister at law enforcement, U.S. Attorney Bill Essayli posted on X.

The California Faculty Association said Caravello was taken away by agents who did not identify themselves nor inform him of why he was being taken into custody. Like Retes, the association said the professor was then held without being allowed to contact his family or an attorney.

Caravello was attempting to dislodge a tear gas canister that was stuck underneath someone's wheelchair, witnesses told KABC-TV, the ABC affiliate in Los Angeles.

A federal judge on Monday ordered Caravello to be released on \$15,000 bond. He's scheduled to be arraigned Aug. 1.

"I want everyone to know what happened. This doesn't just affect one person," Retes said. "It doesn't matter if your skin is brown. It doesn't matter if you're white. It doesn't matter if you're a veteran or you serve this country. They don't care. They're just there to fill a quota." ____ Associated Press writer Jamie Ding contributed from Los Angeles.

In their own words: Trump, Patel, Bongino and Bondi on the Epstein scandal

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By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — When Jeffrey Epstein died in prison, then-President Donald Trump speculated that authorities might be wrong in ruling it a suicide.

Many of his allies in the pro-Trump media went further, casting Epstein's death as a murder meant to continue a decades-long coverup of pedophilia by elites.

Now back in the White House, Trump has elevated prominent proponents of Epstein conspiracies to senior law enforcement roles, and they're struggling to contain a fire that they spent years stoking. Much of Trump's base is choosing to believe the president's earlier claims about Epstein over his latest contention that there's nothing of substance in government files.

Here's a look at how Trump and his aides, including the attorney general and FBI leadership, fanned the flames of the Epstein conspiracy theories over the years, and how they're now trying to extinguish them.

In their own words:

Trump and Epstein were friends

Before Epstein's sexual predation was well-known, he and Trump were friends. Both were New Yorkers with homes in Palm Beach, Florida. Trump knew something about Epstein's "social life" and interest in women "on the younger side," though there's no evidence Trump was aware Epstein was involved in sex trafficking of minors, as prosecutors allege.

"I've known Jeff for 15 years," Trump told New York Magazine for a 2002 profile of Epstein. "Terrific guy. He's a lot of fun to be with. It is even said that he likes beautiful women as much as I do, and many of them are on the younger side."

The friendship later fell apart, according to Trump. He has since distanced himself from Epstein and more recently describes their relationship as far more distant than he portrayed in 2002.

"Well, I knew him like everybody in Palm Beach knew him," Trump said on July 9, 2019, after Epstein was arrested on sex trafficking charges. "I mean, people in Palm Beach knew him. He was a fixture in Palm Beach. I had a falling out with him a long time ago. I don't think I've spoken to him for 15 years. I wasn't a fan."

Three days later, Trump was asked what led to his falling out with Epstein and whether the financier had been banned from Mar-a-Lago, Trump's Palm Beach home.

"Yes. And I did have a falling out a long time ago. The reason doesn't make any difference, frankly," Trump said. He said he had "no idea" Epstein was molesting women. A month later, on Aug. 10, 2019, Epstein was found dead in his New York City jail cell. His death was ruled a suicide.

Trump nods toward conspiracy theories

The day Epstein was found in his cell, Trump shared a social media post that linked his death to former President Bill Clinton.

"I want a full investigation, and that's what I absolutely am demanding," Trump told reporters on Aug. 13, 2019.

Pressed on whether he really believed Clinton was involved in Epstein's death, Trump responded at length about Clinton traveling on Epstein's private plane. "Because Epstein had an island that was not a good place, as I understand it," Trump said. "And I was never there. So you have to ask: Did Bill Clinton go to the island?"

In a 2020 interview with Axios, Trump cast doubt on the New York medical examiner's ruling that Epstein's death was a suicide. He was asked about Ghislaine Maxwell, Epstein's longtime companion. Maxwell had been charged a month earlier with luring teenage girls to be sexually abused by Epstein, and Trump had controversially responded: "I wish her well."

"Well, her boyfriend died in jail and people are still trying to figure out how did it happen? Was it suicide? Was he killed? And I do wish her well. I'm not looking for anything bad for her. I'm not looking bad for anybody," Trump told Axios on Aug. 3, 2020.

After Trump left office, Maxwell was convicted in 2021 and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

In the years since, Trump has said he's unsure whether Epstein killed himself. In a Fox News interview during his 2024 campaign, Trump hedged when asked whether he'd release the Epstein files. His noncom-

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mittal answer came right after he'd agreed without hesitation to declassify files related to the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and the John F. Kennedy assassination.

"I guess I would. I think that, less so, because you don't want to affect people's lives if it's phony stuff in there because it's a lot of phony stuff with that whole world. But I think I would," Trump said on June 2, 2024.

Trump allies lean in

Trump's unconventional picks to lead the FBI — Director Kash Patel and Deputy Director Dan Bongino — were commentators in Trump's Make America Great Again movement before joining federal law enforcement. In their prior roles, both aggressively promoted theories that Epstein was killed to keep him quiet.

In a 2023 appearance on Benny Johnson's podcast, Patel was incensed that House Republicans weren't trying harder to force the release of an alleged list of high-powered Epstein associates — a document the Patel-led FBI now says doesn't exist.

"What the hell are the House Republicans doing? They have the majority. You can't get the list? ... Put on your big boy pants and let us know who the pedophiles are," Patel said in the interview, which Johnson posted to social media on Dec. 19, 2023.

As a podcaster, Bongino called the Epstein story "one of the biggest political scandals of our time" and portrayed it as a wide-ranging conspiracy involving global elites.

"What the hell are they hiding with Jeffrey Epstein?" Bongino asked on his show on May 4, 2023. "What do Clinton, Obama officials, big money leftists, a former Prime Minister of Israel — why do they want to make this Jeffrey Epstein story go away so bad?"

Attorney General Pam Bondi stoked the conspiracy even after taking the helm at the Justice Department. The alleged Epstein client list is "sitting on my desk right now to review," Bondi said in a February interview on Fox News. She later told reporters, "There are tens of thousands of videos of Epstein with children or child porn."

Trump and his team try to put the genie back in the bottle

Patel, Bongino and Bondi now contradict their earlier selves.

The Justice Department this month said Epstein did not maintain a "client list" of powerful men for whom he trafficked underage girls and said no more files would be released. Patel and Bongino offered assurances that they'd reviewed the evidence and there was no reason to doubt Epstein killed himself.

"I believe he hung himself in a cell in the Metropolitan Detention Center," Patel testified in a Senate hearing on May 8.

Trump himself has been the most aggressive.

In a lengthy post Wednesday on Truth Social, he lashed out at his "PAST supporters" who have believed in Epstein conspiracy theories, calling them "weaklings" and saying he doesn't "want their support anymore!" He claimed, without offering evidence, that Democrats concocted the Epstein stories that have animated his base.

"Their new SCAM is what we will forever call the Jeffrey Epstein Hoax," Trump wrote.

In another lengthy post on Saturday, he vouched for Bondi and pressed his supporters to move on.

"What's going on with my 'boys' and, in some cases, 'gals'? They're all going after Attorney General Pam Bondi, who is doing a FANTASTIC JOB!" Trump wrote.

An Alaska tsunami warning had residents scrambling for high ground after 7.3 magnitude earthquake

By MARK THIESSEN and BECKY BOHRER Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — Communities along a 700-mile (1,127-km) stretch of Alaska's southern coast ordered residents to higher ground after a powerful offshore earthquake Wednesday, but officials quickly downgraded and then canceled a tsunami warning for the region. There were no reports of significant damage.

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The earthquake, with a preliminary magnitude of 7.3, struck at 12:37 p.m. local time south of Sand Point, a community of about 600 people on Popof Island, in the Aleutian chain, according to the Alaska Earthquake Center.

There were 40 aftershocks detected within the first three hours, the center said.

"We have seen other earthquakes in the area that have not generated significant tsunami waves, but we're treating it seriously and going through our procedures, making sure communities are notified so they can activate their evacuation procedures," said Jeremy Zidek, a spokesperson for Alaska's emergency management division.

The quake was felt as far away as Anchorage, almost 600 miles (966 km) to the northeast.

The National Tsunami Warning Center issued a warning for an area stretching from about 40 miles (64.4 km) southwest of Homer to Unimak Pass, a distance of about 700 miles (1,126 kilometers). Among the larger communities in the area was Kodiak, with a population of about 5,200. The warning was downgraded to an advisory about an hour later, and canceled just before 2:45 p.m.

The highest water level generated by the earthquake in Sand Point was not quite 2.5 inches (6.3 cm) above the tide, the center said.

"There's no damage at the airport, doesn't appear to be any damage at the harbor, no damage to speak of, really," Sand Point Police Chief Benjamin Allen said.

There was some damage — in the form of broken bottles — at the Alaska Commercial general store in town. Manager Vickey McDonald said about half of the store's alcohol aisle had crashed and shattered.

"I've got liquid smoke and barbecue sauce and pickles ... broken on the floor," McDonald said. "It smells horrendous in here."

In Unalaska, a fishing community of about 4,100, officials urged people in possible inundation zones to move at least 50 feet above sea level or 1 mile (1.6 km) inland. In King Cove, which has about 870 residents on the south side of the Alaska Peninsula, officials sent an alert calling on those in the coastal area to move to higher ground.

Tourists Jodie Stevens and her husband, Aaron Park, were looking at the puffins at the Alaska SeaLife Center in Seward when they heard someone yelling that there had been an earthquake and they needed to evacuate. They walked a few blocks uphill in the rain, with a woman from the center yelling to those they passed to get to higher ground.

They were about halfway to the official high ground spot when they heard a siren signal that all was clear, she said.

The National Weather Service said in posts on social media that there was no tsunami threat for other U.S. and Canadian Pacific coasts in North America, including Washington, Oregon and California.

Alaska's southern coast is earthquake-prone, and Wednesday's was the fifth in roughly the same area since 2020 exceeding magnitude 7, state seismologist Michael West said.

"Something's moving in this area," he said. "I would not call this an isolated earthquake. It appears to be part of a larger sequence spanning the last several years."

That has the attention of seismologists, he said.

"This area has been and remains capable of larger earthquakes and earthquakes capable of significant tsunami damage," he said.

Prince Harry retraces Diana's footsteps by walking through a land mine field in Angola for charity

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — Prince Harry followed in his late mother's footsteps on Wednesday by wearing a flak jacket and walking down a path in an active land mine field in Angola to raise awareness for a charity's work clearing explosives from old warzones.

The Duke of Sussex is in the southern African country with the Halo Trust organization, the same group Princess Diana worked with when she went to Angola in January 1997, seven months before she was killed in a car crash in Paris.

Diana's advocacy and the images of her walking through a minefield helped mobilize support for a land mine ban treaty that was ratified later that year.

Harry walked through a land mine field near a village in Cuito Cuanavale in southern Angola, according to Halo Trust. It's not the first time he has retraced his mother's steps after traveling to Angola for a similar awareness campaign in 2019.

The land mines across Angola were left behind from its 27-year civil war from 1975 to 2002. The Halo Trust says at least 60,000 people have been killed or injured by land mines since 2008. It says it has located and destroyed over 120,000 land mines and 100,000 other explosive devices in Angola since it started work in the country in 1994, but 1,000 minefields still need to be cleared.

What to know about the African kingdom of Eswatini, where the US sent 5 deportees

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — The United States has deported five immigrants from Vietnam, Jamaica, Cuba, Yemen and Laos to Eswatini, a small country in southern Africa where the king still holds absolute power.

Eswatini says it is holding the men in correctional facilities until they can be sent to their home countries, after it became the latest nation to accept third-country deportees from the U.S.

Here's what to know about Eswatini:

The king rules supreme

Eswatini is one of a handful of countries that are still absolute monarchies, and the only one in Africa. That means the king has absolute power over government and is not just a figurehead or a ceremonial ruler.

King Mswati III has ruled Eswatini since 1986, when he turned 18 and was allowed to take his place as the monarch. He can make decisions by decree. He succeeded his father, Sobhuza II, who died in 1982.

The 57-year-old Mswati III has long been criticized for ruling over a government that suppresses political dissent while he lives a lavish lifestyle in one of the poorest countries in the world.

The king is reported to have 11 wives and has been the subject of scrutiny for buying luxury cars. His wealth has been estimated at between \$200 million and \$500 million, while the World Bank says more than half of Eswatini's 1.2 million people live on less than \$4 a day.

No political parties

Political parties were banned by Sobhuza II in 1973. Some exist now, but they are not allowed to play any role in elections or the political process and have been reduced to civic society groups. Candidates seeking public office in Eswatini's Parliament or Senate have to stand as individuals without any party affiliation and are generally approved by traditional leaders loyal to Mswati III.

Pro-democracy protests have grown in recent years and Eswatini authorities under Mswati III have been accused of crushing them using the security forces. Many dissidents live in exile.

Previously Swaziland

The country was previously known as Swaziland but changed to Eswatini in 2018 after the king announced it should revert to its traditional name in the Swazi language. It was Swaziland when it was under British colonial rule, which ended in 1968.

Severely affected by HIV

Eswatini has been severely affected by HIV and has the highest prevalence in the world, with an estimated 26% of the adult population HIV positive, according to the United Nations AIDS agency.

It has made significant progress in confronting that scourge but has been highly reliant on foreign aid to do that, including assistance from the U.S., which has now been cut by the Trump administration.

Camp Mystic leader may not have seen urgent alert before Texas flood, family spokesman says

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

The leader of Camp Mystic had been tracking the weather before the deadly Texas floods, but it is now unclear whether he saw an urgent warning from the National Weather Service that had triggered an emergency alert to phones in the area, a spokesman for camp's operators said Wednesday.

Richard "Dick" Eastland, the owner of Camp Mystic, began taking action after more than 2 inches of rain had fallen in the area along the Guadalupe River, said Jeff Carr, a spokesman for the family and the camp. He said Eastland had a "home weather station" and was monitoring the rain on July 4.

But after initially portraying to the media this week that Eastland got the weather alerts about a flash flood, Carr told The Associated Press that critical moment in the timeline of the tragedy isn't as clear as the family and staff first thought. No one in the family or camp staff, Carr said, could now say whether Eastland got the alert at 1:14 a.m.

"It was assumed that just because he had a cellphone on and shortly after that alert, he was calling his family on the walkie-talkies saying, 'Hey, we got two inches in the last hour. We need to get the canoes up. We got things to do,'" Carr said.

The new account by the family comes as Camp Mystic staff has come under scrutiny of their actions, what preventive measures were taken and the camp's emergency plan leading up to a during the catastrophic flood that has killed at least 132 people.

The flash-flood warning that the National Weather Service issued at 1:14 a.m. on July 4 for Kerr County triggered an emergency alerts to broadcast outlets, weather radios and mobile phones. It warned of "a dangerous and life-threatening situation." The weather service extended the warning at 3:35 a.m. and escalated it to flash-flood emergency at 4:03 a.m.

Eastland died while trying to rescue girls and was found in his Tahoe that was swept away by the floodwaters, Carr said.

Even without a storm, the cellphone coverage at Camp Mystic is spotty at best, so campers and staff turn on their Wi-Fi, Carr said. He called ridiculous criticism that Eastland waited too long before beginning to evacuate the campers, which he said appears to have begun sometime between 2 a.m. and 2:30 a.m.

"Communication was a huge deficiency," Carr said. "This community was hamstrung, nobody could communicate. The first responder, the first rescue personnel that showed up was a game warden."

According to Carr, Eastland and others started evacuating girls from cabins nearest the overflowing river and moved them to the camp's two-story recreation hall. Of the 10 cabins closest to the river, the recreation hall is the furthest at 865 feet (264 meters) with the closest cabin about 315 feet (96 meters), according to an Associated Press analysis of aerial imagery.

To reach Senior Hill, which was on higher ground, they would have had to cross an overflowing creek, Carr said. At times the young campers were climbing hills in bare feet, he said.

Some of the camp's buildings — which flooded — were in what the Federal Emergency Management Agency considered a 100-year flood plain. But in response to an appeal, FEMA in 2013 amended the county's flood map to remove 15 of the camp's buildings from the hazard area. Carr said there were "legitimate" reasons for filing appeals and suggested that the maps may not always be accurate.

Just before daybreak on the Fourth of July, destructive, fast-moving waters rose 26 feet (8 meters) on the Guadalupe River, washing away homes and vehicles. Crews in helicopters, boats and drones have been searching for victims.

Officials say 97 people in the Kerrville area may still be missing.

Trump slams his own supporters as 'weaklings' for falling for what he now calls the Epstein 'hoax'

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President Donald Trump is lashing out at his own supporters, accusing them of being duped by Democrats, as he tries to clamp down on criticism over his administration's handling of much-hyped records in the Jeffrey Epstein sex trafficking investigation, which Trump now calls a "Hoax."

"Their new SCAM is what we will forever call the Jeffrey Epstein Hoax, and my PAST supporters have bought into this "bull——," hook, line, and sinker," Trump wrote Wednesday on his Truth Social site, using an expletive in his post. "They haven't learned their lesson, and probably never will, even after being conned by the Lunatic Left for 8 long years."

"Let these weaklings continue forward and do the Democrats work, don't even think about talking of our incredible and unprecedented success, because I don't want their support anymore!" he went on. There is no evidence former Democratic officials tampered with the documents or played any role in promoting conspiracies about the files, which members of Trump's administration stoked for years.

The rhetoric marks a dramatic escalation for the Republican president, who has broken with some of his most loyal backers on issues in the past, but never with such fervor. Though Trump cannot legally run for another term, he will need strong support from a united party to pass his remaining legislative agenda in a narrowly-divided Congress and an energized base to turn out in next year's midterm elections.

Dangled documents

The schism centers on the administration's handling of documents related to Epstein, who was found dead in his New York jail cell in August 2019, weeks after his arrest on sex trafficking charges. Last week, the Justice Department and the FBI acknowledged in a memo that Epstein did not maintain a "client list" to whom underage girls were trafficked. They also said no more files related to the investigation would be made public, despite past promises from Attorney General Pam Bondi that had raised the expectations of conservative influencers and conspiracy theorists.

"It's a new administration and everything is going to come out to the public," she had said.

The reversal sparked fury among Trump's most loyal defenders, who have turned on Bondi, in particular. But Trump has repeatedly said he maintains confidence in his attorney general and has instead chided those who continue to press the issue.

"I don't understand what the interest or what the fascination is," he said Tuesday, after unsuccessfully urging his "'boys' and, in some cases, 'gals'" to stop wasting "Time and Energy on Jeffrey Epstein, somebody that nobody cares about."

In an Oval Office appearance Wednesday after the Truth post, Trump said he had "lost a lot of faith in certain people" as he tried to turn the page on the story.

"It's all been a big hoax," he told reporters. "It's perpetrated by the Democrats, and some stupid Republicans and foolish Republicans fall into the net."

He complained that Bondi has been "waylaid" over her handling of the case and has given out all "credible information" about the wealthy financier. "If she finds anymore credible information she'll give that, too," Trump said. "What more can she do than that?"

He continued to complain in a pre-taped interview with John Solomon that aired Wednesday evening on Real America's Voice that the issue was distracting from his accomplishments.

"All my supporters want to talk about is the Jeffrey Epstein hoax. It's unbelievable," he said. "It's a disgrace. ... I'm going to remember."

While Trump has tried to blame Democrats for making Epstein an issue, he and many figures in his administration, including FBI Director Kash Patel and his deputy, Dan Bongino, spent years stoking dark and disproved conspiracy theories like those surrounding Epstein, including embracing QAnon-tinged propaganda that casts Trump as a savior sent to demolish the "deep state."

Anger still brewing

Trump's comments have not been enough to quell those who are still demanding answers. Some of

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the podcasters and pro-Trump influencers who helped rally support for Trump in the 2024 campaign said Wednesday they were disappointed or puzzled by his comments.

Far-right conspiracy theorist and podcaster Alex Jones called Trump's handling of the Epstein situation "the biggest train wreck I've ever seen."

"It's not in character for you to be acting like this," he said in a video Tuesday. "I support you, but we built the movement you rode in on. You're not the movement. You just surfed in on it."

Benny Johnson, a conservative podcaster, said on his show that he is a fan of Trump's movement but is trying to "give tough love and speak on behalf of the base."

"Maybe it hasn't been framed correctly for the president," Johnson said. "I don't know."

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., in an interview on Benny Johnson's show Tuesday, had called for the Justice Department to "put everything out there and let the people decide."

His first-term national security adviser, retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn implored Trump in a lengthy message to correct course.

"All we want at this stage is for a modicum of trust to be reestablished between our federal government and the people it is designed to serve. That's all (PERIOD!)," he wrote. "With my strongest recommendation, please gather your team and figure out a way to move past this."

Turning Point USA founder Charlie Kirk on his podcast attempted some damage control on Trump's behalf.

"Don't take too seriously this whole Truth Social here," Kirk told his audience. "I know some people are getting fired up about this. I don't believe he was trying to insult anybody personally."

Still, he expressed frustration about the administration's handling of the issue.

"We are now Wednesday going into Thursday. People are very, very confused, and some people are very disappointed and mad," Kirk said. "We made so much progress with Gen Z, and this is a big vulnerability. Online, on TikTok, this story is not landing well. Let's fix this, and we can."

Other Trump allies have stuck by his side, suggesting he does not need the influencers who have capitalized on Epstein conspiracy theories to make money and earn viewers.

"He lent you his clout and voters," Brenden Dilley, the head of a group of meme makers who have lent their support to Trump, wrote on X on Wednesday. "They don't belong to you."

Broader disapproval

While those speaking out represent a fringe of Trump's most vocal online base, they are not the only ones dissatisfied with the government's handling of the Epstein case, according to recent polling.

A CNN/SSRS poll, for instance, found that about half of U.S. adults are not satisfied with the amount of information the federal government has released about the Epstein case. About 3 in 10 said it doesn't matter either way and about 2 in 10 didn't know enough to offer an opinion. Almost no one said they were satisfied with the amount of information released.

Looking ahead to 2026 midterm elections, some Democrats are clear-eyed that the Epstein files may not be a front-and-center issue for voters who tend to put a premium on kitchen table issues, but they see it as part of a broader pattern that could hamper Trump and the GOP.

"There is something breaking through to voters getting at this idea of a Republican Party working for these big, corrupt, wealthy, famous people and not fighting for their constituents," said Katarina Flicker of the House Majority PAC, Democrats' super PAC for congressional races.

Healthy babies born in Britain after scientists used DNA from three people to avoid genetic disease

By MARIA CHENG and LAURA UNGAR Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Eight healthy babies were born in Britain with the help of an experimental technique that uses DNA from three people to help mothers avoid passing devastating rare diseases to their children, researchers reported Wednesday.

Most DNA is found in the nucleus of our cells, and it's that genetic material — some inherited from mom, some from dad — that makes us who we are. But there's also some DNA outside of the cell's nucleus, in

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structures called mitochondria. Dangerous mutations there can cause a range of diseases in children that can lead to muscle weakness, seizures, developmental delays, major organ failure and death.

Testing during the in vitro fertilization process can usually identify whether these mutations are present. But in rare cases, it's not clear.

Researchers have been developing a technique that tries to avoid the problem by using the healthy mitochondria from a donor egg. They reported in 2023 that the first babies had been born using this method, where scientists take genetic material from the mother's egg or embryo, which is then transferred into a donor egg or embryo that has healthy mitochondria but the rest of its key DNA removed.

The latest research "marks an important milestone," said Dr. Zev Williams, who directs the Columbia University Fertility Center and was not involved in the work. "Expanding the range of reproductive options ... will empower more couples to pursue safe and healthy pregnancies."

Using this method means the embryo has DNA from three people — from the mother's egg, the father's sperm and the donor's mitochondria — and it required a 2016 U.K. law change to approve it. It is also allowed in Australia but not in many other countries, including the U.S.

Experts at Britain's Newcastle University and Monash University in Australia reported in the New England Journal of Medicine Wednesday that they performed the new technique in fertilized embryos from 22 patients, which resulted in eight babies that appear to be free of mitochondrial diseases. One woman is still pregnant.

One of the eight babies born had slightly higher than expected levels of abnormal mitochondria, said Robin Lovell-Badge, a stem cell and developmental genetics scientist at the Francis Crick Institute who was not involved in the research. He said it was still not considered a high enough level to cause disease, but should be monitored as the baby develops.

Dr. Andy Greenfield, a reproductive health expert at the University of Oxford, called the work "a triumph of scientific innovation," and said the method of exchanging mitochondria would only be used for a small number of women for whom other ways of avoiding passing on genetic diseases, like testing embryos at an early stage, was not effective.

Lovell-Badge said the amount of DNA from the donor is insignificant, noting that any resulting child would have no traits from the woman who donated the healthy mitochondria. The genetic material from the donated egg makes up less than 1% of the baby born after this technique.

"If you had a bone marrow transplant from a donor ... you will have much more DNA from another person," he said.

In the U.K., every couple seeking a baby born through donated mitochondria must be approved by the country's fertility regulator. As of this month, 35 patients have been authorized to undergo the technique.

Critics have previously raised concerns, warning that it's impossible to know the impact these sorts of novel techniques might have on future generations.

"Currently, pronuclear transfer is not permitted for clinical use in the U.S., largely due to regulatory restrictions on techniques that result in heritable changes to the embryo," Williams, of Columbia, said in an email. "Whether that will change remains uncertain and will depend on evolving scientific, ethical, and policy discussions."

For about a decade, Congress has included provisions in annual funding bills banning the Food and Drug Administration from accepting applications for clinical research involving techniques, "in which a human embryo is intentionally created or modified to include a heritable genetic modification."

But in countries where the technique is allowed, advocates say it could provide a promising alternative for some families.

Liz Curtis, whose daughter Lily died of a mitochondrial disease in 2006, now works with other families affected by them. She said it was devastating to be told there was no treatment for her eight-month-old baby and that death was inevitable.

She said the diagnosis "turned our world upside down, and yet nobody could tell us very much about it, what it was or how it was going to affect Lily." Curtis later founded the Lily Foundation in her daugh-

ter's name to raise awareness and support research into the disease, including the latest work done at Newcastle University.

"It's super exciting for families that don't have much hope in their lives," Curtis said.

Judge won't rule this week on releasing Kilmar Abrego Garcia from jail

By TRAVIS LOLLER, JONATHAN MATTISE and BEN FINLEY Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Lawyers for Kilmar Abrego Garcia on Wednesday tried to poke holes in the human smuggling case the government is pursuing against him in Tennessee, while a federal judge said he won't rule this week on freeing Abrego Garcia from jail, a decision that could precipitate his deportation.

Abrego Garcia became a flashpoint in the debate over President Donald Trump's immigration policies when he was wrongfully deported to his native El Salvador in March. That expulsion violated a U.S. immigration judge's 2019 order that shields Abrego Garcia from deportation to El Salvador because he likely faces threats of gang violence there.

Facing mounting pressure and a U.S. Supreme Court order, the Republican administration returned Abrego Garcia to the U.S. last month to face the smuggling charges, which his attorneys have called "preposterous." That case relies on the testimony of cooperating witnesses, several of whom have either requested or received help with immigration and criminal matters in return for their statements, according to earlier testimony.

Under questioning on Wednesday, Homeland Security special agent Peter Joseph said he was unaware that a lead witness against Abrego Garcia was calling other witnesses from jail. Asked whether there was reason to believe they might have coordinated their testimony, Joseph noted that three of the witnesses are related.

"That's always a possibility," he said.

The charges stem from a 2022 traffic stop for speeding, during which Abrego Garcia was driving a vehicle with nine passengers. Police in Tennessee suspected human smuggling, but he was allowed to drive on.

The Trump administration has claimed Abrego Garcia was in the MS-13 gang, but that is not part of the charges against him and he has repeatedly denied the allegation. Abrego Garcia has said in court documents that he was beaten and subjected to psychological torture in a notorious El Salvador prison, while El Salvador's president has denied those allegations.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Barbara Holmes in Nashville ruled last month that Abrego Garcia is eligible for release but has kept Abrego Garcia in jail at the request of his own lawyers after U.S. officials said he would be immediately detained and targeted for expulsion for the second time. At Wednesday's hearing, prosecutors asked U.S. District Judge Waverly Crenshaw to revoke Holmes' opinion and rule that Abrego Garcia cannot be released. Crenshaw said he would likely rule on the matter next week.

Meanwhile, Abrego Garcia's immigration attorneys have asked U.S. District Judge Paula Xinis in Maryland to order the government to send him to that state if he's released, a request that aims to prevent his expulsion before trial.

Xinis is overseeing a lawsuit against the Trump administration that was filed by Abrego Garcia's American wife, Jennifer Vasquez Sura, over his wrongful deportation in March. Abrego Garcia lived in Maryland, just outside of Washington, for more than a decade, working construction and raising a family.

In court last Friday, Abrego Garcia's attorneys also asked Xinis to prevent his immediate deportation if he were released from jail by ordering a hold of at least 72-hours. Xinis has not ruled on the matter.

If Abrego Garcia is released into ICE custody, his lawyers have vowed to fight expulsion efforts within the U.S. immigration court system, which is part of the Justice Department.

RFK Jr. and other Trump officials embrace psychedelics after FDA setback

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — For decades, proponents of psychedelic drugs have come to Washington with a provocative message: Illegal, mind-altering substances like LSD and ecstasy should be approved for Americans grappling with depression, trauma and other hard-to-treat conditions.

A presidential administration finally seems to agree.

"This line of therapeutics has tremendous advantage if given in a clinical setting and we are working very hard to make sure that happens within 12 months," Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. recently told members of Congress.

His suggested timeline for green-lighting psychedelic therapy surprised even the most bullish supporters of the drugs. And it comes as psychedelics are making inroads in deep red states like Texas, where former Trump cabinet secretary and ex-governor Rick Perry has thrown his full support behind the effort.

The administration's embrace of psychedelics has sparked both excitement as well as concern from those in the field, who worry the drugs might be discredited if they appear to be rushed onto the market or are too closely linked with Kennedy, who is known for controversial views on vaccines, antidepressants and fluoride.

"I'm quite optimistic," says Rick Doblin, whose organization has pursued the medical use of MDMA (or ecstasy) since the 1980s. "But I'm also worried that the message the public might get is 'Well, RFK likes psychedelics and now it's approved.'"

FDA may reconsider MDMA

Under President Joe Biden, the FDA rejected MDMA as a treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder, citing flawed data and questionable research. Regulators called for a new study, likely taking several years. It was a major setback for Doblin and other advocates hoping to see the first U.S. approval of a psychedelic for medical use.

But the agency appears ready to reconsider. FDA chief Marty Makary, who reports to Kennedy, has called the evaluation of MDMA and other psychedelics "a top priority," announcing a slate of initiatives that could be used to accelerate their approval.

One new program promises to expedite drugs that serve "the health interests of Americans," by slashing their review time from six months or more to as little as one month. Makary has also suggested greater flexibility on requirements for certain drugs, potentially waiving rigorous controlled studies that compare patients to a placebo group.

That approach, considered essential for high-quality research, has long been a stumbling point for psychedelic studies, in which patients can almost always correctly guess whether they've received the drug or a dummy pill.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and FDA also recently hired several new staffers with ties to the psychedelic movement.

"These are all very promising signs that the administration is aware of the potential of psychedelics and is trying to make overtures that they're ready to approve them," said Greg Ferencik, a fellow at the libertarian Reason Foundation, who also consults for psychedelic companies. "We didn't hear anything about that in the Biden administration"

A spokesperson for HHS did not respond to a request for comment.

As a presidential candidate, Kennedy discussed how his son and several close friends benefited from using psychedelics to deal with grief and other issues.

A number of veterans lobbying for psychedelic access have already met with Trump's Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Doug Collins.

"What we're seeing so far is positive," Collins told House lawmakers in May.

But some experts worry the hope and hype surrounding psychedelics has gotten ahead of the science. Philip Corlett, a psychiatric researcher at Yale University, says bypassing rigorous clinical trials could set

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back the field and jeopardize patients.

"If RFK and the new administration are serious about this work, there are things they could do to shepherd it into reality by meeting the benchmarks of medical science," Corlett said. "I just don't think that's going to happen."

Texas goes all-in on ibogaine research

As officials in Washington weigh the future of psychedelics, some states are moving ahead with their own projects in hopes of nudging the federal government. Oregon and Colorado have legalized psychedelic therapy.

And last month, Texas approved \$50 million to study ibogaine, a potent psychedelic made from a shrub that's native to West Africa, as a treatment for opioid addiction, PTSD and other conditions. The research grant — the largest of its kind by any government — passed with support from the state's former GOP governor, Perry, and combat veterans, some who have traveled to clinics in Mexico that offer ibogaine.

Ibogaine is on the U.S. government's ultra-restrictive list of illegal, Schedule 1 drugs, which also includes heroin. So advocates in Texas are hoping to build a national movement to ease restrictions on researching its use.

"Governmental systems move slowly and inefficiently," said Bryan Hubbard of Americans for Ibogaine, a group formed with Perry. "Sometimes you find yourself constrained in terms of the progress you can make from within."

Ibogaine is unique among psychedelics in both its purported benefits and risks. Small studies and anecdotal reports suggest the drug may be able to dramatically ease addiction and trauma. It was sold for medical use in France for several decades starting in the 1930s, but the drug can also cause dangerous irregular heart rhythms, which can be fatal if left untreated.

Some veterans who have taken the drug say the risks can be managed and ibogaine's healing properties go far beyond antidepressants, mood stabilizers, counseling and other standard treatments.

Marcus Capone struggled with anger, insomnia and mood swings after 13 years as a Navy Seal. In 2017, at the urging of his wife Amber, he agreed to try ibogaine as a last resort. He described his first ibogaine session as "a complete purge of everything."

"But afterward I felt the weight just completely off my shoulders," he said. "No more anxiety, no more depression, life made sense all of a sudden."

A nonprofit founded by the Capones, Veterans Exploring Treatment Solutions, or VETS, has helped over 1,000 veterans travel abroad to receive ibogaine and other psychedelics.

But federal scientists have looked at the drug before — three decades ago, when the National Institute on Drug Abuse funded preliminary studies on using it as an addiction treatment. The research was discontinued after it identified "cardiovascular toxicity."

"It would be dead in the water," in terms of winning FDA approval, longtime NIDA director Nora Volkow said.

But Volkow said her agency remains interested in psychedelics, including ibogaine, and is funding an American drugmaker that's working to develop a safer, synthetic version of the drug.

"I am very intrigued by their pharmacological properties and how they are influencing the brain," Volkow said. "But you also have to be very mindful not to fall into the hype and to be objective and rigorous in evaluating them."

Authorities take custody of 21 kids in California while surrogate moms claim couple misled them

By ED WHITE Associated Press

Twenty-one children are in the custody of a California child-welfare agency while authorities investigate a Los Angeles-area couple and whether they misled surrogate mothers around the country.

Fifteen children were removed from the couple's opulent home in Arcadia after an abuse allegation in

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May, and another six living elsewhere were also located, Arcadia police Lt. Kollin Cieadlo said. They range in age from 2 months to 13 years, with most between 1 and 3.

"We believe one or two were born biologically to the mother," he said. "There are some surrogates who have come forward and said they were surrogates for the children."

Silvia Zhang, 38, and Guojun Xuan, 65, are believed to be the legal parents, Cieadlo said.

They were arrested in May after a hospital reported that their 2-month-old infant had a traumatic head injury, the result of a nanny at the home violently shaking the baby, Arcadia police said. The child was not taken to the hospital for another two days.

Cieadlo said neglect charges were not formally pursued in order for an investigation to continue. The couple told police that they "wanted a large family," the lieutenant said.

Zhang produced what appeared to be legitimate birth certificates, including some from outside California, that list her as the mother of the children, Cieadlo said.

He said the FBI is also part of the investigation. A spokesperson declined to comment when reached Wednesday by The Associated Press.

"I'm not familiar with how the surrogacy laws work," Cieadlo said. "We need to do a much deeper dive."

TV stations in Los Angeles quoted women who said they were surrogate mothers for the couple but that they didn't realize so many other surrogates were also involved.

It wasn't immediately clear if Zhang and Xuan had a lawyer who could speak on their behalf. Zhang did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

Business records with the California Secretary of State show a company called Mark Surrogacy Investment LLC was previously registered at the couple's address. The most recent filing shows the business license was terminated in June.

Kallie Fell, director of The Center for Bioethics and Culture, which believes surrogacy exploits women, posted a recent YouTube video of her interview with a Texas woman, Kayla Elliott, who gave birth last spring.

"She was lied to. She was told this couple had one other child and they wanted one more child to complete a family," Fell told The Associated Press. "She didn't know they were the owners of the surrogacy agency. They operate with zero oversight."

Elliott didn't return a request for comment. But she is trying to raise money to seek to have the child placed with her.

"I am prepared and deeply committed to providing that for her, but the legal process to secure placement is complex and costly," Elliott said in her appeal on the fundraising site GoFundMe.

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, which removed the couple's children, said it could not talk about its actions in a specific case.

Gulf Coast braces for flooding as storm system builds into possible tropical depression

By SAFIYAH RIDDLE Associated Press/Report For America

The weather system moving across the Florida Panhandle on Wednesday was showing a greater chance of becoming a tropical depression as it moves toward the northern Gulf Coast, according to the National Hurricane Center.

The system has a 40% chance of becoming a tropical depression as it moves west over the Gulf toward southeastern Louisiana on Thursday, the federal agency said. The severity of its impact will depend on how far it travels offshore, where conditions are ripe for a tropical depression, before reaching Louisiana. The tropical weather will affect Alabama and Mississippi as well.

Regardless of whether the system intensifies, heavy downpours could cause flooding, officials warned.

New Orleans is bracing for 3 to 5 inches (8 to 13 centimeters) of rain through Saturday, but some areas could see as much as 10 inches (25 centimeters), especially near the coast, the National Weather Service said.

"While a tropical depression cannot be ruled out near the coast on Thursday, the main focus remains

the heavy rain threat," the agency wrote on X.

Volunteers and local elected officials played music as they shoveled sand into bags to hand out to residents in New Orleans on Wednesday morning at the Dryades YMCA.

"My street flooded just the other day when we got a little bit of rain and so I want to just make sure that I'm proactive," New Orleans resident Alex Trapps said as he drove away with sandbags in his car.

The looming threat in the southeast comes on the heels of a series of lethal floods this summer. On Monday, flash floods inundated New York City and parts of New Jersey, claiming two lives. And at least 132 people were killed in floodwaters that overwhelmed Texas Hill Country on the Fourth of July.

The system percolating over Florida will be called Dexter if it becomes a named storm. Six weeks into the Atlantic hurricane season, which runs from June 1 to Nov. 30, there have been three named tropical storms — Andrea, Barry and Chantal — but no hurricanes.

Chantal made landfall in South Carolina last week, and its remnants caused flooding in North Carolina that killed an 83-year-old woman when her car was swept off a rural road.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association said in May there was a 60% chance that there will be more named storms this hurricane season than there have been in past years on average.

The currently developing weather system is expected to move fully inland by the end of the week.

Southern Louisiana — a region all too familiar with the potentially devastating impacts of flooding — is expected to be hit hardest Thursday and beyond.

Erika Mann, CEO of the Dryades YMCA, said that local elected officials managed to organize the storm supply distribution within a day after the threat intensified.

"We open our doors and help the community when the community is in need," Mann said.

Some residents who came to get supplies "jumped out of their cars and they helped. And it just represents what New Orleans is about. We come together in crisis," Mann said.

Survivors' lawyers say Illinois has one of nation's worst records on sex abuse in juvenile detention

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Illinois has one of the nation's worst problems with child sex abuse at juvenile detention centers, attorneys representing more than 900 survivors who have filed lawsuits said Wednesday.

Dozens of complaints, including several filed this week in Chicago, allege decades of systemic abuse of children by the employees of detention facilities. Similar lawsuits have popped up in states including Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, but Illinois stands out for the volume of cases that began piling up last year and the lackluster response from state leaders, according to attorneys.

"The scale and the magnitude and the severity of these cases are some of the worst we've seen all over the United States," Jerome Block, an attorney who has filed lawsuits nationwide, said at a news conference.

The latest Illinois complaints, filed Tuesday, represent 107 people who experienced abuse as children at 10 centers statewide. Some have since closed. The lawsuits allege abuse from the mid-1990s to 2018, including rape, forced masturbation and beatings by chaplains, counselors, officers and kitchen supervisors.

The Associated Press does not typically name people who say they were sexually assaulted unless they consent to being identified or decide to tell their stories publicly, as some who have filed lawsuits have done. Most plaintiffs are identified by initials in the lawsuits.

Survivor Kate-Lynn, who appeared at a Chicago news conference, said she only felt comfortable speaking publicly using her first name. The Illinois woman, now 26, said she was held in solitary confinement at a suburban Chicago facility for a year when she was 14. She said she was sexually and physically abused by at least five staff members who came into her cell and stripped her naked.

As she spoke, a fellow survivor who also planned to speak became overcome with emotion and left the room. He didn't return.

Kate-Lynn said she has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety.

"Going to public places is very hard for me," she said, wiping tears at times. "I feel like I'm going to be

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attacked when dealing with authority figures.”

The lawsuits, first filed in May 2024, and they are slowly making their way through the courts.

Two lawsuits against the state — representing 83 people — were filed in the Illinois Court of Claims and seek damages of roughly \$2 million per plaintiff, the most allowed under law. Separate lawsuits representing 24 people held as children at a Chicago center, were filed in Cook County and seek more than \$100,000 per plaintiff.

Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul, who represents the state, has tried to dismiss the cases in court.

Raoul, whose office has investigated church sex abuse cases, declined to comment Wednesday as did officials with the Department of Juvenile Justice and Cook County. The lawsuits also name the state of Illinois and the Department of Corrections. Officials for the governor’s office and Corrections did not return messages Wednesday.

While the number of lawsuits grows, few cases have gone to trial or resulted in settlements. Arrests are infrequent.

Many alleged offenders are not named in the lawsuits, represented by initials or physical descriptions as the plaintiffs remembered them. There are several alleged repeat offenders, including a corrections officer who currently serves as a small-town Illinois mayor and was accused separately by 15 people. He has denied the allegations.

Attorneys have called for legislative hearings, outside monitors, victim input and criminal charges by local authorities. Block has also harshly criticized Illinois leaders, including Raoul, saying there is a double standard for the abuse victims juvenile detention centers versus church abuse victims.

“When it’s the state who perpetrated the abuse, when it’s state employees who perpetrated the abuse rather than Catholic priests, the attorney general doesn’t want to support the survivors,” he said.

Horrific accounts are detailed in the hundreds of pages of complaints. Many plaintiffs said their abusers threatened them with violence, solitary confinement and longer sentences if they reported the abuse. Others were given fast food, candy, cigarettes or the chance to play video games if they kept quiet.

Another survivor, a 40-year-old Texas man identified in the lawsuit by the initials J.B. 2, said he was abused when he was 14 years old and staying at a facility in St. Charles, which is outside Chicago. He issued a statement through attorneys.

“I want to let my fellow survivors know that we are not alone in this,” he wrote. “Speaking your truth, no matter how gruesome it is, it can help to set you free from yourself and all the hurt that’s been bottled up.”

Vance touts tax breaks in Pennsylvania as he makes White House’s first big pitch on Trump’s new law

By MARC LEVY and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WEST PITTSBURGH, Pa. (AP) — Vice President JD Vance on Wednesday made the Trump administration’s first big pitch to sell the public on President Donald Trump’s sweeping budget-and-policy package in the swing political turf of northeastern Pennsylvania.

The vice president, whose tiebreaking vote got the bill through the Senate, touted the legislation’s tax breaks and cast Democrats as opponents of the cutting taxes because of their unanimous opposition to the legislation.

Democrats, who’ve decried the wide-ranging law’s cuts to Medicaid and food stamps, along with other provisions, are expected to try to use it against Republicans in closely contested congressional campaigns next year that will determine control of Congress.

The GOP plans to use it to make their case as well, something the Republican vice president asked the crowd in working-class West Pittston to help with.

“Go and talk to your neighbors, go and talk to your friends, about what this bill does for America’s citizens. Because we don’t want to wake up in a year and a half and give the Democrats power back,” he said.

Vance zeroes in on tax message

As Vance spoke at an industrial machine shop, the vice president was quick to highlight the bill’s new

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tax deductions on overtime.

"You earned that money," Vance said. "You ought to keep it in your pocket."

He also promoted the legislation's creation of a new children's savings program, called Trump Accounts, with a potential \$1,000 deposit from the Treasury Department. Recognizing the significance of the coal and gas industry in Pennsylvania, he also talked up the ways the law seeks to promote energy extraction, such as allowing increased leasing for drilling, mining and logging on public lands, speeding up government approvals and cutting royalty rates paid by extraction companies.

"We are finally going to drill, baby drill and invest in American energy," Vance said. "And I know you all love that."

The historic legislation, which Trump signed into law earlier this month with near unanimous Republican support, includes key campaign pledges like no tax on tips but also cuts Medicaid and food stamps by \$1.2 trillion.

Democrats recently held a town hall in House Speaker Mike Johnson's home state of Louisiana to denounce the legislation as a "reverse Robin Hood — stealing from the poor to give to the rich."

Republicans see Democrats preparing campaign message around the law

Vance's office declined to elaborate on plans for other public events around the U.S. to promote the bill. After his remarks, he visited a nearby diner where he picked up food and spoke to some of the patrons.

It's unclear how much Trump plans to promote it himself. He told NBC News last week that he would travel "a little bit" to help champion the measure he dubbed the "One Big Beautiful Bill."

"But honestly," he said, "It's been received so well I don't think I have to."

But later Wednesday during a signing ceremony at the White House for a separate fentanyl-related bill, Trump said Republicans will need to promote the law and acknowledged that Democrats may have found an effective message.

"We're going to have to start speaking about it because the Democrats use it, they say, 'It represents death.' How effective is that, right? That's pretty good," Trump said.

The battle for control of the messaging on the bill could be critical to how well the measure is ultimately received, as some of the most divisive parts of the law, including Medicaid and food assistance cuts, are timed to take effect only after the midterm elections. The bill was generally unpopular before its passage, polls showed, although some individual provisions are popular, like boosting the annual child tax credit and eliminating taxes on tips.

Pennsylvania becomes test case of messaging

West Pittston, which sits in Republican Rep. Rob Bresnahan's district in northeastern Pennsylvania, is a place where Trump's populist brand of politics has found a foothold. Trump's popularity with the white working class has accelerated the political shift in nearby areas, including around Wilkes-Barre and Scranton, turning reliably Democratic areas into contested turf and contributing to Trump's 2024 win in Pennsylvania.

There, and in a swing district around Allentown just to the south, Republicans last year knocked off two Democratic U.S. House incumbents after years of trying.

Walter Volinski, a 74-year-old retiree from nearby Swoyersville, said he liked that the bill extended the tax cuts that Trump enacted in his first term. He said he hasn't read the nearly 900-page legislation but he thinks most politicians haven't either. Still, Volinski said, "I trust Donald Trump and the Republican Party to make this country a great country again."

Steven Taylor, a 52-year-old truck driver from West Pittston, thought the new law would help people struggling to pay their bills. Taylor, a Republican who voted for Trump, said he liked that the law contained tax breaks on tips and overtime pay. "Everybody's hurting out here," he said. "We need a little extra help."

But Taylor said he was concerned that his nephew, who has diabetes, could be affected by the legislation's cuts to Medicaid. "We don't know as of yet. But we're really hopeful that it doesn't," Taylor said.

Maegan Zielinski, a 33-year-old small business owner from Wilkes-Barre who was among a group of people protesting Vance's appearance, said she worried the law will hurt vulnerable people, including those on Medicaid and Medicare. "I do not like that it continues to support the billionaires instead of the working-

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class people of America, continuing to give them tax breaks while middle-class America suffers," she said. Democratic Gov. Josh Shapiro has aggressively gone after the state's Republican members of Congress who voted for the bill, including Bresnahan, whose seat is a top Democratic target.

"Shame on these members of Congress who spent the last few months saying, 'Oh, I'll never cut Medicaid,'" Shapiro said during an appearance earlier this month on WILK-FM radio in Wilkes-Barre. "I mean, Rep. Bresnahan told you, your listeners, your newspapers, told me to my face, this was a red line in the sand for him, he wouldn't harm people on Medicaid, he wouldn't harm our rural hospitals. ... He caved and voted for this bill."

Bresnahan has defended his vote by saying it strengthens Medicaid by cracking down on fraud, waste and abuse and requiring those who can work to do so. He also said it ensures hospitals in northeastern Pennsylvania will qualify for the funding they need to stay open.

First the shoes went back on. Now, at US airport security, more liquid in carry-ons may be at hand

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Travelers giddy about being able to keep their shoes on while walking through TSA checkpoints at the airport again may have something else to look forward to: changes to how much liquid they can carry.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said Wednesday during a conference hosted by "The Hill" that she is questioning "everything TSA does" and spoke of possible changes to the amount of liquids travelers can tote in their carry-on baggage.

"The liquids, I'm questioning. So that may be the next big announcement is what size your liquids need to be," Noem said. "We have put in place in TSA a multilayered screening process that allows us to change some of how we do security and screening so it's still as safe."

She gave no details about precisely what those changes might be or how quickly travelers could expect to see them.

Under the Transportation and Security Administration's current guidance, travelers can carry liquids in travel-sized containers 3.4 ounces (100 milliliters) or less per item in their carry-on bag. Those containers must be placed in a one-quart resealable plastic bag. Bigger containers must go in checked baggage, though there are exceptions for medications and baby formula.

Noem announced on July 8 that travelers were no longer required to take their shoes off while going through screening after a pilot program showed TSA had the equipment needed to keep airports and aircraft safe while allowing people to keep their shoes on.

That policy had been in place since 2006, several years after "shoe bomber" Richard Reid's failed attempt to take down a flight from Paris to Miami in late 2001.

The limits on liquids were triggered by a 2006 incident where authorities foiled a plot to use liquid explosives smuggled aboard carry-on luggage to blow up planes.

Ever since the guidelines were put in place TSA checkpoints have been the scene of travelers quickly guzzling water, digging through luggage to find and discard a too-large tube of hair gel and chucking jars of everything from jam to bottles of coffee that didn't meet the size requirement.

The guidance also triggered discussions — sometimes arguments — over what constitutes a liquid. Yogurt? Peanut butter? Jam and jelly? All are currently restricted to containers no bigger than 3.4 ounces as detailed on an extensive list that TSA maintains on its website titled "What can I bring?"

Noem also laid out her vision for the future of airport travel during the talk Wednesday.

"Hopefully, the future of an airport, where I'm looking to go is that you walk in the door with your carry-on suitcase, you walk through a scanner and go right to your plane," Noem said. "It takes you one minute."

Researchers try new ways of preserving more hearts for transplants

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two university hospitals are pioneering new ways to expand lifesaving heart transplants for adults and babies — advances that could help recover would-be heart donations that too often go unused.

The new research aims to overcome barriers for using organs from someone who dies when their heart stops. Called DCD, or donation after circulatory death, it involves a controversial recovery technique or the use of expensive machines.

Surgeons at Duke and Vanderbilt universities reported Wednesday that they've separately devised simpler approaches to retrieve those hearts. In the New England Journal of Medicine, they described successfully transplanting hearts to a 3-month-old infant at Duke and three men at Vanderbilt.

"These DCD hearts work just as well as hearts from brain-dead donors," said Vanderbilt lead author Dr. Aaron M. Williams.

How hearts are saved for donation

Most transplanted hearts come from donors who are brain dead. In those situations, the body is left on a ventilator that keeps the heart beating until the organs are removed.

Circulatory death occurs when someone has a nonsurvivable brain injury but because all brain function hasn't ceased, the family decides to withdraw life support and the heart stops. That means organs can spend a while without oxygen before being recovered, a time lag usually doable for kidneys and other organs but that can raise questions about the quality of hearts.

To counter damage and determine whether DCD organs are usable, surgeons can pump blood and oxygen to the deceased donor's abdominal and chest organs — after clamping off access to the brain. But it's ethically controversial to artificially restore circulation even temporarily and some hospitals prohibit that technique, called normothermic regional perfusion, or NRP.

Another option is to "reanimate" DCD organs in a machine that pumps blood and nutrients on the way to the transplant hospital. The machines are expensive and complex, and Duke's Dr. Joseph Turek said the devices can't be used for young children's small hearts — the age group with the most dire need.

New ways of preserving hearts

Turek's team found a middle ground: Remove the heart and attach some tubes of oxygen and blood to briefly assess its ability to function — not in a machine but on a sterile table in the operating room.

They practiced with piglets. Then came the real test. At another hospital, life support was about to be withdrawn from a 1-month-old whose family wanted to donate — and who would be a good match for a 3-month-old Duke patient in desperate need of a new heart. The other hospital didn't allow the controversial NRP recovery technique but let Turek's team test the experimental alternative.

It took just five minutes to tell "the coronary arteries are filling well, it's pink, it's beating," Turek said. The team promptly put the little heart on ice and raced it back to Duke.

Vanderbilt's system is even simpler: Infuse the heart with a nutrient-rich, cold preservative solution before removing it from the donor's body, similar to how hearts from brain-dead donors are handled.

That "replenishes the nutrients that are depleted during the dying process and helps protect it for transport," Williams explained, adding that Vanderbilt has performed about 25 such transplants so far. "Our view is you don't necessarily need to reanimate the heart."

More donated hearts are needed

There's a huge need for more transplantable hearts. Hundreds of thousands of adults suffer from advanced heart failure, yet many are never even offered a transplant because of the organ shortage.

Every year about 700 children in the U.S. are added to the transplant list for a new heart and about 20% die waiting. Turek said infants are at particular risk.

Last year, people whose lives ended via circulatory death made up 43% of the nation's deceased donors — but just 793 of the 4,572 heart transplants.

That's why many specialists say finding ways to use more of those hearts is crucial. The new studies are small and early-stage but promising, said Brendan Parent of NYU Langone Health, who directs transplant ethics and policy research.

"Innovation to find ways to recover organs successfully after circulatory death are essential for reducing the organ shortage," he said.

If alternatives pan out, "I absolutely think that cardiac programs will be thrilled, especially at hospitals that have rejected NRP."

Feds charge 3 current or former Louisiana police chiefs in an alleged visa fraud scheme

By SARA CLINE and JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Federal authorities have charged three small-town Louisiana police chiefs with taking hundreds of \$5,000 bribes over nearly a decade in exchange for filing false police reports that would allow noncitizens to apply for visas that let certain crime victims stay in the U.S.

The false police reports would indicate that the immigrant was a victim of a crime that would qualify them to apply for a so-called U visa, U.S. Attorney Alexander C. Van Hook said Wednesday at a news conference in Lafayette. He said the police officials were paid \$5,000 for each name they provided falsified reports for, and that there were hundreds of names over the years.

There had been "an unusual concentration of armed robberies of people who were not from Louisiana," Van Hook said, noting that two other people were also charged in the alleged scheme.

"In fact, the armed robberies never took place," he said.

Fraud, bribery and conspiracy charges

Earlier this month, a federal grand jury in Shreveport returned a 62 count indictment charging the five defendants with crimes including conspiracy to commit visa fraud, visa fraud, bribery, mail fraud and money laundering, Van Hook said.

Those charged are Oakdale Police Chief Chad Doyle, Forest Hill Police Chief Glynn Dixon, former Glenmora Police Chief Tebo Onishea, Michael "Freck" Slaney, a marshal in Oakdale, and Chandrakant "Lala" Patel, an Oakdale businessman.

If convicted, the defendants could face years or even decades of jail time. Court and jail records don't list attorneys for any of them.

According to investigators, people seeking special visas would reach out to Patel, who would contact the lawmen and offer them a payment in exchange for falsified police reports that identified the migrants as victims of armed robberies that never occurred.

The scheme went on for nearly a decade, Van Hook said. When pressed about the extent of the fraud, Van Hook said there "hundreds of names" — specifically for visas that were approved.

Asked what might happen to the people who allegedly paid bribes, including whether they might be charged or their immigration status might be changed, Van Hook said he couldn't say yet but that the investigation is ongoing.

U visas offer a rare pathway to citizenship

Getting a U visa can give some crime victims and their families a pathway to U.S. citizenship. About 10,000 people got them in the 12-month period that ended Sept. 30, 2022, which was the most recent period for which the Homeland Security Department has published data.

These special visas, which were created by Congress in 2000, are specifically for victims of certain crimes "who have suffered mental or physical abuse" and are "helpful to law enforcement or government officials in the investigation or prosecution of criminal activity," based on a description of the program published by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

"These visas are designed to help law enforcement and prosecutors prosecute crimes where you need the victim or the witness there," Van Hook said. "U visas serve a valuable purpose, and this is a case where they were abused."

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In 2021, USCIS warned that the U visa program was susceptible to fraud after an audit from the Office of Inspector General found that administrators hadn't addressed deficiencies in their process.

The audit found that USCIS approved a handful of suspicious law enforcement signatures that were not cross-referenced with a database of authorized signatures, according to the OIG report. They were also not closely tracking fraud case outcomes, the total number of U visas granted per year, and were not effectively managing the backlog, which led to crime victims waiting for nearly 10 years before receiving a U visa.

Current and former police chiefs are arrested

The current or former police chiefs are from small central Louisiana municipalities that are near each other. They're in a part of the state that is home to multiple immigration detention facilities. Although Louisiana doesn't share a border with a foreign country, there are nine ICE detention facilities in the state — holding nearly 7,000 people.

Local news outlets reported seeing ICE and FBI agents entering the homes of two of the chiefs. Van Hook said authorities searched multiple police departments and a Subway sandwich shop that Patel operated.

Two of the police chiefs were arrested Tuesday at a hotel in Baton Rouge, where the annual Louisiana Association of Chiefs of Police conference was being held. Details surrounding the other arrests were not immediately available.

Van Hook and others said at Wednesday's news conference that the arrests don't mean the indicted chiefs' departments are corrupt.

"It saddens me to have any fellow law enforcement officers caught up in crimes," said Rapides Parish Sheriff Mark Wood, whose office assisted in the investigation. "It puts a bad light on the good cops that do their job right and hold the line as they should."

Astronomers capture the birth of planets around a baby sun outside our solar system

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Astronomers have discovered the earliest seeds of rocky planets forming in the gas around a baby sun-like star, providing a precious peek into the dawn of our own solar system. It's an unprecedented snapshot of "time zero," scientists reported Wednesday, when new worlds begin to gel.

"We've captured a direct glimpse of the hot region where rocky planets like Earth are born around young protostars," said Leiden Observatory's Melissa McClure from the Netherlands, who led the international research team. "For the first time, we can conclusively say that the first steps of planet formation are happening right now."

The observations offer a unique glimpse into the inner workings of an emerging planetary system, said the University of Chicago's Fred Ciesla, who was not involved in the study appearing in the journal *Nature*.

"This is one of the things we've been waiting for. Astronomers have been thinking about how planetary systems form for a long period of time," Ciesla said. "There's a rich opportunity here."

NASA's Webb Space Telescope and the European Southern Observatory in Chile teamed up to unveil these early nuggets of planetary formation around the young star known as HOPS-315. It's a yellow dwarf in the making like the sun, yet much younger at 100,000 to 200,000 years old and some 1,370 light-years away. A single light-year is 6 trillion miles.

In a cosmic first, McClure and her team stared deep into the gas disk around the baby star and detected solid specks condensing — signs of early planet formation. A gap in the outer part of the disk gave allowed them to gaze inside, thanks to the way the star tilts toward Earth.

They detected silicon monoxide gas as well as crystalline silicate minerals, the ingredients for what's believed to be the first solid materials to form in our solar system more than 4.5 billion years ago. The action is unfolding in a location comparable to the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter containing the leftover building blocks of our solar system's planets.

The condensing of hot minerals was never detected before around other young stars, "so we didn't know if it was a universal feature of planet formation or a weird feature of our solar system," McClure said in an email. "Our study shows that it could be a common process during the earliest stage of planet formation."

While other research has looked at younger gas disks and, more commonly, mature disks with potential planet wannabes, there's been no specific evidence for the start of planet formation until now, McClure said.

In a stunning picture taken by the ESO's Alma telescope network, the emerging planetary system resembles a lightning bug glowing against the black void.

It's impossible to know how many planets might form around HOPS-315. With a gas disk as massive as the sun's might have been, it could also wind up with eight planets a million or more years from now, according to McClure.

Purdue University's Merel van 't Hoff, a co-author, is eager to find more budding planetary systems. By casting a wider net, astronomers can look for similarities and determine which processes might be crucial to forming Earth-like worlds.

"Are there Earth-like planets out there or are we like so special that we might not expect it to occur very often?"

US deports immigrants from Jamaica, Cuba and other countries to the African kingdom of Eswatini

By GERALD IMRAY, MICHELLE GUMEDE and REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — The United States sent five immigrants it says were convicted of serious crimes to the African nation of Eswatini, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security said — an expansion of the Trump administration's largely secretive third-country deportation program.

The U.S. has already deported eight men to another African country, South Sudan, after the Supreme Court lifted restrictions on sending people to countries where they have no ties. The South Sudanese government has declined to say where those men, also described as violent criminals, are after it took custody of them nearly two weeks ago.

In a late-night post on X Tuesday, Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said five men — citizens of Vietnam, Jamaica, Cuba, Yemen and Laos — had been deported to Eswatini. She said they were all convicted criminals and "individuals so uniquely barbaric that their home countries refused to take them back."

The men "have been terrorizing American communities" but were now "off of American soil," McLaughlin added.

McLaughlin said they had been convicted of crimes including murder and child rape and one was a "confirmed" gang member. Her social media posts included mug shots of the men and what she said were their criminal records and sentences. They were not named.

The Eswatini government said Wednesday the men, which it referred to as "prisoners" and "inmates," were being held in isolated units in unnamed correctional facilities in Eswatini but were considered to be in transit and would ultimately be sent back to their home countries.

In a series of posts on X, the Eswatini government said it would collaborate with the United States and the U.N. migration agency to facilitate their return home and ensure "due process and respect for human rights is followed" as part of their repatriation. The government gave no timeframe for that to happen.

Four of the five countries where the men are from have historically been resistant to taking back some citizens when they're deported from the United States. That issue has been a recurring problem for Homeland Security even before the Trump administration. Some countries refuse to take back any of their citizens, while others won't accept people who have committed crimes in the United States.

Third-country removals raise concerns

Trina Realmuto is a lawyer with the National Immigration Litigation Alliance and one of the lawyers litigating a key case challenging the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to remove people to third countries without notice or giving them the opportunity to raise concerns over persecution or torture. Third

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countries are ones not specifically listed on the final order of removal issued by an immigration judge and usually not the country a deportee is from.

Realmuto said part of the administration's goal with flights like the one to Eswatini is to send a message that people could be punished by being sent to "far-flung countries."

"It's disturbing that we don't know what the exchange was to get Eswatini to accept these individuals. We don't know if there were diplomatic assurances and, if so, what they said. We don't know if these individuals were given notice," Realmuto said. "It's all done in secrecy."

A July 9 memo to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement staff lays out the agency's policy governing when and how ICE can send someone with a final order of removal to a "third country."

If the United States has received assurances that the State Department deems credible from the third country that people the U.S. sends there won't be tortured, ICE can send them without any further procedures.

If the U.S. hasn't received those assurances, ICE can still send the person there but first has to notify them, in a language the person understands, telling them where they're going. Time between notice and deportation is generally 24 hours, but can be as little as six hours.

ICE doesn't have to ask if they fear being sent there. If the person raises concerns on their own, they're interviewed by an asylum officer and must show it's more likely than not they'll be persecuted or tortured there.

"It's an impossible standard to meet, especially if the person is not knowledgeable about the country," Realmuto said.

Eswatini is an absolute monarchy

Eswatini, previously called Swaziland, is a country of about 1.2 million people between South Africa and Mozambique. It is one of the world's last remaining absolute monarchies and the last in Africa. King Mswati III has ruled by decree since 1986. Political parties are effectively banned and pro-democracy groups have said for years that Mswati III has crushed political dissent, sometimes violently.

Pro-democracy protests erupted in Eswatini in 2021, when dozens were killed, allegedly by security forces. Eswatini authorities have been accused of conducting political assassinations of pro-democracy activists and imprisoning others.

As with South Sudan, rights groups criticized the Trump administration's choice to send the deportees to Eswatini, given its record.

Amy Fischer, Amnesty International USA's director of refugee and migrant rights, said the U.S. State Department's own 2023 human rights report found credible accounts of unlawful or arbitrary killings by security forces in Eswatini, impunity for abuses, and harsh prison conditions.

"As a result, anyone returned to this country is at risk of serious human rights violations," she said. "The cruelty is the point."

US is seeking more deals

The Trump administration has said it is seeking more deals with African nations to take deportees from the United States. Leaders from some of the five West African nations who met last week with President Donald Trump at the White House said the issue of migration and their countries possibly taking deportees from the U.S. was discussed.

Some nations have pushed back. Nigeria, which wasn't part of that White House summit, said it has rejected pressure from the U.S. to take deportees who are citizens of other countries.

Rwanda's foreign minister told The Associated Press last month that talks were underway with the U.S. about a potential agreement to host deported migrants. A British government plan announced in 2022 to deport rejected asylum-seekers to Rwanda was ruled illegal by the U.K. Supreme Court last year.

The U.S. also has sent hundreds of Venezuelans and others to Costa Rica, El Salvador and Panama.

'Not a dumping ground'

The eight men deported by the U.S. to war-torn South Sudan, where they arrived early this month, previously spent weeks at a U.S. military base in nearby Djibouti, located on the northeast border of Ethiopia, as the case over the legality of sending them there played out.

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The South Sudanese government has not released details of its agreement with the U.S. to take deportees, nor has it said what will happen to the men. A prominent civil society leader there said South Sudan was "not a dumping ground for criminals."

Analysts say some African nations might be willing to take third-country deportees in return for more favorable terms from the U.S. in negotiations over tariffs, foreign aid and investment, and restrictions on travel visas.

The Eswatini government said its arrangement with the U.S. posed no security threat to the people of Eswatini. "This exercise is the result of months of robust high-level engagements between the U.S. government and Eswatini," it said.

Trump says he's 'highly unlikely' to fire Fed's Powell after floating that idea in private

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Wednesday that he was "highly unlikely" to fire Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, a public statement made less than 24 hours after suggesting in a private meeting that he was leaning in favor of dismissing the head of the nation's central bank.

Trump confirmed that in a White House meeting Tuesday night with about a dozen House Republicans he had discussed the "concept" of dismissing Powell, long a target because of his refusal to lower interest rates as Trump wants.

"Almost every one of them said I should," Trump said about the lawmakers who had come to talk to him about crypto legislation.

He indicated he was leaning in that direction, according to a White House official. During that session, Trump waved a letter about firing Powell, but a person familiar with the matter said it was essentially a prop drafted by someone else and that the Republican president has not drafted such a letter.

Neither source was authorized to publicly discuss the private meeting and they spoke only on condition of anonymity.

Trump made his comment about being "highly unlikely" to dismiss Powell — "unless he has to leave for fraud" — during an Oval Office meeting with Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the crown prince of Bahrain.

In recent days, White House and administration officials have accused Powell of mismanaging a \$2.5 billion renovation project at the Fed, adding to months of efforts by Trump try to rid himself of the politically independent central banker.

U.S. stocks were shaky as Trump spoke about Powell on Wednesday. The S&P 500's modest gain in the morning became a drop of 0.7% after initial reports that the president may fire the Fed chair. Stocks then trimmed their losses after Trump's later comment.

Treasury yields also swiveled in the bond market but remained mostly calm.

Those at the White House meeting were among the more far-right lawmakers, including members of the House Freedom Cause whose views are not always shared by other Republicans. In the Senate, Republicans have taken a more guarded approach. Some have backed Powell's performance at the Fed as they await an inspector general's review of the construction project.

In a speech Wednesday, Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., said if Powell is dismissed, "you are going to see a pretty immediate response"

"If anybody thinks it would be a good idea for the Fed to become another agency in the government subject to the president, they're making a huge mistake," said Tillis, who has announced that he is not running for reelection.

Sen. John Kennedy, R-La., said this week that Powell "has done a decent job."

"I don't think he's been perfect," he said, adding that there have been times they disagreed, but "I do believe that the chairman is calling them like he sees them."

Republicans on the House Financial Services Committee had been scheduled to meet with Powell on Wednesday evening in a gathering set months ago, but it was abruptly canceled due to votes in the House,

according to a committee aide granted anonymity to discuss a private meeting.

Another key ally quits Netanyahu's governing coalition in a major blow to Israel's leader

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suffered a major political blow on Wednesday as a key governing partner announced it was quitting his coalition government, leaving him with a minority in parliament as the country faces a litany of challenges.

Shas, an ultra-Orthodox party that has long served as kingmaker in Israeli politics, announced that it would bolt the government over disagreements surrounding a proposed law that would enshrine broad military draft exemptions for its constituents — the second ultra-Orthodox governing party to do so this week.

"In this current situation, it's impossible to sit in the government and to be a partner in it," Shas Cabinet minister Michael Malkieli said in announcing the party's decision.

But Shas said it would not undermine Netanyahu's coalition from the outside and could vote with it on some legislation, granting Netanyahu a lifeline in what would otherwise make governing almost impossible and put his lengthy rule at risk.

Once their resignations come into effect, Netanyahu's coalition will have 50 seats in the 120-seat parliament.

Netanyahu's government doesn't face immediate collapse

Netanyahu's rule, for now, doesn't appear threatened. Once Shas' resignations are put forward, there's a 48-hour window before they become official, which gives him a chance to salvage his government.

Netanyahu's Likud party did not immediately comment on Shas' departure.

The party's announcement also comes just before lawmakers recess for the summer, granting Netanyahu several months of little to no legislative activity to bring the parties back into the fold with a possible compromise on the draft law.

But if the coalition isn't shored up by the time the Knesset reconvenes in the fall, it could signal that Israel may be headed to early elections, which are currently scheduled for October 2026.

The political instability comes at a pivotal time for Israel, which is negotiating with Hamas on the terms for a U.S.-backed ceasefire proposal for Gaza. Shas' decision isn't expected to derail the talks.

But with a fracturing coalition, Netanyahu will feel more pressure to appease his other governing allies, especially the influential far-right flank, which opposes ending the 21-month war in Gaza so long as Hamas remains intact. They have threatened to quit the government if it does end.

Despite losing two important political partners, Netanyahu will still be able to move ahead on a ceasefire deal, once one is reached. The Trump administration has been pushing Israel to wrap up the war.

The embattled Netanyahu is on trial for alleged corruption, and critics say he wants to hang on to power so that he can use his office as a bully pulpit to rally supporters and lash out against prosecutors and judges. That makes him all the more vulnerable to the whims of coalition allies.

Exemptions for the ultra-Orthodox have long divided Israel

On Tuesday, the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism party said it was quitting over Netanyahu's failure to pass a law on the military draft exemptions.

Military service is compulsory for most Jewish Israelis, and the issue of exemptions has long divided the country. Those rifts have widened since the start of the war in Gaza as demand for military manpower has grown and hundreds of soldiers have been killed.

A decades-old arrangement by Israel's first prime minister granted hundreds of ultra-Orthodox men exemptions from compulsory Israeli service. Over the years, those exemptions ballooned into the thousands.

The ultra-Orthodox say their men are serving the country by studying sacred Jewish texts and preserving centuries' old tradition. They fear that mandatory enlistment will dilute adherents' connection to the faith.

But most Jewish Israelis see the exemption as unfair, as well as the generous government stipends granted to many ultra-Orthodox men who study instead of work throughout adulthood.

Netanyahu's coalition has been trying to find a path forward on a new law. But his base is largely opposed to granting sweeping draft exemptions and a key lawmaker has stood in the way of giving the ultra-Orthodox a law they can get behind, prompting their exit.

Trump's Turnberry faces logistical hurdles for British Open return

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

PORTRUSH, Northern Ireland (AP) — President Donald Trump is not getting a British Open to the Turnberry course he owns in the near future, an issue the R&A's new chief executive said Wednesday was more about transportation than politics.

Turnberry is regarded as the most beautiful of the links on the Open rotation, set along the Ayrshire coast in Scotland across from the Ailsa Craig. It last hosted the Open in 2009, before Trump bought the resort.

Mark Darbon, who took over at the R&A this year from Martin Slumbers, said Turnberry had not been taken off the list of potential British Open sites, but transportation and other issues had to be addressed.

"I think we've been extremely clear on our position in respect of Turnberry. We love the golf course but we've got some big logistical challenges there," he said. "You see the scale of their setup here and we've got some work to do on the road, rail and accommodation infrastructure around Turnberry."

Darbon said the R&A met with Eric Trump and other leaders of Trump Golf a few months ago and the talks had been constructive.

"I think they understand clearly where we're coming from. We talked through some of the challenges that we have so we've got a good dialogue with them," he said.

Slumbers had previously said the R&A would not be going to Turnberry until it was comfortable the topic would be about golf and not the owner.

Turnberry has only hosted the British Open four times, first in 1977 with the famous "Duel in the Sun" when Tom Watson beat Jack Nicklaus. But the Open is getting bigger, and the roads are limited getting to Turnberry.

There has been speculation Trump, whose golf courses have never hosted a men's major, might ask the British government to intercede in getting the Open back to Turnberry.

"We have an ongoing dialogue with the UK government given that we're a major event that creates significant value into the UK economy," Darbon said. "We've spoken to them specifically about Turnberry and I think they've made it clear that the decision around where we take our championship rests with us."

"I would find it difficult to predict whether there will be any discussion on The Open if the President is making a visit here."

Turnberry is not the only Scottish links being ignored by the R&A. Muirfield, located along the Firth of Forth east of Edinburgh, is reputed to be the purest of links courses. Its first Open was in 1892, and there have been 15 others, most recently in 2013 won by Phil Mickelson.

Only St. Andrews has hosted more Opens than Muirfield.

But it has not been back there since 2013 as the R&A has been geared toward taking golf's oldest championship to courses that can hold big crowds. It is expected 278,000 spectators will be at Royal Portrush this week, the second-largest behind St. Andrews. The last Open at Muirfield had 142,000 spectators.

The Open will be at Royal Birkdale next year, and then St. Andrews in 2027. The site for 2028 has not been announced. Muirfield has never gone more than 11 years — except for interruptions from World War I and World War II — between Opens.

"We love the golf course at Muirfield. We're in a discussion with the venue right now," Darbon said. "There's some things that we need to evolve at Muirfield — the practice ground in particular is a challenge for us with a modern Open and there's some work we need to do with the venue to facilitate some of the infrastructure that we require."

"But it's a good dialogue and we'd love to be back there in the future."

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Today in History: July 17, Disneyland's opening day

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, July 17, the 198th day of 2025. There are 167 days left in the year.

Today in History:

On July 17, 1955, Disneyland opened in Anaheim, California, after its \$17 million, yearlong construction; the park drew a million visitors in its first 10 weeks.

Also on this date:

In 1862, during the Civil War, Congress approved the Second Confiscation Act, which declared that all slaves taking refuge behind Union lines were to be set free.

In 1902, Willis Carrier produced a set of designs for what would become the world's first modern air-conditioning system.

In 1918, Russia's Czar Nicholas II and his family were executed by the Bolsheviks.

In 1936, the Spanish Civil War began as right-wing army generals launched a coup attempt against the Second Spanish Republic.

In 1944, during World War II, 320 men, two-thirds of them African-Americans, were killed when a pair of ammunition ships exploded at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine in California.

In 1945, following Nazi Germany's surrender, President Harry S. Truman, Soviet leader Josef Stalin and British Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill began meeting at Potsdam in the final Allied summit of World War II.

In 1975, an Apollo spaceship docked with a Soyuz spacecraft in orbit in the first superpower link-up of its kind.

In 1981, 114 people were killed when a pair of suspended walkways above the lobby of the Kansas City Hyatt Regency Hotel collapsed during a tea dance.

In 1996, TWA Flight 800, a Europe-bound Boeing 747, exploded and crashed off Long Island, New York, shortly after departing John F. Kennedy International Airport, killing all 230 people on board.

In 2014, all 298 passengers and crew aboard Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 were killed when the Boeing 777 was shot down over rebel-held eastern Ukraine; both Ukraine's government and pro-Russian separatists denied responsibility.

In 2020, civil rights icon John Lewis, whose bloody beating by Alabama state troopers in 1965 helped galvanize opposition to racial segregation, and who went on to a long and celebrated career in Congress, died at age 80.

In 2022, a report said nearly 400 law enforcement officials rushed to a mass shooting that left 21 people dead at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, but "egregiously poor decision-making" resulted in a chaotic scene that lasted more than an hour before the gunman was finally confronted and killed.

Today's Birthdays: Former sportscaster Verne Lundquist is 85. Queen Camilla of the United Kingdom is 78. Rock musician Terry "Geezer" Butler is 76. Actor Lucie Arnaz is 74. Actor David Hasselhoff is 73. Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel is 71. Film director Wong Kar-wai is 67. Television producer Mark Burnett is 65. Singer Regina Belle is 62. Country music artist Craig Morgan is 61. Rock musician Lou Barlow is 59. Actor Bitty Schram (TV: "Monk") is 57. Actor Jason Clarke is 56. Movie director F. Gary Gray is 56. Country singer Luke Bryan is 49. Film director/screenwriter Justine Triet is 47. R&B singer Jeremih (jehr-uh-MY') is 38. Actor Billie Lourd is 33. NHL center Connor Bedard is 20.