

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Friday, July 18

Senior Menu: Ham salad sandwich, tomato spoon salad, acini de pepe salad, cookie.  
State U10 at Webster

## 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

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



## 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.**

## FDA OK's Juul

The Food and Drug Administration authorized Juul to continue selling its signature e-cigarettes on the US market yesterday, as well as tobacco- and menthol-flavored refill cartridges. The decision ends three years of limbo after the federal regulator banned the company's products in 2022, then paused the ban pending further scientific review. The company's fruit-flavored products remain banned.

The FDA determined the benefits to adult smokers seeking to quit traditional cigarettes outweigh the public health risks, including to youth. Since Juul entered the vaping market in 2015, its fruit-flavored nicotine pods and slim vaporizers fueled a spike in underage vaping. E-cigarette use increased from 220,000 high schoolers in 2011 to 3.1 million by 2018. The company agreed in 2022 to pay nearly \$440M to settle a lawsuit alleging it intentionally marketed to youth.

While Juul held roughly 70% of the US e-cigarette market share in 2018, the company today holds roughly 18%, falling behind competitors Vuse and Geek Bar.

## UK Voting Age

The UK's Labour-led government announced yesterday it plans to lower the voting age from 18 to 16 by the next general election—part of a set of electoral reforms requiring parliamentary approval. There are an estimated 1.6 million 16- and 17-year-olds in the UK, representing 3% of the population age 16 and above.

The announcement comes as election turnout last year reached a 23-year low, at 59.7%. The left-leaning Labour Party rejects allegations it seeks to lower the voting age for its own benefit. There are a handful of countries that have already lowered the voting age to 16, including Austria, Brazil, and Ecuador. Research in those countries suggests the change could increase voter engagement without impacting election outcomes. In Scotland and Wales, 16- and 17-year-olds are allowed to participate in local elections.

Labour also plans to expand acceptable voter identification card options to include bank cards and crack down on foreign interference in UK elections, among other changes.

## 'Three-Parent' Babies

Eight babies have been born in a UK trial using an in vitro fertilization technique that combines DNA from three people, designed to reduce inherited mitochondrial diseases. The babies, now between 6 months and just over 2 years old, were born to women treated at a fertility center in northeast England. The approach uses the father's sperm, the mother's egg, and a donor egg with healthy mitochondria—about 0.1% of the child's DNA comes from the donor.

Mitochondrial disorders, affecting about 1 in 5,000 births, are transmitted via the mother and can cause vision loss, diabetes, and heart issues. Six of the eight babies showed a 95% to 100% drop in mutated mitochondrial DNA, while two showed reductions between 77% and 88%. All eight remain healthy; one experienced and recovered from an irregular heartbeat.

The UK became the first country to legalize the three-person IVF procedure in 2015. The US has not approved the technique, although US fertility specialists performed the procedure in Mexico in 2016.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

CBS will cancel "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," retiring the franchise in May 2026, citing financial reasons; the program is the most-watched late night franchise on US broadcast television.

Connie Francis, singer of "Stupid Cupid" and viral TikTok song "Pretty Little Baby," dies at age 87; Francis became the first woman in history to top the Billboard Hot 100 chart in 1960.

Bryan Braman, former Super Bowl-winning linebacker, dies of cancer at age 38.

The 2025 WNBA All-Star festivities kick off tonight with the three-point contest and skills challenge (8 pm ET, ESPN), followed by tomorrow's All-Star Game (8:30 pm ET, ABC); star Caitlin Clark will miss weekend with injury.

## Science & Technology

OpenAI debuts ChatGPT Agent that can control multiple applications on a user's computer to carry out complex tasks such as making purchases, planning trips, creating slide decks, and more.

Surgeons perform world's first pediatric heart transplant using a technique that restarts the heart outside the donor's body; procedure saved the life of a 3-month-old patient, could increase organ donor pool by 20%.

Researchers discover unique electrical patterns that occur as the brain transitions from sleeping to being awake; findings may help lead to new treatments for sleep disorders.

## Business & Markets

US House passes bill regulating dollar-pegged stablecoins, which now heads to President Donald Trump for signing; two House-passed bills governing regulatory oversight of digital assets and barring Federal Reserve from creating its own digital currency head to the Senate.

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.5%, Dow +0.5%, Nasdaq +0.7%); S&P 500 and Nasdaq rise to records.

Mark Zuckerberg and Meta Platforms investors settle shareholder claims seeking \$8B in damages over alleged Facebook privacy violations.

Newsletter publisher Substack raises \$100M at \$1.1B valuation, achieving unicorn status.

AI coding startup Lovable also reaches unicorn status after raising \$200M at a valuation of \$1.8B.

## Politics & World Affairs

President Donald Trump has been diagnosed with benign condition known as chronic venous insufficiency, White House press secretary reveals; the condition occurs when blood pools in the vein, restricting flow to the heart.

Department of Homeland Security reaches deal with Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to get access to data on 79 million Medicaid enrollees.

House of Representatives slated to vote today on Senate bill to reduce \$9B in federal spending on foreign aid and public broadcasting.

Republicans advance judicial nomination for former Trump lawyer, Democrats walk out.

Israeli strike on Gaza church kills at least three people, wounds 10 others, including the priest; Israel says the strike was a mistake.

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## South Dakota Mosquito



The first human case of West Nile Virus has been reported in Brookings County, South Dakota.

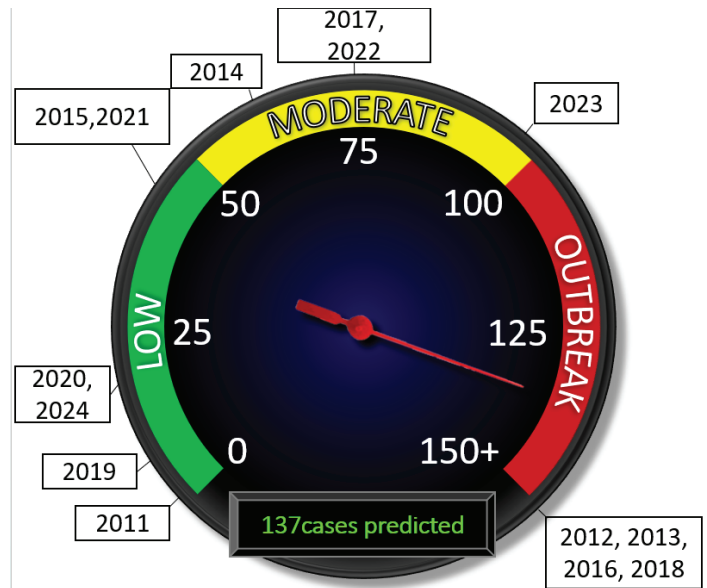
SD WNV (as of July 16 ):

- 1 human case (Brookings)
- 1 human viremic blood donor (Brown)
- 6 counties with positive mosquito pools (Brown, Brookings, Codington, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha)

US WNV (as of July 15): 49 cases (AL, AZ, CA, GA, KS, LA, MS, ND, NE, OH, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA)

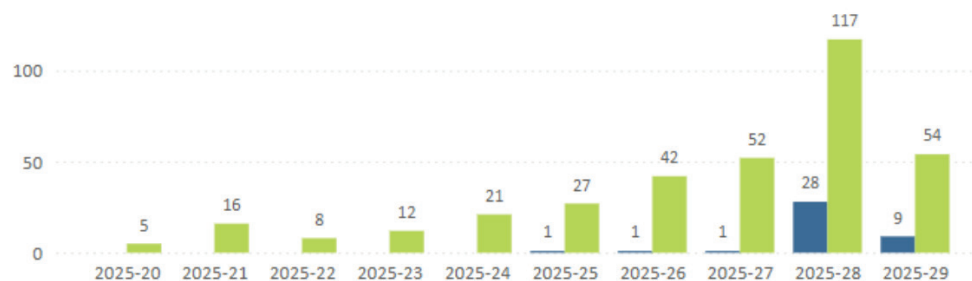
WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2025, South Dakota (as of July 16)

Total sites collecting mosquitoes: 47  
Total mosquito pools tested: 394  
% positivity: 10.15%

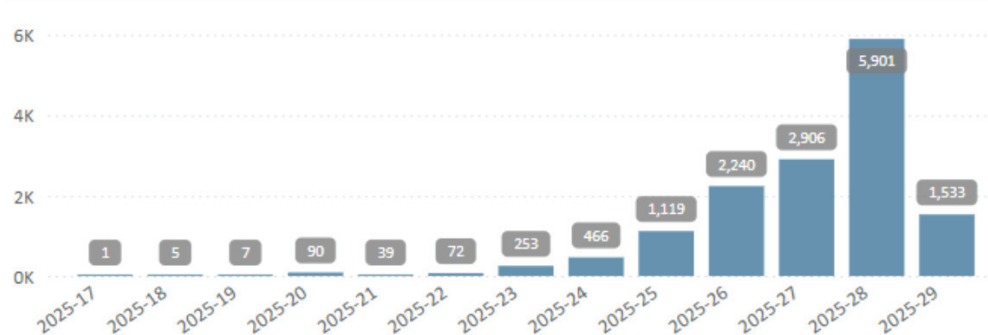


Number of Mosquito Pools Tested by MMWR Week and Status

Test Status: ● Positive ● Negative



Culex Mosquitoes Collected by MMWR Week







## Fact brief: Have fatalities increased since SD raised its speed limit to 80?

July 17, 2025

by Michael Klinski  
investigative reporter

**No.**

South Dakota is one of eight states that has posted speed limits of 80 mph on sections of interstates, but it hasn't resulted in a noticeable increase in fatalities.

The state increased its speed limit from 75 to 80 in 2015. Since then, fatalities in crashes on highways and interstates have stayed relatively flat. There were 135 in 2014, the year before the speed limit change, and 134 in 2015. In 2024, there were 140 fatalities.

The state's highway fatalities peaked at 203 in 2003.

Improved technology and structural designs are a big factor in the improvement. In 1997, the occupant fatality rate per 100,000 registered vehicles was 17.81. In 2017, it was 10.05.

Nationally, however, fatality rates on highways and interstates go up by 8.5% every time the speed limit is increased by 5 mph, according to a 2019 study.

## Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion Defeated By Clark

By GameChanger Media

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion could not keep up with Clark 6-2 on Wednesday.

Clark got on the board in the top of the first inning after Jakob Stean singled to center field, and Clark scored on a wild pitch, each scoring one run.

Clark added one run in the third after Stean grounded out.

Charlie Cavaas earned the win for Clark. The hurler surrendered five hits and two runs over six and two-thirds innings, striking out seven and walking nine. Ethan Kroll took the loss for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. The righty went four innings, giving up three runs (two earned) on six hits, striking out one and walking two.

Kason Oswald led Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion with one run batted in. Alex Abeln led Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion with two hits in four at bats. Oswald paced Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion with three walks. Overall, the team had patience at the plate, piling up nine walks for the game. Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion turned one double play in the game.

Will Lucke led Clark with two hits in three at bats from the leadoff position. Cavaas, Stean, and Weston Olsen each drove in one run for Clark. Clark turned one double play in the game.

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## Clark 6 - 2 Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion

📍 Home 📅 Wednesday July 16, 2025

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E
CLRK	2	0	1	0	2	1	0	6	8	1
GRTN	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	5	2

### BATTING

Clark	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
W Lucke #10 (CF)	3	3	2	0	1	0
D Severs... #61 (LF)	3	1	1	0	1	0
J Stean #21 (SS)	4	1	1	1	0	0
K Varder... #45 (1B)	4	0	0	0	0	1
C Cavaas #20 (P)	3	0	1	1	0	0
W Granth... #19 (C)	3	0	0	0	0	0
M Bratla... #43 (3B)	1	1	1	0	2	0
T Huber #19 (2B)	3	0	1	0	0	0
W Olsen #35	2	0	1	1	0	0
T Dardura... #9 (RF)	2	0	0	0	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>

**TB:** M Bratland, C Cavaas, D Severson, T Huber, J Stean, W Olsen, W Lucke 2, **HBP:** C Cavaas, W Olsen, **SB:** C Cavaas, D Severson, J Stean, W Lucke, **LOB:** 8

### PITCHING

Clark	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
C Cavaas #20	6.2	5	2	2	9	7	0
W Lucke #10	0.1	0	0	0	0	1	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>

**W:** C Cavaas, **P-S:** C Cavaas 126-64, W Lucke 6-4, **HBP:** C Cavaas 2, **BF:** C Cavaas 35, W Lucke

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
L Krause #2 (C)	3	0	1	0	1	0
A Abeln #5 (3B)	4	0	2	0	0	1
N Groebli... #13 (1B)	2	0	1	0	1	0
T Schuster #3 (SS)	3	1	0	0	0	0
E Kroll #14 (P)	3	0	0	0	1	1
R Schelle #8 (LF)	4	1	1	0	0	1
B Fliehs #19 (2B)	1	0	0	0	1	0
J Bisbee #15 (2B)	1	0	0	0	1	1
I Scean... #20 (P)	1	0	0	0	1	1
X Ellene... #21 (RF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
K Oswald #12 (RF)	0	0	0	1	3	0
T McGa... #22 (CF)	2	0	0	0	0	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>

**TB:** R Schelle, N Groeblichhoff, A Abeln 2, L Krause, **HBP:** N Groeblichhoff, T Schuster, **SB:** R Schelle, A Abeln, K Oswald, B Fliehs, L Krause, **LOB:** 12

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion	IP	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
E Kroll #14	4.0	6	3	2	1	0
I Scean... #20	1.0	1	2	1	2	0
L Krause #2	1.0	1	1	1	1	0
J Bisbee #15	1.0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>

**L:** E Kroll, **P-S:** J Bisbee 12-9, I Scepianiak 17-7, L Krause 26-15, E Kroll 58-31, **WP:** L Krause, E Kroll, **HBP:** E Kroll 2, **BF:** J Bisbee 4, I Scepianiak 6, L Krause 5, E Kroll 20

## Milbank Squeaks By Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion In Pitchers Duel

By GameChanger Media

Both teams were strong on the mound on Thursday, but Milbank was just a little bit stronger at the plate in their 2-1 victory over Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. Nick Groeblichhoff started the game for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion and recorded 21 outs.

Milbank got on the board in the second inning after Tyler Heije doubled, scoring one run.

A single by Bennet Hunt extended the Milbank lead to 2-0 in the top of the third inning.

Aiden Kelly earned the win for Milbank. The hurler gave up six hits and one run over seven innings, striking out four and walking four. Groeblichhoff took the loss for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. The righty went seven innings, surrendering two runs on nine hits, striking out seven and walking one.

Kason Oswald and Alex Abeln each collected two hits for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. Isaiah Scepaniak went 1-for-2 at the plate and led the team with one run batted in.

Jeter Sconlar, Mason Allen, and Heije each collected two hits for Milbank. Hunt and Heije each drove in one run for Milbank. Milbank were sure-handed and didn't commit a single error. Zack Karges made the most plays with nine.

## Groton Jr. Legion Surge Past Milbank Thanks To Big First Inning

By GameChanger Media

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion defeated Milbank 11-0 on Thursday thanks in part to seven runs in the first inning. Alex Abeln singled, scoring one run, T.C Schuster singled, scoring one run, John Bisbee drew a walk, scoring one run, Isaiah Scepaniak drew a walk, scoring one run, Lincoln Krause drew a walk, scoring one run, and Abeln singled, scoring two runs.

Abeln earned the win for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. The righty allowed one hit and zero runs over four innings, striking out four and walking one. Jeter Sconlar took the loss for Milbank. The reliever went one and one-third innings, giving up zero runs on one hit, striking out one and walking two. Mack Koplin opened the game for Milbank. The pitcher gave up five hits and seven runs over two-thirds of an inning, striking out two and walking three.

Schuster and Abeln each collected two hits for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. Bisbee and Abeln each drove in three runs for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. Tristin McGannon led Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion with two walks. Overall, the team had a strong eye at the plate, amassing eight walks for the game. Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion were sure-handed in the field and didn't commit a single error. Krause had the most chances in the field with five.

Bennet Hunt led Milbank with one hit in two at bats. Milbank didn't commit a single error in the field. Zack Karges had the most chances in the field with four.

Next up for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion is a game at Clear Lake on Saturday.

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## Milbank 2 - 1 Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion

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	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E
MLBN	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	9	0
GRTN	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	6	2

### BATTING

Milbank	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
J Wiese #12 (CF)	4	0	1	0	0	1
M Allen #26 (2B)	4	1	2	0	0	1
A Kelly #36 (P)	4	0	1	0	0	0
B Hunt #34 (3B)	4	0	1	1	0	0
M Koplin #27 (1B)	3	0	0	0	0	2
Z Karges #21 (SS)	2	1	0	0	1	0
T Heije #25 (C)	3	0	2	1	0	0
J Sconlar #18 (LF)	3	0	2	0	0	0
W Muell... #16 (RF)	3	0	0	0	0	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>

**2B:** M Allen, J Sconlar, T Heije, **TB:** J Wiese, B Hunt, M Allen 3, J Sconlar 3, A Kelly, T Heije 3, **CS:** M Allen, **SB:** B Hunt, Z Karges, M Allen, **LOB:** 8

### PITCHING

Milbank	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
A Kelly #36	7.0	6	1	1	4	4	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>

**W:** A Kelly, **P-S:** A Kelly 98-56, **HBP:** A Kelly, **BF:** A Kelly 30

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
A Abeln #5 (3B)	2	0	2	0	1	0
T Schuster #3 (SS)	3	0	0	0	0	0
L Krause #2 (C)	3	0	0	0	0	0
N Groebli... #13 (P)	2	0	0	0	1	0
R Schelle #8 (CF)	3	0	0	0	0	1
B Fliehs #19 (1B)	2	0	0	0	1	1
X Ellene... #21 (RF)	3	0	1	0	0	1
T McGan... #22 (LF)	2	1	0	0	1	1
K Oswald #12 (2B)	2	0	2	0	0	0
J Bisbee #15	1	0	0	0	0	0
I Scepaniak #20	2	0	1	1	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>

**TB:** K Oswald 2, A Abeln 2, X Ellenecker, I Scepaniak, **CS:** K Oswald, **HBP:** K Oswald, **LOB:** 8

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
N Groe... #13	7.0	9	2	2	1	7	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>

**L:** N Groeblichhoff, **P-S:** N Groeblichhoff 87-68, **BF:** N Groeblichhoff 31



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## Milbank 0 - 11 Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion

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	1	2	3	4	R	H	E
MLBN	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
GRTN	7	0	0	4	11	8	0

### BATTING

Milbank	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
J Wiese #12 (2B)	2	0	0	0	0	0
M Allen #26	2	0	0	0	0	0
B Hunt #34 (3B)	2	0	1	0	0	0
M Koplin #27 (P)	1	0	0	0	0	1
Z Karges #21 (SS)	0	0	0	0	1	0
T Heije #25 (C)	1	0	0	0	0	1
J Sconlar #18 (CF)	1	0	0	0	0	0
K Lindstr... #29 (LF)	1	0	0	0	0	0
D Karst #44 (1B)	1	0	0	0	0	1
S Wilson #7 (RF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>

**TB:** B Hunt, **CS:** B Hunt, **SB:** B Hunt, Z Karges, **LOB:** 1

### PITCHING

Milbank	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
M Koplin #27	0.2	5	7	7	3	2	0
<b>J Sconlar #18</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
T Heije #25	1.0	2	4	4	3	2	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>

**L:** J Sconlar, **P-S:** M Koplin 46-25, J Sconlar 25-11, T Heije 41-23, **WP:** M Koplin, T Heije, **HBP:** T Heije, **BF:** M Koplin 10, J Sconlar 6, T Heije 9

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
L Krause #2 (C)	2	1	1	1	1	0
A Abeln #5 (P)	3	1	2	3	0	1
N Groeb... #13 (1B)	2	2	1	0	1	1
T Schuster #3 (SS)	2	2	2	1	1	0
R Schelle #8 (LF)	2	2	1	0	0	0
T McGa... #22 (CF)	1	1	0	1	2	1
J Bisbee #15 (2B)	2	1	1	3	1	0
I Scepan... #20 (3B)	1	1	0	1	1	1
X Ellene... #21 (RF)	1	0	0	0	1	1
CR: B Fliehs #19	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>

**2B:** L Krause, **3B:** J Bisbee, **TB:** J Bisbee 3, N Groebtinghoff, L Krause 2, A Abeln 2, R Schelle, T Schuster 2, **HBP:** R Schelle, **SB:** A Abeln, R Schelle, **LOB:** 4

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion	IP	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
A Abeln #5	4.0	1	0	1	4	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>

**W:** A Abeln, **P-S:** A Abeln 53-31, **BF:** A Abeln 13

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## Jr. Teeners Fall To Redfield After Surrendering Big Third Inning

By GameChanger Media

Redfield Flickertails scored seven runs in the third inning, which helped them defeat Groton Jr. Teeners 12-6 on Thursday.

A single by Hudson Binger following a 7-pitch at-bat put Redfield Flickertails on the board in the bottom of the first.

Groton Jr. Teeners scored on a wild pitch, which helped Groton Jr. Teeners tie the game at one in the top of the second.

Redfield Flickertails took the lead in the bottom of the second. Brantley Schwartz grounded out, scoring one run, to give Redfield Flickertails the edge, 2-1.

Redfield Flickertails scored seven runs on six hits in the bottom of the third inning. Jace Edgar scored after tagging up, Tayber Hansen singled, scoring one run, Davey Bixler singled, scoring one run, an error scored one run, Schwartz singled, scoring one run, and Braxon Maher singled, scoring two runs.

Schwartz earned the win for Redfield Flickertails. The pitcher surrendered zero hits and three runs over four innings, striking out two and walking seven. Trayce Schelle took the loss for Groton Jr. Teeners. The starter went four innings, giving up 12 runs (six earned) on 11 hits, striking out one and walking two.

Asher Zimmerman, Jordan Schwan, and Kyson Kucker each collected one hit for Groton Jr. Teeners. Zimmerman, Kucker, and Lincoln Shilhanek each drove in one run for Groton Jr. Teeners. Schwan led Groton Jr. Teeners with two walks. Overall, the team had a strong eye at the plate, piling up eight walks for the game. Schwan stole two bases.

Redfield Flickertails collected 11 hits in the game. Schwartz, the number seven hitter for Redfield Flickertails, led the way with three runs batted in. The pitcher went 1-for-3 on the day. Bixler, Binger, and Tate Neuharth each collected two hits for Redfield Flickertails. Neuharth stole two bases.

## Schwan's Big Day Propels Jr. Teeners Past Redfield Flickertails

By GameChanger Media

Jordan Schwan collected three hits in three at bats, as Groton Jr. Teeners defeated Redfield Flickertails 15-2 on Thursday. Schwan singled in the first inning, singled in the second inning, and singled in the third inning.

Groton Jr. Teeners jumped out to the lead in the top of the first inning after Schwan singled, scoring one run, an error scored two runs, Wesley Borg grounded out, scoring one run, and an error scored one run.

Groton Jr. Teeners added to their early lead in the top of the second inning after Trayce Schelle singled to center field, Schwan singled down the left field line, Lincoln Shilhanek walked, Kolton Antonsen singled to center field, Tucker Leicht walked, and Gavin Hanten walked, each scoring one run.

Groton Jr. Teeners added to their early lead in the top of the third inning after Sam Crank was struck by a pitch, Antonsen grounded out, Borg grounded out, and Redfield Flickertails committed an error, each scoring one run.

Noah Scepianiak earned the win for Groton Jr. Teeners. The starter allowed two hits and two runs (zero earned) over four innings, striking out six and walking one. Jack Lewis took the loss for Redfield Flickertails. The pitcher went one and one-third innings, allowing 10 runs (seven earned) on seven hits, striking out two and walking four.

Groton Jr. Teeners piled up 10 hits in the game. Asher Zimmerman and Schwan each collected three hits for Groton Jr. Teeners. Antonsen, Schwan, Borg, and Shilhanek each drove in two runs for Groton Jr. Teeners. Schelle paced Groton Jr. Teeners with three walks. Overall, the team had patience at the plate, accumulating 10 walks for the game.

Gentry Puffer and Breckan Waldner were a force together in the lineup, as they each collected one hit for Redfield Flickertails. Carson Peterson stole two bases.

Groton Jr. Teeners will travel to Beresford Area 14U for their next game on Saturday.

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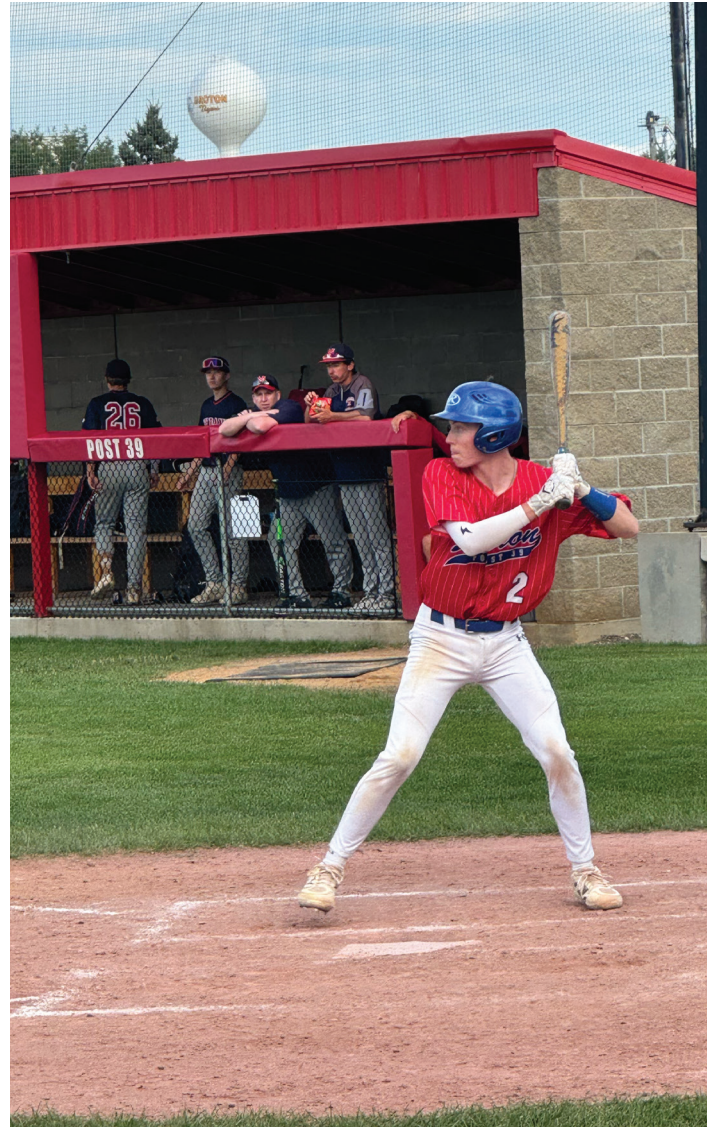
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**Second baseman John Bisbee fields the throw from the catcher Lincoln Krause for the tagged out.** (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



**Alex Abeln on the mound for Groton.** (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



**Lincoln Krause up to the plate in Thursday night Groton Junior Legion double header versus Milbank.** (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



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**Kason Oswald leads off on 3rd base.** (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



**Milbank base coach looks on while 3rd baseman Alex Abeln and short stop TC Schuster stand ready.** (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



**Pitcher Nick Groebelinghoff (left photo) delivers a pitch while catcher Lincoln Krause awaits his pitch.** (Photos by Bruce Babcock)



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**TC Schuster skids safe at home.** (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



**Second baseman Kason Oswald stands ready.** (Photo by Bruce Babcock)

GROTON COMMUNITY APPRECIATION MEAL



*Walking Tacos!*

TUES., JULY 22

11 AM - 2:00 PM

7 E. US Hwy 12 | Groton

**DACOTAH BANK**

MEMBER  
FDIC



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **South Dakota university system approves guns-on-campus policy to comply with new state law**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JULY 17, 2025 2:24 PM**

The South Dakota Board of Regents approved a policy on Thursday in Brookings allowing people with enhanced permits to carry concealed pistols on the state's public university campuses.

"This is something that we don't take lightly," said Regents Executive Director Nathan Lukkes.

The policy was necessitated by a law that took effect July 1, after lawmakers approved it during this year's winter legislative session in Pierre. The prior policy prohibited guns and other dangerous weapons on campuses.

Under the new policy, a person must have an enhanced concealed-carry permit to carry a concealed handgun on campus. The permits require a background check and completion of a handgun safety course, and are available to people as young as 18.

Pistols and ammunition must be stored in a locked case or safe when not being carried. The policy sets standards for schools to designate restricted spaces and rules for special events, establishes signage requirements, and addresses storage rules for dormitories. It also requires members of the public using campus facilities to adhere to the same regulations.

"The safety and well-being of our students and campus communities remains at the forefront, and we wanted to make sure that we were very thoughtful, very intentional, on the policy framework that we put together to do that to the best of our abilities," Lukkes said.

Lukkes said the process was "onerous and involved," citing extensive research into other states' policies and consultation with campus stakeholders. The board opted for a first-and-final reading — rather than its usual two-reading process that allows for more public comment — citing the need to provide certainty ahead of the fall semester and the law already having gone into effect.

*Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.*

### **Universities push to restore campus maintenance funding after \$9 million legislative cut**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JULY 17, 2025 5:00 PM**

South Dakota public university leaders called on lawmakers Thursday in Brookings to restore \$9 million in campus maintenance funding after a cut enacted by the Legislature earlier this year.

"As I stated in the past, and will state in the future, I think it was very shortsighted and disappointing that this was cut," South Dakota Board of Regents member Pam Roberts said. "The state has such a huge investment in infrastructure, and to not maintain it is just not appropriate."

The Board of Regents approved an approximately \$345 million state general fund budget request for fiscal year 2027 (up \$31.7 million from the 2026 fiscal year), prioritizing infrastructure repairs, rising insurance costs and technology upgrades across the state's university system. Governor Larry Rhoden will consider the request as he prepares a proposed budget for lawmakers ahead of this winter's legislative session.

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session in Pierre.

The state general fund contributes about a third of the university system's nearly \$1 billion budget, with another third coming from tuition and fees, and the last third from federal funding.

University presidents said an urgent need is reversing the maintenance cut. Lawmakers dropped support of building maintenance to 1.23% of the total replacement cost for campus buildings, which is down from the typical 2% target.

"As stewards of these facilities, we have a responsibility to prevent them from falling into disrepair," a board report states.

The report says \$17.13 million is the amount needed to reach the 2% target.

University presidents from around the state warned that underfunding maintenance accelerates deterioration, creates safety risks and inflates future costs.

"Every deferred maintenance dollar can lead to four to seven times that in future repair costs," University of South Dakota President Sheila Gestring told the board.

The budget request includes \$4 million to cover rising building insurance premiums, which have jumped nearly 500% systemwide since 2020, according to the board report.

Technology upgrades are another priority. Universities are seeking \$7.9 million to modernize infrastructure, \$2.75 million for cybersecurity and \$4.5 million to migrate core data to a cloud-based system.

Board President Tim Rave said the budget request balances fiscal realities with long-term needs.

"Higher education is one of the most important investments a state can make in its future," Rave said. "Our request focuses on sustaining that investment while being mindful stewards of taxpayer dollars."

*Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.*

## Sioux Falls mayor proposes budget cuts in response to state property tax relief law

**BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - JULY 17, 2025 11:45 AM**

Sioux Falls Mayor Paul TenHaken said Thursday that the city needs to cut its operating expenses by \$8 million to \$10 million over the next three years because of new state caps on property tax growth.

The state Legislature and Gov. Larry Rhoden passed the caps during the annual legislative session that ended in March. The multifaceted law includes a five-year, 3% cap on countywide growth in owner-occupied home assessments, plus other provisions such as expanded eligibility for an assessment freeze program for elderly and disabled people.

Cities receive revenue from sales taxes and property taxes. Counties and schools receive property taxes, and the state receives sales taxes.

TenHaken said in a news release that the law "will impact the way we deliver some city services in the future."

"For Sioux Falls and our surrounding communities that comprise about one-third of the state's population and drive our collective population and economic growth," he said, "it's important to understand how state legislation has the potential to restrict our ability to provide important public services as we grow."

The city's general fund, which receives property tax revenue, accounted for about \$250 million of the city's total \$773 million budget this year, according to the news release. Within the general fund, 64% of expenses go to employee wages and benefits, while the remaining 36% goes toward operational costs for city services.

The general fund pays for city services including public safety, street maintenance, parks, pools, libraries, public health efforts, and planning and development.



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TenHaken's announcement came on the same day as a meeting of the Legislature's Comprehensive Property Tax Task Force. The task force is studying additional ways to lower property taxes, with an eye toward proposing legislation next winter.

The mayor alluded to those efforts in his news release.

"In the end, it's pretty simple," TenHaken said. "An imposed property tax reduction or elimination without an alternate stable revenue source will lead to a reduction in the current level of city services Sioux Falls residents receive."

TenHaken said he has worked with city departments to find targeted savings and avoid across-the-board cuts. The mayor will make a 2026 budget presentation at 3 p.m. July 24 at Carnegie Town Hall, 235 W. 10th St. The Sioux Falls City Council will consider the proposed 2026 budget in September.

## Proposed Sioux Falls budget cuts

A news release from the city of Sioux Falls said Mayor Paul TenHaken and department heads have so far identified \$6 million of reductions for the 2026 proposed budget, including:

- General Government and Operations

- Part-time and consulting alignment.

- Full-time workforce (3 FTEs eliminated: Mayor's Office (1), Attorney's Office (1), and Communications (1)).

- Reduction of funding for subsidy agreements.

- Culture and Recreation

- Library hours of service reduction for Sioux Falls and Brandon locations (up to two hours per day).

- Outdoor pool closures after the first weekend in August.

- Reimagine Midco Aquatics concession offerings.

- Evolve the playground recreation program to incorporate the mobile recreation unit.

- Phased closure of non-refrigerated outdoor ice rinks.

- Streets, Planning and Development

- Alignment of de-icing materials.

- Phasing in city-owned motor graders.

- Extend equipment replacement cycles and reduce equipment rentals.

- Credit card fees shifting to customers who choose to use this form of payment.

- Public Safety and Health

- Public Health Grants expired (3 public health full-time employees reduced).

- Health clinic collaboration with community partners and streamline citywide code enforcement.

- Police and Fire overtime reduction strategies.

- Police tracking team and grant-funded coordinator eliminated; training reduced.

- Fire program supplies and training reduced.

## Trump, 79, has 'benign' vein condition; bruised hand blamed on handshaking, aspirin

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - JULY 17, 2025 5:09 PM

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has been diagnosed with chronic venous insufficiency, the White House announced Thursday.

The condition is "benign and common" for people above age 70, U.S. Navy Capt. Sean Barbabella, the president's physician, wrote in a memo regarding the president's health.

The 79-year-old president underwent a "comprehensive examination, including diagnostic vascular studies," after he noticed mild swelling in his lower legs, the memo said.

The condition happens when veins in the leg struggle to get blood to flow back to the heart, according to Johns Hopkins Medicine.

In the memo, Barbabella specified that "there was no evidence of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) or arterial



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disease," and results from lab testing "were within normal limits." Trump also underwent an echocardiogram, in which "no signs of heart failure, renal impairment, or systemic illness were identified."

Barbabella also elaborated on recent photographs depicting minor bruising on the back of the president's hand, saying "this is consistent with minor soft tissue irritation from frequent handshaking and the use of aspirin, which is taken as part of a standard cardiovascular prevention regimen."

The physician noted that "President Trump remains in excellent health." The memo did not detail any methods for treatment.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt, who read aloud the physician's note at a Thursday briefing, said the mild swelling in Trump's legs is not causing him any discomfort.

"No discomfort from the president at all, and you probably all see that on a day-to-day basis, he's working around the clock," she said.

*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.*

## Thune, Rounds vote yes as US Senate moves to claw back funding for NPR, PBS, foreign aid

**Bill goes back to House; SD Public Broadcasting says it stands to lose \$2.2 million**

**BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JULY 17, 2025 7:09 AM**

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate agreed to legislation early Thursday that will cancel \$9 billion in previously approved funding for public broadcasting and various foreign aid accounts, another victory for the Trump administration.

The 51-48 mostly party-line vote at about 2:30 a.m. sends the bill back to the House, where GOP lawmakers in that chamber would have to clear the final version for President Donald Trump's signature before a Friday deadline.

Maine Sen. Susan Collins and Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski were the only Republicans to vote against passing the measure, which was opposed by all Democrats present and voting.

Democratic Sen. Tina Smith of Minnesota was absent, and her staff said on social media that after she began to feel unwell Wednesday and saw the Capitol physician, she went to George Washington University Hospital, where "out of an abundance of caution, they are keeping her overnight."

Murkowski voiced concerns with the legislation during a floor speech, saying the White House's request lacked detail and could have negative repercussions around the world.

"We've got big, broad categories, but I haven't been given the comfort, if you will, that we're not impacting maternal and child health; that we're not impacting HIV/AIDS; that we're not impacting nutrition programs and programs related to tuberculosis, malaria, polio, neglected tropical disease, pandemic prevention, family planning," Murkwoski said.

"I think that we are entitled to have that level of detail when these funds that we have authorized, that we have appropriated to are now being clawed back. I don't think that that is too much to ask," she said.

Murkowski said the right approach to addressing some conservatives' perception of left-leaning bias at National Public Radio shouldn't be to completely eliminate funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which funds both public radio and television.

The impact on local communities in rural areas, she said, could be significant, given that many people rely on their stations for emergency alerts related to tsunamis and other forms of extreme weather as well as educational programs.

Missouri Republican Sen. Eric Schmitt, who managed the bill, said the cancellations were intended to "restore some fiscal sanity" that's needed after "bureaucrats have betrayed the trust of the American people" by spending foreign aid dollars on programs he described as "offensive."

"What this bill is about is to test the will of this chamber — if we can actually move forward on what the American people sent us here to do, which is to find waste, to find fraud and find abuse," Schmitt said.

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"And also to realign the taxpayer dollars that go out the door with actual American interests."

The win in the Senate for the GOP and Trump followed approval on July 1 of a massive tax and spending cut package he had advocated.

## Two years of federal funds taken back

The rescissions bill will claw back \$1.1 billion in previously approved spending for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which contributes funding to NPR, the Public Broadcasting Service and hundreds of local stations throughout the country. That money was slated to cover the fiscal year set to begin Oct. 1 and the following year.

The legislation also cancels about \$8 billion in foreign aid spending that Congress had appropriated for dozens of programs, including global health initiatives.

Senate Republicans opted to preserve full funding for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR.

South Dakota Republican Sen. Mike Rounds secured a handshake deal with White House budget director Russ Vought to transfer \$9.4 million from an undisclosed account within the Interior Department to Native American radio stations. But that wasn't included in the actual bill.

Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota and Wisconsin all hold public broadcasting stations that will receive a piece of that funding, according to Rounds' office.

## Lack of details

North Carolina Republican Sen. Thom Tillis used floor debate to caution the White House budget office against going too far with the rescissions included in the bill and scolded the administration for not giving Congress more detail about what it wants to cut.

"The only time that we've had a successful rescissions package in modern history was 1992," Tillis said, adding that request was approved, in part, because it was sent to Congress with "very detailed lists of specific programs that were going to be cut."

The request this year, Tillis said, doesn't include nearly that level of information. But he said he's willing to vote for it anyway, giving the president and the Office of Management and Budget "the benefit of the doubt that they're going to be responsible cuts."

Tillis said he was assured the rescissions wouldn't affect a \$200 million account that provides non-military aid to Ukraine or foreign aid accounts like the one funding maternal and child health programs at a Sudanese refugee camp he visited earlier this year.

"However, if we find out that some of these programs that we've communicated should be out of bounds, that advisers to the president decide that they're going to cut anyway, then there will be a reckoning for that," Tillis said.

## 'It did not have to be this way'

Washington Sen. Patty Murray, the top Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, warned Republicans that unilaterally cutting funding approved through bipartisan bills could upend the annual government funding process.

"It did not have to be this way and it still does not have to be this way," Murray said. "In fact if Republicans come to their senses and vote this down, we can still go a different route. We can do what we have always done and consider bipartisan rescissions as part of our annual appropriations process."

Congress must pass some sort of bipartisan funding bill before the start of the new fiscal year on Oct. 1, otherwise there will be a partial government shutdown.

Murray also said that "cutting these investments is just downright wrong."

"We should not be voting to let children starve or die from preventable diseases. We should not be voting to go back on our word to the world," Murray said. "Saving a couple pennies is not worth losing our

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credibility or causing millions of needless deaths across the globe. It is not even close.”

Democrats introduced a series of amendments to change portions of the bill related to public broadcasting funding and foreign aid, but did not succeed.

## House Republicans up next

The reworked bill now goes back to the House, where GOP leaders in that chamber need nearly all their members to support the changes made in the Senate.

If the House cannot meet the Friday deadline, the White House budget office would be required to spend the funding it included in its original rescissions request, which it released in early June.

The House voted 214-212 earlier this year to send the original bill to the Senate, where GOP lawmakers raised concerns about various elements, including how reducing foreign aid spending would impact America’s leadership among adversarial countries like China and global health initiatives.

The Senate didn’t make many changes to the legislation, but did remove the proposed rescission for PEPFAR. The initiative, launched by former President George W. Bush, has saved more than 26 million lives.

The change decreased the total amount of funding that will be canceled from \$9.4 billion to about \$9 billion.

Both figures are miniscule compared to the \$6.8 trillion the federal government spends each year, though this bill is meant to be the first of many the Trump administration hopes Republicans approve in the months and years ahead.

## SD’s votes, SDPB impact

### FROM SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

Majority Leader John Thune and Sen. Mike Rounds, Republicans from South Dakota, each voted in favor of canceling \$9 billion in previously approved funding for public broadcasting and various foreign aid accounts.

Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, voted for the bill previously in the House, where the legislation now goes for consideration of the Senate’s changes.

The bill would cause South Dakota Public Broadcasting to lose \$2.2 million of annual funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which is 20% of SDPB’s budget. The organization has said it would try to raise the money from donors and business sponsors, but in the short term, “the loss of federal funding would very likely result in 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.”

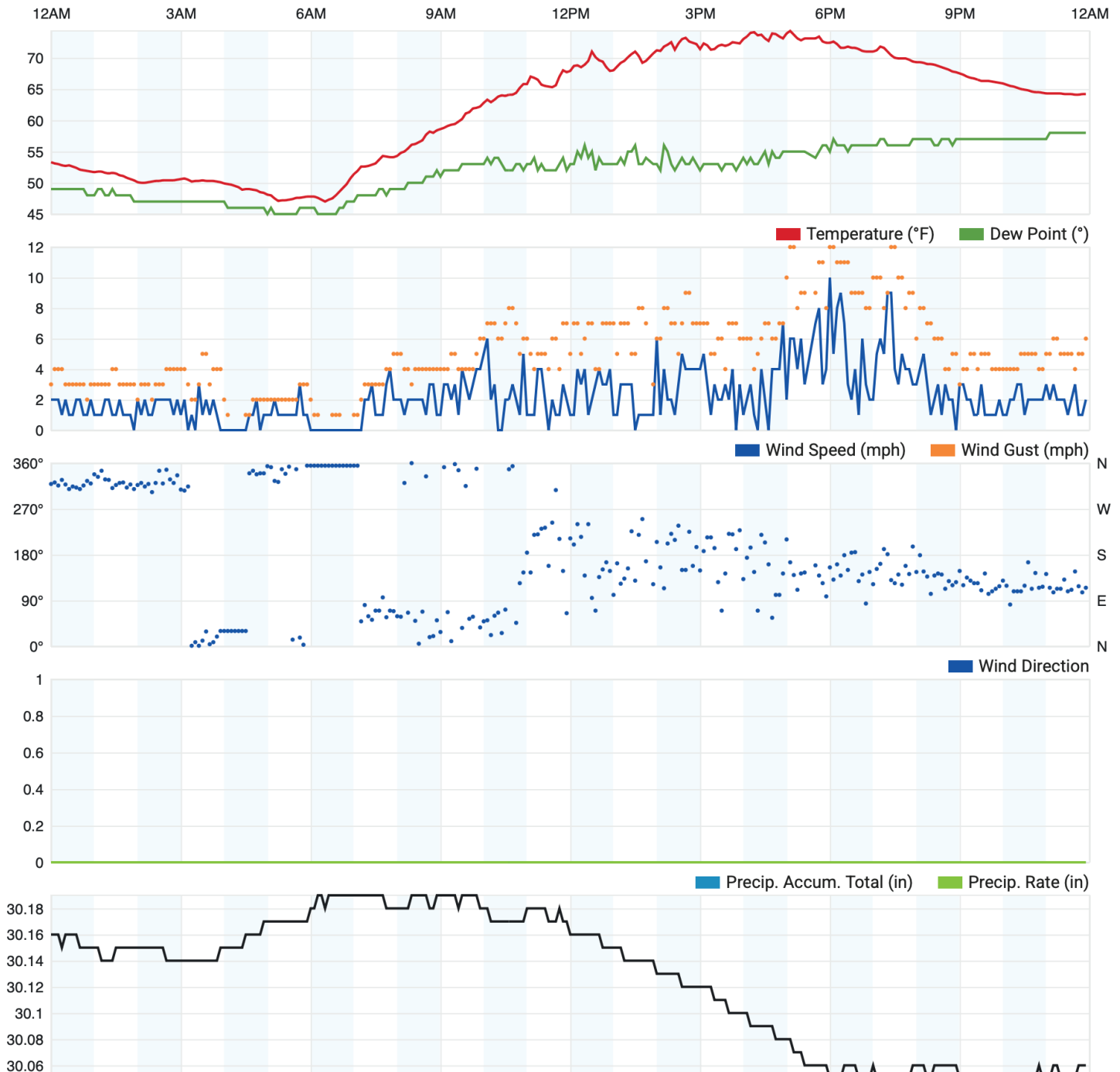
*Jennifer covers the nation’s capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

July 17, 2025

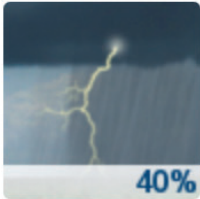




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Today



High: 77 °F

Chance  
T-storms

Tonight



Low: 58 °F

Mostly Cloudy

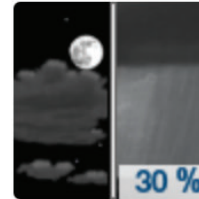
Saturday



High: 75 °F

Partly Sunny

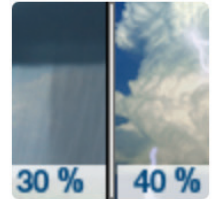
Saturday Night



Low: 59 °F

Partly Cloudy  
then Chance  
Showers

Sunday



High: 79 °F

Chance  
Showers then  
Chance  
T-storms

## THREAT ASSESSMENT

### HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

2

WHAT THIS MEANS:  
Isolated to Scattered Severe  
Storms Possible

Primarily between  
4-9 PM

### PRIMARY THREATS



LARGE HAIL  
to 1" in diameter



DAMAGING  
WIND GUSTS  
to 60 mph

### SECONDARY THREATS

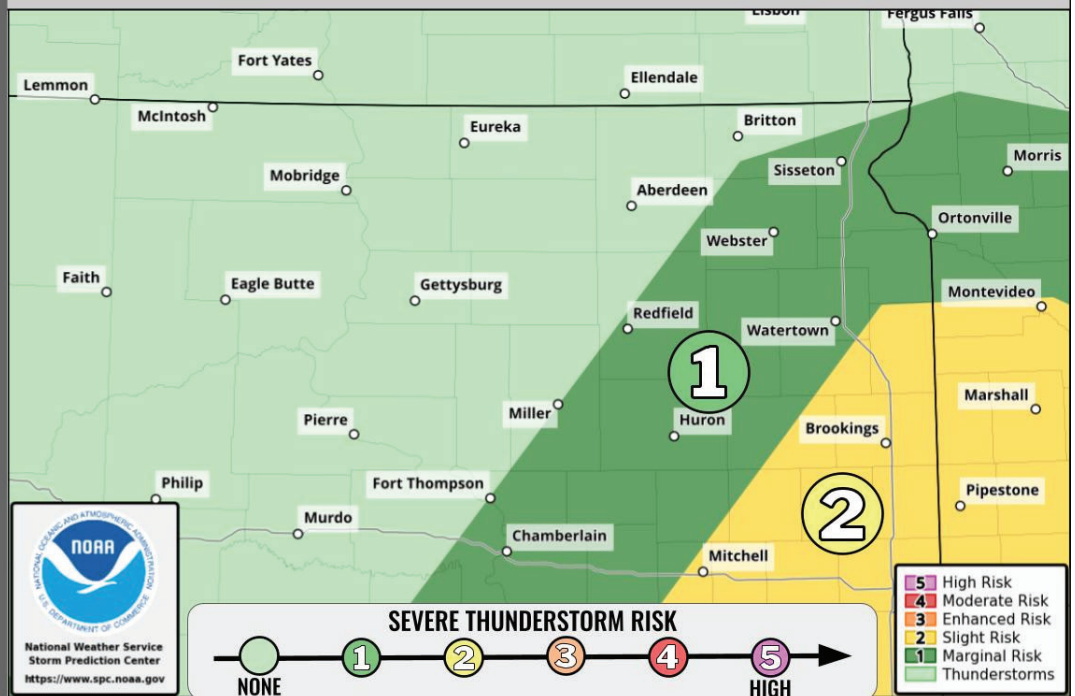


ISOLATED  
TORNADO(ES)  
POSSIBLE



HEAVY  
RAINFALL

## Marginal to Slight Risk For Severe Storms Today (July 18th)



There is a marginal (level 1 out of 5) to slight (level 2 out of 5) risk for isolated to scattered severe storms this afternoon into the evening over south central and eastern South Dakota. The main threats are large hail (about 1" in diameter) and a localized threat of wind gusts up to 60 mph. A tornado or two is also possible over southeastern SD.

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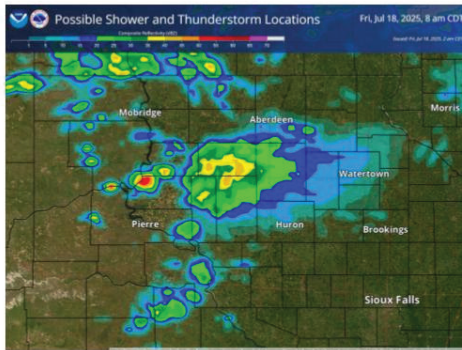
## General Timing And Coverage Of Storms Today

July 18, 2025  
4:12 AM

Model Estimated Timing and Locations of Thunderstorms (CDT)

### 7 AM - 10 AM

*Scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms are expected to be moving east across portions of central SD and into eastern SD*



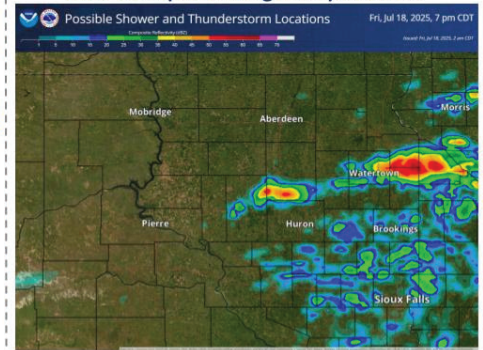
### 12 PM - 3 PM

*Isolated to Scattered showers and thunderstorms will linger over northeast SD as they continue to push off to the east.*



### 4 PM - 9 PM

*Scattered thunderstorms redevelop and intensify over eastern SD and move to the east-southeast. **This is the primary time of the severe threat, with 1" hail and 60 mph wind gusts possible.***



**Make sure to have multiple ways to receive weather warnings!**

These are model simulated snapshots of potential timing/location. Actual timing/location of storms may vary.



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Initial showers and thunderstorms will be over central SD this morning, then continue to move east through the early afternoon. Additional thunderstorms may redevelop this afternoon between 4-9pm (30-50% chance). The primary severe threat is this afternoon with the storms in eastern SD.



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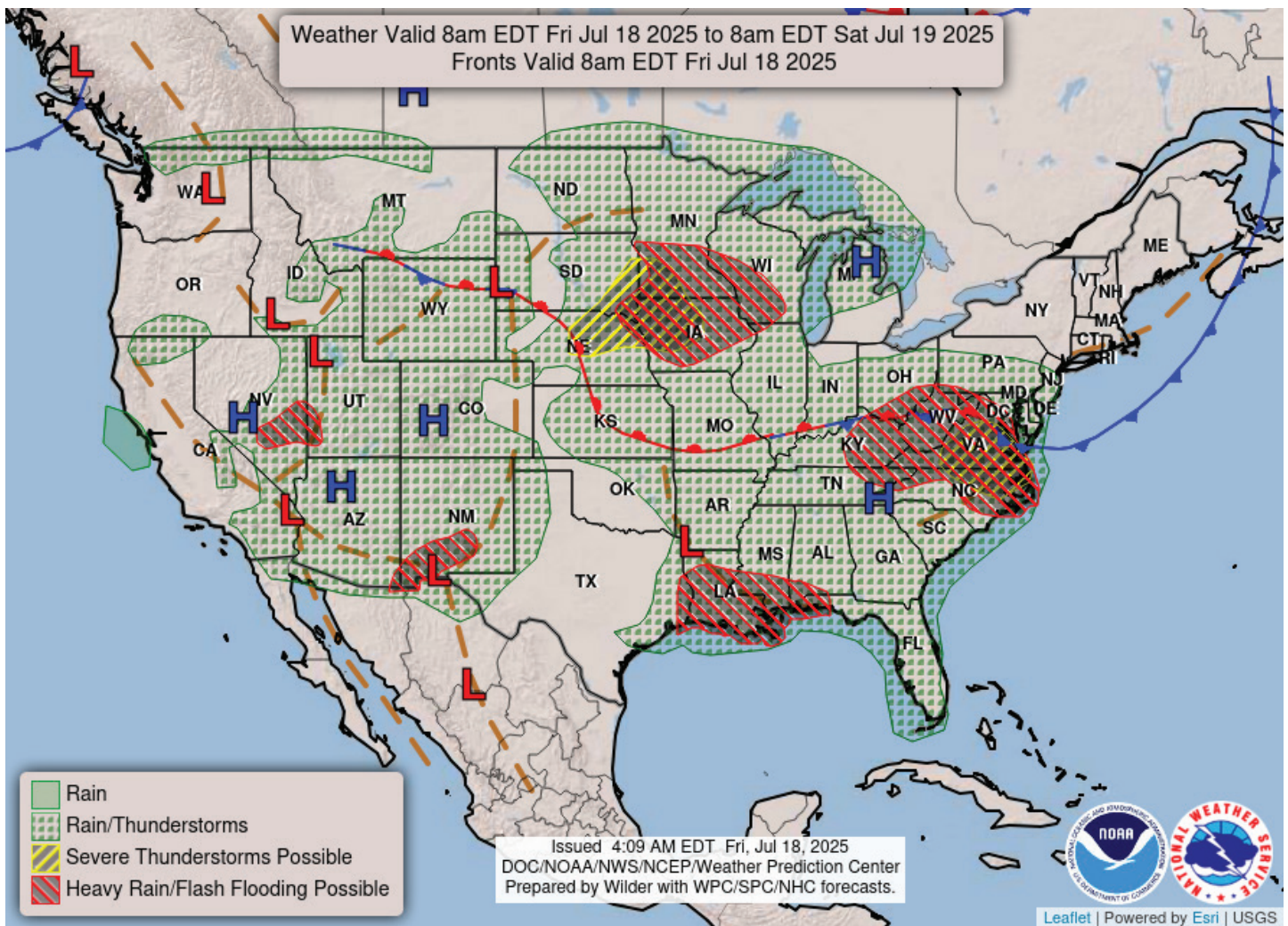
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp:** 74 °F at 5:04 PM  
**Heat Index:** 74 °F at 4:15 PM  
**Low Temp:** 47 °F at 6:20 AM  
**Wind:** 13 mph at 7:23 PM  
**Precip:** : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 16 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 106 in 1936  
Record Low: 40 in 1915  
Average High: 85  
Average Low: 60  
Average Precip in July.: 1.99  
Precip to date in July: 3.72  
Average Precip to date: 13.00  
Precip Year to Date: 13.84  
Sunset Tonight: 9:17:09 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:01:16 am



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## Today in Weather History

July 18, 1883: An estimated F3 tornado moved southeast from south of Redfield to north of Hitchcock, to 6 miles southeast of Crandon in Spink County. At least one farm house was destroyed and swept away. Three people were killed on one farm.

July 18, 1986: In the afternoon, an F2 tornado that touched down in the northern suburbs of Minneapolis became one of the most observed and photographed tornadoes ever. The detailed coverage included video from a Minnesota DOT traffic camera and a remarkable aerial video taken from a helicopter by a television camera crew. The tornado began in Brooklyn Park and moved slowly northeast, causing light to moderate damage. It then turned east and slowed as it crossed the Mississippi River. Also on this day, an F2 tornado touched down two miles southeast of Bryant, in Hamlin County. This tornado traveled near Dolph Creek and moved east along the creek to the Lake Norden area. The tornado damaged many trees and destroyed a barn. A second F2 tornado touched down three miles west of Toronto and moved south-east. The tornado destroyed a barn, silo, and six other buildings and caused extensive damage to farm equipment on a farm one mile south and a half mile west Astoria.

July 18, 2008: Severe thunderstorms developed across parts of central and north-central South Dakota bringing large hail up to the size of golf balls and damaging winds to near 80 mph. Some tree, vehicle, and building damage occurred with some of the storms. Eighty mph winds or higher brought down many branches along with some trees in Fort Pierre. Power was cut off for parts of Fort Pierre when branches fell on power lines. Several truck trailers and feed silos were tipped onto their sides by the high winds. Also, some buildings were damaged. A loaded train was pushed down the tracks almost a quarter of a mile by the strong winds. Seventy mph winds or greater brought down many tree branches along with some trees in Pierre. There were power outages in Pierre along with some buildings receiving damage. Damaging thunderstorm winds also downed six power poles between Sully Buttes and Onida knocking power out to over 800 homes in and around Onida.

64: The great fire of Rome breaks out and destroys much of the city on this day. Despite the well-known stories, there is no evidence that the Roman emperor, Nero, either started the fire or played the fiddle while it burned. The fire began in the slums of a district south of the legendary Palatine Hill. The area's homes burned very quickly, and the fire spread north, fueled by high winds.

1889 - A cloudburst in West Virginia along the small creeks in Wirt County, Jackson County and Wood County claimed twenty lives. Rockport, WV, reported nineteen inches of rain in two hours and ten minutes that Thursday evening. Tygart Creek rose 22 feet in one hour, and villages were swept away on Tygart, Slate, Tucker, and Sandy Creeks. (The Weather Channel)

1936 - The all time record high temperature for the state of Kansas was set when a 121-degree high temperature fried Fredonia. (US National Weather Service Wichita)

1942 - A record deluge occurred at Smethport in northern Pennsylvania, with 30.7 inches in just six hours. The downpours and resultant flooding in Pennsylvania were devastating. (David Ludlum)

1986 - One of the most photo-genic tornadoes touched down in the northern suburbs of Minneapolis, MN, during the late afternoon. The very slow moving tornado actually appeared live on the evening news by way of an aerial video taken by the KARE-TV helicopter crew. The tornado, unlike most, was quite the prima donna, staying visible to tens of thousands of persons for thirty minutes. It was moderate in intensity, with winds of 113-157 mph, and caused 650 thousand dollars damage. (Storm Data)

1987 - Cool weather prevailed in the western U.S. Seven cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Alamosa, CO, with a reading of 38 degrees. The low of 52 degrees at Bakersfield, CA, was a record for July. Up to eight inches of snow covered the Northern Sierra Nevada Range of California from a storm the previous day. During that storm, winds gusting to 52 mph at Slide Mountain, NV, produced a wind chill reading of 20 degrees below zero. Susanville, CA, reached 17 degrees that previous day, Blue Canyon, CA, dipped to a July record of 36 degrees, and the high of 44 degrees at Klamath Falls, OR, smashed their previous record for July by ten degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1996: A massive rainstorm in north central and northeast Illinois led to widespread flooding. Aurora reported 16.94 inches of rain, establishing a state record for the most rain in a single day. Other heavy totals included 13.60 inches at Joliet, 9.24 inches in Wheaton, 8.09 inches in DeKalb, and 7.82 inches at Elgin. This event is often called "the second most damaging weather disaster in Illinois History."



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Entertaining young children often provides moments of enduring joy and memories that last a lifetime.

I often think of those days when I played "Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?" with my sons. We made noises and faces and even built homes out of blankets and chairs. The big bad wolf tried to create problems for the three little pigs but was never able to harm those inside their home. They were prepared to face the threats of the big bad wolf.

We often do the same — making preparation to face the threats and uncertainties of life. We feel strong in our own strength and believe without a doubt that we can, no matter what, withstand any temptation in life.

Solomon, however, presents another way of responding to the threat of evil: be cautious or timid! When temptation threatens us and we feel incapable of rejecting it by ourselves, we are to "shun evil." Looking deeper into these two little words we find that those who shun evil or are timid because they feel weak or are unable to reject it in their own strength, have a built-in alarm: the fear of the Lord! When they realize that they must face God or what could destroy them, they respond in fear and turn to God for His strength.

I often marvel at the countless alarm systems that are available to protect our lives, homes, and identities from fraud and theft, danger and destruction. Some provide constant surveillance through an electronic monitoring system. Others can be self-installed and are battery-operated. Both are designed to warn of impending danger.

We have something better, stronger, more certain, and always available: God's wisdom, strength, and power.

Today's Prayer: Lord, help us to be so fearful of evil that we flee from it in fear rather than standing, fighting and failing. May we look to You to save us by calling on You.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Scripture: "The wise fear the Lord and shun evil, but a fool is hotheaded and yet feels secure." Proverbs 14:16

*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 DRAW: 16 Hrs 25 Mins 52 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 DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 40 Mins 52 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.17.25

1 7 9 10 32 8

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 55 Mins 52 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.16.25

17 23 26 29 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$59,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 55 Mins 52 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.16.25

8 23 42 56 68 10

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 24 Mins 52 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 DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 24 Mins 52 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

### **Officials try to identify 18 bodies in deadly Iraq shopping mall fire**

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Officials struggled Friday to identify more than a dozen bodies pulled from a deadly shopping mall fire in Iraq, amid ongoing investigations into what caused the blaze.

An Iraqi medical official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to comment said the final death toll was 63, including 18 bodies that could not be identified due to the severity of the burns and would undergo DNA testing.

The Corniche Hypermarket mall in the town of Kut in Wasit province, a five-story building containing restaurants, shops and a supermarket, had opened just days before the blaze, which officials said broke out late Wednesday on the second floor in an area selling perfume and cosmetics.

Civil defense crews were able to rescue 45 people from the burning building. Officials said that most of those who died were trapped on the upper floors.

While the cause of the fire has not yet been determined, officials blamed lack of safety standards in the building for the scale of the tragedy.

Provincial Gov. Mohammed al-Miyahi has said that the building owner did not implement fire safety measures and had not applied for required permits.

The provincial council of Wasit on Thursday voted to form committees to carry out building safety inspections and to suspend the director of Kut municipality and the director of occupational safety until investigations into the fire are complete.

Al-Miyahi said Thursday that legal complaints had been filed against the building owner and shopping center owner, who could not be reached for comment. The governor said in a press conference that the son of the shopping center owner and other members of his family were among the victims in the blaze.

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.

### **House Republicans grasp for response to demands for transparency in Epstein case**

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans were grasping late Thursday to formulate a response to the Trump administration's handling of records in the Jeffrey Epstein sex trafficking case, ultimately putting forward a resolution that carries no legal weight but nodded to the growing demand for greater transparency.

The House resolution, which could potentially be voted on next week, will do practically nothing to force the Justice Department to release more records in the case. Still, it showed how backlash from the Republican base is putting pressure on the Trump administration and roiling GOP lawmakers.

The House was held up for hours Thursday from final consideration of President Donald Trump's request for about \$9 billion in government funding cuts because GOP leaders were trying to respond to demands from their own ranks that they weigh in on the Epstein files. In the late evening they settled on the resolution as an attempt to simultaneously placate calls from the far-right for greater transparency and satisfy Trump, who has called the issue a "hoax" that his supporters should forget about.

Yet the House resolution was the latest demonstration of how practically no one is moving on from Attorney General Pam Bondi's promises to publicly release documents related to Epstein. Since he was found dead in his New York jail cell in August 2019 following his arrest on sex trafficking charges, the

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well-connected financier has loomed large among conservatives and conspiracy theorists who have now lashed out at Trump and Bondi for declining to release more files in the case.

"The House Republicans are for transparency, and they're looking for a way to say that they agree with the White House. We agree with the president. Everything he said about that, all the credible evidence should come out," House Speaker Mike Johnson said Thursday afternoon.

Democrats vehemently decried the resolution's lack of force. They have advanced their own legislation, with support from nine Republicans, that would require the Justice Department to release more information on the case.

Rep. Jim McGovern, who led the Democrats' debate against the Republican resolution Thursday night, called it a "glorified press release" and "a fig leaf so they can move on from this issue."

Under pressure from his own GOP members, Johnson had to demonstrate action on the Epstein files or risk having Republicans support the Democratic measures that would force the release of nearly all documents.

"The American people simply need to know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said at a news conference. "Democrats didn't put this into the public domain. The conspiracy theory provocateur-in-chief Donald Trump is the one, along with his extreme MAGA Republican associates, who put this whole thing into the public domain for years. And now they are reaping what they have sown."

Still, Democrats, who hold minorities in both chambers, have relished the opportunity to make Republicans repeatedly block their attempts to force the Justice Department to release the documents.

Trump in recent years has suggested he would release more information about the investigation into Epstein, especially amid speculation over a supposed list of Epstein's clients.

In February, the Justice Department released some government documents regarding the case, but there were no new revelations. After a months-long review of additional evidence, the department earlier this month released a video meant to prove that Epstein killed himself, but said no other files related to the case would be made public.

A White House spokeswoman said Thursday that Trump would not recommend a special counsel in the case. But later Thursday, the president said he had asked Bondi to seek the release of testimony from grand jury proceedings in the case.

Rep. Ro Khanna, a California Democrat, said that process would likely only produce limited information, but added that it showed that "the president is hearing the American people."

## North Korea bans foreign tourists to newly opened beach resort

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea is banning the entry of foreign tourists to a recently opened mega beach resort, a move that dims prospects for the complex that leader Kim Jong Un hailed it as "one of the greatest successes this year."

DPR Korea Tour, a website run by North Korea's tourism authorities, said in a notice Friday that the eastern coastal Wonsan-Kalma tourist complex "is temporarily not receiving foreign tourists." It gave no further details including why a ban was established or how long it would last.

North Korea says the complex can accommodate nearly 20,000 guests. The resort opened to domestic tourists July 1 before receiving a small group of Russian tourists last week. Observers expected North Korea to open the resort to Chinese tourists while largely blocking other international tourists.

Ban comes after visit by Russia's top diplomat

The announcement came after Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov flew to the complex to meet Kim and Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui for talks last weekend.

North Korea and Russia have sharply expanded military and other cooperation in recent years, with North Korea supplying weapons and troops to back Russia's war against Ukraine. During a meeting with Choe, Lavrov promised to take steps to support Russian travel to the zone.



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"I am sure that Russian tourists will be increasingly eager to come here," he said.

But experts say North Korea likely decided to halt foreigner travels to the zone because of a newspaper article by a Russian reporter who travelled with Lavrov that implied North Koreans at the zone appeared to be mobilized by authorities and not real tourists.

"The North Korean government is believed to have determined that it would face some negative consequences when it opens the site to foreigners," said Oh Gyeong-seob, an analyst at Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification.

Oh said the ban would include Russians, but the North Korea-focused NK News website, citing tour groups specializing in North Korea trips, said Russians won't likely be targeted.

Analyst Lee Sangkeun of Seoul's Institute for National Security Strategy said the ban could be associated with difficulties in recruiting Russian tourists because many would consider North Korea too far away and the trip too expensive.

Ban likely won't remain for long

Experts say North Korea must open the Wonsan-Kalma zone, the country's biggest tourist complex, to Russian and Chinese tourists, given what was likely a huge construction and operational expenditure from the country's tight budget.

"If foreign tourists aren't allowed to the site, no Russian rubles, Chinese yuans and dollars won't come in. Then, North Korea can't break even and it has to shut down the resort," said Ahn Chan-il, head of the World Institute for North Korean Studies think tank in Seoul.

Kim has said the site would be "one of the greatest successes this year" and "the proud first step" in tourism development. North Korea's state media reports the Wonsan-Kalma site has been crowded with local tourists.

The first group of 15 Russian tourists arrived in the resort July 11 after visiting Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, NK News reported earlier this week.

"It was magnificent. Everything is new, clean and stunning," Russian tourist Nina Svirida said in the report.

North Korea has been slowly easing the curbs imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic and reopening its borders in phases. But the country hasn't said if it would fully resume international tourism.

Chinese group tours, which made up more than 90% of visitors before the pandemic, remain stalled. In February, North Korea allowed a small group of international tourists to visit the northeastern city of Rason, only to stop the program in less than a month.

## House gives final approval to Trump's \$9 billion cut to public broadcasting and foreign aid

By KEVIN FREKING and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House gave final approval to President Donald Trump's request to claw back about \$9 billion for public broadcasting and foreign aid early Friday as Republicans intensified their efforts to target institutions and programs they view as bloated or out of step with their agenda.

The vote marked the first time in decades that a president has successfully submitted such a rescissions request to Congress, and the White House suggested it won't be the last. Some Republicans were uncomfortable with the cuts, yet supported them anyway, wary of crossing Trump or upsetting his agenda.

The House passed the bill by a vote of 216-213. It now goes to Trump for his signature.

"We need to get back to fiscal sanity and this is an important step," said House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La.

Opponents voiced concerns not only about the programs targeted, but about Congress ceding its spending powers to the executive branch as investments approved on a bipartisan basis were being subsequently canceled on party-line votes. They said previous rescission efforts had at least some bipartisan buy-in and described the Republican package as unprecedented.

No Democrats supported the measure when it passed the Senate, 51-48, in the early morning hours Thursday. Final passage in the House was delayed for several hours as Republicans wrestled with their

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response to Democrats' push for a vote on the release of Jeffrey Epstein files.

The package cancels about \$1.1 billion for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and nearly \$8 billion for a variety of foreign aid programs, many designed to help countries where drought, disease and political unrest endure.

The effort to claw back a sliver of federal spending came just weeks after Republicans also muscled through Trump's tax and spending cut bill without any Democratic support. The Congressional Budget Office has projected that measure will increase the U.S. debt by about \$3.3 trillion over the coming decade.

"No one is buying the notion that Republicans are actually trying to improve wasteful spending," said Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries.

A heavy blow to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting

The cancellation of \$1.1 billion for the CPB represents the full amount it is due to receive during the next two budget years.

The White House says the public media system is politically biased and an unnecessary expense.

The corporation distributes more than two-thirds 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.

Democrats were unsuccessful in restoring the funding in the Senate.

Lawmakers with large rural constituencies voiced particular concern about what the cuts to public broadcasting could mean for some local public stations in their state.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, said the stations are "not just your news — it is your tsunami alert, it is your landslide alert, it is your volcano alert."

As the Senate debated the bill Tuesday, 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.

Sen. Mike Rounds, R-S.D., said he secured a deal from the White House that some money 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."

Inside the cuts to foreign aid

Among the foreign aid cuts are \$800 million for a program that provides emergency shelter, water and family reunification for refugees 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 that the Republican administration's animus toward foreign aid programs would hurt America's standing in the world and create a vacuum for China to fill.

"This is not an America first bill. It's a China first bill because of the void that's being created all across the world," Jeffries said.

The White House argued that many of the cuts would incentivize other nations to step up and do more to respond to humanitarian crises and that the rescissions best served the American taxpayer.

"The money that we're clawing back in this rescissions package is the people's money. We ought not to forget that," said Rep. Virginia Foxx, R-N.C., chair of the House Rules Committee.

After objections from several Republicans, Senate 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 Republican 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 to work together to fund the nation's priorities.

Triggered by the official rescissions request from the White House, the legislation only needed a simple majority vote to advance in the Senate instead of the 60 votes usually required to break a filibuster. That meant Republicans could use their 53-47 majority to pass it along party lines.

Two Republican senators, Murkowski and Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, joined with Democrats in voting against the bill, though a few other Republicans also raised concerns about the process.

"Let's not make a habit of this," said Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Roger Wicker of Mississippi, 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.

Russ Vought, the director of the Office of Management and Budget, said the imminent successful passage of the rescissions shows "enthusiasm" for getting the nation's fiscal situation under control.

"We're happy to go to great lengths to get this thing done," he said during a breakfast with reporters hosted by the Christian Science Monitor.

In response to questions about the relatively small size of the cuts -- \$9 billion -- Vought said that was because "I knew it would be hard" to pass in Congress. Vought said another rescissions package is 'likely to come soon.'

## **Syria's Druze find bodies in the streets while searching for loved ones after days of clashes**

By ABDELRAHMAN SHAHEEN and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

JARAMANA, Syria (AP) — A Syrian Druze woman living in the United Arab Emirates frantically tried to keep in touch with her family in her hometown in southern Syria as clashes raged there over the past days.

Her mother, father and sister sent videos of their neighbors fleeing as fighters moved in. The explosions from shelling were non-stop, hitting near their house. Her family took shelter in the basement. When she reached them later in a video call, they said her father was missing. He had gone out during a lull to check the situation and never returned.

"Now I only pray. That's all I can do," she told The Associated Press at the time.

Hours later, they learned he had been shot and killed by a sniper. The woman spoke on condition of anonymity fearing that using her name would put her surviving family and friends at risk.

A ceasefire went into effect late Wednesday, easing days of brutal clashes in Sweida. Now, members of its Druze community who fled or went into hiding are returning to search for loved ones and count their losses. They are finding homes looted and bloodied bodies of civilians in the streets.

### **'Systemic killings'**

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

At least 600 people — combatants and civilians on both sides — were killed in four days of clashes, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor. It said the dead included more than 80 civilians, mostly Druze, who were rounded up by fighters and collectively shot to death in what the monitor called "field executions."

"These are not individual acts but systemic," the Observatory's director Rami Abdul-Rahman told the AP. "All the violations are there. You can see from the bodies that are all over the streets in Sweida clearly show they're shot in the head."

In response, Druze militias have targeted Bedouin families in revenge attacks since the ceasefire was reached. Footage shared on Syrian state media shows Bedouin families putting their belongings in trucks and fleeing with reports of renewed skirmishes in those areas. There was no word on casualties in those attacks.

Most of the Syrian Druze who spoke to the AP requested anonymity, fearing they and their families could be targeted.



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The Druze religious sect is an offshoot of Ismailism, a branch of Shiite Islam. More than half of the roughly 1 million Druze worldwide live in Syria. The others live in Lebanon and Israel, including in the Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 Mideast War and annexed in 1981.

They largely celebrated the downfall in December of Syrian autocrat Bashar Assad but were divided over interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa's Sunni Islamist rule. The latest violence has left the community more skeptical of Syria's new leadership and doubtful of peaceful coexistence.

Gunned down in the street

One Syrian-American Druze told the AP of his fear as he watched the clashes from the United States and tried to account for his family and friends whom he had seen in a recent trip to his native city Sweida.

Despite internet and communications breakdowns, he tracked down his family. His mother and brother fled because their home was shelled and raided, he said. Their belongings were stole, windows shattered. Their neighbors' house was burned down. Two other neighbors were killed, one by shelling, another by stray bullets, he said.

He also pored over online videos of the fighting, finding a harrowing footage.

It showed gunmen in military uniform forcing a number of men in civilian clothes to kneel in the street in a well-known roundabout in Sweida. The gunmen then spray the men with automatic fire, their bodies dropping to the ground. The footage was seen by the AP.

To his horror, he recognized the men. One was a close family friend — another Syrian American on a visit to Sweida from the U.S. The others were the friend's brother, father, three uncles and a cousin. Friends he reached told him that government forces had raided the house where they were all staying and took them outside and shot them.

"We affirm that protecting your rights and freedoms is among our top priorities," al-Sharaa said in a speech broadcast Thursday, where he addressed the Druze people in Syria, promising to hold perpetrators of civilian killings to account.

But some rights groups accused Syria's interim government of systematic sectarian violence, similar to that inflicted on the Alawite religious minority in the coastal province of Latakia in the aftermath of Assad's fall as the new government tried to quell a counterinsurgency there.

Footage widely circulated on social media showed some of the carnage. One video shows a living room with several bodies on the floor and bullet holes in the walls and sofa.

In another, there are at least nine bloodied bodies in one room of the home of a family that took in people fleeing the fighting. Portraits of Druze notables are visible, smashed on the floor.

Searching for her husband

Evelyn Azzam, a Druze woman, is searching the Damascus suburb of Jaramana, trying to find out what happened to her husband, Robert Kiwan.

Last week, the 23-year-old Kiwan left home in Jaramana early as he does every day to commute to his job in Sweida.

He got caught up in the chaos when the clashes erupted. Azzam was on the phone with him as government forces questioned him and his coworkers. She heard a gunshot when one of the coworkers raised his voice. She heard her husband trying to appeal to the soldiers.

"He was telling them that they are from the Druze of Sweida, but have nothing to do with the armed groups," the 20-year-old Azzam said.

Then she heard another gunshot; her husband was shot in the hip. An ambulance took him to a hospital, where she later learned he underwent an operation. But she hasn't heard anything since and doesn't know if he survived.

Back in the U.S., the Syrian-American said he was relieved that his family is safe but the video of his friend's family being gunned down in the street filled him with "disbelief, betrayal, rage."

He said his family and friends protested against Assad, celebrated his downfall and wanted to give al-Sharaa's rule a chance. He said he hadn't wanted to believe that the new Syrian army — which emerged from al-Sharaa's insurgent forces — was made up of Islamic militants.

But after the violence in Latakia and now in Sweida, he sees the new army as a "bunch of militias ...

with a huge majority being radicals.”

“I can’t imagine a world where I would be able to go back and integrate with these monsters,” he said.

## **Shutdowns of cellphone internet links sweep Russia, further limiting already-stifled net freedom**

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — A snappy tune by a blogger that mockingly laments his poor internet connection in the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don has gotten over a half-million views on Instagram in two weeks.

“How to say you’re from Rostov without saying a word? Show one bar of cellphone service,” Pavel Osipyan raps while walking around the city, smartphone in hand. “We have internet until 12 o’clock, and recently there’s been no connection at all. No need to be angry, just get used to it already.”

The complaints by Osipyan — unable to pay electronically for groceries, or having to use paper maps while driving — aren’t isolated to Rostov-on-Don, which borders Ukraine and, as home to Russia’s Southern Military District, is targeted frequently by drones.

In the last two months, cellphone internet shutdowns, which officials say are needed to foil Ukrainian drones, have hit dozens of Russian regions — from those near the fighting to parts of Siberia and even the Far East. Some Wi-Fi outages also have been reported.

Russians contacted by The Associated Press talked about card payments not going through, taxi and ride-sharing apps not working properly, ATMs that sometimes fail.

Experts point to the unprecedented nature of the measures and warn of far-reaching consequences in a country where the Kremlin already has significantly curtailed online freedom.

Such shutdowns in the name of security legitimize them to the public and open the door for authorities abusing the restrictions, said Anastasiya Zhyrmon, policy manager for Eastern Europe and Central Asia at the Access Now digital rights group.

A signal to regional authorities

Experts say the trend began in May, when Russia celebrated the 80th anniversary of the defeat of the Nazi Germany in World War II and foreign dignitaries flocked to Moscow for a big military parade.

The capital suffered severe disruptions of cellphone connectivity to the internet for days, and Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed those were deliberate restrictions due to regular Ukrainian drone attacks. Asked how long they’d last, he replied, “This will be done as needed.”

Russia has restricted smartphone connectivity before, with isolated instances during protests, as well as in regions bordering Ukraine.

Shutdowns in the capital, however, sent a signal to authorities across the vast country that it’s a useful tool, said lawyer Sarkis Darbinyan, founder of Russian internet freedom group Roskomsvoboda.

Ukraine’s “Operation Spiderweb” in early June, in which drones launched from containers on trucks attacked airfields deep inside Russia, made officials all the more eager to take action, Darbinyan said.

“They got really scared that drones now may appear, like a jack-in-the-box, in any Russian regions,” he told AP.

By mid-July, deliberate shutdowns spread to most of the country, according to Na Svyazi — Russian for “staying connected” — an activist group tracking internet availability.

On Tuesday, the group reported cellphone internet shutdowns in 73 of over 80 regions. In 41 of them, there were reports of broadband network outages as well, while restrictions on broadband internet occurred in six regions, while cellphone connections were fine.

Some regional officials confirmed that cellphone internet was restricted for security reasons. Nizhny Novgorod Gov. Gleb Nikitin said this month the measure will stay in place in the region east of Moscow for “as long as the threat remains.”

Asked Thursday whether such mass shutdowns were justified, Peskov said “everything that has to do with ensuring the safety of citizens, everything is justified and everything is a priority.”

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## Unpredictable disruptions

Russians from affected regions say the outages can last for hours or days; patterns also are hard to discern, with service working in one part of a city but vanishing elsewhere.

In Voronezh, near Ukraine and frequently targeted by drones, one resident said she felt like she was in “a cave” in early July with no cellphone internet or Wi-Fi in her home. The woman, who spoke to AP on condition of anonymity because of security concerns, said she was only able to get online at work the next day.

Cellphone internet in the southwestern city of Samara “goes out at the most unpredictable moments,” said Natalia, who also spoke on condition that her last name be withheld for safety reasons. Her home Wi-Fi recently also has slowed to a near halt around 11 p.m., staying that way for a few hours, she said.

Connectivity has improved recently in the Siberian city of Omsk, said Viktor Shkurenko, who owns retail stores and other businesses there. But cellphone internet service was out in his office for an entire week. A few of his smaller stores that rely on cellphone networks suffered disruptions, but nothing critical, he said.

“I don’t feel any super strong discomfort,” said Grigori Khromov of Nizhny Novgorod, Russia’s fifth-largest city where regular and widespread shutdowns were reported. “I have an office job and I work either at home or in the office and have either wire internet or Wi-Fi.”

In rural areas, small towns and villages, where cellphone internet often is the only way to get online, the situation was harder to gauge.

Pharmacies in such areas have struggled, Russian media reported and the Independent Pharmacies Association confirmed to AP. Viktoria Presnyakova, head of the association, said in a statement that prescriptions must be logged in special software, but that becomes impossible without an internet connection for weeks.

A social media user in the Belgorod region bordering Ukraine complained on Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov’s social media page that without cellphone internet and a working alarm system, village residents have to bang on a rail to warn neighbors of an attack. The authorities promised to look into improving connectivity in the area.

Authorities elsewhere also announced steps to minimize disruptions by opening Wi-Fi spots. They also are reportedly planning to establish an agency to coordinate the shutdowns, according to Izvestia, a Kremlin-backed newspaper that cited unidentified government sources. Peskov said he was unaware of the plan.

## Russia’s efforts at internet control

Russian and Ukrainian drones use cellphone internet networks to operate, so shutdowns are one way authorities try to counter the attacks, said Kateryna Stepanenko, a Russia analyst at the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War.

But it’s also part of the Kremlin’s long-term effort to rein in the internet. Authorities have actively censored online content in the last decade, blocking thousands of websites of independent media, opposition groups and human rights organizations.

After Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the government blocked major social media like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, as well as encrypted messenger platform Signal and a few other messaging apps.

Access to YouTube — wildly popular in Russia — was disrupted last year in what experts called deliberate throttling by the authorities. The Kremlin blamed YouTube owner Google for not properly maintaining its hardware in Russia.

State internet watchdogs routinely block virtual private network services that help circumvent the restrictions, and there are plans to introduce a national messenger app, expected to replace foreign ones.

Along with the shutdowns, these are part of a larger campaign “to establish control over the internet, which is something the Kremlin had failed to do 20 years prior on the same level that China did,” said the ISW’s Stepanenko.

Access Now’s Zhyrmont says it’s “very disturbing” that Russians have gotten used to living with growing internet restrictions, including shutdowns.

“This shouldn’t be modern reality,” she said.



## Trump mired in Epstein controversy as Wall Street Journal reports on 2003 letter

By ERIC TUCKER and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The controversy over President Donald Trump's handling of records from the Jeffrey Epstein investigation entered a new dimension Thursday as his administration struggles to make good on its promises to release details on the sex trafficking case involving a one-time friend of the now-president.

Trump promised a lawsuit after The Wall Street Journal described a sexually suggestive letter that the newspaper says bore Trump's name and was included in a 2003 album for Epstein's 50th birthday. Trump denied writing the letter, calling it "false, malicious, and defamatory."

It came after Trump in recent days has berated as "weaklings" supporters vying for more records from the Epstein probe, after years of courting political support from those who have stoked claims of a cover-up in the case to protect wealthy friends of Epstein, who died by suicide in 2019 awaiting trial on federal charges of trafficking of underage girls.

Trump has also shielded his attorney general from being questioned about the case after she walked back claims of the existence of a "client list" of elites who participated in Epstein's crimes, and has even taken to claiming without evidence that files were doctored by Democrats.

In an administration that prides itself on changing the narrative on negative storylines, the Epstein saga has had remarkable staying power, thanks in part to infighting at high levels of government, Trump's blistering criticism of his own base and the head-scratching mystery of why documents his own administration promised to unlock will remain buried — seemingly for good.

Thursday's disclosure — coupled with frustration from Trump-allied lawmakers on Capitol Hill — pushed Trump to abruptly reverse course and direct Attorney General Pam Bondi to try to make some of the documents in the case public.

Bondi said she would seek court permission Friday to release grand jury information, but it would require a judge's approval, and she and Trump were silent on the additional evidence collected by federal law enforcement in the sprawling investigation that Bondi last week announced she would not release.

A newly revealed letter to Epstein

The letter revealed by The Wall Street Journal was reportedly collected by disgraced British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell as part of a birthday album for Epstein years before the wealthy financier was first arrested in 2006 and subsequently had a falling-out with Trump. The letter bearing Trump's name includes text framed by the outline of what appears to be a hand-drawn naked woman and ends with, "Happy Birthday — and may every day be another wonderful secret," according to the newspaper. The outlet described the contents of the letter but did not publish a photo showing it entirely.

Maxwell was arrested in 2020 and convicted a year later on charges that she helped Epstein lure girls to be sexually abused.

Trump slammed the story in a lengthy social media post Thursday night, saying he spoke to both to the paper's owner, Rupert Murdoch, and its top editor, Emma Tucker, and told them the letter was "fake." Trump promised to sue the paper over the story, saying: "These are not my words, not the way I talk. Also, I don't draw pictures."

Vice President JD Vance said The Wall Street Journal "should be ashamed" for publishing it.

"Where is this letter? Would you be shocked to learn they never showed it to us before publishing it? Does anyone honestly believe this sounds like Donald Trump?" he wrote on X.

Trump tries to move on

The Trump administration has been struggling for nearly two weeks to contain the fallout of the Justice Department's announcement that no more Epstein evidence in the government's possession would be released to the public despite promises of transparency from Bondi. The Justice Department's reversal on

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the Epstein files not only angered Trump supporters but touched off a testy exchange at the White House last week between Bondi and FBI Deputy Director Dan Bongino that neither official has publicly addressed.

The Justice Department has yet to provide a full accounting of its reversal months after Bondi handed out binders to conservative influencers at the White House that read the "Epstein Files: Phase 1" and "the most transparent administration." Bondi earlier this week refused to answer questions from reporters about the Epstein files and her relationship with Bongino.

The White House on Thursday closed the door on calls for a further inquiry into the Epstein investigation, saying the president would not be recommending the appointment of a special counsel.

Even though his administration for months had hyped the expected release of more documents, Trump slammed his own supporters earlier this week for their furor over the Epstein files saga. Trump called it a "hoax" and tried to place blame on Democrats, accusing former Presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden, as well as former FBI Director James Comey — without evidence — of making up such documents.

Earlier Thursday, the controversy over the Epstein files had snarled the House's efforts to pass a bill that claws back \$9.4 billion in federal spending, as Democrats used procedural moves to force votes on releasing the documents in tandem with the package.

That frustrated House Republicans, who tried to forge a solution that could include a resolution supporting the release of "credible" files pertaining to Epstein and his activities.

Trump is no stranger to scrutiny

Trump himself has faced years of scrutiny over his own private life. Last year, for instance, he was convicted of felony charges in New York in connection with hush money payments meant to silence an adult film star's sex claims ahead of the 2016 presidential election. Trump has denied the relationship.

And Trump's ties to Epstein have been well-documented, though the president has not been accused of misconduct in connection with their social relationship.

Video footage unearthed by NBC News following Epstein's federal indictment in 2019 showed the two chatting at a party at Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in 1992. The video, recorded at a time when Trump was newly divorced, shows him surrounded by young women, whom NBC identified as cheerleaders for the Buffalo Bills.

It also depicts the two men standing and gesturing at the women on the dance floor.

"I knew him like everybody in Palm Beach knew him," Trump said when the video emerged. "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."

Previously released files included a 2016 deposition in which an accuser recounted spending several hours with Epstein at Trump's Atlantic City casino but didn't say if she actually met Trump and did not accuse him of any wrongdoing.

## **Felix Baumgartner, the first skydiver to fall faster than the speed of sound, dies in crash in Italy**

By COLLEEN BARRY and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — Extreme athlete Felix Baumgartner, the first skydiver to fall faster than the speed of sound during a 24-mile leap through the stratosphere more than a decade ago, died in a crash Thursday along the eastern coast of Italy. He was 56.

Italian firefighters who responded said a paraglider crashed into the side of a swimming pool in the city of Porto Sant Elpidio.

The city's mayor confirmed Baumgartner's death in a social media post.

"Our community is deeply affected by the tragic disappearance of Felix Baumgartner, a figure of global prominence, a symbol of courage and passion for extreme flight," Mayor Massimiliano Ciarpella said.

Baumgartner, known as "Fearless Felix," stunned the world in 2012 when he became the first human to break the sound barrier with only his body. He wore a pressurized suit and jumped from a capsule hoisted more than 24 miles (39 kilometers) above Earth by a giant helium balloon over New Mexico.

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The Austrian, who was part of the Red Bull Stratos team, topped out at 843.6 mph — the equivalent of 1.25 times the speed of sound — during a nine-minute descent. At one point, he went into a potentially dangerous flat spin while still supersonic, spinning for 13 seconds, his crew later said.

"When I was standing there on top of the world, you become so humble, you do not think about breaking records anymore, you do not think of about gaining scientific data. The only thing you want is to come back alive," he said after landing in the eastern New Mexico desert.

The altitude he jumped from also was the highest-ever for a skydiver, shattering the previous record set in 1960 by Joe Kittinger, who served as an adviser to Baumgartner during his feat.

Baumgartner's altitude record stood for two years until Google executive Alan Eustace set new marks for the highest free-fall jump and greatest free-fall distance.

In 2012, millions watched YouTube's livestream as Baumgartner coolly flashed a thumbs-up when he came out of the capsule high above Earth and then activated his parachute as he neared the ground, lifting his arms in victory after he landed.

Baumgartner, a former Austrian military parachutist, made thousands of jumps from planes, bridges, skyscrapers and famed landmarks, including the Christ the Redeemer statue in Brazil.

In 2003, he flew across the English Channel in a carbon fiber wing after being dropped from a plane.

In recent years, he performed with The Flying Bulls as a helicopter stunt pilot in shows across Europe.

Baumgartner said after his record-breaking jump in 2012 that traveling faster than sound is "hard to describe because you don't feel it."

"Sometimes we have to get really high to see how small we are," he said.

## Here's what to know about chronic venous insufficiency

By The Associated Press undefined

Swollen legs led to President Donald Trump being diagnosed with what's called chronic venous insufficiency. It's a fairly common condition among older adults but requires a thorough checkup to rule out more serious causes of swelling in the legs. Here are some things to know.

What is chronic venous insufficiency?

Chronic venous insufficiency, or CVI, happens when veins in the legs can't properly carry blood back to the heart. That can lead to blood pooling in the lower legs. In addition to swelling, usually around the feet and ankles, symptoms can include legs that are achy, heavy feeling or tingly, and varicose veins. Severe cases could trigger leg sores known as ulcers.

What causes chronic venous insufficiency?

Overcoming gravity to pump blood from the feet all the way up to the heart is a challenge, especially when someone is standing or sitting for long periods. So legs veins are lined with one-way valves that keep blood from sliding backward on that journey. Anything that damages those valves can lead to chronic venous insufficiency. Risk factors can include blood clots, vein inflammation known as phlebitis or being overweight.

How is chronic venous insufficiency diagnosed and treated?

Doctors must rule out serious causes of leg swelling, such as heart problems, kidney disease or blood clots. Ultrasound exams of the leg veins can help confirm chronic venous insufficiency. According to the Cleveland Clinic, treatment can include wearing compression stockings, elevating the legs and achieving a healthy weight. Also exercise, especially walking, is recommended — because strong leg muscles can squeeze veins in a way that helps them pump blood. Medications and medical procedures are available for more advanced cases.

## **Man who sent Facebook message about committing a 2013 campus sexual assault pleads guilty**

By MARYCLAIRE DALE Associated Press

GETTYSBURG, Pa. (AP) — An American extradited from France to face charges that he sexually assaulted a fellow Pennsylvania college student in 2013 — and later sent her a Facebook message that said “So I raped you” — pleaded guilty Thursday.

Ian Cleary, 32, pleaded guilty to second-degree sexual assault more than a decade after Shannon Keeler says he sneaked into her first-year dorm at Gettysburg College on the eve of winter break and assaulted her. Cleary’s guilty plea was the first time she’d seen him since the assault.

“I had been thinking about this moment for 12 years,” said Keeler, who clenched her husband’s hand as Cleary was led into court by deputies. She called it a surreal moment. A decade ago, a former prosecutor had declined the case.

“It’s taken a lot of twists and turns to get to this point,” said Keeler, now 30. “It took a lot of people doing the right thing to get us here.”

Judge Kevin Hess set an Oct. 20 sentencing date. The two sides proposed a four- to eight-year sentence, which the judge can accept or not.

Keeler, in interviews with The Associated Press, described her decade-long efforts to persuade authorities to pursue charges, starting hours after the assault.

She renewed the quest in 2021, after finding a series of disturbing Facebook messages from his account.

Cleary has been in custody since his arrest on minor, unrelated charges in Metz, France, in April 2024. A defense lawyer told the judge Thursday that Cleary experienced several mental health episodes there and was hospitalized around the time he sent the Facebook messages in 2019.

Cleary left Gettysburg after the assault and finished college in Silicon Valley, California, where he’d grown up. He then got a master’s degree and worked for Tesla before moving overseas, where he spent time writing medieval fiction, according to his online posts.

The AP published an investigation on the case and on the broader reluctance among prosecutors to pursue campus sex assault charges in May 2021. An indictment followed weeks later.

Authorities in the U.S. and Europe tried to track Cleary down for the next three years, but seemed unable to follow his trail, online or otherwise.

In court Thursday, defense lawyer John Abom said Cleary was homeless at times and unaware of the charges. Adams County District Attorney Brian Sinnett on Thursday said he has his doubts, but cannot prove that Cleary was on the run, so it’s unlikely to be an issue at sentencing.

The second-degree sexual assault charge carries a maximum 10 years in prison. His family members have declined to comment on the case and have not attended his court hearings. Abom also declined to comment on Cleary’s behalf Thursday.

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

“I hope that we as a society, the institutions around us, can make truly successful legal outcomes more viable for victims,” she said after the plea.

“It starts with listening to victims and making sure their voices are heard,” she said, “even if the system’s slow to catch up.”

## **Syrian forces who fought Druze militias leave Sweida province under a ceasefire**

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and GHAITH ALSAYED Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Syrian government forces had largely pulled out of the southern province of Sweida on Thursday after days of clashes with militias linked to the Druze minority that threatened to unravel the country’s post-war transition.



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The conflict had drawn airstrikes against Syrian forces by neighboring Israel in defense of the Druze before a truce — mediated by the U.S., Turkey and Arab countries and announced Wednesday — halted most of the fighting.

However, Syrian state media said Thursday that Druze militiamen had launched revenge attacks on Sunni Bedouin communities, leading to a wave of their displacement. There were some reports of renewed clashes.

Bedouin clans had fought on the government side, while the Israeli military came to the assistance of the Druze, who form a substantial community in Israel, where they are seen as a loyal minority and often serve in the Israeli military.

A new ceasefire deal

Under the latest truce, reached Wednesday after a previous agreement unraveled, 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.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed Thursday to keep southern Syria demilitarized and to protect the Druze community. "This will also be the continuation of our policy," he said.

In a major escalation of its involvement in the conflict, Israel on Wednesday had struck the Syrian Defense Ministry headquarters in central Damascus.

Convoys of government forces started withdrawing from Sweida overnight, Syrian state media reported, saying it was in line with the ceasefire deal and that the military operation against the Druze factions had ended.

The truce was announced by Syria's Interior Ministry and in a video message by a Druze religious leader. The previous agreement on Tuesday quickly broke down after being dismissed by prominent Druze cleric Sheikh Hikmat Al-Hijri.

The Syrian government has not released any casualty counts from the fighting.

The Britain-based war monitor Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said nearly 600 fighters and civilians were killed on both sides over four days of deadly clashes. The monitor also said at least 86 civilians killed in "field executions" — mostly Druze Syrians killed by government forces and their allies — and that at least three Bedouin civilians were killed in revenge attacks Thursday by Druze militiamen.

Looting homes and killing civilians

Turkey's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and intelligence chief Ibrahim Kalin held a series of diplomatic and security contacts to deescalate the clashes, a Turkish official said Thursday. They worked with the U.S. mediators and regional officials and leaders, including Lebanese Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, said the official who requested anonymity to discuss the negotiations.

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

Video circulated on social media showing 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.

Interim President al-Sharaa said the Druze were an "integral part" of Syria, protected under the law.

"We are committed to holding accountable those who wronged our Druze brethren," al-Sharaa said.

'Militant sectarianism'

The Druze community had been divided over how to approach al-Sharaa's de facto Islamist rule after largely celebrating when his forces ousted former President Bashar Assad and the Assad family's decades-long autocratic rule. They feared persecution after attacks from the militant Islamic State group and al-Qaida affiliates during Syria's 14-year civil war.

Issam al-Reis, a senior military adviser with Etana, a Syrian research group, said the lack of "effective state-led negotiations" could sow further divisions between the Druze community with the Sunni Bedouins, who had sometimes also clashed in the past.

"This is leading to militant sectarianism, which is dangerous," he said, adding it's a sign that the govern-

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ment needs to speed up its integration of other sects into the Syrian army to make it a more unifying force and help resolve sectarian tensions.

"There have been agreements and talks about this with different communities, but until now none of this has been implemented," he said.

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.

Druze cross the border fence

An Israeli security official said Israel is strengthening fences along the Golan border to prevent people from crossing into Syrian territory.

Thousands of Druze residents in the Israeli-controlled Golan converged on the border on Wednesday after hearing of the sectarian clashes inside Syria.

Israeli media said that dozens of people forced their way into Syria – in hopes of helping fellow Druze and in some cases to visit relatives that they normally are unable to see.

The security official, speaking on condition of anonymity under military briefing rules, said that soldiers had returned dozens of people who crossed into Syria, while security forces were also returning an unknown number of Druze Syrians who crossed into the Israeli side. It was not known how many people remained on each side of the border.

Speaking about Syria, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said late Thursday that it was "absolutely essential to achieve" unity in Syria, with the respect of its sovereignty, territorial integrity and "the full integration of the different communities in the state."

"It is for the Syrians to solve the Syrian problem," he said.

## **Trump is checked for lower leg swelling and diagnosed with a common condition in older adults**

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE and LAURAN NEERGAARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump recently had a medical checkup after noticing "mild swelling" in his lower legs and was found to have a condition common in older adults that causes blood to pool in his veins, the White House said Thursday.

Press secretary Karoline Leavitt said tests by the White House medical unit showed that Trump has chronic venous insufficiency, which occurs when little valves inside the veins that normally help move blood against gravity gradually lose the ability to work properly.

Leavitt also addressed bruising on the back of Trump's hand, seen in recent photos covered by makeup that was not an exact match to his skin tone. She said the bruising was "consistent" with irritation from his "frequent handshaking and the use of aspirin." Trump takes aspirin to reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke.

She said during her press briefing that her disclosure of Trump's medical checkup was meant to dispel recent speculation about the 79-year-old president's health. Nonetheless, the announcement was notable given that the Republican president has routinely kept secret basic facts about his health.

Trump in April had a comprehensive physical exam with more than a dozen medical specialists. The three-page report released then by the White House did not include a finding of chronic venous insufficiency. At the time, Trump's doctor, Sean Barbabella, determined that the president's joints and muscles had a full range of motion, with normal blood flow and no swelling.

Leavitt did not say when Trump first noticed the swelling in his lower legs. As part of the president's routine medical care and out of an "abundance of caution," she said he had a "comprehensive exam" that included vascular, lower extremity and ultrasound testing.

She noted that chronic venous insufficiency is a benign condition that is common in people over age 70.

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She said the tests revealed no evidence of deep vein thrombosis, a more serious medical condition in which a blood clot forms in one or more of the deep veins in the body, usually in the legs. Nor was there any evidence of arterial disease, she said, reading a letter from Barbabella.

People often are advised to lose weight, walk for exercise and elevate their legs periodically, and some may be advised to wear compression stockings. Severe cases over time can lead to complications including lower leg sores called ulcers. Blood clots are one cause, but was ruled out, Leavitt said.

Leavitt said the condition wasn't causing the president any discomfort. She wouldn't discuss how he was treating the condition and suggested those details would be in the doctor's letter, which was later released to the public. But the letter was the same as what she read, and it did not include any additional details.

Dr. Anahita Dua, a vascular surgeon at Mass General Brigham who has never treated Trump, said there is no cure for chronic venous insufficiency.

"The vast majority of people, probably including our president, have a mild to moderate form of it," Dua said.

People with the condition can reduce the swelling by wearing medical-grade compression socks or stockings, to help the blood circulate back to the heart, or by walking, she said.

The exam the White House disclosed Thursday included other testing that found no signs of heart failure, renal impairment or systemic illness in Trump, Leavitt said.

"The president remains in excellent health, which I think all of you witness on a daily basis here," she told reporters.

## Connie Francis, whose hit songs included 'Who's Sorry Now?' and 'Pretty Little Baby,' dies at 87

By BOB THOMAS Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Connie Francis, the wholesome pop star of the 1950s and '60s whose hits included "Pretty Little Baby" and "Who's Sorry Now?" — the latter would serve as an ironic title for a personal life filled with heartbreak and tragedy — has died at age 87.

Radio DJ Bruce "Cousin Brucie" Morrow, a longtime friend, told The Associated Press that she died Wednesday at a hospital in Florida, the state where she had lived for years. Morrow did not cite a specific cause of death, but Francis had posted on social media earlier this month that she had been hospitalized with "extreme pain."

Francis had gained renewed attention in recent months after "Pretty Little Baby" became a sensation on TikTok, with Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner among the many celebrities citing it.

"I'm flabbergasted and excited about the huge buzz my 1962 recording of 'Pretty Little Baby' is making all over the world," she said in a video on TikTok, which she had joined in response to the song's unexpected revival. "To think that a song I recorded 63 years ago is captivating new generations of audiences is truly overwhelming for me."

Francis was a top performer of the pre-Beatles era, rarely out of the charts from 1957-64. Able to appeal to both young people and adults, she had more than a dozen Top 20 hits, starting with "Who's Sorry Now?" and including the No. 1 songs "Don't Break the Heart That Loves You" and "The Heart Has a Mind of Its Own." Like other teen favorites of her time, she also starred in several films, including "Where the Boys Are" and "Follow the Boys."

The dark-haired singer was just 17 when she signed a contract with MGM Records following appearances on several TV variety shows. Her earliest recordings attracted little attention, but then she released her version of "Who's Sorry Now?" an old ballad by Ted Snyder, Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby.

It, too, had little success initially until Dick Clark played it on his "American Bandstand" show in 1958. Clark featured her repeatedly on "American Bandstand," and she said in later years that without his support, she would have abandoned her music career.

Francis followed with such teen hits as "Stupid Cupid," "Everybody's Somebody's Fool" and "Lipstick on Your Collar." Her records became hits worldwide as she re-recorded versions of her original songs in Italian

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and Spanish, among other languages. Her concerts around the country quickly sold out.

Meanwhile, a romance bloomed with fellow teen idol Bobby Darin, who had volunteered to write songs for her. But when her father heard rumors that the pair was planning a wedding, he stormed into a rehearsal and pulled a gun on Darin, ending their relationship and seeming to set Francis on a pained and traumatic path.

She chronicled some of it in her autobiography, "Who's Sorry Now?"

"My personal life is a regret from A to Z," she told The Associated Press in 1984, the year the book came out. "I realized I had allowed my father to exert too much influence over me."

Her father, George Franconero, was a roofing contractor from New Jersey who played the accordion. She was just 3 when her father presented her with a child-size accordion, as soon as she began to show an aptitude for music. When she was 4, he began booking singing dates for her, going on to become her manager.

Although her acting career had faded by the mid-1960s, Francis was still popular on the concert circuit when she appeared at the Westbury Music Fair in Westbury, New York, in 1974. She had returned to her hotel room and was asleep when a man broke in and raped her at knifepoint. He was never captured.

Francis sued the hotel, alleging its security was faulty, and a jury awarded her \$2.5 million in 1976. The two sides then settled out of court for \$1,475,000 as an appeal was pending. She said the attack destroyed her marriage and put her through years of emotional turmoil.

She suffered tragedy in 1981 when her brother George was shot to death as he was leaving his New Jersey home. Later that decade, her father had her committed to a psychiatric hospital, where she was diagnosed as manic-depressive. At one point, she tried to kill herself by swallowing dozens of sleeping tablets. After three days in a coma, she recovered.

Around that time, she wrote to President Ronald Reagan and volunteered to help others, calling herself "America's most famous crime victim." Reagan appointed her to a task force on violent crime.

"I don't want people to feel sorry for me," she told The New York Times in 1981. "I have my voice, a gift from God I took for granted before. He gave it back to me."

She was married four times and would say that only her third husband, Joseph Garzilli, was worth the trouble. The other marriages each lasted less than a year.

Concetta Rosemarie Franconero was born on Dec. 12, 1937, in Newark, New Jersey. At age 9 she began appearing on television programs, including "Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts" and "The Perry Como Show." It was Godfrey who suggested she shorten her last name.

## Wall Street cruises to more records as PepsiCo and tech stocks rally

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Wall Street rose to records on Thursday following better-than-expected updates on the economy and a mixed set of profit reports from big U.S. companies.

The S&P 500 climbed 0.5% to top its all-time high set a week ago. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 229 points, or 0.5%, and the Nasdaq composite added 0.7% to its own record set the day before.

Trading was calmer than Wednesday's, when President Donald Trump jolted financial markets by saying he had discussed the "concept" of firing the chair of the Federal Reserve but was unlikely to do so. Such a move could help Wall Street get the lower interest rates it loves but would also risk a weakened Fed unable to make the unpopular moves needed to keep inflation under control.

A strong profit report from Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. helped drive tech stocks, and its net income soared nearly 61% in the last quarter from a year earlier. The chip maker said it's seeing strong demand from artificial-intelligence and other customers, and TSMC's stock that trades in the United States rose 3.4%.

Other stocks involved in AI also climbed, and a 1% gain for Nvidia was one of the strongest forces pushing upward on the S&P 500.



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PepsiCo jumped 7.5% after delivering revenue and profit that topped Wall Street's expectations. The drink and snack giant also stood by its financial forecasts given in April, which projected lower full-year profit than previous forecasts due to increased costs from tariffs and a pullback in consumer spending.

United Airlines flew 3.1% higher after reporting a stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. It also said it's seen an acceleration in demand from customers that began in early July, and it's expecting less uncertainty about the economy to hurt its business in the second half of this year.

Lucid Group's stock surged 36.2% after it said Uber Technologies is aiming to use 20,000 or more of its vehicles over six years in a robotaxi program. Using an autonomy system by Nuro, it expects to launch "later next year in a major US city."

Uber, which plans to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in Lucid and Nuro, saw its stock edge down by 0.3%.

On the losing side of Wall Street was Abbott Laboratories, which fell 8.5% despite delivering results for the latest quarter that edged past analysts' expectations. The health care company cut the top end of its forecasted range for revenue growth over 2025.

Elevance Health dropped 12.2% after reporting a weaker profit than analysts expected. It cut its forecast for profit in 2025 because of rising medical cost trends in its Affordable Care Act business, along with other factors.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 33.66 points to 6,297.36. The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 229.71 to 44,484.49, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 153.78 to 20,885.27.

In the bond market, Treasury yields were mixed following several better-than-expected reports on the economy.

One said that shoppers upped their spending at U.S. retailers by more last month than economists expected. Such spending, along with a relatively solid jobs market, has helped keep the U.S. economy out of a recession.

A separate report said that fewer U.S. workers applied for unemployment benefits last week, which could be a signal of limited layoffs. A third suggested unexpectedly strong growth in manufacturing in the mid-Atlantic region.

Such solid data could keep the Federal Reserve on pause when it comes to interest rates. The Fed has been keeping rates steady this year, after cutting them at the end of last year. The Fed's chair, Jerome Powell, has been insisting that he wants to wait for more data about how Trump's tariffs will affect the economy and inflation before the Fed makes its next move.

That's because while lower interest rates could goose the economy and prices for investments, they would also give inflation more fuel. And prices may already be starting to feel the upward effects of tariffs.

Thursday's strong economic helped push the two-year Treasury yield, which closely tracks expectations for the Fed, up to 3.91% from 3.88% late Wednesday.

Longer-term Treasury yields held steadier, though, and the 10-year yield edged down to 4.45% from 4.46%. The Fed has less influence over these yields, where investors in the bond market carry more sway.

Bond investors had briefly driven longer-term yields higher on Wednesday, when fears were high that Trump may fire Powell. The president has been angrily calling for Powell to cut interest rates, and a less independent Fed may end up pulling short-term rates lower in the near term. That could allow inflation to run higher in future years. Longer-term yields then relaxed after Trump said he was unlikely to fire Powell.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rose across much of Europe and Asia.

## Juul gets FDA's OK to keep selling tobacco and menthol e-cigarettes

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Food and Drug Administration is allowing vaping brand Juul to keep its e-cigarettes on the market, providing relief to a company that has struggled for years after being widely blamed for sparking the teen vaping trend.

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FDA regulators said Thursday that Juul's studies show its e-cigarettes are less harmful for adult smokers, who can benefit from switching completely to vaping.

The FDA decision applies to both tobacco- and menthol-flavored versions of the reusable product, which works with nicotine-filled cartridges sold in two different strengths. Juul previously discontinued several fruit and candy flavors that helped drive its popularity but were favored by teens.

Juul will be one of only two U.S. companies authorized to sell menthol-flavored vapes, which many adults prefer to tobacco flavor.

"This is an important milestone for the company and I think we made a scientifically sound case for the role that menthol can play in e-vapor," Juul CEO K.C. Crosthwaite told The Associated Press.

Parents, politicians and anti-tobacco groups are certain to oppose FDA's decision. They have argued for years that Juul products should be permanently banned due to their role in triggering a yearslong spike in underage vaping.

"It is a big step in the wrong direction to authorize sales of the product that was responsible for this public health crisis in the first place," said Yolonda Richardson, CEO of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids in a statement.

Juul was once valued at over \$13 billion and its small, sleek e-cigarettes revolutionized the image and technology of the vaping industry. But the company has since been forced to slash hundreds of jobs and pay billions to settle lawsuits over its role in the rise of youth vaping.

The FDA had ordered the company to remove its products from the market in June 2022. But then the agency abruptly reversed course days later and agreed to reopen its scientific review of Juul's application after the company pushed back in court.

Juul said that regulators had overlooked thousands of pages of scientific data critical to its submission.

Thursday's announcement is not an approval or endorsement, and the FDA reiterated that people who do not smoke should not use Juul or any other e-cigarettes. The FDA determination indicates that smokers who switch completely to Juul can reduce their exposure to deadly carcinogens and other chemicals found in traditional cigarettes.

The FDA decision applies to Juul's original system, which is now roughly a decade old. Crosthwaite said the company hopes to win authorization for its next-generation device and is also considering applying to FDA for more flavors.

"It's critically important that American adults who use tobacco have regulated options," Crosthwaite said.

In recent years, the FDA has authorized a handful of e-cigarettes to help adult smokers cut back on cigarettes. Juul's main competitors, Vuse and Njoy, each previously received FDA permission to remain on the market. Njoy sells the only other menthol-flavored e-cigarettes authorized by FDA.

To meet FDA requirements, companies must show that their products benefit public health. In practice, that means proving that adult smokers who use them are likely to quit or reduce their smoking, while teens are unlikely to get hooked on them.

The brainchild of two Stanford University students, Juul launched in 2015 and within two years rocketed to the top of the vaping market.

Juul quickly outpaced older brands with its high-nicotine, fruity-flavored cartridges, sold in mango, mint and creme brûlée. The company's small, discrete devices provided a more potent, user-friendly alternative to older, bulkier devices.

But the company's rise was fueled by underage use, and e-cigarettes quickly became ubiquitous in U.S. schools. In 2019, the company was pressured into halting all advertising and eliminating most of its flavors, leaving only tobacco and menthol-flavored options.

By then the company was already the target of multiple investigations and lawsuits by federal, state and local officials as well as class action attorneys.

In 2022, the company paid \$1.7 billion to settle thousands of lawsuits brought by families of Juul users, school districts, city governments and Native American tribes. The company separately agreed to pay \$1.1 billion to settle lawsuits or investigations from most U.S. states.

Juul is no longer the top-selling e-cigarette brand and now trails Vuse, which is sold by tobacco giant

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Reynolds American, which also makes Camel and Newport cigarettes.

Teens have shifted away from Juul amid a wider drop in vaping, according to the latest federal figures. The FDA reported last year that teen vaping dropped to a 10-year low, after stepped up enforcement against unauthorized brands imported from China, such as Elf Bar.

Unlike Juul, disposable e-cigarettes like Elf Bar still come in fruit and candy flavors, despite efforts by regulators to block their use.

## Caitlin Clark pulls out of All-Star weekend because of groin injury

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Caitlin Clark is out of All-Star weekend.

The Indiana Fever guard injured her right groin on Tuesday night in the final minute of the team's win over the Connecticut Sun. She said Thursday in a message posted on X that she had to rest her body.

"I am incredibly sad and disappointed to say I can't participate in the 3-Point Contest or the All-Star Game," Clark said in the message posted by the Fever. "I have to rest my body. I will still be at Gainbridge Fieldhouse for all the action and I'm looking forward to helping (Liberty coach Sandy Brondello) coach our team to a win."

Clark was supposed to compete in a loaded 3-point contest Friday night and is captain of one of the All-Star teams. The second-year guard was the leading vote getter from the fans and has been a huge reason the league has had a boon in attendance and ratings over the last two seasons.

The WNBA announced that Brittney Sykes of Washington will replace Clark in the All-Star Game. They haven't announced a replacement for her in the 3-point contest.

Clark sat out the Fever's 98-77 loss against New York.

Fever coach Stephanie White said Clark had imaging done Wednesday afternoon and deferred to the team's training staff for more details except to say that she considered it good news.

Clark got hurt with under a minute left. She walked downcourt holding her right groin after assisting on the Fever's final basket. As teammate Aliyah Boston tried to console her, Clark walked to the basket stanchion and banged her head against it before heading to the bench. During the timeout, she covered her head with a towel and appeared to be holding back tears.

Clark had been durable throughout college and her first season in the WNBA, never missing a game. Now she's had four different muscle injuries so far this year.

She missed the preseason opener with tightness in her quad but played the next day in an exhibition game at her alma mater, Iowa. She suffered a quad strain against New York on May 24 that kept her out for five games. Clark returned June 14 and played in five games before suffering another injury to her left groin that kept her out for four contests and the Commissioner's Cup final.

## 'Fear is the tool of a tyrant', fired federal prosecutor Maurene Comey tells colleagues

By ERIC TUCKER and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Maurene Comey, the daughter of former FBI director James Comey who as a federal prosecutor in Manhattan worked on cases against Sean "Diddy" Combs and Jeffrey Epstein, said in a note to colleagues that "fear is the tool of a tyrant" and that her firing without reason should fuel "a fire of righteous indignation at abuses of power."

"If a career prosecutor can be fired without reason, fear may seep into the decisions of those who remain," Comey said in the note, which was obtained by The Associated Press on Thursday. "Do not let that happen. Fear is the tool of a tyrant, wielded to suppress independent thought."

"Instead of fear," she added, "let this moment fuel the fire that already burns at the heart of this place. A fire of righteous indignation at abuses of power. Of commitment to seek justice for victims. Of dedication to truth above all else."

Until her firing Wednesday, Comey had been a veteran lawyer in the Southern District of New York, long

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considered the most elite of the Justice Department's prosecution offices. Her cases included the sex trafficking prosecution of Epstein, who killed himself behind bars in 2019 as he was awaiting trial, and the recent case against Combs, which ended earlier this month with a mixed verdict.

Her termination represented the latest Justice Department effort to fire lawyers without explanation, a trend that has raised alarm over a disregard for civil service protections designed to remove attorneys for political reasons. The department has also fired a number of prosecutors who worked on cases that have provoked Donald Trump's ire, including some who handled U.S. Capitol riot cases and lawyers and support staff who worked on special counsel Jack Smith's prosecutions of the Republican president.

She was long seen as a potential target given her father's fraught relationship over the last decade with Trump. The Justice Department recently appeared to acknowledge the existence of an investigation into James Comey, though the basis for that inquiry is unclear.

Asked about the firing Thursday, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said, "This was a decision made by the Department of Justice."

Maurene Comey had most recently been among the prosecutors in the sex trafficking and racketeering case against Combs. The hip-hop mogul was acquitted of the main charges but convicted of lesser prostitution-related offenses that may result in a prison sentence of just a few years, an outcome seen by some as a rare defeat for prosecutions.

But she was successful in numerous other prosecutions, most notably helping secure the conviction of Ghislaine Maxwell on sex trafficking charges for helping financier Epstein sexually abuse underage girls. In that case, she delivered a rebuttal argument during closings, as she did in the Combs case.

Her firing comes as Attorney General Pam Bondi faces intense criticism from some members of Trump's base for the Justice Department's decision not to release any more evidence in the government's possession from Epstein's sex trafficking investigation. Some right-wing internet personalities, like Laura Loomer, who have been critical of Bondi's handling of the Epstein files, had been calling for Maurene Comey's firing.

James Comey was the FBI director when Trump took office in 2017, having been appointed by then-President Barack Obama, a Democrat, and serving before that as a senior Justice Department official in Republican President George W. Bush's administration.

But his relationship with Trump was strained from the start. The FBI director resisted a request by Trump at a private dinner to pledge personal loyalty to the president — an overture that so unnerved the FBI director that he documented it in a contemporaneous memorandum.

Trump soon after fired Comey amid an investigation into potential ties between Russia and Trump's presidential campaign. That inquiry, later taken over by special counsel Robert Mueller, would ultimately find that while Russia interfered with the 2016 election and the Trump team welcomed the help, there was insufficient evidence to prove a criminal collaboration.

Trump's fury at the older Comey continued long after firing him from the bureau, blaming him for a "hoax" and "witch hunt" that shadowed much of his first term.

Comey disclosed contemporaneous memos of his conversations with Trump to a friend so that their content could be revealed to the media. The following year, Comey published a book calling Trump "ego driven" and likening him to a mafia don. Trump, for his part, has accused Comey and other officials of treason.

## Severe weather in tropical storm's wake triggers North Carolina state of emergency

By MAKIYA SEMINERA Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina can seek federal funding to help its overloaded response efforts to Tropical Storm Chantal, which killed at least six people and left damage from flooding in its wake, as Gov. Josh Stein announced a state of emergency Thursday.

A one-two punch from Chantal followed by severe weather in the state's center has "overwhelmed the



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response and recovery efforts of local governments,” according to Stein’s executive order.

Some rivers reached record-breaking levels from the storm, including the Eno River in Durham, one of several cities where some residents lost access to safe drinking water because of damage to the water system. In some places, the storm dumped as much as 9 to 12 inches of rain, according to the governor’s office.

Chantal hit at the end of the July Fourth weekend, and several days of severe weather plowed through as people were still picking up the pieces from damage caused by the tropical storm’s remnants.

The emergency declaration, which took effect Wednesday, jumpstarts the process for North Carolina to seek federal recovery assistance if needed. It covers 13 counties in the state’s center, some of which are home to populous cities like Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill.

Local law enforcement agencies have confirmed at least six deaths from the storm. Businesses were wrecked and many residents were displaced from their homes after emergency responders rescued them from flooding.

A 58-year-old woman called 911 on her way to work after her SUV got caught in floodwaters, but the call disconnected and she was later found dead a little ways from her unoccupied vehicle, according to the Orange County Sheriff’s Office.

Rescuers searched for days in Chatham County only to find two missing canoers had died, the county sheriff’s office said, while another woman died when floodwaters swept her vehicle off the road, the State Highway Patrol said.

Two people died in Alamance County, including a missing 71-year-old man found dead inside his vehicle covered in flowing water, the sheriff’s office said. The Graham County Police Department said a missing 23-year-old woman was found dead inside a submerged vehicle.

Many people were also rescued during the storm. In one neighborhood north of Durham, the city’s fire department said it did more than 80 water rescues amid the flooding. The fire department in Chapel Hill rescued more than 50 people while teaming up with neighboring agencies, mostly near apartments, officials said.

## The grueling 135-mile journey of a 66-year-old runner through one of the hottest places on Earth

By DORANY PINEDA, TY O’NEIL and JOHN LOCHER Associated Press

DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK, Calif. (AP) — When the running gets hard in this desert dubbed “hell on Earth,” Danny Westergaard tells himself: “Slow and steady” or “smooth as butter.”

For 18 years, Westergaard, 66, has braved the scorching summer heat of California’s Death Valley in an ultramarathon billed as the world’s toughest. Last week, 99 runners from across the globe embarked on a grueling 135 mile (217.26 kilometer) competition from the lowest point below sea level of North America to the trailhead of the highest peak in the contiguous U.S. They had 48 hours to do it. Few have completed the competition as many times as Westergaard, a retired aerospace project manager, though finishing is not a given.

“It’s just become like a summer ritual and a family reunion,” he said. “I feel at home when I’m here. It’s my tribe.”

For the 37th year, the Badwater 135 Ultramarathon challenged athletes to withstand stretches of this dry, searing desert. The race takes place in July, when temperatures have soared into the 130s F (54.44s C). Even as a place of extremes, Death Valley is not immune to global warming. Seven of its hottest summers have occurred in the past 10 years, according to the National Park Service. And if planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions continue at their current pace, more places could experience its broiling temperatures.

Over two days, Westergaard would trek up and down mountain ranges, past sand dunes and salt flats, through quaint towns and vast desertscapes amid temperatures as high as 117 F (47.22 C). He tried to smile throughout, even when he felt miserable.

“It just lifts you up,” he said of smiling so others smile back.

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First night: The race begins

At 8 p.m., the first wave of runners take off. Westergaard jogs up a ramp into the pale light of dusk. It's 113 F (45 C), and it feels like a blow dryer to the face.

Leap frogging in a van behind him is his cheer squad and support crew – Jennifer Drain, his smiley cousin back for the 17th year, and daughters Meagan, who has attended before, and Madison, a first timer. The crew, who playfully call Westergaard “wiener dog,” are hauling everything he needs: food, ice, water, electrolytes.

This heat can kill. Soaring body temperatures can lead to organ failure and strain the heart, especially for people with heart disease, and cause heat stroke. To prevent that they keep him cool. They spray mist on him and pour ice into his hat and a bandana wrapped around his neck. His drinking water is ice cold.

A few hours in, Meagan asks her dad if he's peed. “Long stream,” he responded of his amount of urine. Staying hydrated is critical. As he sweats, he's losing liquids that can critically stress kidneys if not replenished. Dehydration can cause organs to fail from lack of blood, oxygen and nutrients, leading to seizures and death.

No runners have died doing the competition, but heat-related issues are common, said Megan Dell, the race's medical director. Stomach issues can lead to vomiting and dehydration. Hyponatremia — which happens when your blood's sodium is too low — has sent runners to the hospital.

Westergaard has learned to embrace the rollercoaster. One moment he feels like Superman — the next he could be throwing up on the side of the road, questioning if he'll make it. “You just suck it up, just like in life, and get through the lows, and it always gets better.”

The next day: Running through “the oven”

The runners dash toward mile 50.8 (81.75 kilometers), the critical cut off point they must get to by 10 a.m. or be eliminated. The sun is peaking over the mountains, casting a warm glow over dune fields. It's 85 F (29.44 C).

“Living the dream, ey?” Westergaard said with a smile, his perky strut now a droopy shuffle.

He pours water on his face and arms and munches some watermelon. Madison paces behind him as they crack jokes. “Get er done! Junior wiener in training!” Meagan yelled.

Westergaard makes it to the cut off point before 9 a.m. It's 90 F (32.2 C).

Mile 56 (90.12 kilometers): After moving for 14 hours straight, Westergaard rests and eats some avocado toast. “Great! Let's motor!” he said after 10 minutes sitting on a chair.

Miles later, he begins his descent into “the oven” that is Panamint Valley, usually the hottest part of the race during the hottest part of the day. It's 96 F (35.56 C) and the heat sizzles from above and below. Westergaard runs on the white line on the road because it's cooler. In hotter years, the asphalt got so hot the bottoms of his shoes felt sticky on the ground.

Westergaard trains year round to acclimate to the heat. As he gets older, he doesn't tolerate heat as well and has slowed down. His two-hour sauna sessions are now one, and he runs a few times a week instead of daily.

“I'm just out there longer,” he said, “but still getting it done.”

Tony Wolf, kinesiology professor at the University of Georgia, said aging adults generally have reduced heart function compared to younger adults. When combined with the cardiovascular demand of exercise and heat stress, it can cause difficulties.

There isn't much research about how the bodies of fit older adults, including competitive athletes, regulate internal temperature. “There aren't a ton of people in their 60s and older who are doing those kinds of events,” said Wolf.

Studies focused on adults before and after a training program found that exercise improved heart function and thermoregulation. That could suggest that the heart and thermoregulation impairments linked to aging are largely mitigated by lifelong fitness, Wolf said.

Second night: Sleepy hallucinations

The runners are spread out now, their flashing lights twinkling in the distance. This night is the toughest

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for Westergaard as sleep deprivation sets in. He zigzags on the road, barely awake. The runners ahead of him look like they're running toward him.

In past years, his hallucinations have included people luring him to rest on couches that were actually bushes. Another time, he struck up a conversation with a kid skateboarding by him with a dog. And once, he watched for hours as a guy swung off the edge of the crescent moon, waving down at him.

"It was just clear as day," Westergaard said of the hallucination.

At 3:10 a.m. at mile 98 (157.72 kilometers), he sleeps for 15 minutes under the moonlight.

"No one really quite understands" why he does this, said Madison.

Final day: The push toward the finish

At 11:50 a.m. and around mile 123 (197.95 kilometers), Westergaard shuffles through the town of Lone Pine. Mount Whitney, the tallest peak in the continental U.S., soars some 14,500 feet (4,420 meters) into the blue sky.

A crowd claps and cheers as he runs by.

"Go Danny, go!" yelled a man.

It's 92 F (33.33 C) as he approaches the final 4,750 foot (1,447.8 meters) mountain ascent to the finish line. Westergaard is walking at a snail's pace and says he's falling asleep. But his smile hasn't waned.

"We've come a long way," Westergaard said, Madison pacing behind and spraying him.

"Long way for a burger!" she responded. They giggle while thinking about the veggie burger they'll buy upon finishing.

Then he does, crossing the finish line with his crew at exactly 45 hours and 29 minutes.

It was his most special Badwater 135 race by far, he says misty eyed, having Meagan and Madison at his side.

## Trump administration hands over Medicaid recipients' personal data, including addresses, to ICE

By KIMBERLY KINDY and AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials will be given access to the personal data of the nation's 79 million Medicaid enrollees, including home addresses and ethnicities, to track down immigrants who may not be living legally in the United States, according to an agreement obtained by The Associated Press.

The information will give ICE officials the ability to find "the location of aliens" across the country, says the agreement signed Monday between the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Department of Homeland Security. The agreement has not been announced publicly.

The extraordinary disclosure of millions of such personal health data to deportation officials is the latest escalation in the Trump administration's immigration crackdown, which has repeatedly tested legal boundaries in its effort to arrest 3,000 people daily.

Lawmakers and some CMS officials have challenged the legality of deportation officials' access to some states' Medicaid enrollee data. It's a move, first reported by the AP last month, that Health and Human Services officials said was aimed at rooting out people enrolled in the program improperly.

But the latest data-sharing agreement makes clear what ICE officials intend to do with the health data. "ICE will use the CMS data to allow ICE to receive identity and location information on aliens identified by ICE," the agreement says.

Such an action could ripple widely

Such disclosures, even if not acted upon, could cause widespread alarm among people seeking emergency medical help for themselves or their children. Other efforts to crack down on illegal immigration have made schools, churches, courthouses and other everyday places feel perilous to immigrants and even U.S. citizens who fear getting caught up in a raid.

HHS spokesman Andrew Nixon would not respond to the latest agreement. It is unclear, though, whether Homeland Security has yet accessed the information. The department's assistant secretary, Tricia McLaugh-

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lin, said in an emailed statement that the two agencies “are exploring an initiative to ensure that illegal aliens are not receiving Medicaid benefits that are meant for law-abiding Americans.”

The database will reveal to ICE officials the names, addresses, birth dates, ethnic and racial information, as well as Social Security numbers for all people enrolled in Medicaid. The state and federally funded program provides health care coverage program for the poorest of people, including millions of children.

The agreement does not allow ICE officials to download the data. Instead, they will be allowed to access it for a limited period from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, until Sept. 9.

“They are trying to turn us into immigration agents,” said a CMS official who did not have permission to speak to the media and insisted on anonymity.

Immigrants who are not living in the U.S. legally, as well as some lawfully present immigrants, are not allowed to enroll in the Medicaid program that provides nearly-free coverage for health services. Medicaid is a jointly funded program between states and the federal government.

But federal law requires all states to offer emergency Medicaid, a temporary coverage that pays only for lifesaving services in emergency rooms to anyone, including non-U.S. citizens. Emergency Medicaid is often used by immigrants, including those who are lawfully present and those who are not.

Many people sign up for emergency Medicaid in their most desperate moments, said Hannah Katch, a previous adviser at CMS during the Biden administration.

“It’s unthinkable that CMS would violate the trust of Medicaid enrollees in this way,” Katch said. She said the personally identifiable information of enrollees has not been historically shared outside of the agency unless for law enforcement purposes to investigate waste, fraud or abuse of the program.

Trump team has pursued information aggressively

Trump officials last month demanded that the federal health agency’s staffers release personally identifiable information on millions of Medicaid enrollees from seven states that permit non-U.S. citizens to enroll in their full Medicaid programs.

The states launched these programs during the Biden administration and said they would not bill the federal government to cover the health care costs of those immigrants. All the states — California, New York, Washington, Oregon, Illinois, Minnesota and Colorado — have Democratic governors.

That data sharing with DHS officials prompted widespread backlash from lawmakers and governors. Twenty states have since sued over the move, alleging it violated federal health privacy laws.

CMS officials previously fought and failed to stop the data sharing that is now at the center of the lawsuits. On Monday, CMS officials were once again debating whether they should provide DHS access, citing concerns about the ongoing litigation.

In an email chain obtained by the AP called “Hold DHS Access — URGENT,” CMS chief legal officer Rujul H. Desai said they should first ask the Department of Justice to appeal to the White House directly for a “pause” on the information sharing. In a response the next day, HHS lawyer Lena Amanti Yueh said that the Justice Department was “comfortable with CMS proceeding with providing DHS access.”

Dozens of members of Congress, including Democratic Sen. Adam Schiff of California, sent letters last month to DHS and HHS officials demanding that the information-sharing stop.

“The massive transfer of the personal data of millions of Medicaid recipients should alarm every American. This massive violation of our privacy laws must be halted immediately,” Schiff said in response to AP’s description of the new, expanded agreement. “It will harm families across the nation and only cause more citizens to forego lifesaving access to health care.”

The new agreement makes clear that DHS will use the data to identify, for deportation purposes, people who in the country illegally. But HHS officials have repeatedly maintained that it would be used primarily as a cost-saving measure, to investigate whether non-U.S. citizens were improperly accessing Medicaid benefits.

“HHS acted entirely within its legal authority — and in full compliance with all applicable laws — to ensure that Medicaid benefits are reserved for individuals who are lawfully entitled to receive them,” Nixon said in a statement responding to the lawsuits last month.



## Zelenskyy appoints a new prime minister for a war-weary nation

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Fresh off securing a plan to receive more U.S. weaponry, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has appointed a new prime minister — the key negotiator of his country's deal with the U.S. to partner on the development of minerals.

By naming Yulia Svyrydenko, the former economy minister, to become the country's first new head of government since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, Zelenskyy on Thursday elevated a loyal politician who has experience in diplomacy with the U.S. and other Western nations.

In addition to negotiating the mineral agreement — seen as an important way of tying U.S. interests to Ukraine's security — the 39-year-old Svyrydenko has represented her country in a wide range of high-level talks with Western partners, including on issues of defense and economic recovery and reconstruction. In 2022, she negotiated with other countries to impose sanctions on Russia.

The outgoing prime minister, Denys Shmyhal, will become defense minister at a time when Ukraine is looking to ramp up domestic weapons production, and as President Donald Trump seeks to bring an end to the war.

"War leaves no room for delay," Svyrydenko said on X after the parliament voted to approve her promotion. "We must act swiftly and decisively. Our priorities for the first six months are clear: reliable supply for the army, expansion of domestic weapons production, and boosting the technological strength of our defense forces."

Svyrydenko and Shmyhal are among a wider group of officials taking on new leadership roles as Zelenskyy aims to reenergize a war-weary nation. But to Ukrainians, the reshuffling of the Cabinet is not seen as a major shift in direction for Zelenskyy, who will still be mostly relying on the same experienced officials, as opposed to introducing new faces to his leadership team.

Earlier this week, Trump endorsed a plan to have European allies buy billions of dollars of U.S. military equipment — including air-defense systems — that can be transferred to Ukraine, which has come under intense Russian attacks.

"We all want peace as soon as possible," Zelenskyy said Thursday in a speech to Ukraine's parliament. "At the same time, we all see how difficult it is to maintain sufficient global support, and how many other wars and crises are flaring up around the world, truly scattering global efforts. Therefore, Ukraine needs more of its own strength."

In announcing the weapons plan on Monday, Trump also made an ultimatum to Russian President Vladimir Putin, promising to impose stiff tariffs on countries that purchase its oil if he doesn't agree to a ceasefire within 50 days.

Shmyhal, who announced his resignation as prime minister on Tuesday, was the longest-serving head of government in Ukraine's history, serving since March 2020.

Shmyhal will replace Rustem Umerov as defense minister. Although Umerov sought to push reforms, critics said the ministry under his command was plagued by mismanagement.

Also on Thursday, Zelenskyy nominated Olga Stefanishyna to become Ukraine's next ambassador to the United States. In the meantime, he appointed Stefanishyna, previously the minister for European integration, as the special representative for the development of cooperation with the United States.

Ties between Ukraine and the U.S. have been uneasy since Trump returned to the White House in January, and Zelenskyy had previously said he intended to replace Oksana Markarova as Ukrainian ambassador in the U.S.

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

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.

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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 noncommittal 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.

## Marathon world record-holder Chepngetich suspended for positive doping test

MONACO (AP) — Women's marathon world record-holder Ruth Chepngetich was provisionally suspended for a positive doping test on Thursday.

Track and field's Athletics Integrity Unit said Chepngetich tested positive for a banned diuretic and mask-

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ing agent in March and "opted for a voluntary provisional suspension while the AIU's investigation was ongoing."

The Kenyan runner set the world record by almost two minutes at the Chicago Marathon last October in 2 hours, 9 minutes, 56 seconds. It was her third win in Chicago.

She also won the marathon at the 2019 world championships in Qatar, where the women's race started at midnight to avoid extreme daytime heat.

The AIU gave no timetable for a disciplinary case for the 30-year-old runner.

Chepngetich was interviewed in person in Kenya in April and "complied with requests regarding our investigation," AIU official Brett Clothier said in a statement.

The substance Chepngetich tested positive for, hydrochlorothiazide or HCTZ, can be used to disguise the use of performance-enhancing drugs.

## Trump's approval rating on immigration and government spending has slipped, new AP-NORC poll finds

By STEVE PEOPLES and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Only about one-quarter of U.S. adults say that President Donald Trump's policies have helped them since he took office, according to a new poll that finds underwhelming marks for him on key issues, including the economy, immigration, government spending and health care.

In fact, the Republican president fails to earn majority approval on any of the issues included in the poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. He's even slipped slightly since earlier this year on immigration, which has consistently been a strength for him in his second term.

And while a majority of Americans do see Trump as at least "somewhat" capable of getting things done following the passage of his sprawling budget bill, fewer believe he understands the problems facing people like them.

Most don't see positive impact from Trump's policies

Roughly half of U.S. adults report that Trump's policies have "done more to hurt" them since his second term began six months ago, the survey found. About 2 in 10 say his policies have "not made a difference" in their lives, with about one-quarter saying his policies have "done more to help" them.

The vast majority of Democrats and about half of independents say Trump's policies have had a negative impact, while even many Republicans say they haven't seen positive effects.

"As it sits today, I don't know his policies have made much of a difference in my day-to-day life," said Landon Lindemer, a 29-year-old logistics manager from suburban Atlanta who voted for Trump three times.

Lindemer said he generally approves of Trump's job performance, even if he has concerns about the massive spending in the big bill the president signed into law on July 4.

"I'm not sold it's really going to help," he said.

Low but steady presidential approval ratings

The mixed reviews on Trump's policies come as he struggles to follow through on key campaign promises, including lowering costs for working-class Americans, preserving popular social welfare programs like Medicaid, ending foreign wars and lowering government spending.

Inflation rose last month to its highest level since February as Trump's sweeping tariffs push up the cost of everything from groceries and clothes to furniture and appliances. Separately, Trump's budget bill included Medicaid cuts that will lead to 11.8 million more Americans becoming uninsured and add \$3.3 trillion to the national debt, the Congressional Budget Office estimated.

At the same time, violent conflicts still rage in Israel and Ukraine.

Overall, the new poll finds that about 4 in 10 U.S. adults approve of Trump's job performance, a figure that's in line with his June approval but historically weak compared with recent presidents. Closer to half of U.S. adults approved of President Joe Biden and President Barack Obama at roughly the same point in their Democratic presidencies, according to polls from AP-NORC and Gallup, although Biden's approval rating declined in the second half of his first year and remained low for the rest of his time in office.



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Poll respondent Bailey Neill, a 42-year-old attorney from San Antonio, said he was “terrified” of Trump. Neill, a Democrat who describes himself as a “student of history,” cast Trump as an authoritarian who has followed the controversial playbook outlined in Project 2025, a conservative blueprint for transformative changes across the federal government that Trump tried to distance himself from before the November election.

“In terms of my day-to-day life, I really haven’t seen a change, except for the general fear and anxiety I feel at a core level,” Neill said.

Most disapprove of Trump’s handling of immigration, economy and more

Trump earned less than 50% approval on every issue included in the new AP-NORC poll, including the economy, government spending, trade, taxes, immigration, health care and his handling of the conflict in the Middle East.

Only 43% of U.S. adults said they approved of his handling of immigration, down slightly from the 49% who supported his work on the issue back in March.

Trump also appears to have lost some support for his spending decisions. About 4 in 10 Americans approve of Trump’s handling of government spending, down from 46% in March.

On the economy overall, roughly 4 in 10 adults approve of Trump’s performance, which hasn’t changed measurably in the last few months.

Timothy Dwyer, of Dyersburg, Tennessee, a 26-year-old self-described independent who works in retail sales and leans Republican, said Trump’s work on the economy, especially his tariffs, has “really sucked.”

“He’s turned us into a toilet and has absolutely made us the laughing stock of the world,” Dwyer said of Trump’s trade policies, while also lamenting the president’s work on reducing grocery prices and health care.

Most view Trump as effective, but fewer think he understands their needs

Despite such criticism, most U.S. adults think Trump is at least somewhat effective.

About 6 in 10 say “capable of getting things done” describes Trump at least “somewhat” well. And about half of U.S. adults say the same about the phrases “good negotiator” or “capable of handling a crisis.”

That doesn’t mean they believe Trump can see things from their perspective.

Most Americans, 56%, say “understands the problems facing people like you” is a phrase that describes Trump “not very well” or “not well at all.” His numbers on the question are relatively weak even among those in his party: Just about half of Republicans say he understands the problems facing people like them “extremely” or “very” well.

“I think he’s doing quite well. He could be doing a hell of a lot worse,” said poll respondent Levi Fischer, of Marshalltown, Iowa, who voted for Trump three times.

Still, Fischer acknowledged that he hasn’t seen the economy improve as quickly as he hoped. Trump’s policies, he said, “don’t make much difference in my life.”

## 1.4M of the nation’s poorest renters risk losing their homes with Trump’s proposed HUD time limit

By SALLY HO and CHARLOTTE KRAMON Associated Press/Report for America

WOODINVILLE, Wash. (AP) — Havalah Hopkins rarely says no to the chain restaurant catering gigs that send her out to Seattle-area events — from church potlucks to office lunches and graduation parties.

The delivery fees and tips she earns on top of \$18 an hour mean it’s better than minimum-wage shift work, even though it’s not consistent. It helps her afford the government-subsidized apartment she and her 14-year-old autistic son have lived in for three years, though it’s still tough to make ends meet.

“It’s a cycle of feeling defeated and depleted, no matter how much energy and effort and tenacity you have towards surviving,” Hopkins said.

Still, the 33-year-old single mother is grateful she has stable housing — experts estimate just 1 in 4 low-income households eligible for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development rental assistance get the benefits. And now Hopkins is at risk of losing her home, as federal officials move to restrict HUD policy.

Amid a worsening national affordable housing and homelessness crisis, President Donald Trump’s admin-

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istration is determined to reshape HUD's expansive role providing stable housing for low-income people, which has been at the heart of its mission for generations. The proposed changes include a two-year limit on the federal government's signature rental assistance programs.

At a June congressional budget hearing, HUD Secretary Scott Turner argued policies like time limits will fix waste and fraud in public housing and Section 8 voucher programs.

"It's broken and deviated from its original purpose, which is to temporarily help Americans in need," Turner said. "HUD assistance is not supposed to be permanent."

But the move to restrict such key subsidies would mark a significant retreat from the scope of HUD's work. Millions of tenants moved in with the promise of subsidized housing for as long as they were poor enough to remain qualified, so time limits would be a seismic shift that could destabilize the most vulnerable households, many unlikely to ever afford today's record-high rents.

New research from New York University, obtained exclusively by The Associated Press and published Thursday, found that if families were cut off after two years, 1.4 million households could lose their vouchers and public housing subsidies — largely working families with children. This would lead housing authorities to evict many families, the report said.

A broad time limit would cause "substantial disruption and dislocation," it said, noting the policy is largely untested and most of the few housing authorities to voluntarily try it eventually abandoned the pilots.

A break from HUD's long-held purpose of helping house the poor could also jeopardize its contracts with private landlords, who say they're already feeling the uncertainty as public housing authorities from Seattle to Atlanta announce they're scaling back in anticipation of federal funding cuts.

Critics fear the restriction could derail those working towards self-sufficiency — defeating the goal time-limit supporters hope to achieve.

HUD spokesperson Kasey Lovett pushed back on the NYU study.

"There is plenty of data that strongly supports time limits and shows that long-term government assistance without any incentive disincentivizes able-bodied Americans to work," Lovett said in a statement. She primarily cited statistics suggesting low employment among HUD-subsidized tenants.

Hopkins said the policy would likely leave her and her son homeless in an economy that often feels indifferent to working poor people like her.

"A two-year time limit is ridiculous," she said. "It's so disrespectful. I think it's dehumanizing — the whole system."

Working families are most at risk

Researchers from the Housing Solutions Lab at New York University's Furman Center analyzed HUD's data over a 10-year period and found about 70% of households who could be affected by a two-year limit had already been living on those subsidies for two or more years.

That's based on 2024 estimates and doesn't include elderly and disabled people who wouldn't be subject to time limits. Exempted households make up about half of the roughly 4.9 million households getting rental assistance.

In the first study to examine the proposed policy's possible impacts, the NYU researchers found time limits would largely punish families who are working but earning far below their area's median income, which would ultimately shift federal rental assistance away from households with kids.

"Housing assistance is especially impactful for children," said Claudia Aiken, the study co-author and director of new research partnerships for the Housing Solutions Lab. Their health, education, employment and earnings potential can "change in really meaningful ways if they have stable housing," she said.

It would affect people like Hopkins, whose family was on a years-long waitlist in the expensive region where she grew up. In July 2022, she and her son moved into a two-bedroom public housing unit in Woodinville, Washington. She pays \$450 a month in rent — 30% of her household income.

A market-rate apartment in the area costs at least \$2,000 more, according to the King County Housing Authority, which in June announced it would pause issuing some new vouchers.

Hopkins knows she could never afford to live in her home state without rental assistance. It was a relief they could stay as long as they needed. She had been struggling to scrape together hundreds of dollars

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more a month for her previous trailer home.

"There's no words to put on feeling like your housing is secure," Hopkins said. "I feel like I was gasping for air and I'm finally able to breathe."

She credits the housing subsidy for her ability to finally leave an abusive marriage, and still dreams of more — perhaps her own catering business or working as a party decorator.

"We all can't be lawyers and doctors — and two years isn't enough to even become that," Hopkins said.

Since learning of Trump's proposal, Hopkins said she's been haunted by thoughts of shoving her possessions into a van with her son, upending the stability she built for him.

'Difficult to do well'

The average household in HUD-subsidized housing stays about six years, studies show.

HUD funds local public housing projects where nearly 1 million households live and the Section 8 vouchers that about 4 million households use to offset their private rentals.

There's been little guidance from HUD on how time-limited housing assistance would be implemented — how it would be enforced, when the clock starts and how the exemptions would be defined.

Both Democrats and Republicans have acknowledged the potential for time limits to help curb HUD's notorious waitlists. Hard-liners contend the threat of housing loss will push people to reach self-sufficiency; others see limits, when coupled with support and workforce incentives, as a means to motivate tenants to improve their lives.

Yet there are strikingly few successful examples.

NYU researchers identified just 17 public housing authorities that have tested time limits. None of the programs were designed for only two years and 11 abandoned the restriction — despite being able to use federal dollars for services to help people achieve self-sufficiency. Several agencies that dropped the limits said tenants still struggled to afford housing after their time was up.

"These policies are complex and difficult to monitor, enforce, and do well," NYU's Aiken said.

The city of Keene, New Hampshire, tried five-year time limits starting in 2001, but terminated the policy before fully enforcing it to avoid kicking out households that would still be "rent burdened, or potentially homeless," said Josh Meehan, executive director of Keene Housing.

In California, Shawnté Spears of the Housing Authority of San Mateo County said the agency has kept its five-year time limit in tandem with educational programs she says have "given folks motivation" to meet their goals. It also gives more people the chance to use vouchers, she said.

NYU's Aiken acknowledged HUD's long waitlists make the current system "a bit of a lottery," adding: "You could say that time limits are a way of increasing people's odds in that lottery."

The landlord's dilemma

HUD's Section 8 programs have long depended on hundreds of thousands of for-profit and nonprofit small business owners and property managers to accept tenant vouchers. Now, landlords fear a two-year limit could put their contracts for HUD-subsidized housing in limbo.

Amid the uncertainty, Denise Muha, executive director of the National Leased Housing Association, said multiple landlord groups have voiced their concerns about HUD's next budget in a letter to congressional leaders. She said landlords generally agree two years is simply not enough time for most low-income tenants to change their fortunes.

"As a practical matter, you're going to increase your turnover, which is a cost," Muha said. "Nobody wants to throw out their tenants without cause."

It's always been a significant lift for private landlords to work with HUD subsidies, which involve burdensome paperwork, heavy oversight and maintenance inspections.

But the trade-off is a near guarantee of dependable longer-term renters and rental income. If that's compromised, some landlords say they'd pull back from the federal subsidy programs.

Brad Suster, who owns 86 Chicago-area units funded by HUD, said accepting subsidies could become risky.

"Would we have the same reliability that we know has traditionally come for countless years from the federal government?" Suster said. "That's something landlords and owners want to know is there."

The diminishing housing stock available to low-income tenants has been a brewing problem for HUD.

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Between 2010 and 2020, some 50,000 housing providers left the voucher program, the agency has reported. Chaos and trade-offs, critics say

It's up for debate whether lawmakers will buy into Trump's vision for HUD.

This week the U.S. House appropriations committee is taking up HUD's 2026 budget, which so far makes no mention of time limits.

HUD's Lovett noted the Senate's budget plans for the agency have not yet been released, and said the administration remains focused on future implementation of time limits.

"HUD will continue to engage with colleagues on the hill to ensure a seamless transition and enforcement of any new time limit," Lovett said in a statement.

Noëlle Porter, the director of government affairs at the National Housing Law Project, said Trump's fight for time limits is far from over, noting that legislative and rule changes could make them a reality.

"It is clearly a stated goal of the administration to impose work requirements and time limits on rental assistance, even though it would be wildly unpopular," Porter said.

Democratic Rep. James Clyburn of South Carolina says there's no evidence time limits would save HUD money.

"This doesn't help families who already are working multiple jobs to become self-sufficient," Clyburn said at a June hearing. "Instead, it creates chaos, financial uncertainty and pushes these families into more severe trade-offs."

Time limits could imperil Aaliyah Barnes' longtime dream of graduating college and becoming a nurse, finding a job and a home she can afford.

The 28-year-old single mom in Louisville, Kentucky, this year joined Family Scholar House, which provides counseling and support for people pursuing an education — and, to Barnes' relief, housing.

Her apartment is paid for by a Section 8 voucher. In March, Barnes moved in and her 3-year-old son, Aarmoni, finally got his own room, where she set up a learning wall.

Previously, she had struggled to afford housing on her wages at a call center — and living with her mom, two sisters and their kids in a cramped house was an environment ridden with arguments.

The stable future she's building could disappear, though, if she's forced out in two years when her schooling is expected to take three years.

"I'd be so close, but so far away," Barnes said.

## Britain will lower its voting age to 16 in a bid to strengthen democracy

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain will lower the voting age from 18 to 16 by the next national election as part of measures to increase democratic participation, the government announced Thursday.

The center-left Labour Party pledged before it was elected in July 2024 to lower the voting age for elections to Britain's Parliament. Scotland and Wales already let 16- and 17-year-olds vote in local and regional elections.

Britain will join the short list of countries where the voting age is 16, alongside the likes of Austria, Brazil and Ecuador. A handful of European Union countries, including Belgium, Germany and Malta, allow 16-year-olds to vote in elections to the European Parliament.

The move comes alongside wider reforms that include tightening campaign financing rules to stop shell companies with murky ownership from donating to political parties. Democracy Minister Rushanara Ali said the change would strengthen safeguards against foreign interference in British politics.

There will also be tougher sentences for people convicted of intimidating candidates.

Additionally, the government said it will introduce automatic voter registration and allow voters to use bank cards as a form of identification at polling stations.

The previous Conservative government introduced a requirement for voters to show photo identification



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in 2022, a measure it said would combat fraud. Critics argued it could disenfranchise millions of voters, particularly the young, the poor and members of ethnic minorities.

Elections watchdog the Electoral Commission estimates that about 750,000 people did not vote in last year's election because they lacked ID.

Turnout in the 2024 election was 59.7%, the lowest level in more than two decades.

Harry Quilter-Pinner, head of left-leaning think tank the Institute for Public Policy Research, said the changes were "the biggest reform to our electoral system since 1969," when the voting age was lowered to 18 from 21.

The changes must be approved by Parliament. The next national election must be held by 2029.

"For too long, public trust in our democracy has been damaged and faith in our institutions has been allowed to decline," Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner said. "We are taking action to break down barriers to participation that will ensure more people have the opportunity to engage in U.K. democracy."

Stuart Fox, a politics lecturer at the University of Exeter who has studied youth voting, said it's "far from clear" whether lowering the voting age actually increases youth engagement.

"It is right to help young people be heard," he said. "But there are other measures which are more effective at getting young people to vote — particularly those from the poorest backgrounds who are by far the least likely to vote — such as beefing up the citizenship curriculum or expanding the provision of volunteering programs in schools."

## Today in History: July 18, Nadia's perfect 10

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, July 18, the 199th day of 2025. There are 166 days left in the year.

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On July 18, 1976, at the Summer Olympics in Montreal, Nadia Comaneci of Romania became the first gymnast to receive a perfect score of 10 from Olympic judges for her performance on the uneven bars.

Also on this date:

In 1536, the English Parliament passed an act declaring the authority of the pope void in England.

In 1863, during the Civil War, Union troops spearheaded by the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, made up of Black soldiers, charged Confederate-held Fort Wagner on Morris Island, S.C. The Confederates were able to repel the Northerners, who suffered heavy losses; the 54th's commander, Col. Robert Gould Shaw, was among those who were killed.

In 1918, South African anti-apartheid leader and president Nelson Mandela was born in the village of Mvezo.

In 1925, Adolf Hitler published the first volume of his autobiographical manifesto, "Mein Kampf (My Struggle)."

In 1944, Hideki Tojo was removed as Japanese premier and war minister because of setbacks suffered by his country in World War II.

In 1947, President Harry S. Truman signed a Presidential Succession Act which placed the speaker of the House and the Senate president pro tempore next in the line of succession after the vice president.

In 1964, nearly a week of rioting erupted in New York's Harlem neighborhood following the fatal police shooting of a Black teenager, James Powell, two days earlier.

In 1994, a bomb hidden in a van destroyed a Jewish cultural center in Buenos Aires, Argentina, killing 85.

In 2005, an unrepentant Eric Rudolph was sentenced in Birmingham, Alabama, to life in prison for an abortion clinic bombing that killed an off-duty police officer and maimed a nurse.

In 2013, Detroit became the biggest U.S. city to file for bankruptcy, its finances ravaged and its neighborhoods hollowed out by a long, slow decline in population and auto manufacturing.

Today's Birthdays: Olympic gold medal figure skater Tenley Albright is 90. Movie director Paul Verhoeven is 87. Singer Dion DiMucci is 86. Actor James Brolin is 85. Baseball Hall of Famer Joe Torre is 85. Singer

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Martha Reeves is 84. Business mogul Richard Branson is 75. Actor Margo Martindale is 74. Musician Ricky Skaggs is 71. World Golf Hall of Famer Nick Faldo is 68. Actor Elizabeth McGovern is 64. Actor Vin Diesel is 58. Author Elizabeth Gilbert is 56. Retired NBA All-Star Penny Hardaway is 54. Singer-songwriter M.I.A. is 50. Actor Elsa Pataky ("The Fast and the Furious" films) is 49. Movie director Jared Hess is 46. Actor Kristen Bell is 45. Actor Priyanka Chopra is 43. Actor Chace Crawford is 40. Boxer Canelo Alvarez is 35. Olympic sprinter Noah Lyles is 28.