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Saturday, July 19

Jr. Legion at Clear Lake, 3 p.m.
Jr. Teeners at Clear Lake, 1 p.m.
State U10 at Webster
U10 and U12 Softball Tourney in Groton

Sunday, July 20

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion 11 a.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.

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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

Monday, July 21

Senior Menu: Breaded chicken sandwich, scalloped potato, mixed vegetables, oranges, whole wheat bread.

Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.

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

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

Tuesday, July 22

Senior Menu: Lasagna rotini bake, seven layer salad, tropical fruit, breadstick.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Region 6B Legion Tourney in Sisseton

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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.

\$9B Federal Budget Slash

The US House early Friday morning approved \$9B in cuts to public broadcasting and foreign aid programs, advancing President Donald Trump's budget agenda in a 216-213 vote largely along party lines. The House vote came ahead of a midnight Friday deadline and marked the first time since 1999 that Congress has approved a president's effort to cancel previously authorized discretionary spending. The bill now heads to the White House for Trump's signature.

The package cancels \$1.1B in previously authorized funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which subsidizes over 1,500 local media stations. It also rescinds nearly \$8B from various foreign aid programs tied to public health, disaster relief, and peacekeeping. About \$400M in funding for an HIV/AIDS prevention program was restored earlier this week after bipartisan pushback, helping to secure Senate approval of the package by a 51-48 vote Thursday.

Separately, under Trump's direction, the Justice Department asked a federal court to unseal grand jury testimony related to the investigation of late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Trump also filed a libel lawsuit yesterday over a Wall Street Journal story alleging he sent Epstein an indecent birthday card.

Education Department releases \$1.3B in frozen funding.

The now-available funding supports after-school and summer programming for low-income families. However, over \$5B in funding for educational programming—including English language instruction and adult literacy—remains frozen as the Trump administration conducts a programmatic review to ensure it aligns with the White House's priorities. Earlier this week, more than 20 states filed a lawsuit against the administration over the withheld funds.

US, El Salvador, and Venezuela coordinate prisoner swap.

The US sent 252 Venezuelans deported to a maximum-security prison in El Salvador back to their home country Friday in exchange for the return of 10 Americans detained in Venezuela. As part of the deal, the Venezuelan government also freed dozens of domestic political prisoners and detainees. The exchange follows the Trump administration's use of a wartime law in March to deport more than 200 Venezuelan men accused of ties to the Tren de Aragua gang, allegations immigration attorneys and family members have denied.

Brazil's ex-president ordered to wear ankle monitor.

The nation's Supreme Court has ruled that former President Jair Bolsonaro wear an ankle monitor as he awaits trial over an alleged coup attempt in 2022. The order comes alongside a raid on his home early Friday morning. Bolsonaro is also barred from leaving his house at night, using social media, approaching embassies, and speaking with foreign officials or anyone under investigation, including his son.

Netflix is using AI to cut costs and save time.

The film juggernaut used visual effects created by generative AI for the first time in one of its original TV shows. Thanks to the technology, creating a sequence of a building collapsing in the Argentinian sci-fi show "The Eternaut" became 10 times faster and financially feasible, CEO Ted Sarandos told investors Thursday. The announcement came as Netflix reported over \$11B in revenue last quarter, a 16% rise compared to the same period last year.

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Scientists pinpoint vitamin D gene with cancer-fighting potential.

A team of scientists has identified the gene SDR42E1 as critical to how the body absorbs and processes vitamin D, a discovery with potential for highly targeted medical therapies. Using CRISPR gene-editing technology, the researchers disabled SDR42E1 in cell lines of a patient with colorectal cancer, cutting off the vitamin D supply the cancer cells needed to survive. The newfound understanding of the gene's connection to vitamin D could also help address vitamin D deficiency, which affects nearly 50% of the global population.

Chevron wins dispute with Exxon Mobil over Hess' Guyana oil assets.

Chevron has finalized its \$53B acquisition of energy company Hess, securing a 30% stake in the over 11 billion barrel-equivalents of oil and natural gas reserves off Guyana, a small nation on South America's North Atlantic coast. The deal had been in limbo for nearly two years due to a contractual dispute brought by Chevron's larger rival, Exxon Mobil. The Paris-based International Chamber of Commerce ruled in Chevron's favor Friday, clearing the way for the merger.

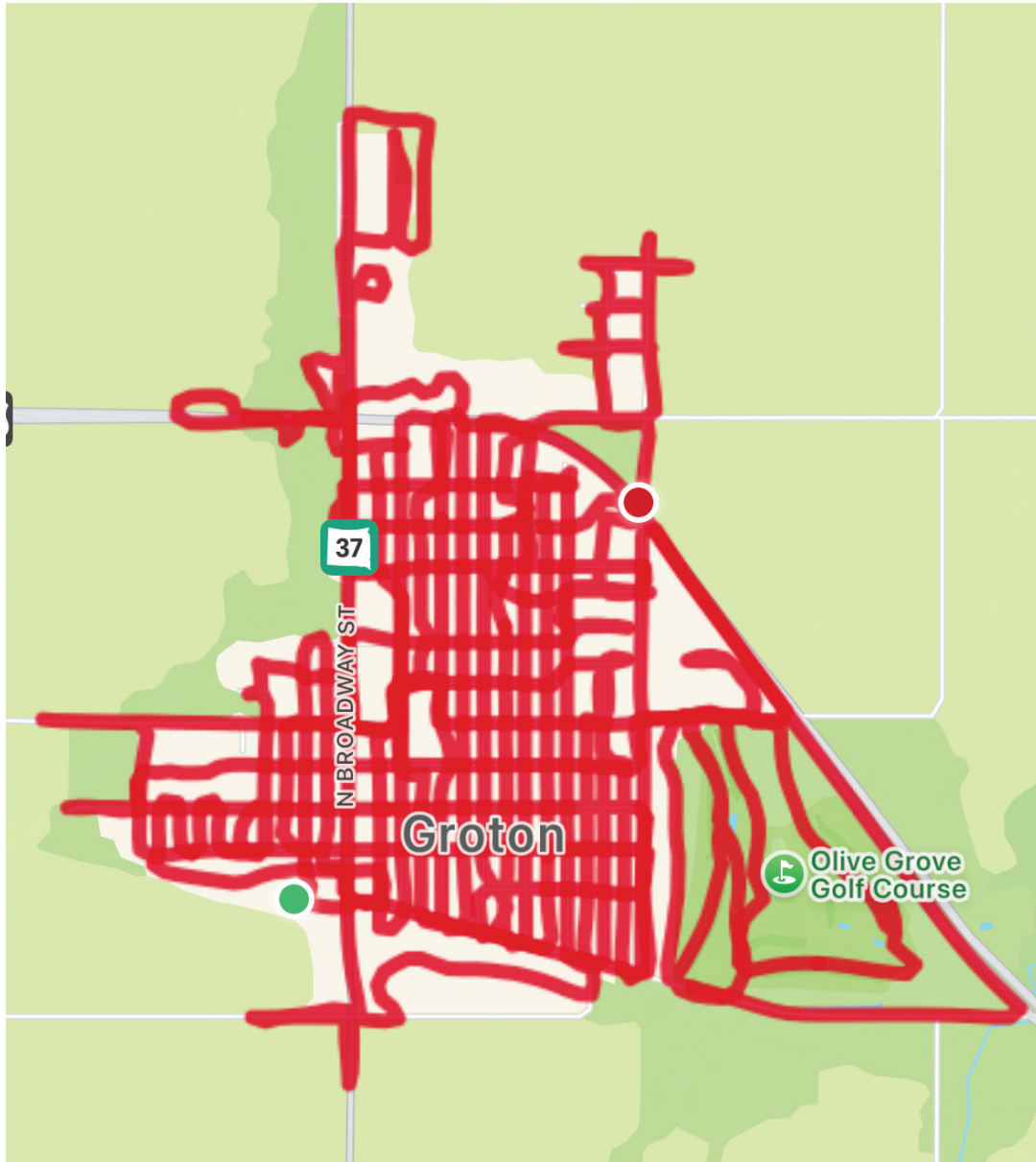
Stratospheric skydiver Felix Baumgartner dies in paraglider crash.

Known as "Fearless Felix," the former Austrian military parachutist became the first skydiver to surpass the speed of sound, reaching 843.6 mph during a more than 24-mile free fall over New Mexico in 2012. The feat set records for the highest manned balloon flight, as well as the highest and fastest jump in free fall. Italian officials confirmed Baumgartner's death Thursday, after reports of a paraglider crashing into a swimming pool in the city of Porto Sant'Elpidio. He was 56.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Hanisha V. in India.

"We stopped at the bakery to get some delicious cream buns and we took some extra with us before heading to the beach in hopes of giving it to someone who might need it. An old man approaches us seeking alms; before even reaching out for the bun, my uncle nearby asks him how he was doing. That simple question broke him (the old man) into tears. We did give him the bun and then some, after listening to his very touching story about his son and wife."



Adult Mosquito Control

The City of Groton conducted adult mosquito control last night. The temperature was 67-72 degrees with the wind out of the east-northeast at 5-10 mph. 11.2 gallons of Perm-X UL 4-4 was used. Travel time was 2 hours and 35 minutes with a distance of 35.84 miles. During my travels I saw 15 rabbits, 2 dogs and 1 deer. Total cost of the application was around \$555.

Groton Jr. Teeners' Jordan Schwan Takes Hit Streak Into Game Against Clear Lake 14U

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U's Jordan Schwan takes a 20-game hitting streak into their matchup against Clear Lake 14U on Saturday. Schwan has gone 31-54 during the streak with seven extra base hits. The game is set for 11 a.m. Then after that, Groton will play Beresford Area at 1 p.m. at the Clear Lake triangular.

Player Highlight:

Trayce Schelle hits and pitches for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. Schelle primarily plays shortstop on the field. Schelle drove in one run last game as they went 1-1 at the plate. Schelle has an on-base percentage of 0.483 this season thanks in part to a 0.370 average and 13 walks. Schelle gets ahead in the count fast on the mound. Schelle has thrown first pitch strikes to 79 of the 139 batters they've faced this season.

About Groton Jr. Teeners 14U:

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U has 16 wins against 12 losses this season. Schwan's 1.442 OPS leads Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. The right-handed hitter has a 0.646 OBP and a 0.796 slugging percentage this season. Schelle leads Groton Jr. Teeners 14U with 26 and two-thirds innings pitched. Keegan Kucker leads Groton Jr. Teeners 14U with 153 total fielding chances this season. Kucker's primary position is catcher.

About Clear Lake 14U:

Clear Lake 14U has two wins against nine losses this season. Asher Bauman's 1.932 OPS leads Clear Lake 14U. The infielder has a 0.750 OBP and a 1.182 slugging percentage this season. Gray Holden leads Clear Lake 14U with 11 innings pitched. Kyler Marson leads Clear Lake 14U with 17 total fielding chances this season. Marson's primary position is catcher.

GROTON COMMUNITY APPRECIATION MEAL



Walking Tacos!

TUES., JULY 22

11 AM - 2:00 PM

7 E. US Hwy 12 | Groton

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Groton 2025 Invitational Softball Tournament – U10

Teams: Groton Gold, Groton Black, Ipswich, Warner, Redfield, Clark

Pool A

Groton Gold

Warner

Clark

Pool B

Groton Black

Ipswich

Redfield

Pool Play Games

Nelson Field

Game 1 - 9:00 Groton Gold vs Warner

Game 2 - 10:15 Groton Gold vs Clark

Game 3 - 11:30 Warner vs Clark

Falk Field

Groton Black vs Ipswich

Groton Black vs Redfield

Ipswich vs Redfield

Post-Pool Play Games:

1:00 Game 1: Pool A #1 vs Pool B #2 – winner moves to championship game

1:00 Game 2: Pool B #1 vs Pool A #2 – winner moves to championship game

Placing Games:

2:00 5th/6th Place Game: Pool A 3rd place team vs Pool B 3rd Place team

3:30 Consolation Championship Game

3:30 Championship Game

In the event of a heat advisory, we will move right into placing games based on pool play.

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Groton 2025 Invitational Softball Tournament – U12

Teams: Groton, Ipswich, Aberdeen, Clark, Milbank

Time	Falk Field	Nelson Field	Bye
9:00 AM	Groton vs Clark	Aberdeen vs Ipswich	Milbank
10:15 AM	Milbank vs Clark	Groton vs Ipswich	Aberdeen
11:30 AM	Milbank vs Aberdeen	Clark vs Ipswich	Groton
1:00 PM	Milbank vs Ipswich	Groton vs Aberdeen	Clark
2:15 PM	Clark vs Aberdeen	Milbank vs Groton	Ipswich
3:30 PM	Championship Game – Top 2 Teams – 5 innings, no clock		

Round Robin Tiebreakers

- **Win-Loss Record (Primary)** - Team with the most **wins** is the winner.
- **Head-to-Head Result (First Tiebreaker)**
 - If two teams are tied, check the result of the game they played against each other.
 - The winner of that matchup ranks higher.
- **Run Differential (Second Tiebreaker)**
 - For teams still tied, calculate:
$$\text{Run Differential} = \text{Total Runs Scored} - \text{Total Runs Allowed}$$
 - Higher differential wins.
- **Runs Allowed (Third Tiebreaker)**
 - If still tied, the team that **allowed fewer total runs** is ranked higher.
- **Coin Toss or Playoff Game (Final Tiebreaker)**
 - If still tied (very rare), use a coin toss or schedule a tiebreaker game if time allows.

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Groton 14U girls fastpitch wraps up first season

Front Row L-R: Tenley Frost, Makenna Krause, Ryelle Gilbert, Arianna Dinger, Kinsley Rowen, Kyleigh Kroll

Back Row L-R: Andi Gauer, Illyanna Dellaire, Libby Cole, Rylue Rose, Neely Althoff, Rylen Ekern, Audrey Davis, Coach Amanda Bisbee

The 14U girls fastpitch softball team has wrapped up its inaugural season, finishing with three wins and a whole lot of growth. Despite being a first-year fast pitch team, the girls came together quickly, showed heart on the field, and worked hard in practice to improve their skills. Great Season, ladies! (Photo courtesy

Amanda Bisbee)

South Dakota 9-1-1 Centers Implement RapidSOS to Enhance Emergency Response

Pierre, SD — South Dakota 9-1-1 call centers have recently begun implementing the RapidSOS Unite GIS module, an AI-powered intelligent safety platform that securely connects life-saving data from over 540 million devices, apps, and sensors directly to 9-1-1 centers and first responders across the state. The upgrade enhances the capability of an introductory version of the program successfully tested state-wide.

Traditionally, 9-1-1 telecommunicators relied solely on what a caller could verbally communicate during an emergency. With RapidSOS, South Dakota's emergency responders now receive additional vital information instantly including caller location, contact details, health profiles, vehicle crash data, alarm alerts, and even cell phone video in some cases. This data helps accelerate response times and improve on-scene decision-making.

"Being able to receive a caller's near real-time location and other information can better inform our Public Safety Answering Points (PSAP) during emergency response," said Jason Husby, Statewide 9-1-1 Coordinator. "RapidSOS helps PSAPs respond, dispatch, and allocate resources more efficiently by sharing critical data, strengthening our connection to the communities we serve."

One key feature now live in South Dakota is RapidSOS GIS, which overlays locally sourced mapping data such as trails, mile markers, fire hydrants, and boat ramps on top of standard maps to more accurately locate callers in both urban and rural areas.

Additionally, RapidSOS provides a redundant digital connection to 9-1-1 centers. In the event of outages or disasters, it serves as a backup system, enabling telecommunicators to continue receiving caller location and contact information and even call citizens back.

Citizens are encouraged to update their emergency health profiles through their smartphone's Health or Health Connect apps, allowing first responders to access medical details that may be crucial in emergencies. By doing so, important health information will automatically be available to the 9-1-1 dispatchers in the event the caller is unable to communicate that information. The health information is only shared with the PSAP during an incoming 9-1-1 call.

RapidSOS is a global safety company working with over 22,000 public safety agencies in 11 countries. Its integration into South Dakota's 9-1-1 infrastructure represents a major step forward in delivering smarter, faster emergency services across the state.

South Dakota State 9-1-1 Coordination is an agency of the Department of Public Safety.

#

Gov. Rhoden Announces Prison Special Session on September 23

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Larry Rhoden announced the date of the special session to consider and pass legislation for a new prison. The special session will be on Tuesday, September 23, 2025, at 9:00 am CT. Governor Rhoden signed an Executive Proclamation formally announcing the special session. You can read his letter to the legislature, which includes the Executive Proclamation, [here](#).

“When we started this process, we knew that we needed to build consensus on a plan that a supermajority of the legislature can agree on, and I believe that we are in good shape to achieve that,” wrote Governor Larry Rhoden. “The purpose of this session shall be to consider and pass legislation to authorize the Department of Corrections to do everything necessary to move forward with this project.”

Lt. Governor Tony Venhuizen, who chaired the prison task force, also wrote a letter to Governor Rhoden on the task force’s findings. You can find that letter [here](#).

“We understood that compromise was necessary to reach a recommendation that can win [the Governor’s] support and the support of the legislature,” wrote Lt. Governor Tony Venhuizen. “The task force’s unanimous vote for its recommendation demonstrates that we have found a good site for a new penitentiary and a strong path forward.”

The prison task force was announced by Governor Larry Rhoden in February. They were tasked with answering three questions:

Do we need a new prison?
How big should it be?
Where should it go?

The prison task force came to unanimous agreement on all three of these questions.

The special session is called pursuant to Article IV, Section 3 of the South Dakota Constitution.

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- Continuous 2" x 2" tubular steel frame with protective e-coat on lower end

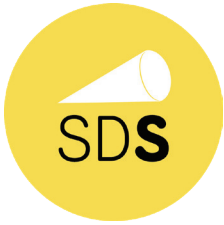
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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JULY 18, 2025 4:28 PM

South Dakota Public Broadcasting is bracing for potential cuts and layoffs after Congress canceled \$1.1 billion in previously approved nationwide funding for public media.

The federal funding went to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which distributes money to local stations. SDPB depends on \$2.2 million in annual funding from the corporation, which is about 20% of SDPB's budget. State funds account for a little more than half of SDPB's budget, while fundraising, private donations and other sources make up the rest.

Because the federal funding was previously approved, SDPB was counting on it to arrive in the months ahead.

"I don't think it's realistic to raise an additional \$2.2 million on 75 days' notice," said Ryan Howlett, CEO of Friends of SDPB, a nonprofit that raises money for SDPB. He added that donor support increased in recent weeks.

SDPB provides non-commercial public radio and television across South Dakota. In addition to news coverage, the organization provides live video and audio feeds of legislative and state government meetings, educational content, cultural programming, high school activities broadcasts, and emergency alerts across the state.

The congressional legislation, which President Donald Trump is expected to sign into law, also cancels \$8 billion in foreign aid. It's the second time in more than three decades that Congress approved a presidential rescission request.

Julie Overgaard, SDPB executive director, said if funding isn't replaced, the organization will reduce staff by 20 to 25%. South Dakota Public Broadcasting employs about 60 people, meaning up to 15 people could lose their jobs.

Overgaard said she was raised on "Sesame Street" and "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" in a "poor rural household" in northwest Iowa. She said public broadcasting is what readied her for school, since she didn't have access to the same resources as more affluent, urban areas of the state.

Overgaard said the cuts will have "real, long-lasting, damaging impacts" on South Dakota. Trump and some congressional Republicans have accused National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting Service of bias in their news coverage.

"I don't think this is about bias in media," Overgaard said in an SDPB interview. "I think this is about trying to shutter and change people's access to information, to public safety, to education, to things that make a big, big difference."



South Dakota Public Broadcasting's logo at its downtown Sioux Falls studio. (Makenzie

Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

Rounds, Johnson explain support for recession

The three members of Congress from South Dakota, who are all Republicans, each voted in favor of rescinding the funding for public broadcasting.

Sen. Mike Rounds announced his support after securing a handshake deal earlier this week with the White House budget director to transfer \$9.4 million to Native American radio stations in rural areas across

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11 states.

In a statement to South Dakota Searchlight, Rounds said SDPB and tribal stations both provide critical alerts and public safety information for the state. But he said tribal radio stations receive up to 92% of their operating budgets from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

"These rural tribal stations that provide potentially lifesaving alerts would not survive without assistance from the federal government," Rounds said. "SDPB receives financial support through donations to Friends of SDPB that assist with their operating costs."

Rounds also said in a press release that with "nearly \$37 trillion in federal debt, we must preserve essential services but also take meaningful steps to reduce wasteful spending."

Overgaard said she was surprised to see Rounds rally funding for tribal radio stations but not other rural broadcasters.

Native Public Media CEO Loris Taylor wrote in an editorial that the organization is grateful for Sen. Rounds proposing alternatives, but said the solution found "is neither administratively feasible nor fiscally sustainable in the short term."

Rep. Dusty Johnson "understands the importance of public broadcasting in South Dakota," said spokesperson Kristen Blakely, and he applauded Rounds' effort to help tribes. Johnson said in an interview with C-SPAN this week that he had concerns about the impact on rural and reservation areas of the state. Rounds' deal made adjustments regarding those concerns, he said.

The office of Senate Majority Leader John Thune did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

SDPB doesn't expect state to fill funding gap

SDPB escaped then-Gov. Kristi Noem's proposed \$3.6 million cut in state funding this winter. State dollars pay for the infrastructure and engineering of the public media network. Friends of SDPB largely pays for national programming, while grants from the corporation support local programming.

Overgaard said there was resounding support from the public and Legislature for SDPB during the legislative session.

"If you take away one leg of our three-legged stool, it puts a lot of pressure on the other two legs to pick up the slack," Overgaard said.

State Rep. Jack Kolbeck, R-Sioux Falls, sits on the legislative budget committee and fought against the proposed state cut. The committee will meet next week, where Kolbeck hopes to hear more about how the federal cuts will affect SDPB.

"I listen to SDPB a lot," Kolbeck said. "I'm not in favor of them getting to the point where they can't operate."

Overgaard doesn't expect the state or its taxpayers to "be forced or make up for the decisions our congressional delegation made." She plans to advocate for public media funding in the upcoming federal budget process and seek other funding sources, such as donations and grants.

"I know it's going to be another tight budget year. I will not be asking or expecting them to come up with \$2 million," Overgaard said of legislators. "We will have to solve that ourselves."

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

COMMENTARY

'Big, beautiful' funding for Trump statue garden could put an ugly blemish in the Black Hills

by Seth Tupper

It's not surprising that a guy with a gold-gilded New York City apartment would want to decorate a forest with 250 statues.

What might surprise South Dakotans is how close President Donald Trump's National Garden of American Heroes is to becoming a Black Hills reality.

Tucked among the hundreds of pages in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act that Congress passed and Trump signed, there's a provision appropriating \$40 million for statue procurement.

The bill doesn't designate a location, but multiple signs point to the Black Hills as a contender. Trump was in the Black Hills, after all, when he announced the idea five years ago during a speech at Mount Rushmore National Memorial. Earlier this year, South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden offered Trump a site about a mile east of the mountain carving, where members of a prominent Rapid City family are willing to donate undeveloped land bordering the Black Hills National Forest.

If the Black Hills location is chosen, a peaceful pocket of nature will be obliterated to make way for a new road, a parking lot and statues of Kobe Bryant, Julia Child, Whitney Houston, Vince Lombardi and Alex Trebek.

Those debatably statue-worthy names from sports and entertainment are all on the list Trump released in 2021, along with a bunch of names most people have probably never heard of, plus dozens of historical figures such as Paul Revere, Harriet Tubman and Martin Luther King Jr.

The project has supporters, but many people who love the natural beauty of the "island in the plains" are likely to oppose the man-made intrusion. It wouldn't be the first time a politician wrongly anticipated broad public support for a Big, Beautiful Black Hills Idea.

Nearly 10 years ago, then-Gov. Dennis Daugaard was convinced that Spearfish Canyon should have a state park. But where he saw a canyon in need of state management for throngs of visitors like those at Mount Rushmore and Custer State Park, many locals saw a natural treasure in need of protection from exactly that kind of development and increased visitation.

Daugaard eventually gave up in the face of opposition, but that didn't stop people from flocking to Spearfish Canyon, much of which lies within the federally managed Black Hills National Forest. Modern methods of information sharing have turned some of the canyon's locally known secret spots into congested tourist destinations.

Some Black Hills residents have conflicted feelings about that. They know tourism is vital to their economy. They also know that if the Black Hills is overpromoted and overdeveloped in pursuit of tourist dollars, it'll wreck some of the natural beauty that inspires tourists to visit in the first place. There has to be a balance.

Few people understood that better than the late Peter Norbeck, a legendary South Dakota governor and U.S. senator. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, he hiked and rode horseback over Iron Mountain more than 20 times while surveying a route for Iron Mountain Road. The winding ribbon of asphalt that resulted from those efforts intentionally forces drivers to slow down and appreciate the surrounding forest and mountains.



A June 2025 view of the area in South Dakota's Black Hills proposed as a site for the National Garden of American Heroes sculpture park. (Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)

In some ways, the road intrudes on those surroundings, not only with pavement but also with tunnels that frame Mount Rushmore. Those intrusions were carefully planned to complement nature and the mountain carving. The rest of the route twists and turns around the scenery to preserve as much of it as possible.

Norbeck fought for his circuitous route against engineers who favored cheaper, easier and more destructive ways to cut a road through the area.

"He insisted," wrote Norbeck's biographer, Gilbert Fite, "that none of the natural beauty be destroyed."

The proposed Black Hills site of the National Garden of American Heroes is a stone's throw from Norbeck's meticulously designed road. It's unlikely he would have supported a spontaneous, ill-considered installation of 250 statues that would drastically change the character of the route.

And it's apparent that Norbeck — who devoted much of his life and career to conservation — knew a little more about what's best for the Black Hills than a guy who's spent a lifetime putting his name on tall buildings.

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

Some frozen federal funds for schools released to states by Trump administration

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - JULY 18, 2025 3:15 PM

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's administration confirmed Friday that it's releasing funds that support before- and after-school programs as well as summer programs, a portion of the \$6.8 billion in withheld funds for K-12 schools that were supposed to be sent out two weeks ago.

The administration has faced bipartisan backlash over its decision to freeze billions of dollars that also go toward migrant education, English-language learning, adult education and literacy programs, among other initiatives. Those other funds apparently remained stalled on Friday, and Democrats, a key Republican appropriator and school leaders called for them to be released as well.

The funds that will be released total \$1.3 billion, according to Democrats on the Senate Appropriations Committee, and are intended for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative.

The Education Department says the program "supports the creation of community learning centers that provide academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children, particularly students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools."

A senior administration official said the programmatic review for 21st Century Community Learning Centers has concluded and funds "will be released to the states."

"Guardrails have been put in place to ensure these funds are not used in violation of Executive Orders," the official added.



The Lyndon Baines Johnson Department of Education Building pictured on Nov. 25, 2024. (Photo by Shauneen Miranda/States Newsroom)

Pressure from GOP senators

The announcement came after 10 Republican senators sent a letter to Office of Management and Budget Director Russ Vought on July 16 urging him to release the \$6.8 billion in funds to states.

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West Virginia GOP Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, who led the letter, said in a statement Friday that "21st Century Community Learning Centers offer important services that many West Virginians rely on."

"This program supports states in providing quality after-school and summer learning programs for students while enabling their parents to work and contribute to local economies," said Capito, who chairs the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies.

Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, who leads the broader Senate Appropriations panel, also signed the July 16 letter, along with: Sens. Katie Britt of Alabama, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, John Boozman of Arkansas, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, Deb Fischer of Nebraska, John Hoeven of North Dakota, Mike Rounds of South Dakota and Jim Justice of West Virginia.

While Collins said in a Friday statement she is glad she and her colleagues were able to work together to "effectively urge the Administration to get these funds released," she noted that "there is more funding that still needs to be disbursed."

"I will continue to work to ensure it is delivered swiftly so educators can prepare for the upcoming academic year with certainty and Maine students and families have the resources they need to succeed," she said.

July 1 notification

The Education Department notified states of the freeze just a day before July 1, when these funds are typically sent out as educators plan for the school year, saying the funds were under review.

A slew of congressional Democrats and one independent pushed back on the funding freeze.

Thirty-two senators and 150 House Democrats urged Vought and Education Secretary Linda McMahon in two letters dated July 10 to immediately release the funds they say are being withheld "illegally."

A coalition of 24 states and the District of Columbia also sued the administration over the withheld funds.

The rest of the school money

Sen. Patty Murray of Washington state, the top Democrat on the Senate spending panel, called on the Trump administration to release the rest of the frozen funds.

"After we spoke up — and after weeks of needless chaos — the Trump administration is now releasing funding for after school programs while continuing to block billions more in funding for our students, teachers, and schools," Murray said in a statement Friday.

"Every penny of this funding must flow immediately," she said. "Whether or not parents know the afterschool program they depend on will exist should not depend on whether Republicans will push back against Trump's lawlessness — he should simply get the funding out, just as the law requires him to do. I am going to keep pushing until every dollar goes."

David Schuler, executive director of AASA, The School Superintendents Association, expressed similar concerns in a statement Friday.

"While we're pleased to see crucial dollars going to afterschool programs which are vital for students across the nation, the bottom line is this: Districts should not be in this impossible position where the Administration is denying funds that had already been appropriated to our public schools, by Congress," said Schuler, whose organization helps to ensure every child has access to a high quality public education.

"The remaining funds must be released immediately — America's children are counting on it."

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.

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US House sends bill to Trump yanking funding for NPR, PBS, foreign aid; SD congressman votes yes

SD Public Broadcasting, which stands to lose \$2.2 million, encourages supporters to donate

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JULY 18, 2025 6:54 AM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House cleared legislation just after midnight Friday that will cancel \$9 billion in previously approved spending for public broadcasting and foreign aid, marking only the second time in more than three decades Congress has approved a presidential rescissions request.

The 216-213 mostly party-line vote sends the bill to President Donald Trump for his signature and notches another legislative victory for the White House, following passage earlier in July of a giant tax and spending cut package. Republican Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania and Mike Turner of Ohio voted against approval along with Democratic lawmakers.

The Senate voted to pass the bill earlier this week after removing the section that would have eliminated hundreds of millions of dollars for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR.

South Dakota Republican Sen. Mike Rounds also secured a handshake deal with the White House budget director to transfer \$9.4 million from an undisclosed account within the Interior Department to Native American radio stations in rural areas.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting will lose \$1.1 billion in funding that Congress had previously approved for the fiscal year slated to begin Oct. 1 and for the year after that.

The corporation provides funding for National Public Radio, the Public Broadcasting Service and hundreds of local stations throughout the country.

Another \$8 billion of foreign aid will be eliminated once Trump signs the legislation.

The White House budget office's original rescissions request included more than a dozen accounts for reduced spending, including those addressing global health and democracy programs.

The proposal called on lawmakers to cancel \$500 million the U.S. Agency for International Development used for "activities related to child and maternal health, HIV/ AIDS, and infectious diseases."

"This proposal would not reduce treatment but would eliminate programs that are antithetical to American interests and worsen the lives of women and children, like 'family planning' and 'reproductive health,' LGBTQI+ activities, and 'equity' programs," the request states. "Enacting the rescission would reinstate focus on appropriate health and life spending. This best serves the American taxpayer."

The final bill includes that spending cut but says the cancellation cannot affect HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, nutrition, or maternal and child health programs. It also says that "does not apply to family planning and reproductive health programs."

The White House asked to eliminate \$83 million from the State Department's democracy fund, writing that "aligns with the Administration's efforts to eliminate wasteful USAID foreign assistance programs and focus remaining funds on priorities that advance American interests. This best serves the American taxpayer."

Lawmakers included that request in the bill, along with nearly all the others, without any caveats or additional guardrails.

Congress last approved a stand-alone rescissions bill in 1992 following a series of requests from President George H.W. Bush, according to a report from the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.



The U.S. Capitol on July 2, 2025. (Photo by Ashley

Murray/States Newsroom)

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The first Trump administration sent Congress a rescission request in 2018 that passed the House, but didn't receive Senate approval.

'Wasteful spending' or 'stealing from the American people'?

House debate largely fell along party lines, with Republicans citing disagreements with how the Biden administrations spent congressionally approved funding as the reason to claw back money that would have otherwise been doled out by the Trump administration.

North Carolina Republican Rep. Virginia Foxx said the \$9 billion, spread across accounts that have existed for decades, was a prime example of "wasteful spending (that) overtook Washington during the Biden-Harris administration."

"The American people saw the fiscal ruin that was created by the previous administration," Foxx said. "That's why they overwhelmingly chose Republicans to lead the nation and restore fiscal sanity. That restoration is here."

The federal government spends about \$6.8 trillion per year, with \$4.1 trillion going to mandatory programs like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

Another \$1.8 trillion is spent on discretionary accounts, including for the departments of Agriculture, Defense, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Justice, Transportation and State. Nearly \$900 billion goes toward net interests payments on the country's debt.

Connecticut Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the top Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, said during floor debate the bill represented the Trump administration "stealing from the American people."

"This bill will shut down rural television and radio stations, cutting off coverage of local news; eliminating emergency information, like severe weather alerts; jeopardizing access to PBS kids children's programs, like Sesame Street," DeLauro said.

The foreign aid spending reduction, she said, "rips life-saving support away from hungry, displaced and sick people in developing countries and conflict zones."

DeLauro raised concerns that U.S. withdrawal as a source of support for people and nations that are struggling would leave space for non-democratic countries to increase their influence.

"When we retreat from the world, diplomatically and through our assistance to vulnerable people, America will be alone — without allies, in a less stable world, without the support of the international community," DeLauro said. "And do you know who will come out ahead? China, Russia, Iran."

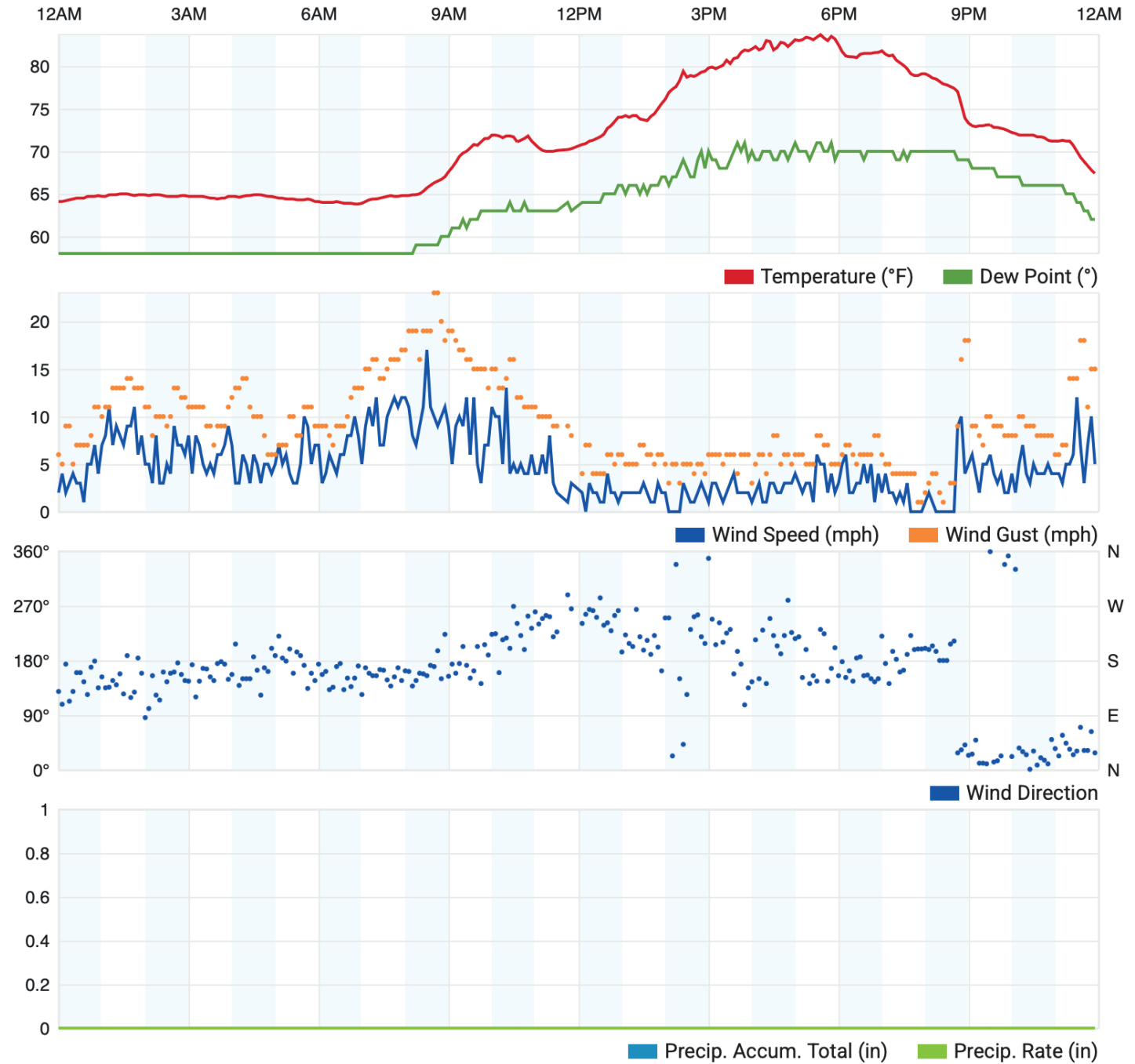
Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

July 18, 2025



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Today

Tonight

Sunday

Sunday Night

Monday



High: 76 °F

Partly Sunny



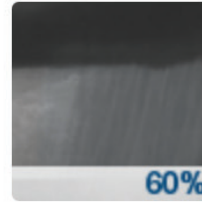
Low: 58 °F

Partly Cloudy
then Slight
Chance
Showers



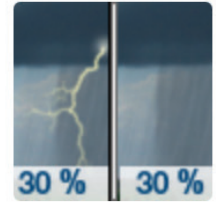
High: 80 °F

Chance
Showers



Low: 64 °F

Showers
Likely



High: 84 °F

Chance
T-storms then
Chance
Showers

THREAT ASSESSMENT

HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

1

WHAT THIS MEANS:
Isolated Severe Storms
Possible

**Saturday Evening and
Overnight**

PRIMARY THREATS



LARGE HAIL
of 1" in diameter



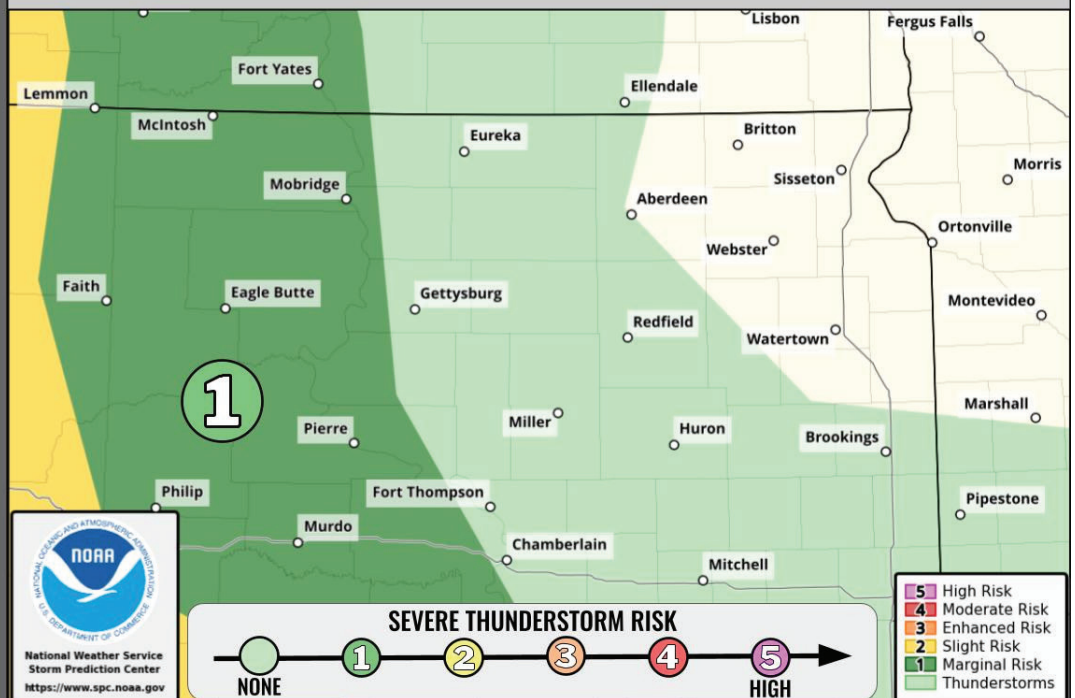
DAMAGING
WIND GUSTS
of 60 mph

SECONDARY THREATS



HEAVY
RAINFALL

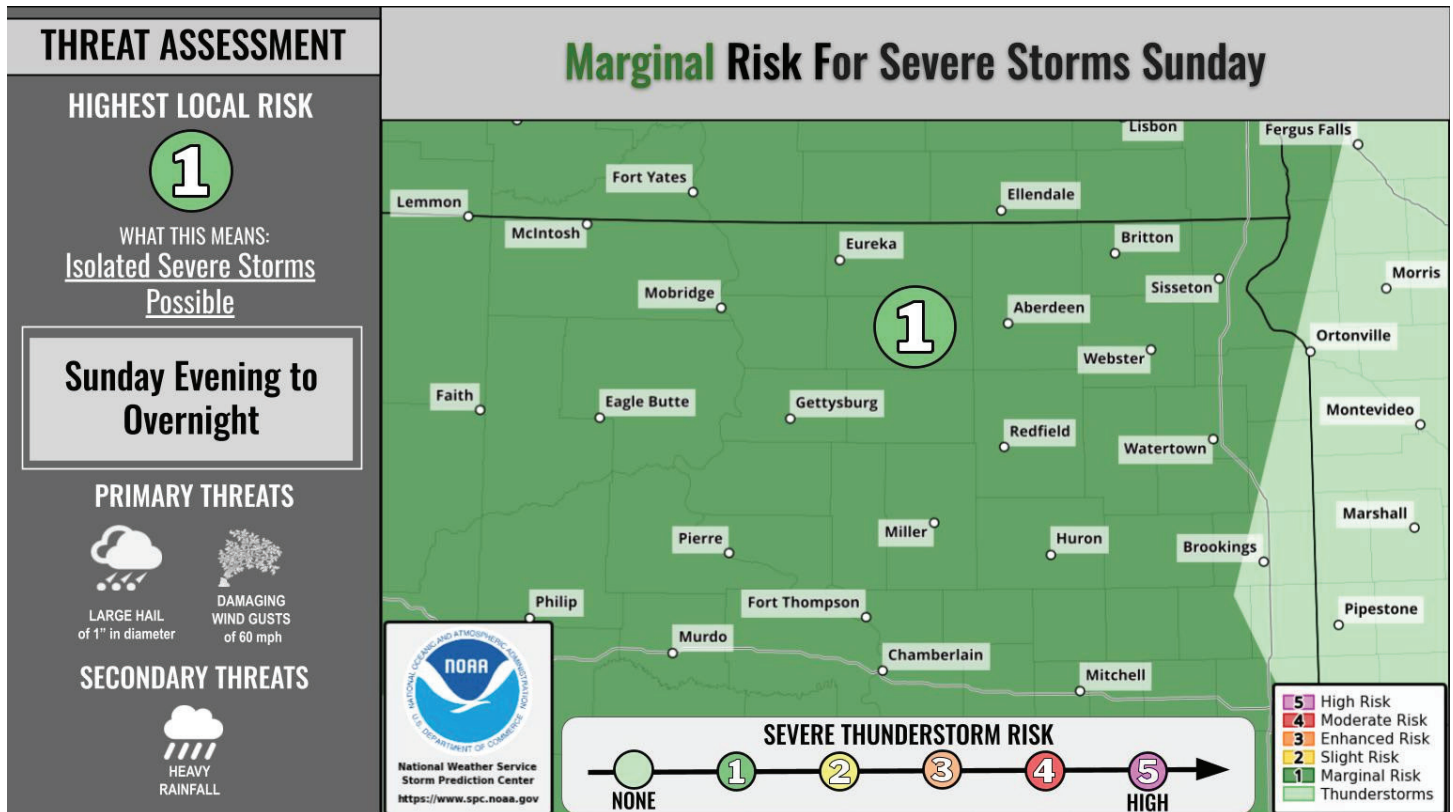
Marginal Risk For Severe Storms Saturday



Another Marginal Risk, level 1 of 5, for severe weather comes on Saturday evening, mainly west of the Missouri River. Large hail of 1 inch in diameter and damaging wind of 60 mph are the main threats for this event. Chances for storms will continue into Saturday night and early Sunday morning.

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Marginal Risk, level 1 of 5, is in effect for Sunday for nearly all of the forecast area. Large hail of 1" in diameter and damaging wind gusts of 60 mph are the main threats once again. Storms are expected to develop in the afternoon to evening and progress eastward during the overnight period.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 84 °F at 5:35 PM

Heat Index: 89 °F at 4:30 PM

Low Temp: 64 °F at 6:55 AM

Wind: 24 mph at 8:38 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 15 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 106 in 1932

Record Low: 42 in 1900

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 2.09

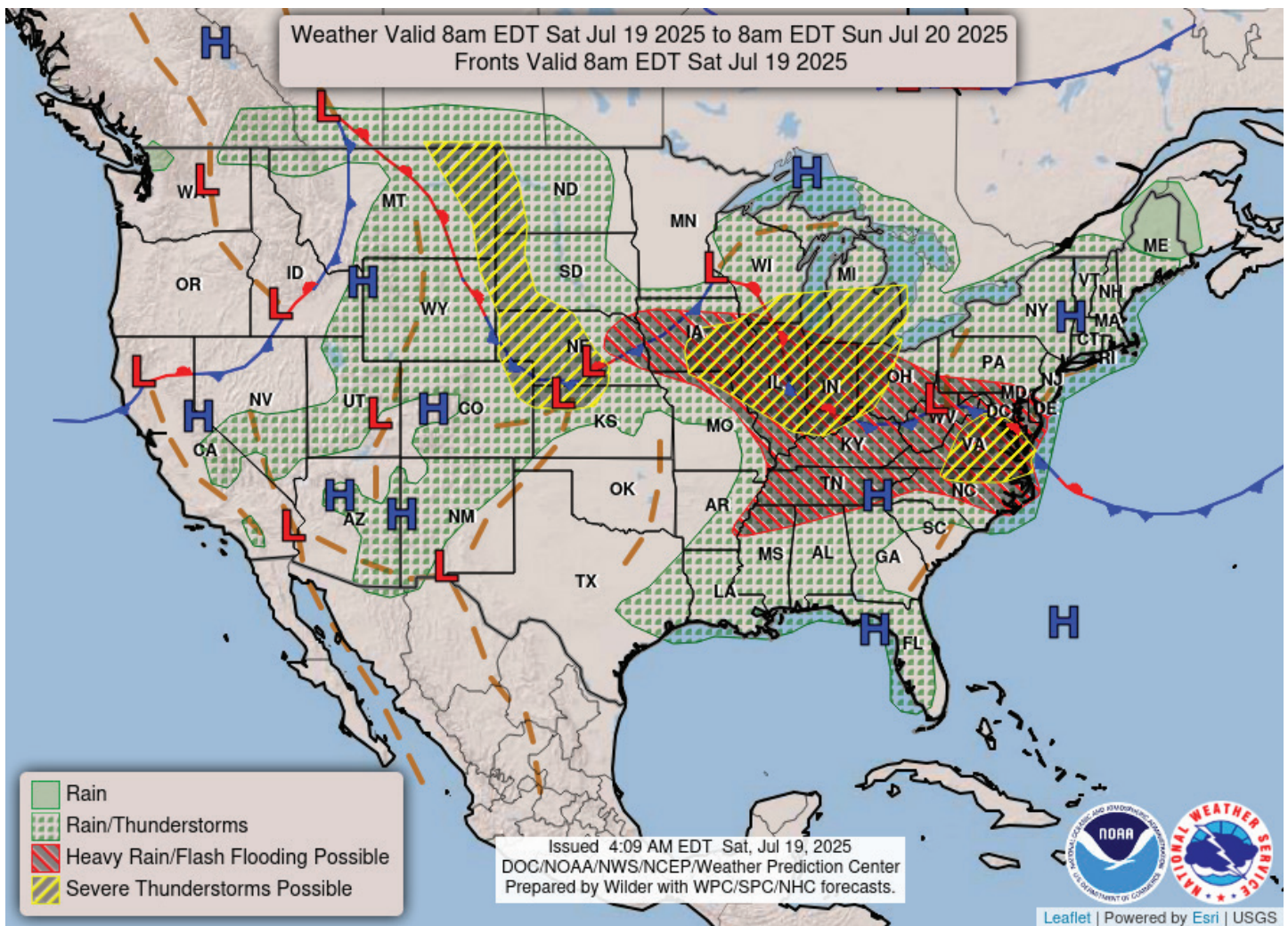
Precip to date in July: 3.72

Average Precip to date: 13.10

Precip Year to Date: 13.84

Sunset Tonight: 9:16:16 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:02:17 am



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Today in Weather History

July 19, 1933: An F2 tornado moved ESE from west of Tulare to 3 miles ENE of Hitchcock. About ten farms had damage, and several barns were destroyed.

July 19, 2010: Severe storms produced a wide swath of hail and high winds from northern Butte County, through southern Meade, eastern Pennington, Jackson, and Bennett Counties. Millions of dollars in crop damage was reported, along with some damage to homes and automobiles.

1886: The 1886 Atlanta Hurricane season was a very active year with ten hurricanes, seven of which struck the United States. During the evening hours of July 18th, a category 1 storm made landfall near Homosassa Springs, Florida. Damage was slight as the area was thinly inhabited. The hurricane weakened to tropical storm status south of Gainesville and emerged on the eastern side of Florida, south of Jacksonville during the morning hours of the 19th. This was the fourth hurricane to make landfall in the United States.

1960 - Cow Creek and Greenland Ranch in Death Valley, CA, reported morning lows of 102 degrees. The afternoon high at Greenland Ranch was 124 degrees, and the high at Cow Creek that afternoon was 126 degrees. The coolest low for the entire month for both locations was 82 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1974 - A severe thunderstorm with winds to 80 mph and up to two inches of rain washed out four to five foot deep sections of roadway in Lake Havasu City, AZ. Three persons in a station wagon died as it was carried 3000 feet down a wash by a ten foot wall of water. (The Weather Channel)

1977 - Thunderstorms produced torrential rains over parts of southwestern Pennsylvania. Some places receive more than twelve inches in a seven hour period. The heavy rains cause flash flooding along streams resulting in widespread severe damage. The cloudburst floods Johnstown with up to ten feet of water resulting in 76 deaths, countless injuries, and 424 million dollars damage. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Fifteen cities in the western and the southeastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Winnemucca, NV, with a reading of 33 degrees. Flagstaff AZ reported a record low of 34 degrees. Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in New York State and New Jersey. High winds and hail two inches in diameter injured two persons and caused considerable damage to crops in the Pine Island area of central New York State. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms in Nebraska produced more than five inches of rain at Red Cloud, including two inches in fifteen minutes. Torrid temperatures continued over California, with record highs of 115 degrees at Red Bluff and 116 degrees at Redding. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Early morning thunderstorms in the Lower Mississippi Valley produced 5.50 inches of rain south of Alexander, AR, in just ninety minutes, and flash flooding which resulted claimed the life of one woman. Thunderstorms in Indiana produced 4.95 inches of rain in twelve hours east of Muncie. Eight cities in the southwestern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Las Vegas, NV, with a reading of 115 degrees, and Phoenix, AZ, with a high of 116 degrees. The low that night at Phoenix of 93 degrees was the warmest of record for that location. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2005 - A severe heat wave gripped the region during early to mid-July. Las Vegas, NV tied their all-time record high temperature of 117 degrees, equalling the old record set on July 24, 1942.

2006: A derecho impacted a sellout crowd of almost 44,000 St. Louis Cardinals fans, packed into the new Busch Stadium. Winds of about 80 mph whirled around the St. Louis area, sending the fans running for shelter. The winds knocked out power and broke windows out of the press box. Nearly two minutes after the winds began at 100 mph, they stopped, and it started to rain. In all, about 30 people were injured at the stadium.



EXCLUDING GOD

Nations, like individuals, are destined to live or die. And both face the same choice: do what is right or accept the consequences. Right choices lead to eternal life and the wrong choices that are not consistent with God's Word and His teachings, lead to death.

The Bible very clearly, carefully, and consistently distinguishes the difference between right and wrong, righteousness and unrighteousness. And this distinction applies to cities as well as to citizens.

Individuals like Abel, Moses, Daniel, and Paul took the right way. Men like Cain, Pharaoh, Herod, and Judas took the wrong way.

Cities like Sodom and Gomorrah took the wrong way and perished. And the "international graveyards" of Ancient Rome, Babylon, Media, Persia, and Ancient Greece also provide historical proof of the fact that: "Righteousness exalts a nation, and sin is a reproach to any people."

The desolation, destruction, and death of cities and nations are recorded in the pages of history. The evidence provided by archeologists to prove this fact is powerful and plentiful. Yet, many refuse to see and acknowledge the hand of God and the lessons from God that He has planted in the "sands of time."

However, to deny a fact will not make it go away nor will ignoring it excuse any person, city, or nation from its consequences. Punishment for sin is awaiting those who refuse to accept the love, mercy, grace, and salvation of God. But those who trust in and live for the Lord will be saved.

Prayer: Father, whether we like it or not, accept it or not, believe it or not, we will be judged by Your Word. May we turn to You and be saved! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The wicked will go down to the grave. This is the fate of all the nations who ignore God. Psalm 9:17

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: 07.18.25

11 43 54 55 63 3

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$110,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[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: 14 Hrs 11 Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.18.25

10 12 18 22 39 9

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 26 Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.16.25

17 23 26 29 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$59,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 26 Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.16.25

8 23 42 56 68 10

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 55 Mins 50 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: 14 Hrs 55 Mins 49 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

Congo and Rwanda-backed rebels sign declaration of principles to end conflict in eastern Congo

By CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Congo and Rwanda-backed rebels on Saturday signed a declaration of principles in Qatar to end decadeslong fighting and commit to a comprehensive peace agreement that would include the restoration of state authorities in key eastern cities controlled by the insurgents.

Congo and the M23 rebels committed to “building trust” through various measures, including an exchange of prisoners and detainees as well as restoring state authority in all parts of the country, including rebel-held areas, Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh Al-Khulaifi, Qatar’s minister of state, said at a briefing.

It was not immediately clear if the declaration involves M23’s withdrawal from cities it controls, as the two parties seemed to interpret the agreement differently.

Bertrand Bisimwa, an M23 leader, said the declaration is “not a question of withdrawal but of mechanisms for empowering the state, enabling it to assume its prerogatives and obligations.” However, Congolese government spokesman Patrick Muyaya said the declaration takes into account “the non-negotiable withdrawal” of the rebels, followed by the deployment of government forces and institutions. Both officials posted on X.

Backed by neighboring Rwanda, the M23 is the most prominent of more than 100 armed groups fighting for control in Congo’s mineral-rich east. With 7 million people displaced in Congo, the U.N. has called the conflict in eastern Congo “one of the most protracted, complex, serious humanitarian crises on Earth.”

Saturday’s signing is the first direct commitment by both sides since the rebels seized two key cities in eastern Congo in a major advance early this year. A final peace deal is to be signed no later than Aug. 18, and it “shall align with the Peace Agreement between Congo and Rwanda,” facilitated by the U.S. in June, according to a copy of the declaration seen by The Associated Press.

M23 had been pushing for the release of its members held by Congo’s military, many of them facing the death sentence. Congo had requested the withdrawal of the rebels from seized territories.

“The Declaration of Principles signed today paves the way for direct negotiations towards a comprehensive peace that addresses the deep-rooted causes of the conflict,” the Qatari minister said.

The document touches on most of the highlights of the peace deal Congo and Rwanda signed on June 27, including the protection and safe return of millions who fled the conflict.

Massad Boulos, a senior adviser to U.S. President Donald Trump who attended the Doha-led talks, said on Saturday: “It is time to find a final solution” to the conflict, reiterating that the most important article of the agreement is the affirmation of state control in rebel-held territories.

“The issue requires dialogue, and following up on this dialogue and requires persistence,” Boulos said.

Another key issue the two sides will have to face is whether Rwanda will stop supporting the rebels, including the thousands of troops that the United Nations experts said are in eastern Congo.

When Rwanda and Congo signed the peace deal in Washington, Rwandan Foreign Minister Olivier Nduhungirehe said Rwanda agreed to lift its “defensive measures” — suggesting a reference to its troops in eastern Congo — once Congo neutralizes an armed group whose members Kigali accuses of carrying out the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

Analysts have said it is going to be difficult for the M23 rebels to withdraw from the eastern Congolese cities of Goma and Bukavu and that it would depend on concessions the Congolese authorities agree to make. There have also been doubts about long-lasting peace if justice for the victims of the war is not addressed.

A vehicle drives into a crowd in East Hollywood, injuring more than 20 people

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A vehicle rammed into a crowd of people on a busy boulevard in Los Angeles early Saturday, injuring more than 20 people.

The Los Angeles Fire Department said Saturday that the incident left five people in critical condition.

Another eight to 10 people were in serious condition and between 10 and 15 victims were in fair condition, the department said.

The incident occurred on Santa Monica Boulevard in East Hollywood.

Syria's interim president urges Bedouin tribes to commit to ceasefire ending clashes with the Druze

By SALLY ABOU ALJOUD Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Syria's interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa urged Sunni Muslim Bedouin tribes Saturday to "fully commit" to a ceasefire aimed at ending clashes with Druze-linked militias that left hundreds dead and threatened to unravel the country's post-war transition.

This comes as government forces, initially sent to restore order but effectively sided with the Bedouins against the Druze, were redeployed to halt renewed fighting that erupted late Thursday in the southern province of Sweida. The violence has also drawn airstrikes against Syrian forces by neighboring Israel before a truce was reached.

In his second televised address since the fighting started, al-Sharaa blamed "armed groups from Sweida" for reigniting the conflict by "launching retaliatory attacks against the Bedouins and their families." He also said Israeli intervention "pushed the country into a dangerous phase."

Israel had launched dozens of airstrikes on convoys of government fighters and even struck the Syrian Defense Ministry headquarters in central Damascus, saying it was in support of the Druze, who form a substantial community in Israel and are seen as a loyal minority, often serving in the Israeli military.

Reports had surfaced of Syrian government-affiliated fighters executing Druze civilians and looting and burning homes over the four-day violence.

U.S. envoy to Syria, Tom Barrack, announced that Israel and Syria had agreed to a ceasefire early Saturday. Al-Sharaa made no direct reference to the agreement in his speech, but said "American and Arab mediations stepped in" to restore calm.

Addressing the Bedouins, al-Sharaa said they "cannot replace the role of the state in handling the country's affairs and restoring security." He also said: "We thank the Bedouins for their heroic stances but demand they fully commit to the ceasefire and comply with the state's orders."

Meanwhile, a prominent Druze leader, Sheikh Hikmat Al-Hijri, who opposes the current government and has distanced himself from the two ceasefires announced on Tuesday and Wednesday, said an agreement, brokered under the sponsorship of guarantor states, has several measures aimed at de-escalating tensions in Suweida.

This includes the deployment of General Security checkpoints outside the province's administrative borders to contain clashes and prevent infiltration, a 48-hour ban on entry by any party into border villages, and safe, guaranteed passage for remaining members of the Bedouin tribes still inside the province.

Sharaa reiterated that Suweida "remains an integral part of the Syrian state, and the Druze constitute a fundamental pillar of the Syrian national fabric," vowing to protect all minorities in Syria.

He also thanked the United States for its "significant role in affirming its support for Syria during these difficult times," as well as Arab countries and Turkey, who mediated Wednesday's truce.

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.

As the going gets tough in South Sudan, some artisans offer cheap footwear made from rubber tires

By MICHAEL ATIT Associated Press

Wau, South Sudan (AP) — From Rwanda to Kenya, fashioning footwear from discarded tires has long been a mark of local ingenuity.

In South Sudan, however, the creative work of such artisans is now fueled by an economic crisis that has left the government on the verge of bankruptcy and many people struggling to put food on the table.

As South Sudan's oil revenues have dwindled, the government for months has been unable to pay civil servants on time. The cash crisis affects everyone from soldiers to teachers, underscoring the range of economic hardship across the country, and many are looking for ways to keep going.

Some want cheap shoes, finding them not in supermarkets but in open markets where flip-flops and sandals are fashioned from worn-out tires usually thrown away as rubbish.

Demand rises along with cost of living

In Wau, some 650 kilometers (400 miles) from the South Sudanese capital of Juba, shoemaker Emmanuel Achuil works under the shade of a tarpaulin in the town's bustling main market.

His hands blackened from grappling with rubber, Achuil uses a blade to carve pieces from discarded tires. Colorful straps are scattered around him like pieces of a puzzle.

Achuil, who makes five to 10 pairs a week, told the AP that in recent months he's seen a rise in demand that he and others say is directly related to the rising cost of living here. They say footwear made from scraps of rubber has found a firm place in local markets, confirmed in the ubiquitous displays of such shoes even in open markets in Juba.

Two years ago, Achuil was getting five to seven customers a month. Now he expects up to 20 of them, he said. Achuil's shoes can fetch up to 15,000 South Sudanese pounds a pair, or roughly \$4, depending on size and quality of finishing. In addition to their affordability, the rough-hewn pairs are praised for their durability.

"Even when things get bad — no food, no jobs — this work doesn't fail me," Achuil said. "People always need shoes, especially cheap ones."

Akol Majok Ring, a cattle-keeper from the state of Warrap, said he discovered these sandals in March and immediately bought a pair for himself because "they are good for cattle grazing."

"When you're moving with the cattle all day, these sandals are perfect," he said. "They're durable and well-suited for the job."

Food insecurity and inflation affect millions

The South Sudanese pound has been under pressure since 2023, losing much of its value against the dollar as oil exports are sporadically disrupted by civil war in neighboring Sudan.

The economy has been in decline for five consecutive years, hampered by violence stemming mostly from the political contest between President Salva Kiir and his deputy Riek Machar, who is currently under house arrest for alleged subversion.

Hyperinflation and widespread food insecurity affect nearly 80% of South Sudan's 11 million people, the same number of people living below the poverty line, according to the World Bank.

South Sudan depends on oil revenues to meet 90% of the government's annual budget, but damage earlier this year to the oil pipeline through Sudan left South Sudanese authorities briefly unable to export any crude.

The government announced earlier in June that exports were due to resume after repairs to the pipeline.

Many government workers are effectively without pay, and unemployment is rampant even as the prices of basic goods skyrocket. Leather shoes in the shops can seem a luxury in these circumstances.

"Tire soles last longer," said Deng Akol Athuai, who has been buying from Achuil for years. "I buy one pair, and it lasts me a year or more. They're strong, especially for walking on rough roads."

Shoemaker hopes to expand his business and train others

Gabriel Bataku, a 26-year-old who is unemployed in Wau, said of artisans that they "are solving real

problems. They just need recognition and support.”

Achuil has been making shoes since 1996. He is not formally trained. He got his skills as a grade schooler watching older men in their workshops as they went about their business.

In those days discarded tires were much easier to find, scavenged from garages or sourced through people throwing them away.

But now, he said, “more people are doing this work, so the competition for materials is high.”

He lamented the lack of formal support, from the government and others, that has left artisans struggling to access the tools of their trade. He wants access to better equipment.

Despite the difficulties, he dreams of opening a proper workshop where he would train others. He also hopes to be able to expand his business to other towns in South Sudan.

“If I had better cutting tools, and a way to expand, I could train young people,” he said. “Many are idle here in Wau. This skill could help them survive.”

Over 30 Palestinians killed trying to reach US group’s food distribution sites, Gaza authorities say

By WAFAA SHURAF and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli troops opened fire Saturday toward crowds of Palestinians seeking food from distribution hubs run by a U.S.-, Israeli-backed group in southern Gaza, killing at least 32 people, according to witnesses and hospital officials.

The two incidents occurred near hubs operated by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation. In other violence, two Palestinians were killed in an Israeli airstrike in Gaza City, health officials said.

The GHF launched operations in late May with backing from the U.S. and Israel. The two governments are seeking to replace the traditional U.N.-led aid distribution system in Gaza, saying that Hamas militants siphon off supplies. The U.N. denies the allegation.

While the GHF says it has distributed millions of meals to hungry Palestinians, local health officials and witnesses say that hundreds of people have been killed by Israeli army fire as they try to reach the distribution hubs.

The army, which is not at the sites but secures them from a distance, says it only fires warning shots if crowds get too close to its forces.

The GHF, which employs private armed guards, says there have been no deadly shootings at its sites, though this week, 20 people were killed at one of its locations, most of them in a stampede. The group accused Hamas agitators of causing a panic, but gave no evidence to back the claim.

In a statement, the GHF said there were no incidents at or near its sites. It said the reported Israeli shootings occurred far from the sites and hours before they opened. “We have repeatedly warned aid seekers not to travel to our sites overnight and early morning hours,” it said.

The Israeli military said it had fired “warning shots” near Rafah after a group of suspects approached troops and ignored calls to keep their distance. It said it was investigating reports of casualties, but noted the incident occurred overnight when the distribution site was closed.

‘Indiscriminate fire’

Most of Saturday’s deaths occurred as Palestinians massed in the Teina area, around three kilometers (2 miles) away from a GHF aid distribution center east of the city of Khan Younis.

Mahmoud Mokeimar, an eyewitness, said he was walking with masses of people — mostly young men — toward the food hub. Troops fired warning shots as the crowds advanced, before opening fire toward the marching people.

“It was a massacre ... the occupation opened fire at us indiscriminately,” he said. He said he managed to flee but saw at least three motionless bodies lying on the ground, and many other wounded fleeing.

Akram Aker, another witness, said troops fired machine guns mounted on tanks and drones. He said the shooting happened between 5 a.m. and 6 a.m.

“They encircled us and started firing directly at us,” he said. He said he saw many casualties lying on

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the ground.

Sanaa al-Jaberi, a 55-year-old woman, said she saw many dead and wounded as she fled the area.

"We shouted: 'food, food,' but they didn't talk to us. They just opened fire," she said.

Monzer Fesifes, a Palestinian-Jordanian, said his 19-year-old son Hisham was among those killed in the Teina area.

"He went to bring food from the failed US, Zionist aid to feed us," the father of six said, pleading for the Jordanian government to help evacuate them from the Palestinian enclave.

The Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis said it received 25 bodies, along with dozens wounded.

Seven other people, including one woman, were killed in the Shakoush area, hundreds of meters (yards) north of another GHF hub in Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, the hospital said. The toll was also confirmed by the health ministry.

Dr. Mohamed Saker, the head of Nasser's nursing department, said it received 70 wounded people. He told The Associated Press that most of the casualties were shot in their heads and chests, and that some were placed in the already overwhelmed intensive care unit.

"The situation is difficult and tragic," he said, adding that the facility lacks badly needed medical supplies to treat the daily flow of casualties.

Meanwhile, Fares Awad, head of the Health Ministry's ambulance and emergency service in northern Gaza, confirmed the two deaths in Gaza City. He said an airstrike hit a tent in a camp sheltering displaced families in the courtyard of the Development Ministry. There were no further details on the target of the strike.

The Israeli army said it had struck some 90 targets throughout Gaza over the past day and that it had killed militants and targeted "terror infrastructure" in northern Gaza and Gaza City.

Humanitarian crisis

Gaza's more than 2 million Palestinians are living through a catastrophic humanitarian crisis, and the territory is teetering on the edge of famine, according to food security experts.

Distribution at the GHF sites has often been chaotic. Boxes of food are left stacked on the ground inside the centers and, once opened, crowds charge in to grab whatever they can, according to witnesses and videos released by GHF itself.

In videos obtained recently by the AP from an American contractor working with GHF, contractors are seen using tear gas and stun grenades to keep crowds behind metal fences or to force them to disperse. Gunshots can also be heard.

Hamas triggered the ongoing 21-month war in Gaza when it stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people and taking 250 others hostage.

An Israeli military offensive has killed over 58,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, displaced nearly all of Gaza's 2 million people and caused widespread destruction.

The ministry does not say how many militants are among the dead, though it says over half were women and children. The ministry is part of the Hamas government, but is seen by the U.N. and other international organizations as the most reliable source of data on war casualties.

Israel and Hamas have been holding ceasefire talks in Qatar in recent weeks. But international mediators say there have been no breakthroughs in the talks.

Trump administration seeks release of Epstein grand jury records but not Justice Department files

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Under intense pressure from President Donald Trump's own supporters, his administration on Friday asked a federal court to unseal secret documents related to Jeffrey Epstein's case in an effort to put to rest for good a political crisis largely of its own making.

But even if those records become public, it's far from certain they will appease critics enraged over the

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administration's unfulfilled promises of full transparency about evidence against the wealthy financier. Meanwhile, the administration remains dogged by questions about its refusal to release other records in its possession after stoking conspiracy theories and pledging to uncover government secrets of the "deep state."

Here's a look at the ongoing Epstein files controversy and what may happen next:

How the case got here

Trump is desperately trying to turn the page on a crisis that has consumed his administration since the Justice Department announced last week that it would not release any more evidence about the sex trafficking investigation into Epstein, who killed himself behind bars while awaiting trial in 2019.

The latest development came Thursday when 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."

Shortly after the story was published, Trump said he had directed Attorney General Pam Bondi to "produce any and all pertinent Grand Jury testimony, subject to Court approval."

"This SCAM, perpetuated by the Democrats, should end, right now!" the president wrote on social media.

Bondi then announced that the Justice Department would move Friday to ask the court to unseal the grand jury transcripts. Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche filed the motion urging the court to release the transcripts.

Courts are typically reluctant to release grand jury materials

Grand juries decide whether there is enough evidence to bring an indictment, or a formal criminal charge, and their proceedings are secret to protect the reputations of people who end up not being charged and to encourage reluctant witnesses to testify.

Grand jury transcripts — which could show the testimony of witnesses and other evidence presented by prosecutors — are rarely released by courts, unless they need to be disclosed in connection with a judicial proceeding. In fact, grand jury secrecy is such a sacrosanct principle under the law that government officials who improperly disclose testimony are subject to prosecution. Witnesses are not bound by those rules.

Even with the Justice Department endorsement, it could take weeks or months of legal wrangling to decide what can be released and how to protect witnesses and other sensitive victim information.

And it's unlikely the transcripts would shed any light on a major fascination of conspiracy theorists obsessed with Epstein's case: the financier's connections to other powerful figures whom some believe were involved in Epstein's sex trafficking scheme.

Court have blocked the release of grand jury materials in other high-profile investigations. House Democrats in 2019 sought grand jury testimony from special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation while Congress was conducting its impeachment inquiry into Trump. But the Justice Department successfully fought for years to keep the material secret.

The administration could release other records right now

The Justice Department's decision to seek grand jury transcripts gives the administration a reason to point to the courts to explain why more material hasn't yet been released. But the uproar over the Epstein files was never about the grand jury transcripts — it was about the thousands of other pages in the government's possession that the administration now says it won't release.

Facing outrage after the first release of Epstein files flopped in February, Bondi said officials were poring over a "truckload" of previously withheld evidence she said had been handed over by the FBI. But after a monthslong review of evidence in the government's possession, the Justice Department determined that no "further disclosure would be appropriate or warranted."

The Justice Department has yet to fully explain why none of that material could be released. It noted in its memo earlier this month that much of the material was placed under seal by a court to protect victims and "only a fraction" of it "would have been aired publicly had Epstein gone to trial."

Since then, Bondi has largely refused to answer questions from reporters about the matter.

Congress' Epstein files resolution carries no legal weight

House Republicans may vote next week on a resolution that seeks to appease GOP demands for more

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transparency on the Epstein case. The resolution calls on the Justice Department to publicly release records, but it carries no legal force.

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

Democrats, with the support of nine Republicans, have advanced their own legislation that would require the Justice Department to release more information about the case.

Russia pounds Ukraine with over 300 drones, killing 1 in Odesa

By The Associated Press undefined

Russia launched a massive attack on Ukraine overnight into Saturday with hundreds of drones, killing at least one person, part of a stepped-up bombing campaign that has dashed hopes for a breakthrough in efforts to end the more than 3-year-old war.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy posted on X, saying Russia fired over 300 drones, along with more than 30 cruise missiles.

One person died when Russian forces attacked the Black Sea port city of Odesa with more than 20 drones and a missile, the city's mayor, Hennadii Trukhanov, said Saturday on Telegram, while five people were rescued when a fire broke out in a residential high-rise building.

According to Zelenskyy, six other people were wounded in the attack on Odesa, including a child, and critical infrastructure was damaged in Ukraine's northeastern Sumy region.

The Ukrainian president also thanked international leaders "who understand how important it is to promptly implement our agreements" aimed at boosting Ukraine's defense capabilities, including joint weapons production, drone manufacturing, and the supply of air defense systems.

Russia has been intensifying its long-range attacks on Ukrainian cities. It now often batters Ukraine with more drones in a single night than it did during some entire months in 2024, and analysts say the barrages are likely to escalate. On July 8, Russia unleashed more than 700 drones — a record.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it shot down 71 Ukrainian drones overnight into Saturday. Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said that 13 drones were shot down as they approached the Russian capital.

Venezuela releases jailed Americans in deal that frees migrants deported to El Salvador by US

By REGINA GARCIA CANO, ERIC TUCKER and MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuela on Friday released 10 jailed U.S. citizens and permanent residents in exchange for getting home scores of migrants deported by the United States to El Salvador months ago under the Trump administration's immigration crackdown, officials said.

The complex, three-country arrangement represents a diplomatic achievement for Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, helps President Donald Trump in his goal of bringing home Americans jailed abroad and lands Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele a swap that he proposed months ago.

"Every wrongfully detained American in Venezuela is now free and back in our homeland," Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in a statement in which he thanked Bukele, a Trump ally.

Bukele said El Salvador had handed over all the Venezuelan nationals in its custody. Maduro described Friday as "a day of blessings and good news for Venezuela." He called it "the perfect day for Venezuela."

Venezuelans leave El Salvador's mega-prison

Central to the deal are more than 250 Venezuelan migrants freed by El Salvador, which in March agreed to a \$6 million payment from the Trump administration to house them in its notorious prison.

That arrangement drew immediate blowback when Trump invoked an 18th century wartime law, the Alien Enemies Act, to quickly remove the men that his administration had accused of belonging to the violent Tren de Aragua street gang, teeing up a legal fight that reached the U.S. Supreme Court. The administra-

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tion did not provide evidence to back up those claims.

The Venezuelans had been held in a mega-prison known as the Terrorism Confinement Center, or CE-COT, which was built to hold alleged gang members in Bukele's war on the country's gangs. Human rights groups have documented hundreds of deaths as well as cases of torture inside its walls.

Lawyers have little access to those in the prison, which is heavily guarded, and information has been locked tight, other than heavily produced state propaganda videos showing tattooed men packed behind bars.

Photos and videos released by El Salvador's government on Friday showed shackled Venezuelans sitting in a fleet of buses and boarding planes surrounded by officers in riot gear. One man looked up and pointed toward the sky as he climbed aboard a plane, while another made an obscene gesture toward police.

After arriving in Venezuela, some of the migrants crossed themselves, cried and hugged one another. They wore face masks and street clothes.

Maduro alleged that some of them were subjected to various forms of abuse at the Salvadoran prison, and one of them even lost a kidney "due to the beatings he received."

Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello told reporters the men would undergo medical tests and background checks before they can go home.

One of the men is reportedly Andry Hernández Romero, a makeup artist who fled Venezuela last year and was taken into Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody at a border crossing in San Diego before eventually being flown to El Salvador.

Rep. Robert Garcia, D-Calif., posted on social media Friday night: "We have been in touch with Andry Hernández Romero's legal team and they have confirmed he is out of CECOT and back in Venezuela. We are grateful he is alive and are engaged with both the State Department and his team."

In April, Bukele proposed exchanging the Venezuelans for the same number of what he called "political prisoners" held by Maduro. The suggestion provoked a harsh response from Venezuelan authorities, who called his comments "cynical" and referred to Bukele as a "neofascist."

Families say the Americans released are innocent

The State Department office responsible for negotiating the release of American detainees posted a photo Friday evening of the newly released prisoners smiling for the camera inside an airplane bringing them home, some clutching an unfurled American flag.

A plane carrying the freed Americans arrived late Friday evening at Joint Base San Antonio, with some waving flags and rushing to embrace welcomers after they landed.

Among those released was 37-year-old Lucas Hunter, whose family says he was kidnapped in January by Venezuelan border guards from inside Colombia, where he was vacationing.

"We cannot wait to see him in person and help him recover from the ordeal," his younger sister Sophie Hunter said.

Venezuelan authorities detained nearly a dozen U.S. citizens in the second half of 2024 and linked them to alleged plots to destabilize the country.

"We have prayed for this day for almost a year. My brother is an innocent man who was used as a political pawn by the Maduro regime," said a statement from Christian Castenada, whose brother Wilbert, a Navy SEAL, was arrested in his Caracas hotel room last year.

Global Reach, a nonprofit organization that had advocated for his release and that of several other Americans, said Venezuelan officials initially and falsely accused him of being involved in a coup but backed off that claim.

The three-country swap gives Maduro a boost

The release of the Venezuelans, meanwhile, is an invaluable win for Maduro as he presses his efforts to assert himself as president despite credible evidence that he lost reelection last year.

Long accused of human rights abuses, Maduro for months has used the migrants' detention in El Salvador to flip the script on the U.S. government, forcing even some of his strongest political opponents to agree with his condemnation of the migrants' treatment.

Their return will allow Maduro to reaffirm support within his shrinking base, while demonstrating that

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even if the Trump administration and other nations see him as an illegitimate president, he is still firmly in power.

Just a week ago, the U.S. State Department reiterated its policy of shunning Maduro government officials and recognizing only the National Assembly elected in 2015 as the legitimate government of the country. Signed by Rubio, the cable said U.S. officials are free to meet and have discussions with National Assembly members "but cannot engage with Maduro regime representatives unless cleared by the Department of State."

Maduro's crackdown on dissent spurs detentions

The Americans were among dozens of people, including activists, opposition members and union leaders, that Venezuela's government took into custody in its brutal campaign to crack down on dissent in the 11 months since Maduro claimed to win reelection.

Besides the U.S., several other Western nations also do not recognize Maduro's claim to victory. They instead point to tally sheets collected by the opposition coalition showing that its candidate, Edmundo González, won the July 2024 election by a more than a two-to-one margin.

The dispute over results prompted immediate protests, and the government responded by detaining more than 2,000 people, mostly poor young men. González fled into exile in Spain to avoid arrest.

More than 7.7 million Venezuelans have migrated since 2013, when its oil-dependent economy came undone and Maduro became president. Most settled in Latin America and the Caribbean, but after the COVID-19 pandemic, many saw the U.S. as their best chance to improve their living conditions.

The US and Venezuela have agreed on other releases

Despite the U.S. not recognizing Maduro, the two governments have carried out other recent exchanges.

In May, Venezuela freed a U.S. Air Force veteran after about six months in detention. Joseph St. Clair's family has said the language specialist, who served four tours in Afghanistan, had traveled to South America to seek treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder.

Three months earlier, six other Americans whom the U.S. government considered wrongfully detained in Venezuela were released after Richard Grenell, Trump's envoy for special missions, met with Maduro at the presidential palace.

Grenell, during the meeting in Caracas, urged Maduro to take back deported migrants who have committed crimes in the U.S. Hundreds of Venezuelans have since been deported to their home country.

Maduro's government had accused the Trump administration of "kidnapping" the children by placing them in foster care after their parents were deported.

Trump's tariff threat pushes Lula's popularity and worsens legal troubles for Brazil's ex-leader

By GABRIELA SÁ PESSOA and MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump may have thought that pressuring Brazil with higher tariffs would help his ally, the country's former President Jair Bolsonaro, but the move apparently backfired.

Last week, Trump sent a letter to Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva threatening a 50% import tax and directly linking the decision to Bolsonaro's trial, which he called a "witch hunt."

"This trial should end immediately!" Trump wrote Thursday evening in a second letter, this one addressed to Bolsonaro. He added that he had "strongly voiced" his disapproval through his tariff policy.

Rather than backing down, Brazil's Supreme Court escalated the case, worsening Bolsonaro's legal troubles. On Friday morning, federal police raided Bolsonaro's home and political office. The former president was ordered to wear an ankle monitor, banned from using social media, and hit with other restrictions.

Meanwhile, President Lula — who was facing higher unpopularity, growing opposition in Congress and increasing risks to his likely reelection bid — seems to have gained politically from the situation.

Now the 79-year-old leftist Lula, in office for the third non-consecutive term of his long political career, is seeing renewed acceptance, congressional support against Trump and pleas to run one last time to

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defend Brazil's sovereignty.

Back in the game

Lula has appeared more energized in public since Trump's announcement. At a national students assembly Thursday, he wore a blue cap reading "Sovereign Brazil Unites Us" — a contrast to MAGA's red cap.

"A gringo will not give orders to this president," he told the crowd, and called the tariff hike "unacceptable blackmail."

The impact on Lula is not a first. Trump's actions targeting other countries have boosted ideological rivals in Canada and Australia instead of strengthening his allies at a local level.

Private pollster Atlas said Tuesday that Lula's unpopularity had reversed course after his spat with Trump. Lula's job approval went from at 47.3% in June to 49.7% since the tariffs battle began. The poll of more than 2,800 people was conducted July 11-13, with a margin of error of 2 percentage points. The study also said 62.2% of Brazilians think the higher tariffs are unjustified while 36.8% agree with the measure.

Even Bolsonaro's former vice president, Sen. Hamilton Mourão, criticized Trump's move as undue interference in Brazil's politics, though he said he agreed the trial against the far-right leader is biased against him.

Social media analytics firm Palver analyzed 20,000 messages about Trump on WhatsApp, Brazil's most widely used communication platform, a day after Trump's announcement. Its analysis said right-wing users dominated viral content, but spontaneous conversations leaned left, mocking Bolsonaro as submissive and defending Brazil's sovereignty.

"Trump has put Lula back in the game," said Thomas Traumann, an independent political consultant and former spokesman for the Brazilian presidency who only weeks ago argued that Lula had lost his front-runner status in the presidential race as he struggled to deliver on his promises on the economy.

"Trump handed it to Lula on a silver platter," Traumann said.

Business leaders who until recently sided with Bolsonaro are having to court Lula to negotiate with Trump. Agribusiness, Brazil's largest economic sector and a traditional right-wing stronghold, united to criticize the U.S. president's move. Industry groups were quick to denounce the tariffs as politically motivated and lacking any commercial justification.

National outrage

"In general, with the major exception of a more radical conservative wing, (Trump's move) generated national outrage for violating Brazil's sovereignty," lawmaker Arnaldo Jardim, a member of the congressional agricultural caucus, told The Associated Press.

Jardim, who pushed for the approval of a reciprocity bill that could be used by Lula if there's no agreement until the Aug. 1 deadline, hardly sides with the president.

"Even among sectors that initially thought this could benefit Bolsonaro, many had to reconsider their positions," he said.

Top congressional leaders who recently helped nix a Lula decree to raise a transactions tax were moving toward a head-on collision with him. After Trump's announcement, they signed a joint statement agreeing with Lula's promise to use the reciprocity law against the U.S.

In another change, Brazil's Congress decided to start moving on Lula's plan to give an income tax break to millions of poorer Brazilians. Many politicians said that such initiative was dead after Lula became the first president in three decades to have a decree annulled by lawmakers.

Bolsonaro remains on trial

At the Supreme Court, Bolsonaro is only getting deeper into trouble as his trial continues.

Earlier this week, Brazil's chief prosecutor called for a guilty verdict, accusing the former president of leading an armed criminal organization, attempting to stage a coup and attempting violent abolition of the democratic rule of law, among other charges.

The defense will next likely present its case in the coming weeks, after which the panel of Supreme Court justices in the trial will vote on whether to convict or acquit him.

The former president also suffered more consequences — the court's latest restrictions on Bolsonaro, including the ankle monitor, are part of a second investigation against one of his sons, Eduardo Bolsonaro, a Brazilian lawmaker who currently lives in the United States and is known for his close ties to Trump. He

has been under scrutiny for allegedly working with U.S. authorities to impose sanctions against Brazilian officials.

Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who oversees criminal cases against Bolsonaro, said his and his son's actions attempted to pressure the Brazilian judiciary by involving the U.S.

The court's decision cited both Trump's letter to Lula and several social media posts by the Bolsonaros in support of sanctions against Brazilian officials and speaking favorably about tariffs.

"A sovereign country like Brazil will always know how to defend its democracy and sovereignty," de Moraes said. "The judiciary will not allow any attempt to subject the functioning of the Supreme Court to the scrutiny of another state through hostile acts."

Jair Bolsonaro told journalists in Brasilia, the country's capital, that the ankle monitoring was a "supreme humiliation."

"I never thought about leaving Brazil, I never thought about going to an embassy, but the precautionary measures are because of that," the former president said.

In a statement, Eduardo Bolsonaro accused de Moraes of trying to criminalize Trump and the U.S. government.

"Since he has no power over them, he decided to make my father a hostage," the younger Bolsonaro said of the judge.

Two surrogates speak out about California couple under investigation

By JAIMIE DING and HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A woman who almost served as a surrogate for a Southern California couple now under investigation by authorities said she backed out after the couple asked her if any of her friends would like to carry a child for them too.

The request as well as conflicting information she was getting left the woman, Esperanza, unnerved and she decided not to sign a surrogacy contract with Silvia Zhang, who offered her \$60,000. Esperanza spoke to The Associated Press on the condition that her last name not be used because she has not shared her surrogacy experience publicly.

Zhang, 38, and her husband, Guojun Xuan, 65, are now the target of an investigation by local and federal authorities after their infant child was taken to the hospital with a traumatic head injury in May. Authorities have since taken 21 children from the couple's custody, many of whom were born by surrogate, said Lt. Kollin Cieadlo of the Arcadia Police Department, near Los Angeles.

Surrogacy is an agreement between parties for a woman to become pregnant, typically through an embryo transfer, and deliver a baby for the intended person or couple to raise.

The children range in age from 2 months to 13 years, with most between 1 and 3.

Federal authorities' role in investigation

Esperanza is one of at least eight women who say they were aggressively pursued by the couple to serve as surrogates. The women, many of whom were first-time surrogates, say they were given misleading or incomplete information about the couple's family situation and intentions. Some, like Esperanza, did not move forward with carrying a child for the couple. Another who did, Kayla Elliott, is now trying to get custody of a baby she birthed in March for the couple.

Arcadia police say the FBI is involved in the investigation over whether the couple misled surrogates around the country. The FBI has not confirmed its investigation. Elliott said she was interviewed by the FBI at the end of May.

Elliott worked through a business called Mark Surrogacy, according to the contract she signed and shared with the AP. California state records show a company called Mark Surrogacy Investments LLC registered at the company's Arcadia home until this June. Elliott's contract listed an El Monte address for the company. An AP reporter visited that location Thursday and did not find anyone who recognized the names of the

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couple or Mark Surrogacy.

Zhang did not respond to phone calls and emails seeking comment. Lawyers for Mark Surrogacy did not respond to emails seeking comment, nor did a fertility clinic involved in the embryo transfer.

In social media posts, other women who say they served as surrogates for Zhang and Xuan outlined suspicious actions including the couple not fulfilling payment obligations and weren't present for the children's births. Many women contacted by the AP did not respond or said they would only speak after securing an attorney.

Injured infant draws concern

Zhang and Xuan were arrested in May after a hospital reported that their 2-month-old infant had a traumatic head injury, the result of a nanny at the home violently shaking the baby, according to Arcadia police.

Arcadia police did not file charges at the time, in order to finish a full investigation, Ceadlo said, and detectives were looking into possible child abuse charges and anticipated presenting a case in a few weeks.

The couple told police that they "wanted a large family" and produced what appeared to be legitimate birth certificates, including some from outside California, that list Zhang as the mother of the children, Ceadlo said. Xuan was listed as the father on at least some of the birth certificates, Ceadlo said.

Potential surrogate backs out

Esperanza's dealings with Zhang began in 2023. She had posted in a Facebook group for people interested in surrogacy and received a message from Zhang.

Zhang said she and her partner already had an 8-year-old daughter in China but were having fertility issues. Zhang said she was working with a surrogate who was already pregnant but that she wanted "twins," so she was pursuing a second surrogate. But Esperanza said things started to feel amiss after Zhang asked if she had any friends who also wanted to be surrogates.

"She said that she's a realtor in Arcadia and that's how she has a lot of money and was able to afford a lot of surrogates at the time," Esperanza said.

Esperanza backed out of the surrogacy after the lawyer for the couple abruptly hung up on her while discussing the contract. She said the document said the couple would implant two embryos instead of one and the section requiring background information on the couple was cut out. The couple became angry when she decided not to move forward.

Esperanza showed text messages to the AP that showed Zhang offering \$3,000 more if she agreed to keep going, and another \$2,000 bonus after a fetal heartbeat is detected.

Surrogate who wants custody of child

Elliott gave birth to a baby girl in March. She chose to be a surrogate because she "really wanted to give somebody a family."

The Texas woman began the process when Mark Surrogacy reached out to her directly on Facebook. She signed a contract listing Xuan and Zhang as the intended parents. The contract said Elliott would receive \$65,000 in a series of payments by the end of her 16th gestational week.

Elliott became wary when early in the pregnancy she flew to California to meet the couple and only Xuan showed up. As the process went on, Elliott had almost no direct contact with the Xuan and Zhang, which is uncommon in surrogacy. Most of the messaging was through texts and emails with representatives from the agency, who discouraged her from reaching out to Zhang.

"The agency was always like, 'Oh, they're very busy people,'" she said.

When she learned that the couple had at least two other surrogates having babies for them, she was told by the agency "they just want a big family."

Elliott flew to California for the embryo transfer, which was done at Western Fertility Institute in Los Angeles. The clinic declined to comment on the investigation.

Neither parent were there for Elliott's labor or delivery, and only Zhang showed up a few hours after the baby was born. The woman "didn't seem very connected with the child ... she kind of barely looked at her," Elliott said.

After handing Elliott \$2,000 in cash and giving three of her family members in the room \$200 each, the woman left with the baby girl.

Now, Elliott wants custody of the girl and says she just hopes all the babies are safe. When the news first broke about the couple, she confronted Zhang on the phone and over text.

In text messages Elliott showed to the AP, Zhang wrote: "All the babies really important in our life."

Training facility blast kills 3 LA deputies in one of sheriff's department's worst losses of life

By ETIENNE LAURENT, ERIC TUCKER and OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A blast at a Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department training facility killed three members of its arson and explosives unit Friday, marking one of the department's worst losses of life from a single incident, authorities said.

All three were veteran deputies. The department has not said what they were doing at the time or what caused the explosion.

Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said the arson and explosives team undergoes in-depth training and responds to more than 1,000 calls a year. Those killed were identified Friday evening by the department as Detective Joshua Kelley-Eklund, Detective Victor Lemus and Detective William Osborn. They served 19, 22 and 33 years in the department respectively, Luna said.

"They have years of training," the sheriff said at a news conference. "They are fantastic experts, and unfortunately I lost three of them today."

The explosion was reported about 7:30 a.m. at the Biscailuz Training Facility, according to sheriff's department spokesperson Nicole Nishida.

Officials were exploring whether there may be a connection to the discovery the previous day of "devices" at an apartment complex in Santa Monica, Nishida said, without specifying what sort of devices they were. The three members of the arson and explosives team responded that day to assist local police.

Law enforcement agencies were obtaining a warrant to search the complex for potential explosive material, and police evacuated residents, Nishida said.

Aerial video from KABC-TV showed that the explosion happened in a parking lot filled with sheriff's patrol cars and box trucks. Three covered bodies could be seen near a truck with a ramp attached to a side door. A patrol cruiser parked nearby had its rearview mirror shattered by the blast.

Luna said it took more than four hours to render the scene safe and the deaths were being investigated by the department's homicide detectives, with the assistance of the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. No one else was injured, he said.

U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi said in a post on the social platform X that the explosion "appears to be a horrific incident" and federal agents were at the scene to learn more.

"Please pray for the families of the sheriff's deputies killed," Bondi said.

Luna said the deaths marked the department's worst loss of life in a single incident since 1857, when four officers were killed by gunfire.

"I have met with two of three families thus far. Those were extremely challenging conversations," Luna said, his voice breaking.

Arson investigators from the Los Angeles Fire Department and members of the Los Angeles Police Department bomb squad were also assisting the investigation, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said via X.

Gov. Gavin Newsom's office said he was briefed and the Governor's Office of Emergency Services was in contact with the Sheriff's Department and closely monitoring the situation. He later said on X that members of the State Fire Marshal were helping with the investigation at the request of the ATF.

Jason Zabala, a deputy on the sheriff's department SWAT team, said those who died were "the best of the best."

"When you sign up for the job, you know it's going to be a dangerous job," he said, adding that as time passes, "you realize how dangerous it is."

The department held a procession and service for the fallen deputies in the evening.

Trump sues Wall Street Journal and media mogul Rupert Murdoch over reporting on Epstein ties

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, LARRY NEUMEISTER and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump filed a \$10 billion lawsuit against The Wall Street Journal and media mogul Rupert Murdoch Friday, a day after the newspaper published a story reporting on his ties to wealthy financier Jeffrey Epstein.

The move came shortly after the Justice Department asked a federal court on Friday to unseal grand jury transcripts in Epstein's sex trafficking case, as the administration seeks to contain the firestorm that erupted after it announced that it would not be releasing additional files from the case, despite previously pledging to do so.

The controversy has created a major fissure between Trump and his loyal base, with some of his most vocal supporters slamming the White House for the way it has handled the case, and questioning why Trump would not want the documents made public.

Trump had promised to sue the Wall Street Journal almost immediately after the paper put a new spotlight on his well-documented relationship with Epstein by publishing an article that described a sexually suggestive letter that the newspaper says bore Trump's name and was included in a 2003 album compiled for Epstein's 50th birthday.

Trump denied writing the letter, calling the story "false, malicious, and defamatory."

The suit, filed in federal court in Miami, accuses the paper and its reporters of having "knowingly and recklessly" published "numerous false, defamatory, and disparaging statements," which, it alleges, caused "overwhelming financial and reputational harm" to the president.

In a post on his Truth Social site, Trump cast the lawsuit as part of his efforts to punish news outlets, including ABC and CBS, which both reached multimillion-dollar settlement deals with the president after he took them to court.

"This lawsuit is filed not only on behalf of your favorite President, ME, but also in order to continue standing up for ALL Americans who will no longer tolerate the abusive wrongdoings of the Fake News Media," he wrote.

A spokesperson for Dow Jones, the Journal's publisher, responded Friday night, "We have full confidence in the rigor and accuracy of our reporting, and will vigorously defend against any lawsuit."

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.

Trump denied writing the letter and promised to sue. He said he spoke to both to the paper's owner, Rupert Murdoch, and its top editor, Emma Tucker, before the story was published and told them the letter was "fake."

"These are not my words, not the way I talk. Also, I don't draw pictures," the president insisted.

The outlet described the contents of the letter but did not publish a photo showing it entirely or provide details on how it came to learn about it.

In the lawsuit, Trump takes issue with that fact. The defendants, it attests, "failed to attach the letter, failed to attach the alleged drawing, failed to show proof that President Trump authored or signed any such letter, and failed to explain how this purported letter was obtained."

"The reason for those failures is because no authentic letter or drawing exists," it goes on to charge, alleging that the "Defendants concocted this story to malign President Trump's character and integrity and deceptively portray him in a false light."

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Earlier Friday, Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche filed motions in a separate federal court urging them to unseal the Epstein transcripts as well as those in the case against Maxwell, who was convicted of luring teenage girls to be sexually abused by Epstein. Epstein killed himself in 2019 shortly after his arrest while awaiting trial.

The Justice Department's announcement that it would not be making public any more Epstein files enraged parts of Trump's base in part because members of his own administration had hyped the expected release and stoked conspiracies around the well-connected financier.

The Justice Department said in the court filings that it will work with prosecutors in New York to make appropriate redactions of victim-related information and other personally identifying information before transcripts are released.

"Transparency in this process will not be at the expense of our obligation under the law to protect victims," Blanche wrote.

But despite the new push to release the grand jury transcripts, the administration has not announced plans to reverse course and release other evidence in its possession. Attorney General Pam Bondi had hyped the release of more materials after the first Epstein files disclosure in February sparked outrage because it contained no new revelations.

A judge would have to approve the release of the grand jury transcripts, and it's likely to be a lengthy process to decide what can become public and to make redactions to protect sensitive witness and victim information.

The records would show testimony of witnesses and other evidence that was presented by prosecutions during the secret grand jury proceedings, when a panel decides whether there is enough evidence to bring an indictment, or a formal criminal charge.

US envoy says Syria and Israel agree to ceasefire as Druze minority and Bedouin clans clash in Syria

By GHAITH ALSAYED and ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

MAZRAA, Syria (AP) — U.S. envoy to Syria Tom Barrack said early Saturday that Israel and Syria had agreed to a ceasefire following Israel's intervention this week in fighting between Syrian government forces and rival armed groups.

The announcement came as renewed clashes erupted between Druze groups and Bedouin clans and Syria's president said he would send troops back in to quell the fighting, which has left tens of thousands of people displaced in a worsening humanitarian crisis.

Barrack said in a statement posted on social platform X that the new ceasefire between Israel and Syria was supported by Turkey, Jordan and other neighboring countries and called for "Druze, Bedouins, and Sunnis to put down their weapons and together with other minorities build a new and united Syrian identity in peace and prosperity with its neighbors."

He did not share any details on the agreement.

Israel attacked Syrian forces to protect the Druze minority

Clashes began Sunday between Druze militias and local Sunni Muslim Bedouin tribes in Syria's southern Sweida province. Government forces intervened, nominally to restore order, but ended up taking the Bedouins' side against the Druze.

Israel intervened in defense of the Druze, launching dozens of airstrikes on convoys of government fighters and even striking the Syrian Defense Ministry headquarters in central Damascus. The Druze form a substantial community in Israel, where they are seen as a loyal minority and often serve in the Israeli military.

The fighting killed hundreds of people over four days, with allegations that Syrian government-affiliated fighters executed Druze civilians and looted and burned homes.

On Wednesday, the Syrian government reached a truce with Druze groups, mediated by the U.S., Turkey and Arab countries, and began withdrawing its forces from the province. Under the accord, Druze factions

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and clerics were to maintain the internal security in Sweida as government forces pulled out, Syria's interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa said Thursday.

Syria sends troops back in as more clashes erupt

By late Thursday, clashes were flaring again between the Druze and Bedouin groups in parts of Sweida province, and on Friday al-Sharaa said that the government would send in a "specialized force to break up clashes and resolve the conflict on the ground."

Officials had negotiated with Druze factions on an agreement to re-enter the area to impose stability and protect state institutions, according to two Syrian officials who spoke earlier Friday on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly. They said an agreement was reached, but later said the deployment was delayed, without giving an explanation.

State media reported that Druze militias had carried out revenge attacks against Bedouin communities, leading to a new wave of displacement.

The governor of neighboring Daraa province said in a statement that more than 1,000 families had been displaced to the area from Sweida as a result of "attacks on Bedouin tribes by outlaw groups."

The volunteer group Syrian Civil Defense said Friday that the head of its center in Sweida city had been kidnapped by gunmen two days earlier while on his way to evacuate a U.N. team.

The official, Hamza al-Amarin, was driving a van with the insignia of the organization, known as the White Helmets, when he was stopped by militants, the statement said. A person who answered his phone on Thursday said he was safe, it added, but they have been unable to reach him.

The United Nations has been unable to bring in much-needed humanitarian and medical aid because of ongoing clashes.

Tens of thousands displaced

The United Nations' migration agency said Friday that nearly 80,000 people had been displaced altogether since clashes started on Sunday.

It also noted that essential services, including water and electricity, have collapsed in Sweida, telecommunications systems are widely disrupted, and health facilities in Sweida and Daraa are under severe strain.

Meanwhile "there are severe disruptions to supply routes, with insecurity and road closures blocking aid deliveries," Adam Abdelmoula, U.N. Resident and Humanitarian Affairs Coordinator in Syria, said in a statement Friday.

The World Health Organization was able to send trauma care supplies to Daraa province, but Sweida remains inaccessible, he said.

"Once conditions allow, we are planning to send a mission to assess needs and provide critical aid, in full coordination with authorities," Abdelmoula said.

Sweida conflict draws in others

Bedouin groups and supporters arrived Friday from other areas of Syria to join the fight.

On the outskirts of Sweida, groups of them gathered in front of buildings that had been set ablaze. An armed man who gave his name only as Abu Mariam ("father of Mariam") said he had come from the eastern province of Deir ez-Zor to "support the oppressed."

"We will not return to our homes until we crush Al-Hijri and his ilk," he said, referring to a prominent Druze leader opposed to the government in Damascus, Sheikh Hikmat Al-Hijri. "We have nothing to do with civilians and innocent people as long as they stay in their homes."

Bedouins and Druze have clashed before

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.

While predominantly Druze, Sweida is also home to Bedouin tribes who are Sunni Muslim and have periodically clashed with the Druze over the years. The latest escalation began with members of a Bedouin tribe in Sweida setting up a checkpoint and attacking and robbing a Druze man, which triggered tit-for-tat attacks and kidnappings.

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Ahmed Aba Zeid, a Syrian researcher who has studied armed groups in southern Syria, said there is "no specific reason" for the historic tensions between the groups.

"All of Syria is full of social problems that have no reason," he said.

In this case, however, "The state exploited the latest problem to try to change the situation in Sweida, and this only increased the scope of it," he said.

A Druze leader calls for unity

In Israel, members of the Druze community had called for intervention to protect the Druze in Syria. But elsewhere in the region, Druze leaders have rejected Israeli intervention.

The spiritual leader of the Druze community in Lebanon, Sheikh Sami Abi al-Muna, said Friday at a gathering of Druze officials in Beirut that sectarian clashes in Syria "give an excuse for Israeli intervention and for blowing up the situation in the region."

"We do not accept to request protection from Israel, which we believe is harmful to our history and identity," he said.

Al-Muna called for all parties to adhere to the ceasefire agreement reached Wednesday and for a national dialogue to address the issues between different communities in Syria.

Lebanese Druze leader Walid Joumblatt, who had been one of the regional figures mediating the ceasefire reached Wednesday, at the same gathering called for the formation of an investigative committee to investigate violations against both Druze and Bedouins in Syria.

Brazil's former President Bolsonaro ordered to wear an electronic ankle monitor

By GABRIELA SÁ PESSOA Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Brazil's former President Jair Bolsonaro has been ordered to wear an ankle monitor, authorities said on Friday, in a move he described as "a supreme humiliation."

The development came as federal police conducted searches at his home and his party's headquarters in Brasília, in compliance with a Supreme Court order.

The order prohibits Bolsonaro from leaving the house at night, communicate with foreign ambassadors and diplomats or approach embassies. The former president is also barred from using social media or contacting other individuals under investigation by the Supreme Court, including his son, Eduardo Bolsonaro, a Brazilian lawmaker who currently lives in the United States and is known for his close ties to U.S. President Donald Trump.

Bolsonaro is currently on trial at the Supreme Court accused of leading an alleged attempt to stage a coup to overturn the 2022 election in which he was defeated by left-wing president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

"It is a supreme humiliation," Bolsonaro told journalists in Brasília after putting on the ankle monitoring. "I never thought about leaving Brazil, I never thought about going to an embassy, but the precautionary measures are because of that."

On Thursday, Trump wrote to Bolsonaro describing his ally's treatment by the Brazilian legal system as terrible and unjust. "This trial should end immediately!" the U.S. President said, adding that he "strongly voiced" his disapproval through his tariff policy.

On Friday, the U.S. State Department announced visa restrictions on Brazilian judicial officials.

"President Trump made clear that his administration will hold accountable foreign nationals who are responsible for censorship of protected expression in the United States," Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in a statement. "Brazilian Supreme Federal Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes's political witch hunt against Jair Bolsonaro created a persecution and censorship complex so sweeping that it not only violates basic rights of Brazilians, but also extends beyond Brazil's shores to target Americans.

"I have therefore ordered visa revocations for Moraes and his allies on the court, as well as their immediate family members effective immediately," Rubio said.

The Supreme Court's restrictions on Bolsonaro are part of a second investigation against Eduardo for allegedly working with U.S. authorities to impose sanctions against Brazilian officials.

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Moraes, who is also the rapporteur of the case, said that the former president and his son's recent actions were "blatant confessions of criminal conduct," such as coercion during legal proceedings, obstruction of investigations and attacks on national sovereignty.

"Alexandre de Moraes doubled down," Eduardo said on X, mentioning the order to the Supreme Court justice ahead of the criminal cases against his father. His elder brother, Sen. Flávio Bolsonaro, said on X: "Prohibiting a father from speaking to his own son is the greatest symbol of the hatred that has consumed Alexandre de Moraes."

Live aerial footage from local broadcasters showed federal police vehicles outside Bolsonaro's residence in Brasília.

Congressman Sóstenes Cavalcante, the leader of Bolsonaro's party in the lower house, told The Associated Press that officers also searched Bolsonaro's office at the party's headquarters. He described the operation as "another chapter in the persecution of conservatives and right-wing figures" in Brazil.

A lawyer for Bolsonaro did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

On Tuesday, Brazil's Prosecutor-General Paulo Gonet said in a report to the Supreme Court that the "evidence is clear: the defendant acted systematically, throughout his mandate and after his defeat at the polls, to incite insurrection and the destabilization of the democratic rule of law."

Bolsonaro has described the trial on X as a "witch hunt," echoing a term used by Trump when he came to his South American ally's defense last week.

Last week, Trump imposed a 50% import tax on Brazil, directly tying the tariffs to Bolsonaro's trial. The U.S. president has hosted the former Brazilian president at his Mar-a-Lago resort when both were in power in 2020. Trump compared the Brazilian's situation to his own. On Tuesday, speaking to reporters at the White House, Trump repeated the claim that the trial is a "witch hunt."

A source at Brazil's Supreme Court said some justices have already made it clear among themselves that U.S. tariffs will have no effect on Bolsonaro's trial, which is expected to resume between August and September. The staffer spoke under condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly. ____

Mauricio Savarese contributed reporting in Sao Paulo.

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Trump appointees pushed more marble in Fed building renovation White House now attacks

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has looked to the marble finishes and hefty price tag of the Federal Reserve headquarters to claim grounds to fire Chair Jerome Powell, with whom he has tussled for years over interest rates. But the extensive use of marble in the building is, at least in part, the result of policies backed by Trump himself.

As the Fed moved forward with plans to renovate its Great Depression-era headquarters in Washington during Trump's first term, it faced concerns in 2020 during a vetting process involving Trump appointees, who called for more "white Georgia marble" for the facade of the building.

The Fed's architects said the central bank wanted glass walls, to reflect the Fed as a transparent institution, but three Trump appointees to a local commission felt marble best fit the building's historic character. While most of the proposed glass exterior was kept, some marble was added as a result, according to the minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, which advises the federal government on architecture.

The marble does not explain the roughly \$600 million in cost overruns for the project, now budgeted to cost \$2.5 billion, which also includes the addition of an underground parking garage and new glass atria in the building's courtyards. But the roots of its extensive use further muddies the White House's attempts to use the renovation to paint the central banker as a profligate spender as a possible pretext to removing him.

"I wouldn't be surprised if the result costs more" because of the added marble, said Alex Krieger, a

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Harvard University emeritus professor who was a member of the commission and participated in hearings on the Fed's proposal.

Russ Vought, Trump's top budget adviser, cited "premium marble" in a letter to Powell last week as an example of the "ostentatious overhaul."

In a response late Thursday, Powell wrote that the project would "use new domestic marble" for several reasons, including "to address concerns raised by external review agencies."

The National Capital Planning Commission, which also reviewed and approved the Fed renovation project, has started an inquiry into how Powell oversaw the updates.

"The Federal Reserve's extravagant multi-billion dollar renovation happened on the watch of the Fed's leadership, and the Fed's leadership needs to own up for this mismanagement of taxpayer dollars – as well as its botched coverup job," said White House spokesman Kush Desai. A Fed spokesperson declined to comment.

There is an uncomfortable possibility that the fate of the U.S. central bank and its foundational role in the economy hinges on a dispute about renovation costs and architecture, one that could lead a broader legal battle as to whether Trump can dismiss a Fed chair he dislikes after the Supreme Court in May described the institution as having protections against an abrupt firing.

Trump White House investigating renovation

Trump, who has redecorated the Oval Office in gold leaf, has argued that inflation is not a concern, so the Fed can dramatically slash its rate to encourage more borrowing. But Powell and other Fed committee members are waiting to see whether Trump's tariffs lift inflation, which higher interest rates could help blunt.

The Fed chair pushed back against criticism during a June congressional hearing that the renovation was lavish by saying some features were removed due to cost, leading the White House to speculate as to whether Powell deceived lawmakers or made changes to the renovation plans without getting additional approvals. At that hearing, Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., also cited "white marble" as an example of extravagance.

James Blair, a White House deputy chief of staff who was recently added to the planning commission, said Wednesday that he would send a letter to the Fed requesting any revisions to the project. His goal is to see whether Powell was accurate in his congressional testimony.

"He's either telling the truth or he isn't," Blair told The Associated Press. "If he's telling the truth, he can prove it by just submitting all the plans and revisions."

Blair told reporters Friday that the Fed offered to let them inspect the construction site at 7 p.m. that evening, but the timing didn't work and officials would like to tour the area next week.

Trump said Wednesday that he's "highly unlikely" to try to fire Powell unless there was what he deemed as "fraud."

The attempt to remove Powell before his May 2026 term as chair ends could unleash a devastating financial blowback, as financial markets expect the Fed, with its mission of stabilizing prices and maximizing employment, to be free of White House politicking. The perception that the central bank would use its powers to serve Trump's political ends could lead to higher interest rates on the U.S. debt and mortgages, instead of the declines being promised by the president.

Trump appointees push for more marble

The 115-year old Commission of Fine Arts reviewed the plans for the renovation three times in 2020.

Duncan Stroik, who was appointed to the commission in 2019 during Trump's first term, "proposed an amendment requesting that the next submission include an alternative design in white Georgia marble, the same material used for the five existing buildings along the north side of Constitution Avenue," the minutes of a Jan. 16, 2020, meeting said.

Stroik "does not think the proposed additions defer to the historic buildings as great marble edifices on an important street," the minutes added.

Stroik's amendment was voted down, but the commission didn't fully endorse the Fed's plans. The architects presented new plans in May 2020, though those didn't appear to satisfy Trump's appointees.

Some commissioners "continued to object to the addition as a glass box that is reminiscent of a commercial office building, glowing at night, that would present an unacceptable contrast to the solid masonry

architecture of the historic building in its monumental context," the commission wrote in a May 2020 letter to a Fed official.

By July 2020, however, the Fed's architects came back with a new proposal, which included "panels of white Georgia marble" which would be used for the "base, cornice, and other details, consistent with the historic building," the commission's minutes said.

Neoclassical vs. modern designs

Stroik, now a professor of architecture at the University of Notre Dame, said in an interview that "stone buildings don't necessarily have to cost a fortune." But he acknowledged that the commission had not discussed expenses, which has not been part of its mission.

"If they wanted to play the cost game, you do a marble facade and you do the glass facade and you compare the cost," Stroik said. "And you know, they never did that."

Krieger, the former commission member, noted that the body's discussions became much more contentious after the Trump administration removed several members and replaced them with Stroik and James McCrery, a professor at Catholic University, whom he said often echoed the sentiments in a then- draft executive order from Trump that extolled classical architecture.

"At the time, it was a fierce battle over how literal to the original design should the renovations be," Krieger said. "Normally, that attitude does add costs to the construction project." McCrery declined to comment.

Trump issued the executive order in December 2020, which criticized modernist architecture and expressed a preference for "beautiful" classical buildings with more traditional designs. Biden revoked the order, and Trump reissued it the first day of his second term.

The commission did not fully approve the Fed's project until September 2021, after McCrery and another Trump appointee, Justin Shubow, had been removed by then President Joe Biden.

Education Department will release some frozen grants supporting after-school and summer programs

By ANNIE MA AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Education Department will release \$1.3 billion in previously withheld grant money for after-school programs, days after 10 Republican senators sent a letter imploring the Trump administration to allow frozen education money to be sent to states.

President Donald Trump's administration on July 1 withheld more than \$6 billion in federal grants for after-school and summer programs, adult literacy and English language instruction, part of a review to ensure spending aligned with the White House's priorities.

In a letter sent Wednesday, Republican senators said the withheld money supported programs that had longstanding bipartisan support and were critical to local communities. The money had been appropriated by Congress in a bill that was signed by Trump.

"We share your concern about taxpayer money going to fund radical left-wing programs," the senators wrote to the Office of Management and Budget. "However, we do not believe that is happening with these funds."

The administration's review of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, which support after-school and summer programming, has been completed, a senior official said Friday. The person declined to be identified so they could share progress from the review. That funding will be released to states, the official said. The rest of the withheld grants, close to \$5 billion, continues to be reviewed for bias by the Office of Management and Budget.

Without the money, school districts and nonprofits such as the YMCA and Boys and Girls Club of America had said they would have to close or scale back educational offerings this fall.

The money being released Friday pays for free programming before and after school and during the summer. The programs provide child care so low-income parents can work, and they give options to families who live in rural areas with few other child care providers. Beyond just child care, kids receive reading

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and math help at the programs, along with enrichment in science and the arts.

Despite the money's release Friday, schools and nonprofits have already been disrupted by two weeks of uncertainty. Some programs have made plans to close, and others have fallen behind on hiring and contracting for the fall.

"While we are thrilled the funds will be made available," said Jodi Grant, executive director of the Afterschool Alliance, "the administration's inexplicable delay in disbursing them caused massive chaos and harm." Many after-school programs had canceled plans to open in the fall, she said.

On Monday, more than 20 states had filed a lawsuit challenging the \$6 billion funding freeze, including the money for English language instruction, teacher development and adult literacy that remains on hold. The lawsuit, led by California, argued withholding the money was unconstitutional and many low-income families would lose access to critical after-school care if the grants were not released.

David Schuler, executive director of AASA, an association of school superintendents, praised the release of after-school money but said that the remaining education funding should not be withheld.

"Districts should not be in this impossible position where the Administration is denying funds that had already been appropriated to our public schools, by Congress," Schuler said in a statement. "The remaining funds must be released immediately — America's children are counting on it."

Republican Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-West Virginia, who chairs the Senate Appropriations subcommittee that oversees education spending, led the letter sent this week by Republican senators, protesting the funding freeze. The letter called for the rest of the money to be released, including funds for adult education and teaching English as a second language.

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

Sen. Patty Murray, D-Washington, called on the White House to release the rest of the money.

"At this very moment, schools nationwide are crunching the numbers to figure out how many teachers they will need to lay off as Trump continues to hold up billions in funding," Murray said Friday in a statement. "Every penny of this funding must flow immediately."

Alan Bergman, Oscar-winning lyricist who helped write 'The Way We Were,' dies at 99

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

Alan Bergman, the Oscar-winning lyricist who teamed with his wife, Marilyn, for an enduring and loving partnership that produced such old-fashioned hits as "How Do You Keep the Music Playing?," "It Might Be You" and the classic "The Way We Were," has died at 99.

Bergman died late Thursday at his home in Los Angeles, family spokesperson Ken Sunshine said in a statement Friday. The statement said Bergman had, in recent months, suffered from respiratory issues "but continued to write songs till the very end."

The Bergmans married in 1958 and remained together until her death, in 2022. With collaborators ranging from Marvin Hamlisch and Quincy Jones to Michel Legrand and Cy Coleman, they were among the most successful and prolific partnerships of their time, providing words and occasional music for hundreds of songs, including movie themes that became as famous as the films themselves. Frank Sinatra, Michael Jackson, Tony Bennett and many other artists performed their material, and Barbra Streisand became a frequent collaborator and close friend.

Sunshine said that there will still be a centennial celebration of Alan Bergman as planned at Santa Monica's Broad Stage, with guests including Michael Feinstein, Jackson Browne and Patti Austin. Feinstein, among the many artists who posted tributes Friday, wrote that the Bergmans were "kind, talented and principled artists" who "lived from a place called Love."

Blending Tin Pan Alley sentiment and contemporary pop, the Bergmans crafted lyrics known by millions, many of whom would not have recognized the writers had they walked right past them. Among their most

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famous works: the Streisand-Neil Diamond duet "You Don't Bring Me Flowers," the well-named Sinatra favorite "Nice 'n' Easy" and the topical themes to the 1970s sitcoms "Maude" and "Good Times." Their film compositions included Ray Charles' "In the Heat of the Night" from the movie of the same name; Noel Harrison's "The Windmills of Your Mind," from "The Thomas Crown Affair"; and Stephen Bishop's "It Might Be You," from "Tootsie."

The whole world seemed to sing and cry along to "The Way We Were," an instant favorite recorded by Streisand for the 1973 romantic drama of the same name that co-starred Streisand and Robert Redford. Set to Hamlisch's tender, bittersweet melody, it was essentially a song about itself — a nostalgic ballad about nostalgia, an indelible ode to the uncertainty of the past, starting with one of history's most famous opening stanzas: "Memories / light the corners of my mind / misty watercolor memories / of the way we were."

"The Way We Were" was the top-selling song of 1974 and brought the Bergmans one of their three Oscars, the others coming for "Windmills of Your Mind" and the soundtrack to "Yentl," the Streisand-directed movie from 1983. At times, the Academy Awards could be mistaken for a Bergman showcase. In 1983, three of the nominees for best song featured lyrics by the Bergmans, who received 16 nominations in all.

The Bergmans also won two Grammys, four Emmys, were presented numerous lifetime achievement honors and received tributes from individual artists, including Streisand's 2011 album of Bergman songs, "What Matters Most." On "Lyrically, Alan Bergman," Bergman handled the vocals himself. Although best known for their movie work, the Bergmans wrote the Broadway musical "Ballroom" and provided lyrics for the symphony "Visions of America."

Their very lives seemed to rhyme. They didn't meet until they were adults, but were born in the same Brooklyn hospital, four years apart; raised in the same Brooklyn neighborhood, attended the same children's concerts at Carnegie Hall and moved to California in the same year, 1950. They were introduced in Los Angeles while working for the same composer, but at different times of the day. Their actual courtship was in part a story of music. Fred Astaire was Marilyn's favorite singer at the time and Alan Bergman co-wrote a song, "That Face," which Astaire agreed to record. Acetate in hand, Bergman rushed home to tell Marilyn the news, then proposed.

Bergman is survived by a daughter, Julie Bergman, and granddaughter.

Bergman had wanted to be a songwriter since he was a boy. He majored in music and theater at the University of North Carolina, and received a master's from the University of California, Los Angeles, where he befriended Johnny Mercer and became a protege. He and Marilyn at first wrote children's songs together, and broke through commercially in the late 1950s with the calypso hit "Yellowbird." Their friendship with Streisand began soon after, when they visited her backstage during one of her early New York club appearances. "Do you know how wonderful you are?" was how Marilyn Bergman greeted the young singer.

The Bergmans worked so closely together that they often found themselves coming up with the same word at the same time. Alan likened their partnership to housework: one washes, one dries, the title of a song they eventually devised for a Hamlisch melody. Bergman was reluctant to name a favorite song, but cited "A Love Like Ours" as among their most personal:

"When love like ours arrives / We guard it with our lives / Whatever goes astray / When a rainy day comes around / A love like ours will keep us safe and sound."

Did money or politics cause Colbert cancellation? Either way, the economics are tough for TV

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

CBS says its decision to end Stephen Colbert's late-night comedy show is financial, not political. Yet even with the ample skepticism about that explanation, there's no denying the economics were not working in Colbert's favor.

The network's bombshell announcement late Thursday that the "Late Show" will end next May takes away President Donald Trump's most prominent TV critic and the most popular entertainment program

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in its genre.

The television industry's declining economic health means similar hard calls are already being made with personalities and programming, with others to be faced in the future. For the late-night genre, there are unique factors to consider.

As recently as 2018, broadcast networks took in an estimated \$439 million in advertising revenue for its late-night programs, according to the advertising firm Guidelines. Last year, that number dwindled to \$220 million.

Once a draw for young men, now they've turned away

Late-night TV was a particular draw for young men, considered the hardest-to-get and most valuable demographic for advertisers. Increasingly, these viewers are turning to streaming services, either to watch something else entirely or catch highlights of the late-night shows, which are more difficult for the networks to monetize.

More broadly, the much-predicted takeover of viewers by streaming services is coming to pass. The Nielsen company reported that during the last two months, for the first time ever, more people consumed programming on services like YouTube and Netflix than on ABC, CBS and NBC or any cable network.

Networks and streamers spent roughly \$70 billion on entertainment shows and \$30 billion for sports rights last year, said Brian Wieser, CEO of Madison & Wall, an advertising consultant and data services firm. Live sports is the most dependable magnet for viewers and costs for its rights are expected to increase 8% a year over the next decade. With television viewership declining in general, it's clear where savings will have to come from.

Wieser said he does not know whether Colbert's show is profitable or not for CBS and parent company Paramount Global, but he knows the direction in which it is headed. "The economics of television are weak," he said.

In a statement announcing the cancellation, George Cheeks, Paramount Global's president and chief executive officer, said that "This is purely a financial decision against a challenging backdrop in late night. It is not related in any way to the show's performance, content or other matters happening at Paramount."

Cheeks' problem is that not everyone believes him.

Colbert is a relentless critic of Trump, and earlier this week pointedly criticized Paramount's decision to settle Trump's lawsuit against CBS over a "60 Minutes" interview with Kamala Harris. He called Paramount's \$16 million payment to Trump a "big fat bribe," since the company is seeking the administration's approval of its merger with Skydance Media.

On Friday, the Writers Guild of America called for an investigation by New York's attorney general into whether Colbert's cancellation is itself a bribe, "sacrificing free speech to curry favor with the Trump administration as the company looks for merger approval."

CBS' decision made this a pivotal week for the future of television and radio programming. Congress stripped federal funding for PBS and NPR, threatening the future of shows on those outlets.

Journey Gunderson, executive director of the National Comedy Center, called the decision to end Colbert's show the end of an era.

"Late-night television has historically been one of comedy's most audience-accessible platforms — a place where commentary meets community, night after night," Gunderson said. "This isn't just the end of a show. It's the quiet removal of one of the few remaining platforms for daily comedic commentary.

Trump celebrates Colbert's demise

Trump, who has called in the past for CBS to terminate Colbert's contract, celebrated the show's upcoming demise. "I absolutely love that Colbert got fired," the president wrote on Truth Social. "His talent was even less than his ratings."

Some experts questioned whether CBS could have explored other ways to save money on Colbert. NBC, for example, has cut costs by eliminating the band on Seth Meyers' late-night show and curtailing Jimmy Fallon's "Tonight" show to four nights a week.

Could CBS have saved more money by cutting off the show immediately, instead of letting it run until next May, which sets up an awkward "lame duck" period? Then again, Colbert will keep working until his

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contract runs out; CBS would have had to keep paying him anyway.

CBS recently cancelled the "After Midnight" show that ran after Colbert. But the network had signaled earlier this year that it was prepared to continue that show until host Taylor Tomlinson decided that she wanted to leave, noted Bill Carter, author of "The Late Shift."

"It is a very sad day for CBS that they are getting out of the late-night race," Andy Cohen, host of Bravo's "Watch What Happens Live," told The Associated Press. "I mean, they are turning off the lights after the news."

Colbert, if he wanted to continue past next May, would likely be able to find a streaming service willing to pay him, Wieser said. But the future of late-night comedy on the entertainment networks is genuinely at risk. Trump, in fact, may outlast his fiercest comic critics. Jon Stewart, once a weeknight fixture, works one night a week at "The Daily Show" for Paramount's Comedy Central, a network that seldom produces much original programming any more.

ABC's Jimmy Kimmel, who was chided on social media by Trump on Friday — "I hear Jimmy Kimmel is next" — has a contract that also runs out next year. Kimmel, 57, openly wondered in a Variety interview before signing his latest three-year contract extension how long he wanted to do it. He's hosted his show since 2003.

"I have moments where I go, I cannot do this anymore," Kimmel told Variety in 2022. "And I have moments where I go, what am I gonna do with my life if I'm not doing this anymore?" It's a very complicated thing ... I'm not going to do this forever."

Colbert, Kimmel and Stewart were all nominated for Emmy awards this week.

Trump signs new stablecoin regulations into law, a major milestone for crypto industry

By SEUNG MIN KIM and ALAN SUDERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Friday signed into law new regulations for a type of cryptocurrency, a major milestone for an industry that has spent heavily to strengthen its legitimacy and political might.

The GENIUS Act sets initial guardrails and consumer protections for stablecoins, which are tied to assets like the U.S. dollar to reduce price volatility compared with other forms of cryptocurrency. It passed both the House and Senate with wide bipartisan margins.

The new law is meant to bolster consumer confidence in the crypto industry, which has quickly become a major power player in Washington thanks to massive campaign donations and spending on lobbying. Its passage comes as Trump had repeatedly pledged to make the U.S. the "crypto capital of the world."

"For years you were mocked and dismissed and counted out," Trump told crypto industry executives at a White House bill signing attended by about 200 people, including several top GOP lawmakers. "This signing is a massive validation of your hard work and your pioneering spirit."

The crypto industry has long complained it was unfairly targeted by former President Joe Biden's administration and spent heavily to help Trump win last year's election.

The president lavished praise on crypto leaders during his speech Friday, saying "nobody has gained the respect in such a short period of time."

Trump said helping the cryptocurrency industry was "good for the dollar and it's good for the country."

"That's why I backed you at an early stage," said Trump, who had previously been a skeptic of cryptocurrency before embracing it. His administration has taken several early steps to boost the crypto industry, including the Securities and Exchange Commission dropping several enforcement actions against large crypto companies.

Trump then added a candid admission about the political calculus of his support for the crypto industry: "And I also did it for the votes," he said, drawing laughter from the audience.

The president also joked that lawmakers had named the GENIUS Act after him. The acronym stands for "Guiding and Establishing National Innovation for U.S. Stablecoins."

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The use of stablecoins has grown dramatically in recent years. Circle, the U.S.-based issuer of one of the most popular cryptocurrencies, made its debut on the New York Stock Exchange earlier this year and quickly saw its value soar amid heavy interest from crypto enthusiasts and investors. Stablecoin issuers make profits by collecting the interest on the assets they hold in reserve to back their stablecoins.

A provision in the GENIUS Act bans members of Congress and their families from profiting off stablecoins. But that prohibition does not extend to the president and his family, even as Trump builds a crypto empire from the White House. His family holds a significant stake in World Liberty Financial, a crypto project that launched its own stablecoin earlier this year and received an early boost from an investment fund in the United Arab Emirates.

The House also passed two other bills Thursday that are meant to help the crypto industry. One creates a new market structure for cryptocurrency, and the other bans the Federal Reserve from issuing a new digital currency. Both measures now go to the Senate.

For Sale: Trump is leveraging power of his office to reap profits for family businesses

By BRIAN SLODYSKO and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — If one theme has emerged in President Donald Trump's second term, it's this: He's leveraged the power of his office for personal gain unlike anyone before in history.

From crypto coins to bibles, overseas development deals to an upcoming line of cellphones, Trump family businesses have raked in hundreds of millions of dollars since his election, an unprecedented flood of often shadowy money from billionaires, foreign governments and cryptocurrency tycoons with interests before the federal government.

"He is president and is supposed to be working in the public's interest," said James Thurber, an emeritus professor at American University, who has researched lobbying, campaign finance and political corruption for decades. "Instead, he is helping his own personal interest to grow his wealth. It's totally not normal."

The sums amassed by the Trump Organization, the collection of companies controlled by the president's children, are far greater than those collected by the family during the president's first term, when patronage of his hotels, resorts and golf courses was de rigueur to curry favor with the famously transactional commander-in-chief.

The second time around, the Trump family's ambitions are far grander, stretching from cyberspace to far-flung regions across the globe. One of Trump's cryptocurrencies is conservatively estimated to have pulled in at least \$320 million since January, while another received a \$2 billion investment from a foreign government wealth fund. A third has sold at least \$550 million in tokens.

His sons have jetted across the Middle East to line up new development deals, while his daughter and son-in-law are working with the Albanian government to build a Mediterranean island resort. Even first lady Melania Trump has inked a \$40 million documentary deal with Amazon, whose founder, Jeff Bezos, was a frequent target of Trump during his first presidency and whose companies contract extensively with the federal government.

Drain the swamp?

The dealmaking is a rejection of Trump's first-term pledge to "drain the swamp" in Washington and dwarfs the influence peddling efforts of former President Joe Biden's family, whom Trump and his allies attacked as the "Biden Crime Family."

While Democrats have condemned Trump for his overlapping roles as a beneficiary and president, he is not likely to face any immediate repercussions for such extensive conflicts-of-interest. Congress is controlled by fellow Republicans, and his administration is stocked with loyalists who have dismantled many guardrails of oversight. Last summer, the Supreme Court, with a conservative majority cemented by Trump, ruled that presidents have broad immunity from prosecution.

Even in the rare cases where Trump's allies have urged caution, the president has ignored them. That's what happened when he accepted a \$400 million "beautiful, big, magnificent, free airplane" from the Qatari

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government. Trump said the Boeing 747 "would go directly" to his presidential library upon leaving office. "It's the Mount Everest of corruption" said Sen. Jeff Merkley, an Oregon Democrat.

Since Richard Nixon resigned in disgrace, presidents have gone to great lengths to avoid the appearance of such conflicts.

Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan kept assets in a "blind trust," while George H.W. Bush used a "diversified trust," which blocked him from knowing what was in his portfolio. His son, George W. Bush, used a similar arrangement.

Barack Obama was an exception, but his investments were mostly a bland mix of index funds and U.S. treasuries. During his first term, Trump even gave a nod toward ethics. He issued a moratorium on foreign deals. But instead of placing his assets in a blind trust like many of his predecessors, he handed the reins of the Trump Organization to his children, which kept his financial holdings close.

This time, he has made no such gesture. His sons, Eric and Donald Jr., are again running the business while Trump is in office. And though the White House says he is not involved in its day-to-day decisions, the trust he has established continues to profit. He promotes his resorts, merchandise and the family's crypto ventures while residing in the White House, often from his account on Truth Social, the social media company he and his allies launched.

He's also touted a line of Trump shoes, a Bible, which is made in China, and Trump guitars, one of which is a \$1,500 Gibson Les Paul knockoff, featuring "Make America Great Again" fret inlays. Conservative groups and Republican committees have spent at least \$25 million at Trump properties since 2015, with most of it coming from Trump's own political organization, campaign finance disclosures show.

Trump embraces crypto

Yet, those ventures pale in comparison to his exploits in cryptocurrency, which offers perhaps the clearest example of the conflicts of interest that have come to dominate Trump's second term.

Trump was once a crypto skeptic who declared that cryptocurrencies were "not money," were based on "thin air" and seemed "like a scam." By the time he was running again for president, however, he'd become a proponent of the industry.

"The difference now is he has realized that it can be his scam," said Hilary Allen, a law professor at American University who specializes in banking and cryptocurrencies.

Trump has pledged to turn the U.S. into the "crypto capital of the world" and promised to roll back oversight of the industry.

Deregulation, of course, will help his own businesses. At the height of the campaign, Trump announced the launch of his own crypto coin and World Liberty Financial, a cryptocurrency firm that would be run by his sons and several business associates. Among those partners was Steve Witkoff, now one of Trump's top diplomatic envoys.

The Trump Organization and World Liberty Financial declined to comment.

But it was also rooted in his 2024 campaign. At a crypto event at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida in May 2024, he received assurances that industry figures would spend lavishly to get him reelected, The Associated Press previously reported.

Asked recently at the White House if he'd consider having his family business step back from its crypto investments to avoid questions about conflicts of interest, Trump said: "We've created a very powerful industry. That's much more important than anything that we invest in."

"I don't care about investing. You know, I have kids and they invest in it, because they do believe in it," Trump added of crypto. "But I'm president, and what I did do there was build an industry that's very important. And, if we didn't have it, China would."

White House: Trump's crypto push is not driven by self-interest

Harrison Fields, a White House spokesman, reiterated that Trump's crypto boosterism isn't driven by self-interest.

He "is taking decisive action to establish regulatory clarity for digital financial technology and to secure America's position as the world's leader in the digital asset economy," Fields said.

"The Trump administration," Fields added, "is fulfilling the president's promise to make the United States

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the crypto capital of the planet by driving innovation and economic opportunity for all Americans.”

Trump on Friday signed new cryptocurrency legislation that had been sought by the industry. Among the provisions is a ban on members of Congress issuing their own “stablecoins,” a particular type of cryptocurrency. The prohibition does not extend to the president.

Fields said it was unfair to equate critics’ charges of conflicts of interest against Trump with the president’s own suggestions that Biden’s family benefited financially while he was in office.

He said Trump’s policies haven’t benefited the president personally and have nothing to do with his family’s financial concerns — and said Trump entered the White House an already successful businessman who didn’t need a political career to become rich.

Even so, Trump’s family is poised to benefit financially from the crypto industry’s growing clout. It holds a majority ownership stake that entitles them to 75% of earnings from their first coin, released last September, according to World Liberty Financial’s website.

The coin, \$WLFI, was not an immediate success. Then, after the president’s election, sales took off.

Days before his inauguration, Trump announced a new meme coin, \$Trump, during the “Crypto Ball,” a Washington gala intended to showcase a regulatory sea change he vowed to usher in.

“Time to celebrate everything we stand for: WINNING!” Trump posted to his X account. “Join my very special Trump Community. GET YOUR \$TRUMP NOW.”

Trump’s meme coin generated at least \$320 million in fees

Often created as a joke with no real utility, meme coins are prone to wild price swings that often enrich a small group of insiders at the expense of less sophisticated investors. \$Trump soared to over \$70, but its price soon collapsed, losing money for many. It has hovered around \$10 since March. Trump did well, though. By the end of April, the coin had earned over \$320 million in fees, according to an analysis by the crypto tracking firm Chainalysis.

A third cryptocurrency, a stablecoin called USD1, launched in April.

There appear to be upsides for Trump’s cryptocurrency investors and associates.

Justin Sun, a Chinese-born crypto billionaire, has disclosed investing nearly \$200 million in the Trumps’ various crypto ventures. Amid this spree, the Trump administration paused a securities fraud case against him. In June, Sun announced he was taking his crypto company, Tron, public after securing financing through a deal brokered by Eric Trump. Then, last week, Sun posted on X that he was purchasing an additional \$100 million worth of Trump’s meme coin.

Sun is not the only one. Changpen Zhao, a convicted felon who founded the crypto exchange Binance, was part of a megadeal in which a United Arab Emirates-controlled wealth fund invested \$2 billion in the Trump stablecoin, USD1, which it used to purchase a stake in Zhao’s Binance.

The deal gave outsized publicity to World Liberty Financial and instantly made the stablecoin one of the top in the market. It will also allow the Trump family and their business partners to reinvest the \$2 billion and collect interest, estimated to be worth as much as \$80 million a year.

Soon after the purchase was announced, Trump granted the UAE greater access to U.S. artificial intelligence chips, which it had long sought. Binance and Zhao benefited, too.

Binance is restricted in the U.S. and entered a settlement with the Biden administration that sent Zhao to jail in 2024 after he pleaded guilty to failing to maintain an anti-money-laundering program. Prosecutors said he looked the other way as criminals used his platform to move money connected to child sex abuse, drug trafficking and terrorism.

In May, Trump’s Securities and Exchange Commission dropped the final federal enforcement action against Binance. Zhao, who goes by CZ, is now seeking a pardon. The White House says no decision has been made on issuing such a grant of clemency.

White House tour for top crypto investors

Trump announced several months ago a new promotion that would trade on his presidency: He was hosting a dinner at his Virginia golf club for the top 220 investors in his meme coin, \$Trump, with a special White House tour for the top 25.

That fueled a temporary rise in the coin's value. It also helped enrich the Trump Organization, which is entitled to collect fees when the coin is traded. A month later, Trump addressed attendees of the dinner, standing before a lectern with the presidential seal. The White House said at the time that it had nothing to do with the meme coin.

For decades, campaign contributions and lobbying have been governed by laws that place limits on how much donors can give, require a degree of transparency and limit how politicians can spend the money they raise. Trump's venture into cryptocurrency effectively sidesteps these laws, legal and finance experts say.

"It's a lot like the Trump Hotel from the first term, but what crypto has done is dispensed with the need for the hotel," said Allen, the law professor. "Because crypto assets can be made out of thin air, he has found a way of creating an unlimited supply of assets to offer to people who want to give."

Trump's pivot from aid to trade leaves Africa wary as it faces tariffs and uncertainty

By FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — When U.S. President Donald Trump met five African leaders in Washington this month, his lack of familiarity with the continent was on display. He praised Liberian President Joseph Boakai's English — Liberia's official language — and gestured at another leader to wrap up remarks.

But the bigger takeaway was Trump's pledge to transform U.S.-Africa relations: a shift from aid to trade, even as the region reels from his steep tariffs and sweeping aid cuts.

African leaders offered minerals from manganese to uranium and possibly lithium. Senegal's president even sought to leverage Trump's love of golf by inviting him to build a course. Yet many nations are anxious about Washington's new path.

Here's a look at Trump's new 'trade not aid' policy toward African nations:

A commercial diplomacy approach

After slashing billions in foreign aid, including shutting down the U.S. Agency for International Development — which provided over \$12 billion in humanitarian assistance in 2024 alone — the Trump administration says it is forging a new approach: "commercial diplomacy." Trade, not aid, is the order of the day.

"It is now truly our policy for Africa," said Troy Fitrell, the top U.S. diplomat for Africa, when announcing the strategy in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, in May. Ambassadors will now be judged not by aid projects but on "how well they support" local businesses and "how effectively they advocate for U.S. business and the number of deals they facilitate," he said.

Africa accounts for less than 1% of U.S. goods trade, but Fitrell called it "the world's largest untapped market," projecting its purchasing power could surpass \$16 trillion by 2050.

Early deals, lingering doubts

Washington touts quick progress: 33 agreements worth \$6 billion in Trump's first 100 days, plus \$2.5 billion in commitments at a U.S.-Africa business summit in June. Projects span grain storage and digital infrastructure in Angola, energy ventures in Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Congo, and tourism in Ethiopia.

Still, many worry about the costs. Job losses and economic pain from tariffs are mounting even as Washington celebrates these wins.

Trump did not invent the idea of trade over aid. African leaders have pushed for this since the 1970s. The problem, critics say, is the caveat of tariffs and uncertainty over the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the U.S. flagship program for trade with the continent.

"In reality, these tariffs are not about trade balances. It's economic warfare," said the Alternative Information and Development Centre, a South African NGO.

Fears that jobs could go

Trump has imposed a 30% tariff on selected South African goods and threatens another 10% for nations aligned with the BRICS bloc of developing economies. South Africa's Automotive Business Council says vehicle exports to the U.S. have plunged over 80%, warning that tariffs "strike at the heart of South Africa's industrialization agenda." More than 100,000 jobs, mostly in auto and agriculture, are at risk, the

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council says.

Smaller nations are also reeling. Lesotho declared a state of disaster after being hit with 50% duties — the second-highest rate after China — before Trump announced a 90-day pause. About 12,000 textile jobs in Lesotho hang in the balance, according to its Minister of Trade, Industry, and Business Development, Mokhethi Shelile. From vanilla farmers in Madagascar to cocoa growers in Ivory Coast and oil exporters in Nigeria, tariffs have shaken economies and raised doubts about Washington's intent.

"The U.S. certainly can't have it both ways," said Brendon Verster, an economist at Oxford Economics Africa. "The 'aid to trade' stance risks leaving Africa behind once the U.S. has gotten what it wanted, which will probably be critical minerals."

An agreement on the brink

AGOA, enacted in 2000 and renewed in 2015, allows duty-free U.S. access for nearly 2,000 goods from 32 African nations. It expires in September, with no clear sign that it will be renewed.

South Africa's trade minister warned it will be "very difficult" to keep AGOA under current conditions. Fitrell said he is a "big fan" of the deal but told African leaders they must do more to lobby Congress. Future arrangements may require "much greater attention toward some form of reciprocity" to reflect Trump's push for U.S. economic interests, he said.

Meanwhile, China is leveraging zero-tariff policies to expand its influence. In June, China — already Africa's biggest trading partner — said it plans to grant duty-free market access to 53 African nations. Still, Verster said some African nations might be cautious about strengthening ties with China, for fear of triggering retaliation from the U.S.

"Aligning with China ... could possibly bring about more economic punishment from the U.S.," he said.

Most US adults think the GOP tax bill will help the wealthy and harm the poor, AP-NORC poll finds

By LEAH ASKARINAM and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican elected officials are promoting their recently passed tax and spending bill as a win for working Americans, but a new survey shows that Americans broadly see it as a win for the wealthy.

About two-thirds of U.S. adults expect the new tax law will help the rich, according to the poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Most — about 6 in 10 — think it will do more to hurt than help low-income people. About half say it will do more harm than good for middle-class people and people like them.

Republicans have already begun airing advertisements framing the legislation as a tax cut for all Americans, highlighting new deductions on tips and overtime income. But Democrats have been making the case that the wealthiest Americans will benefit from the legislation, citing cuts to Medicaid and food assistance programs.

The new poll indicates that Republicans still have persuading to do. The high price tag may also be turning off some Americans. Trump's approval rating on government spending has fallen since the spring, according to the new survey, and about 6 in 10 U.S. adults across the political spectrum think the government is spending "too much."

Americans see little benefit for low-income or middle-class people

Most people have heard at least something about the new law, according to the poll, which found that about two-thirds of U.S. adults have heard or read "a lot" or "some" about it.

Those who know something about the legislation are more likely to believe it favors the wealthy, compared with people who have heard "only a little" or "nothing at all."

Anaiah Barrow, a 25-year-old single mom from North Carolina who doesn't identify with a political party, said she's concerned that the new law will hurt caregivers like her. Barrow -- who's juggling a job, taking care of two young children and pursuing a degree -- is concerned about losing access to day care and food stamps.

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"It has a really big effect," Barrow said of the recently passed legislation, which she has learned about on TikTok. "It may not be as big now, but in the long run it's going to have that effect -- it's going to hit bad."

Even many Republicans agree that the wealthy are likely to benefit from the tax and spending law. About half say the law will do more to help the wealthy. A similar percentage say this about middle-class people, while about 4 in 10 Republicans think it will do more to help than hurt low-income people.

Lori Nichols, a 51-year-old caregiver for her elderly mother in Illinois, said the legislation has "very little for the older people and people that are on disability." Although Nichols is a Republican, she said she didn't vote in the 2024 presidential election and voted for Democrat Joe Biden in 2020.

"As far as the tax part goes, it seems to me like (Trump's) just making the rich richer," Nichols said.

Republicans are less likely to think they'll be harmed

Despite the overall sense that wealthy people will be the primary beneficiaries, Democrats and independents are much likelier than Republicans to think the law could harm them personally.

Nathan Hay, a shift service manager at an international dealership that repairs trucks, said he thinks lower-income people might see a "slight increase" in taxes but still supports the bill. "Personally, it's not helping me a ton," Hay said, but he believes it will help small businesses, which have been a staple in his own life and his family's.

About half of Republicans expect the legislation to do more to help "people like you," compared with about 2 in 10 independents and just 6% of Democrats.

"I'm not a tax accountant, but it sounds as if it would be more beneficial to (people) in the higher tax level," said Republican Geraldine Putnam, 87, a Trump voter who lives in the rural south.

"It's not that I would want to take away the incentive to become more wealthy — that's the American dream," Putnam said.

But she also thinks she'll end up paying more in taxes. "What he's doing I'm sure he thinks is correct," she said of Trump. "It's just the extreme method that he's using."

Trump approval on government spending

The law's hefty price tag may be factoring into some Americans' assessments of the law. The poll found they are less likely to approve of how Trump is handling government spending since the spring.

Just 38% of Americans approve of how Donald Trump is handling government spending, compared with 46% in an AP-NORC poll conducted in March.

Republicans are less likely to say the government is spending "too much" than they were in March 2023, when Joe Biden was president, but about 6 in 10 still think the government is overspending. A similar share of Democrats say the same thing.

Putnam, now a retiree, took issue with Trump's cuts in federal workers, even though she says she approves of being able to "trim off people who aren't really doing their jobs."

The way she sees it, Trump drew attention to people abusing social services, then "fires the people in the office" that are investigating that very fraud and abuse. "What's the sense in that?" she asked.

Christian patriarchs make rare visit to Gaza after deadly Israeli strike on church

By WAFAA SHURAF, JULIA FRANKEL and FATMA KHALED Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Top church leaders visited Gaza on Friday after its only Catholic church was struck by an Israeli shell the day before, an attack that killed three people and wounded 10, including a priest who had developed a close friendship with the late Pope Francis.

The strike drew condemnation from the pope and U.S. President Donald Trump, and prompted statements of regret from Israel, which said it was an accident. Since ending a ceasefire in March, Israel has regularly launched far deadlier strikes across Gaza against what it says are Hamas militants, frequently killing women and children. Strikes killed 18 people overnight, health officials said Friday.

Pope Leo XVI meanwhile renewed his call for negotiations to bring an end to the 21-month war in a phone call Friday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who offered condolences to the victims.

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Church leaders organize aid, evacuations

The religious delegation to Gaza included two Patriarchs from Jerusalem — Latin Patriarch Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa and Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III. The rare visit aimed to express the “shared pastoral solicitude of the Churches of the Holy Land,” a statement said.

Israel has heavily restricted access to Gaza since the start of the war, though church leaders have entered on previous occasions, usually to mark major holidays.

They visited the Holy Family Catholic Church, whose compound was damaged in the shelling. They were also organizing convoys carrying hundreds of tons of food, medical supplies and other equipment to the territory — which experts say has been pushed to the brink of famine by Israel’s war and military offensive — and the evacuation of those wounded in the church strike.

In his call with Netanyahu, Pope Leo XVI “expressed again his concern over the dramatic humanitarian situation for the population in Gaza, with children, the elderly and the sick paying the most heartbreaking price,” the Vatican said in a statement.

Netanyahu “expressed Israel’s regret for the tragic incident in which stray ammunition accidentally struck The Holy Family Church in Gaza,” the prime minister’s office said in a statement. The Israeli military has said it is investigating the incident.

In an earlier statement, the pope had “repeated his intentions to do everything possible to stop the useless slaughter of innocent people,” and condemned “the unjustifiable attack” on the church.

The Vatican said the pope had also received an update on the condition of Rev. Gabriel Romanelli, the resident priest at the church, who was lightly wounded. The priest had regularly spoken by phone with Pope Francis, who died in April, telling the pontiff about the struggles faced by civilians in Gaza.

‘We are unable to get them out, even in small pieces’

Israel has repeatedly struck schools, shelters, hospitals and other civilian buildings, accusing Hamas militants of sheltering inside and blaming them for civilian deaths. Palestinians say nowhere has felt safe since Israel launched its offensive in response to Hamas’ Oct. 7, 2023, attack.

Israeli strikes killed at least 18 Palestinians overnight and into Friday, including a strike on a home in the southern city of Khan Younis that killed four members of the same family, according to morgue records at Nasser Hospital, which received the bodies.

Associated Press footage of the aftermath of the strike showed people digging through the rubble in search of remains.

“They are still under the rubble,” said Belal Abu Sahloul, a relative of those killed. “Until now we are unable to get them out, even in small pieces.”

At the hospital, a mother could be seen holding the hand of her daughter, who had been killed in one of the other strikes and placed in a body bag. Nearly 18,000 Palestinian children have been killed since the start of the war, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry.

Israel’s military said it was “operating to dismantle Hamas military capabilities” and that it takes “feasible precautions to mitigate civilian harm.”

Three more killed seeking aid, according to health officials

Nasser Hospital said another three people were killed while heading toward an aid site run by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, an Israeli-backed American contractor. A spokesperson for the foundation said there was no violence at its sites overnight and that crowds were “docile.”

Since the group’s operations began in late May, hundreds of Palestinians have been killed in shootings by Israeli soldiers while on roads heading to the sites, according to witnesses and health officials. GHF’s four sites are all in military-controlled zones, and the Israeli military has said its troops have only fired warning shots to control crowds. There was no comment from the military on the latest deaths.

Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in the Oct. 7 attack and abducted 251 people, most of whom have since been released in ceasefire agreements or other deals. Fifty hostages are still being held, less than half of them believed to be alive

Israel’s retaliatory offensive has killed over 58,600 Palestinians, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry, which has said women and children make up more than half of the dead. It does not distinguish between

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civilians and militants in its tally.

The ministry is part of the Hamas-run government but is led by medical professionals. The United Nations and other international organizations consider its figures to be the most reliable count of war casualties.

Under pressure, House Republicans consider vote on Epstein file

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 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.

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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."

Congress approves 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 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.

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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."

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

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the Epstein probe, after years of courting political support from those who have stoked claims of a coverup 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 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

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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.

Today in History: July 19, the Seneca Falls Convention

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, July 19, the 200th day of 2025. There are 165 days left in the year.

Today in History:

On July 19, 1848, the first "Convention to discuss the social, civil and religious condition and rights of Woman" convened at the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, N.Y.

Also on this date:

In 1812, during the War of 1812, the First Battle of Sacket's Harbor in Lake Ontario resulted in an American victory as U.S. naval forces repelled a British attack.

In 1969, Apollo 11 and its astronauts, Neil Armstrong, Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin and Michael Collins, went into orbit around the moon.

In 1975, the Apollo and Soyuz space capsules that were linked in orbit for two days separated.

In 1979, the Nicaraguan capital of Managua fell to Sandinista guerrillas, two days after President Anastasio Somoza fled the country.

In 1980, the Moscow Summer Olympics began, minus dozens of nations that were boycotting the games because of Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan.

In 1989, 111 people were killed when United Air Lines Flight 232, a DC-10 which sustained the uncontained failure of its tail engine and the loss of hydraulic systems, crashed while making an emergency landing at Sioux City, Iowa; 185 other people survived.

In 1990, baseball's all-time hits leader, Pete Rose, was sentenced in Cincinnati to five months in prison for tax evasion.

In 1993, President Bill Clinton announced a policy allowing gays to serve in the military under a compromise dubbed "don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue."

In 2006, prosecutors reported that Chicago police beat, kicked, shocked or otherwise tortured scores of Black suspects from the 1970s to the early 1990s to try to extract confessions from them.

In 2005, President George W. Bush announced his choice of federal appeals court judge John G. Roberts

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Jr. to replace Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. (Roberts ended up succeeding Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, who died in Sept. 2005; Samuel Alito followed O'Connor.)

In 2013, in a rare and public reflection on race, President Barack Obama called on the nation to do some soul searching over the death of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of his shooter, George Zimmerman, saying the slain Black teenager "could have been me 35 years ago."

In 2018, a duck boat packed with tourists capsized and sank in high winds on a lake in the tourist town of Branson, Missouri, killing 17 people.

In 2021, Paul Allard Hodgkins, a Florida man who breached the U.S. Senate chamber on Jan. 6, 2021, carrying a Trump campaign flag, received an eight-month prison term in the first resolution of a felony case arising from the U.S. Capitol insurrection. (In 2025, President Donald Trump pardoned, commuted the prison sentences or vowed to dismiss the cases of all 1,500-plus people charged with crimes in the riot.)

In 2022, Britain shattered its record for the highest temperature ever registered amid a heat wave that seared swaths of Europe.

Today's Birthdays: Civil rights activist and educator Rachel Robinson, widow of baseball's Jackie Robinson, is 103. Blues singer-musician Little Freddie King is 85. Singer-musician Alan Gorrie (Average White Band) is 79. International Tennis Hall of Famer Ilie Nastase is 79. Rock musician Brian May (Queen) is 78. Rock musician Bernie Leadon is 78. Movie director Abel Ferrara is 74. Movie director Atom Egoyan is 65. Actor Campbell Scott is 64. Actor Anthony Edwards is 63. Ukrainian politician and former boxing champion Vitali Klitschko is 54. Actor Benedict Cumberbatch is 49. TV chef Marcela Valladolid is 47. Actor Trai Byers (TV: "Empire") is 42.