

Groton Daily Independent

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Monday, July 21

Reminder of the Mandatory 2025-26 Parent/Athlete Meeting at 7pm.

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

Wednesday, July 23

Senior Menu: Roast beef, mashed potatoes with gravy, carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: WELCA Guest Day, 6 p.m.

Region 6B Legion Tourney in Sisseton

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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

Thursday, July 24

Senior Menu: Beef and broccoli stir fry, wild rice, green beans, peaches, whole wheat bread.

Region 6B Legion Tourney in Sisseton

Friday, July 25

Senior Menu: Ranch chicken breast, baked potato, California blend, strawberry ambrosia, whole wheat bread.

Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove

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.

African Peace Deal Advances

The Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda-backed rebel group M23 signed a declaration of principles in Qatar Saturday. The document brings the two sides one step closer to a permanent ceasefire agreement, intended to end one of Africa's longest conflicts.

Following the 1994 Rwandan genocide, an estimated 2 million Hutus crossed into eastern DRC. Violence between armed militias drew in foreign powers in the mid to late 1990s, resulting in two wars that collectively killed over 6 million people. The latest bout of violence erupted earlier this year when M23—one of over 100 armed groups—captured two cities: Goma in January and Bukavu in February. Over 7,000 people have been killed and more than 7 million displaced in recent months.

The draft agreement promises prisoner and detainee exchanges, and the restoration of state authority throughout the DRC. A final deal is due to be signed by Aug. 18.

Japan's Electoral Pressure

Japan's ruling party lost its upper house majority in yesterday's election. The results add pressure on Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's center-right minority government after he lost the lower house last year. Opposition parties calling for larger tax cuts and immigration controls were slated to make gains.

A loss does not trigger a change in government given that the upper house cannot file no-confidence motions against the country's leader. However, Shigeru is expected to face pressure from within his own government to step down (recent party leaders who lost control of the upper house resigned within two months). Shigeru indicated yesterday he plans to stay on, citing ongoing trade negotiations with the United States, with tariffs set to go into effect Aug. 1, barring a deal.

The economy—particularly Japan's high cost of living—has been a key concern with voters. The cost of rice has doubled since last year following a 2023 heat wave.

'Trial of the Century,' 100 Years Later

Today marks the 100th anniversary of the conclusion of the Scopes Monkey Trial, a landmark legal case dubbed the "trial of the century." A symbolic clash between the roles of science and religion during the Roaring Twenties, the trial became a public spectacle and was the first to be broadcast nationally on radio.

The case challenged Tennessee's 1925 Butler Act, which prohibited public teachers from contradicting the biblical account of creation (including the theory of evolution). High school teacher John Scopes intentionally incriminated himself, with his defense helmed by Clarence Darrow and the American Civil Liberties Union. Three-time presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan—who died five days after the trial—led the prosecution. Broader legal questions included the separation of church and state, free speech, and more.

Scopes was found guilty and fined \$100 (later overturned), and the Butler Act remained in place until 1967.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Golf world No. 1 Scottie Scheffler cruises to victory by four strokes at British Open to win his fourth major championship.

Alan Bergman, Oscar-, Emmy-, and Grammy-winning songwriter for performers including Frank Sinatra and Barbra Streisand, dies at age 99.

Eileen Fulton, actress who starred in "As the World Turns" for 50 years, dies at age 91.

Minnesota Lynx's Napheesa Collier leads Team Collier to 151-131 victory over Team Clark in WNBA All-Star Game.

Mario Barrios draws with Manny Pacquiao to retain WBC welterweight title; Pacquiao, 46, was attempting to become oldest boxer to win welterweight world championship.

Science & Technology

Environmental Protection Agency to shutter research and development arm, carry out reduction in force targeting 23% of agency's overall staff.

Engineers demonstrate 3D-printed stainless steel components that can withstand radiative environments found in nuclear reactors; milestone may help further innovative new reactor designs.

British scientists begin study of Antarctic ice cores believed to be up to 1.5 million years old; analysis expected to shed light on temperature and climate conditions during the period.

DNA discovery: Tomorrow's Science & Technology newsletter explores the life and legacy of Rosalind Franklin, the uncredited force behind the discovery of the double helix. Sign up here to receive!

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed Friday (S&P 500 -0.0%, Dow -0.3%, Nasdaq +0.1%) amid report President Donald Trump is pushing for EU tariffs of at least 15%.

President Donald Trump signs law on regulating dollar-pegged stablecoins, enabling banks and other entities to begin issuing the digital currencies.

Uber invests \$300M in bid to compete with Waymo and Tesla; will secure 20,000 electric vehicles from startup Lucid, purchase self-driving software from tech startup Nuro.

Politics & World Affairs

Car rams into crowd outside Los Angeles Saturday, injuring at least 30 people; officials are investigating the action as an intentional attack, have not yet publicly identified a motive.

Bedouin fighters withdraw from Druze-majority city of Sweida in southern Syria as truce to end weeklong fighting appears to hold, as of this writing.

Tourist boat in Vietnam capsizes during sudden thunderstorm, killing at least 35 people with four others missing.

South Korea floods and landslides kill at least 17 people.

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As the 2025 NFL season draws closer, the Minnesota Vikings find themselves in a rare position: built to win now, yet still developing key young talent across the roster. With training camp on the horizon and a deep, competitive team in place, I'll be breaking down each position group over the next seven weeks to get a clearer picture of who's locked in, who's on the bubble, and who could surprise us this summer. We'll start at quarterback and work our way through the entire roster, ending with the secondary just before the first preseason game kicks off.

Last week, we did a breakdown on the defensive line, so this week we'll be focusing on the linebackers. The Vikings' 3-4 defense uses four lineback-

ers in the base formation, two inside linebackers who are responsible for defending both the run and the pass, and two outside linebackers who are mainly responsible for getting to the QB and stopping the run.

Inside Linebackers

The Vikings will have the same two starting inside linebackers as they had last season, Ivan Pace Jr. and Blake Cashman. Pace Jr., the undersized and undrafted underdog, is entering his third season in the NFL. Cashman, the 29-year-old Eden Prairie native, is entering his seventh season in the NFL and second with the Vikings.

Behind the starting duo will be three players vying for two roster spots: Eric Wilson, Kobe King, and Brian Asamoah II. The soon-to-be 31-year-old Wilson started his career in Minnesota before bouncing around the league and eventually finding himself back to where it all started. King was a sixth-round pick just a few months ago and will need to improve his pass coverage if he wants to avoid the practice squad. Asamoah II was a third-round pick by the Vikings in 2022, but the speedster has yet to start a game in his NFL career.

Austin Keys, Dorian Mausi, and Max Tooley are all likely competing for a spot on the practice squad. Both Keys and Mausi are undrafted rookies from Auburn, while Tooley is a second-year player from BYU.

Outside Linebackers

Perhaps the strongest position group on the team, the Vikings have three outstanding outside linebackers in Jonathan Greenard, Andrew Van Ginkel, and Dallas Turner. Greenard, entering his sixth season in the NFL and second with the Vikings, earned his first Pro Bowl last year. Van Ginkel also earned his first Pro Bowl invite in his first season with the Vikings after spending the first five seasons of his career in Miami. Sitting behind the two Pro Bowlers is Dallas Turner, a first-round pick in 2024. Even though there are technically only two starting outside linebackers on the depth chart, I expect all three of these players to get significant playing time in 2025.

The Vikings had four outside linebackers on the opening day roster last season, which likely means there is only one spot left on the depth chart. Bo Richter played in 14 games as a rookie last season, which undoubtedly gives him the inside track for that final spot. Gabriel Murphy, who is also entering his second season, will be Richter's biggest competition. Tyler Batty, a rookie from BYU, and Chaz Chambliss, a rookie from Georgia, are both hoping to secure a spot on the practice squad. Chambliss has a slight edge because he's three years younger than Batty.

Spiritual Pain and Grief

After nearly twenty years of parish ministry, I entered the world of health care, which, I learned, abounds in acronyms. My first clue was in chaplaincy training, known as "CPE" (Clinical Pastoral Education), the required education for most hospital and hospice chaplains. CNA, SoB (Shortness of Breath), PRN, HoH (Hard of Hearing), and a myriad of other acronyms are now part of my own vernacular. QoL (Quality of Life) is the 'big' one in hospice, sometimes called "comfort care." When quantity of life becomes diminished, it's all about quality.

Dame Cicely Saunders, the founder of hospice as we know it, understood human suffering as a combination of physical, psychological, social and spiritual pain. She famously said the following: YOU MATTER BECAUSE YOU ARE YOU, AND YOU MATTER TO THE END OF YOUR LIFE.

I suggest that all people are spiritual, where spirituality is defined as the source(s) of meaning and purpose that guide and encourage us. Spiritual pain, then, is part and parcel of being human. I describe it simply as anything that breaks your heart. A pet dies; a friend moves away; a family member becomes estranged; a dream is not realized; divorce, death, broken trust, and so on.

In hospice, when death is impending, spiritual pain can lead us to ponder existential questions, such as the following:

- How has my life been meaningful?
- Is there a God or Higher Power?
- What will be my legacy?
- Have I lived my life to the fullest?
- What do I do about my regrets?
- Will I see my loved ones again?

Chaplains abide with us when we boldly ask these (and other) questions. At our best, we provide both active and reflective listening, safe space, and a supportive presence. In the crying, wrestling, confusion and fear, we remain.

In addition to supporting areas of spiritual pain, chaplains are curious about sources of meaning in our lives (our spiritual resources). In whom or what do you place our ultimate trust? What people, experiences, music, places and/or Higher Power enliven your spirit and ground you? Life review in this realm can lead to laughter, connection and peace.

SPIRITUAL CARE IS NOT AN OPTIONAL EXTRA FOR THE DYING.

-Dame Cicely Saunders

When we are grieving, spiritual pain can be exhausting. We can move through anger, sadness, numbness and peace in the course of thirty minutes. How do we 'do' life with the emptiness we feel? We are not made to endure this suffering alone.

Grief groups, clergy, therapists, good friends, music, books, podcasts and nature walks, are among the resources available to us. It is important, in all life chapters, to nurture our spiritual resources. When crises come, our spiritual grounding can buoy us.

As you tend to your body, mind and spirit through in this complex and beautiful life, may your QoL be well.



**By The Rev. Kari Sansgaard,
Avera@Home Hospice Chaplain –
Sioux Falls, SD**

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The Columbia Comet Midgets placed 3rd in the Three Rivers League Tournament

Back Row: Coach Josh Larson, Pierson Schaeffer, Gavin Dinger, Easton Larson, Bennett Roettele, Rylee Hofer, Babe Becker, Coach Cole Kampa, Kacyn Becker, Coach Collin Eichler
Front Row: Cooper Brust, Kason Hofer, Mason Stahl, Arthur Eichler, Garrett Faehn, Hudson Eichler, Landon Schaffner, Cooper Zemlicka. (Courtesy Photo)

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 Locke Electric Go Down On Final Play Against Redfield Dairy Queen

By GameChanger Media

A walk-off left Groton Locke Electric on the wrong end of a 5-4 defeat to Redfield Dairy Queen on Sunday at Groton. The game was tied at four in the bottom of the ninth when Bennett Osborn singled, scoring one run.

A walk by Ty Sieber put Groton Locke Electric on the board in the top of the second.

Groton Locke Electric added to their early lead in the top of the third inning after Ben Althoff singled to the right side of the infield, and Jonah Schmidt scored after tagging up, each scoring one run.

Redfield Dairy Queen tied the game in the bottom of the fourth thanks to a single by Cooper Hainy, and a ground out by Keith Gall.

Groton Locke Electric took the lead in the top of the seventh. Peyton Osborn induced Althoff to hit into a fielder's choice, but one run scored, to give Groton Locke Electric the advantage, 4-3.

Hainy grounded out, which helped Redfield Dairy Queen tie the game at four in the bottom of the seventh.

Ryan Groeblinghoff stepped on the hill first for Groton Locke Electric. The hurler gave up three hits and three runs over five innings, striking out three and walking two. Noah Hainy started the game for Redfield Dairy Queen. The hurler gave up five hits and three runs over five and two-thirds innings, striking out four and walking five.

Althoff went 1-for-3 at the plate and led the team with two runs batted in. Wyatt Locke and Alex Morris each collected two hits for Groton Locke Electric. Groton Locke Electric had a strong eye at the plate, collecting six walks for the game. Sieber and Althoff led the team with two free passes each.

Hainy drove the middle of the lineup, leading Redfield Dairy Queen with two runs batted in. The shortstop went 1-for-4 on the day. Nolan Gall set the tone at the top of the lineup, leading Redfield Dairy Queen with two hits in five at bats. Owen Osborn stole two bases. Redfield Dairy Queen stole four bases in the game.

Groton Locke Electric Lose To Redfield Dairy Queen

By GameChanger Media

Groton Locke Electric fell to Redfield Dairy Queen 7-4 on Sunday at Redfield.

Redfield Dairy Queen jumped out to the lead in the top of the first inning after Cooper Hainy doubled, scoring two runs, and an error scored one run.

Redfield Dairy Queen added one run in the third. Keith Gall singled down the right field line, making the score 4-0.

Nolan Gall earned the win for Redfield Dairy Queen. The starting pitcher surrendered three hits and four runs over five innings, striking out two and walking five. Jonah Schmidt pitched four innings in relief for Groton Locke Electric. The hurler surrendered eight hits and three runs (two earned) while, striking out four and walking three. Alex Morris took the loss for Groton Locke Electric. The righty went three innings, allowing four runs (three earned) on six hits, striking out one and walking none.

Ryan Groeblinghoff went 2-for-3 at the plate to lead Groton Locke Electric in hits. Ben Althoff, Cade Larson, Morris, and Schmidt each drove in one run for Groton Locke Electric. Groton Locke Electric had a strong eye at the plate, accumulating six walks for the game. Ty Sieber and Larson led the team with two walks each. Groton Locke Electric turned one double play in the game.

Redfield Dairy Queen piled up 14 hits in the game. Hainy provided pop in the middle of the lineup, and led Redfield Dairy Queen with two runs batted in. The shortstop went 2-for-4 on the day. Redfield Dairy Queen's Noah Hainy, the number eight hitter, led Redfield Dairy Queen with three hits in four at bats. Bennett Osborn and Owen Osborn each collected multiple hits for Redfield Dairy Queen. Osborn stole two bases. Redfield Dairy Queen turned two double plays in the game. Redfield Dairy Queen didn't commit a single error in the field. Nathan Hainy had the most chances in the field with eight.

Next up for Groton Locke Electric is a game at Hitmen Amateurs on Thursday.

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Redfield Dairy Queen 7 - 4 Groton Locke Electric

📍 Home 📅 Sunday July 20, 2025

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E
RDFL	3	0	1	2	0	0	1	7	14	0
GRTN	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	4	3	2

BATTING

Redfield Dairy Queen	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
N Gall #17 (P)	5	0	1	0	0	1
O Osborn #5 (2B)	4	2	2	1	0	1
B Osborn #29 (CF)	5	1	2	0	0	0
P Osborn #15 (1B)	2	2	1	0	2	0
C Hainy #19 (SS)	4	1	2	2	1	0
K Gall #57 (RF)	2	0	1	1	0	0
B Bremer #42 (RF)	2	0	0	0	0	1
B Osborn #3 (LF)	4	0	1	0	0	1
N Hainy #22 (C)	4	0	3	0	0	1
N Hainy #26 (3B)	2	1	1	0	0	0
Totals	34	7	14	4	3	5

2B: C Hainy, **HR:** O Osborn, **TB:** B Osborn 2, N Gall, N Hainy, N Hainy 3, K Gall, P Osborn, B Osborn, O Osborn 5, C Hainy 3, **SAC:** N Hainy, **CS:** O Osborn, **HBP:** N Hainy, P Osborn, O Osborn, **SB:** B Osborn 2, **LOB:** 13

PITCHING

Redfield Dairy Queen	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
N Gall #17	5.0	3	4	4	5	2	0
C Hainy #19	2.0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Totals	7.0	3	4	4	6	2	0

W: N Gall, **P-S:** N Gall 84-43, C Hainy 23-11, **WP:** C Hainy, **HBP:** N Gall 3, C Hainy 2, **BF:** N Gall 25, C Hainy 8

Groton Locke Electric	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
T Sieber #24 (SS)	2	1	0	0	2	0
R Groebli... #0 (LF)	3	1	2	0	0	1
A Morris #13 (P)	3	0	0	1	1	0
N Morri... #17 (SS)	0	0	0	0	0	0
J Schmidt #21 (CF)	3	0	1	1	0	0
B Hansen #18 (1B)	2	0	0	0	1	0
B Althoff #1 (3B)	2	1	0	1	0	0
B Richter #19 (C)	3	0	0	0	0	0
G Knebel #9	0	0	0	0	0	0
C Larson #17 (RF)	1	1	0	1	2	0
C Camac... #10 (2B)	2	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	21	4	3	4	6	2

2B: J Schmidt, **TB:** J Schmidt 2, R Groeblichhoff 2, **SF:** B Althoff, **HBP:** J Schmidt, C Camacho, R Groeblichhoff, B Althoff, B Hansen, **LOB:** 8

Groton Locke Electric	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
A Morris #13	3.0	6	4	3	0	1	0
J Schmi... #21	4.0	8	3	2	3	4	1
Totals	7.0	14	7	5	3	5	1

L: A Morris, **P-S:** A Morris 45-28, J Schmidt 96-52, **WP:** J Schmidt, **HBP:** A Morris 2, J Schmidt, **BF:** A Morris 18, J Schmidt 23

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Groton Locke Electric 4 - 5 Redfield Dairy Queen

📍 Away 📅 Sunday July 20, 2025

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	R	H	E
GRTN	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	4	8	1
RDFL	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	1	5	8	2

BATTING

Groton Locke Electric	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
T Sieber #24 (SS)	3	0	1	1	2	0
D Frey #6 (LF)	5	1	1	0	0	2
A Morris #13 (C)	4	0	2	0	1	0
J Schmidt #21 (CF)	5	1	1	0	0	1
B Hansen #18 (1B)	5	0	0	0	0	0
B Althoff #1 (3B)	3	1	1	2	2	1
W Locke #38 (DH)	5	0	2	1	0	1
A Sever... #33 (RF)	2	0	0	0	0	1
N Morri... #17 (RF)	2	1	0	0	0	1
B Richter #19 (2B)	3	0	0	0	1	1
Totals	37	4	8	4	6	8

TB: A Morris 2, T Sieber, B Althoff, D Frey, W Locke 2, J Schmidt, **SB:** W Locke, **LOB:** 12

Redfield Dairy Queen	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
N Gall #17 (LF)	5	1	2	0	0	2
O Osborn #5 (2B)	2	2	1	0	2	0
B Osborn #29 (CF)	4	1	1	1	0	0
P Osborn #15 (3B)	2	1	1	0	1	0
C Hainy #19 (SS)	4	0	1	2	0	0
K Gall #57 (1B)	3	0	1	0	1	0
B Osborn #3 (RF)	3	0	1	0	0	0
N Hainy #22 (P)	4	0	0	0	0	2
N Hainy #26 (C)	3	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	30	5	8	3	4	5

2B: K Gall, **TB:** B Osborn, N Gall 2, O Osborn, C Hainy, P Osborn, B Osborn, K Gall 2, **SAC:** O Osborn, B Osborn, **HBP:** B Osborn, N Hainy, P Osborn, **SB:** O Osborn 2, C Hainy, P Osborn, **LOB:** 8

PITCHING

Groton Locke Electric	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
R Groebl... #0	5.0	3	3	2	3	0
A Morris #13	3.1	5	2	2	2	0
Totals	8.1	8	5	4	5	0

P-S: A Morris 53-35, R Groebelinghoff 90-49, **WP:** R Groebelinghoff, **HBP:** R Groebelinghoff 3, **BF:** A Morris 16, R Groebelinghoff 23

Redfield Dairy Queen	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
N Hainy #22	5.2	5	3	5	4	0
P Osborn #15	3.1	3	1	1	4	0
Totals	9.0	8	4	6	8	0

P-S: N Hainy 114-63, P Osborn 51-36, **BF:** N Hainy 27, P Osborn 16

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EARTHTALK

Dear EarthTalk: Which countries currently lead the world in total clean energy generation—and is the current ranking order expected to shift anytime soon?
-- Charles Jensen, Detroit, MI

Clean energy generation—or energy generation without the output of harmful greenhouse gases—has become an increasingly hot topic in today's race for productivity and the growing global emphasis on eco-consciousness. Some of the most widely used forms of clean energy are solar, wind and biofuel. Other expanding clean energy sources include hydroelectric power and geothermal energy, according to Constellation. Constellation also deems nuclear power to be a "clean" energy, which many would dispute.

Regarding clean energy production by country, it is vital to consider that while China leads the world in clean energy production, generating an astounding 951 terawatt-hours in the first quarter of 2025 alone (with the United States following at about 907 terawatt-hours/year in 2023), China and the U.S. do not have the highest proportion of clean energy to total energy generation when compared to other nations. Iceland, Norway, Paraguay and Brazil lead in having the majority of their total energy production come from clean energy sources, such as geothermal energy in Iceland and hydroelectric power in Norway.

So, how are the U.S. and China the leaders in clean energy production despite clean energy being a smaller portion of their overall energy generation? The answer lies in both nations' large-scale demand for energy due to their size, population and productive efficiency.

While clean energy makes up roughly 30 percent of U.S. energy production, with the total energy production coming in at about 102.83 quadrillion British thermal units (quads) in 2023, the sheer volume of clean energy production from the two countries is larger than any other nation. China's clean energy production makes up about 38 percent of its total energy production, placing it just below the global average of 41 percent and the U.S. even lower at 30 percent as mentioned above.

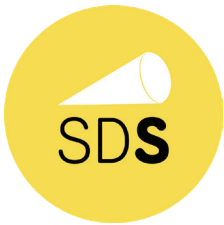
Other countries are able to make the complete or nearly total shift toward using solely clean energy due to their relatively smaller size—both in population and land—as well as having relatively less demand for energy. Albania, Bhutan, Nepal and Lesotho utilize hydroelectric power without needing to use coal or natural gas because their demand for energy is so small that their existing renewable resources are able to meet their needs. With factors like population size and energy demand unlikely to decrease in China and the U.S., the current rankings of clean energy production will most likely not shift. In fact, according to Lauri Myllyvirta, lead analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), "the [clean energy] industry is now a key part of China's wider economic and industrial development."

To advocate for the spread of clean energy, reach out to your local legislators and understand the rules surrounding local energy generation facilities, support plans for the creation of clean energy facilities in your area, and emphasize the transition from traditional to clean energy in your own life.



It's no surprise that China's lead in global production of clean energy is expanding despite the best efforts of environmentalists, Elon Musk and others.

Credit: Hahaheditor12667 – Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

New processing centers raise hopes for South Dakota hemp, tempered by challenges

Advocates say industry holds potential to sequester carbon, bring jobs to small towns

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JULY 20, 2025 9:10 AM

WINFRED — Ken Meyer's boots imprint the fine layer of dust settled over the concrete floor as he walks through South Dakota's first industrial hemp processing facility.

It's loud. Fans whirl and machinery grinds. Strips of sunlight cut through the haze.

Piles of dry hemp stalks line one wall. Meyer gestures toward a forklift feeding one of the piles into an industrial contraption.

On one side of the machine, fiber pours out in tangled ribbons. On another, chunks of the woody core, called "hurd," tumble into a large sack atop a pallet. Meyer reaches in and raises a handful.

"We can turn hemp stalks into materials for animal bedding, hempcrete, bioplastics, you name it," he said. "Right here in South Dakota."

Meyer has a vision. He said expanding the hemp supply chain in South Dakota will bring more small processing and manufacturing into the state, and pull heat-trapping carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

"Hemp absorbs carbon as it grows, and we can lock the carbon into the various materials produced," Meyer said. "And all that manufacturing could happen here in South Dakota."

But coordinating the investments, infrastructure, oversight and market development needed to realize that vision is more work than Meyer alone can accomplish with his company, Complete Hemp Processing.

In Wakonda, John Peterson with Dakota Hemp is not only constructing the state's second processing facility but is also a hemp farmer.

"We can't just have everybody start planting hemp," Peterson said. "You need the whole chain — growers, processors, and manufacturers — to come online at the same time. And that's hard."



Ken Meyer reaches out to inspect some processed hemp at his plant in Winfred on June 2, 2025. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

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Hemp and carbon

South Dakotans have only been growing hemp since 2021. The state is now the No. 1 hemp producer in the country, with 3,700 acres harvested in 2024. To capitalize on hemp's potential to sequester carbon dioxide and keep it from trapping heat in the atmosphere, millions more acres are needed.

Hemp can grow 16 feet tall in three months. Growing a field of 16-foot-high stalks requires a lot of photosynthesis, which is the way plants absorb carbon dioxide and water to convert sunlight into energy for growth. An acre of hemp stalks absorbs approximately 5.5 tons of carbon per acre each season, according to Brittany McKell, with Hemp Carbon Standard in Canada. She said an additional ton of CO₂ per acre is stored in the soil if less invasive tillage practices are used.

Hemp Carbon Standard works with farmers to quantify the amount of carbon sequestered by their hemp farm and convert that to credits. Those are sold on global, private carbon markets where companies and individuals purchase them to offset their greenhouse gas emissions. The company then shares those profits back with farmers. Peterson recently signed up and earned 367 carbon credits on one year's harvest, which can be sold for over \$100 each.

While corn stalks can temporarily store up to about 4 tons of above-ground carbon dioxide per acre, most of it is re-released through digestion and decay.

Decay happens to harvested hemp, too. Keeping the carbon in the hemp stalks requires a longer-term carbon storage solution: processing those stalks into long-lasting materials. Hemp's utility extends to everything from bioplastics and lumber to textiles and insulation. Hempcrete, for example, is a construction material made from hemp hurd and lime that absorbs CO₂ as it sets.

Hemp Carbon Standard promotes the use of those products, too, because McKell said they serve as sustainable, less carbon-intensive alternatives that indirectly offset the production of their more carbon-intensive counterparts: oil-based plastics, wood from trees and energy-intensive construction materials. Depending on the product being made, McKell said, the impact of producing hemp-based, less carbon-intensive alternatives prevents another 9 to 18 tons of CO₂ from entering the atmosphere, per acre of hemp allocated to the production of the material.

The numbers mean that if 18% of South Dakota's approximately 18.5 million cropland acres grew hemp every summer, the hemp stalks — not counting the carbon potentially stored in the soil or the material offset of producing less carbon-intensive materials — would remove over 18 million tons of atmospheric carbon per year. That's as much as a proposal in South Dakota aiming to achieve a similar vision: Summit Carbon Solution's carbon sequestration pipeline, which would annually capture up to 18 million tons of carbon emissions from 57 ethanol plants in five states. The five-state project has faced numerous regulatory and legal hurdles, along with opposition from landowners refusing to grant access and expressing concerns about potential leaks of toxic carbon dioxide plumes.

Farmers with land crossed by the pipeline would receive easement payments. In hemp production, farmers can capitalize the carbon-storage potential of their crop by selling carbon credits. Hemp also requires no herbicides, unlike other row crops such as corn and soybeans.

Despite its potential, the hemp market faces regulatory challenges. And industrial hemp advocates say getting hemp this far was not easy.

The fight to legalize hemp

Although hemp was federally legalized under the 2018 farm bill — which defined hemp as cannabis containing no more than 0.3% tetrahydrocannabinol (known as THC, which results in a high at greater concentrations) — South Dakota did not immediately follow suit.

Early efforts to legalize hemp production at the state level were met with resistance, particularly from former Gov. Kristi Noem's administration, which expressed concern that legal hemp could lead to broader marijuana legalization. Oren Lesmeister, a rancher and Democratic former legislator from Parade, spent years fighting to get the hemp industry rolling in South Dakota.

"There was this fear that everyone was going to run out and get stoned," Lesmeister said. "We had to

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beat that misconception with education and persistence.”

The legal and regulatory barriers fell in several stages. The first major step was ensuring that South Dakota’s laws aligned with federal standards legalizing the crop, something the 2018 farm bill allowed states to do.

Implementation in South Dakota lagged, with hemp cultivation beginning in 2021 after state administrative rules were finalized and approved. Even then, regulatory burdens remained. But Meyer said many of these initial state restrictions have since been scaled back as South Dakota gained experience with the crop.

Meyer said the two major impediments still in place are THC testing requirements and criminal background checks. He hopes those requirements will be loosened in the next federal farm bill.

Selling a bottom-up vision

Lesmeister sees parallels with corn-based ethanol, which grew into a major industry with help from the federal government. It created a guaranteed market through the Renewable Fuel Standard, which requires refiners to blend billions of gallons of ethanol into gasoline each year or buy credits. The number of corn acres in South Dakota went from about 4 million before the standard was enacted to about 6 million last year.

“Hemp got this far without any of that,” Lesmeister said. “But imagine where it could be with a little help.”

Doug Sombke, president of the South Dakota Farmers Union, sees helping the emerging hemp industry as a better way to sequester carbon than controversial proposals to capture carbon emitted by ethanol plants.

“If you really want to support the climate and agriculture, get that money to the people working the land,” Sombke said.

Bryan Jorgensen is a regenerative farmer and soil health expert from Ideal. He is skeptical that climate change requires government action. But Jorgensen does see industrial hemp as a chance to rebuild rural communities as part of America’s manufacturing base.

“This could localize manufacturing,” he said. “But it takes vision and the will to invest in producers instead of propping up extractive systems.”

By comparison, he sees carbon pipelines as an extension of a flawed farm economy that has become overly dependent on corn and soybeans, partly due to the federal support for those crops.

“We’ve created this monster,” Jorgensen said. “We’ve invested billions in learning how to grow corn, so now we don’t know how to do anything else. And farmers are stuck in a system where they’re not even the ones benefiting.”

Silvia Secchi, a professor at the University of Iowa who studies agricultural and climate policy, agrees.

“We subsidized the corn, not the farmer,” she said. “That’s the problem.”

For now, the few thousand acres of hemp grown in South Dakota pale in comparison to about 6 million acres of corn and 5 million acres of soybeans. But advocates believe that could change rapidly if hemp processors and manufacturers move in, and the U.S. government backs the vision.

“There’s a real opportunity here,” said Karl Lecher, co-founder of Dakota Hemp. “We just need more boots on the ground.”

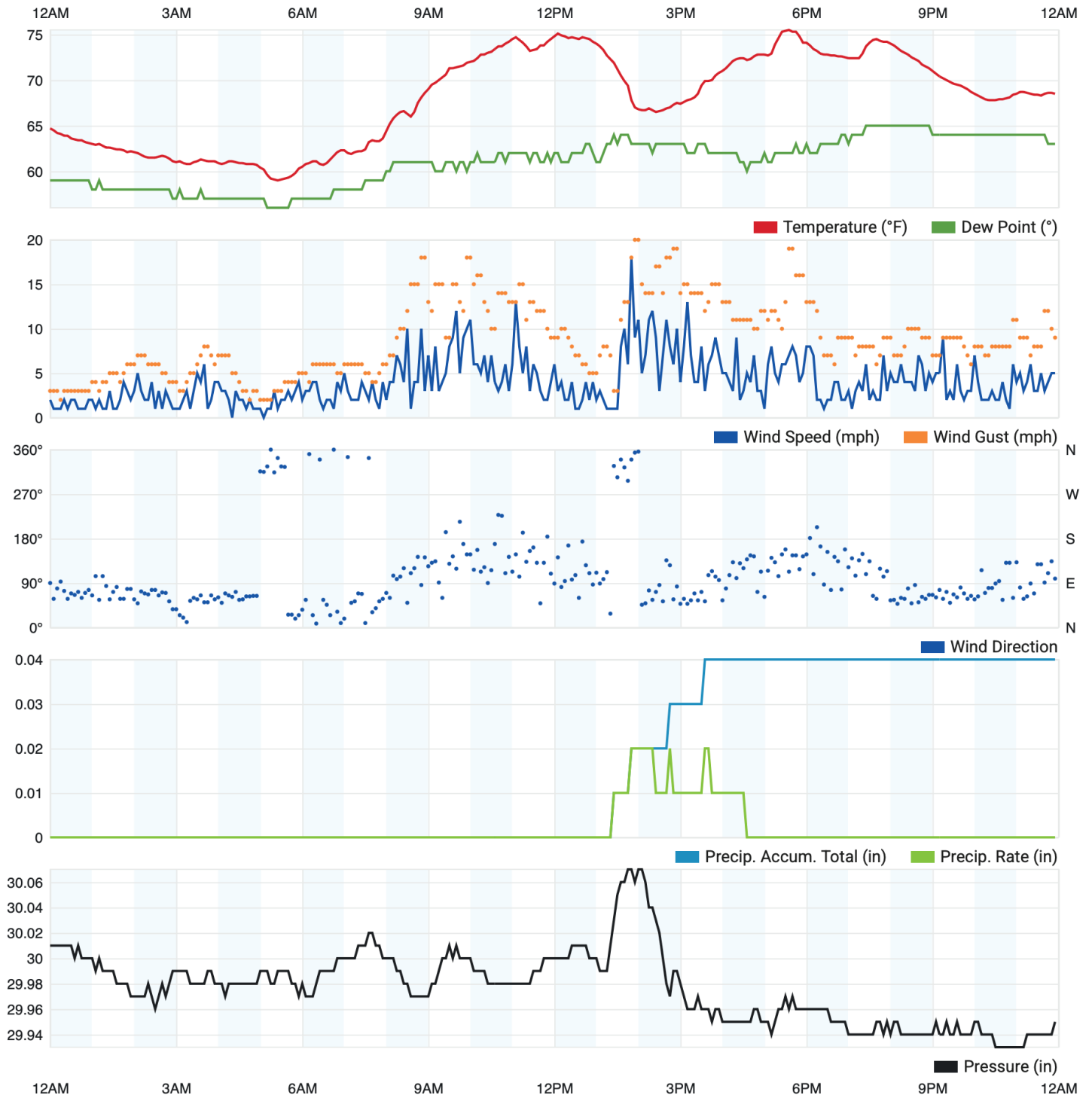
Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

July 20, 2025



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Monday



High: 85 °F

Chance
T-storms

Monday Night



Low: 69 °F

Chance
T-storms

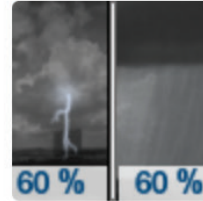
Tuesday



High: 91 °F

Chance
T-storms

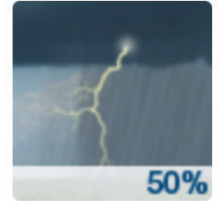
Tuesday Night



Low: 66 °F

T-storms
Likely then
Showers
Likely

Wednesday



High: 77 °F

Chance
T-storms



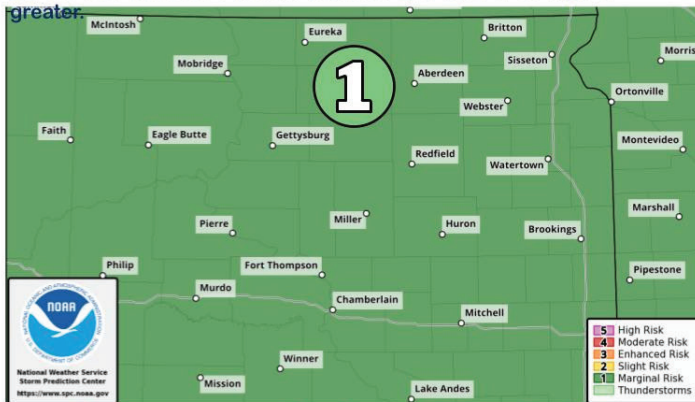
Monday and Tuesday Severe Weather Threat

July 21, 2025
4:15 AM

The severe weather potential continues into Monday and Tuesday

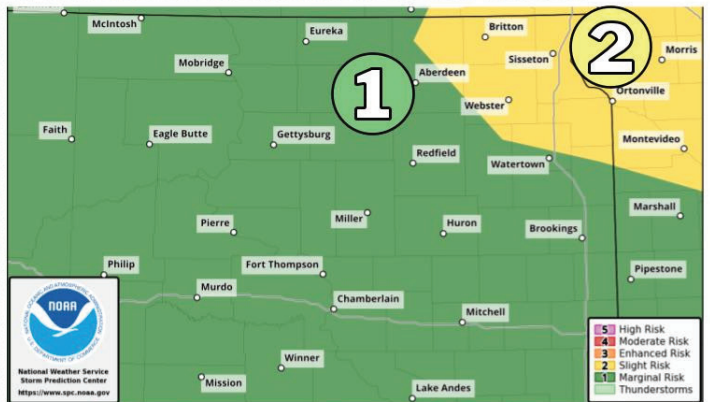
Monday - July 21, 2025

A **Marginal Risk (Level 1 out of 5)** for thunderstorms on Monday. There is still **high uncertainty on when/if thunderstorms will develop on Monday afternoon and evening**. This is **due to very warm air above the surface, which may "cap" development or put a lid on any thunderstorm development**. If storms develop, they will likely become severe with hail over 1 inch in diameter and wind of 60 mph or greater.



Tuesday - July 22, 2025

A **Marginal Risk (Level 1 out of 5)** to **Slight Risk (Level 2 out of 5)** for thunderstorms on Tuesday too, with **uncertainty remaining on when or if thunderstorms will develop**. If storms develop, they will likely be severe with hail of 1 inch in diameter or greater and winds of 60 mph or stronger. Area with the best chances to see severe weather is over far northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota.



Make sure to monitor later forecasts for the latest updates on if thunderstorms will occur during this period



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Both Monday and Tuesday have a risk for isolated severe weather, with a Marginal Risk on Monday (level 1 of 5) and a Marginal to Slight Risk (level 2 of 5) on Tuesday. Both days have a conditional risk for storms, meaning that there is a high uncertainty on if storms will even develop in the first place. Hail of 1 inch in diameter and wind gusts of 60 miles per hour are the main threats with any severe weather that does develop. Tornadoes also cannot be ruled out at this time.

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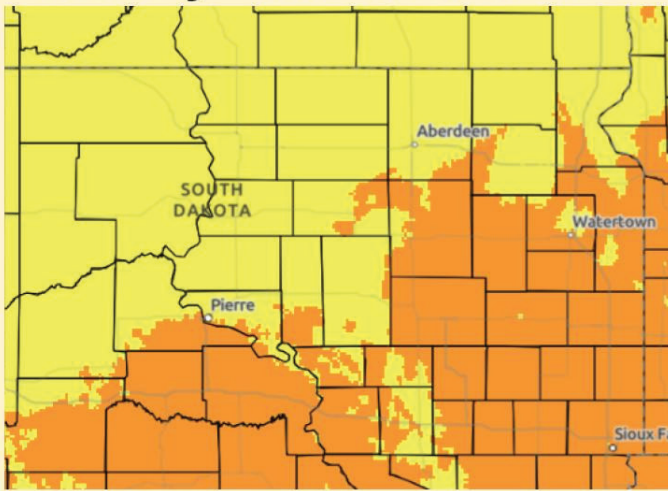
HeatRisk for Monday and Tuesday

Category	Risk of Heat-Related Impacts
Yellow 1	Minor - This level of heat affects primarily those individuals extremely sensitive to heat, especially when outdoors without effective cooling and/or adequate hydration.
Orange 2	Moderate - This level of heat affects most individuals sensitive to heat, especially those without effective cooling and/or adequate hydration. Impacts possible in some health systems and in heat-sensitive industries.
Red 3	Major - This level of heat affects anyone without effective cooling and/or adequate hydration. Impacts likely in some health systems, heat-sensitive industries and infrastructure.

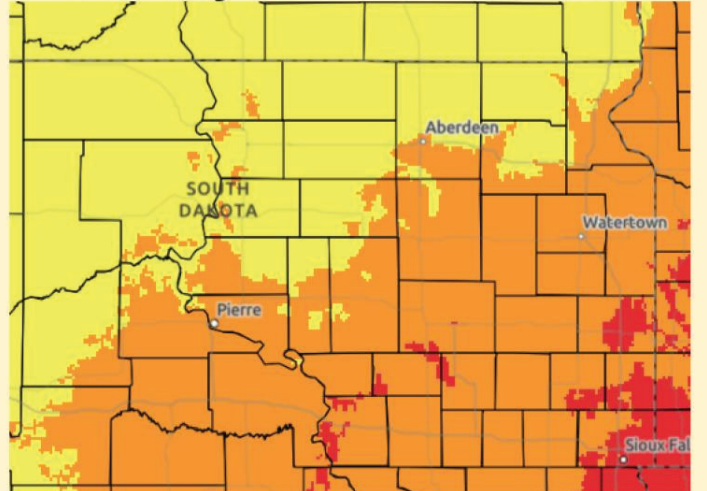
NWS Aberdeen, SD

July 20, 2025 3:28 PM

Monday - minor to moderate HeatRisk



Tuesday - minor to moderate HeatRisk



A Heat Advisory has been issued for south central South Dakota from 1 PM CDT to 8 PM CDT on Monday. Heat index values will reach as high as 105 degrees. This level of heat will impact those without effective cooling or adequate hydration.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 76 °F at 5:33 PM

Heat Index: 77 °F at 5:45 PM

Low Temp: 59 °F at 5:24 AM

Wind: 21 mph at 1:53 PM

Precip: : 0.04 (this morning: 0.64+)

Day length: 15 hours, 11 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 106 in 1899

Record Low: 41 in 1902

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 2.27

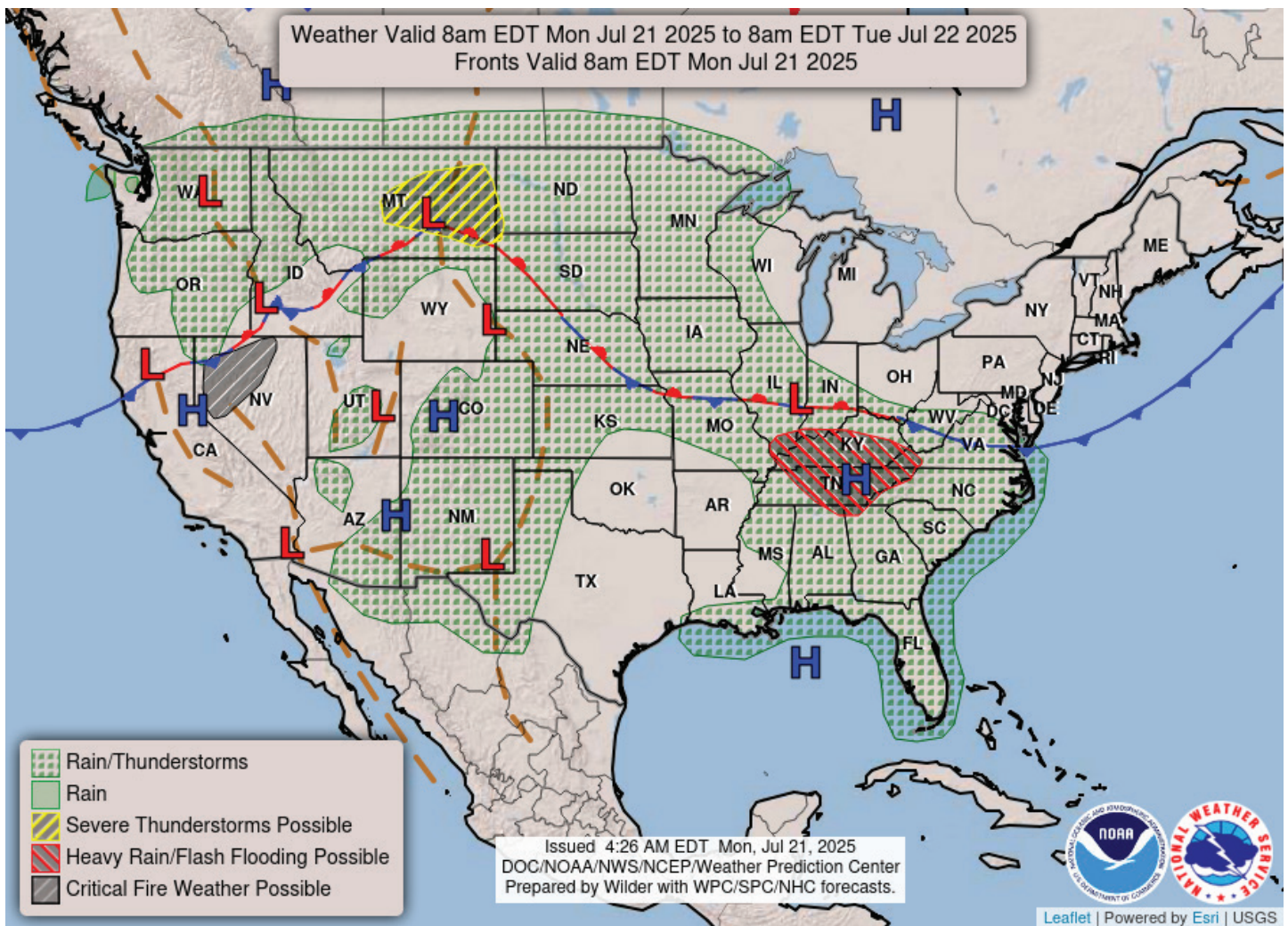
Precip to date in July: 3.76

Average Precip to date: 13.28

Precip Year to Date: 13.88

Sunset Tonight: 9:14:24 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:04:23 am



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Today in Weather History

July 21, 1940: From near Miller, an estimated F2 tornado moved southeast, destroying a barn, garage, and two windmills.

July 21, 2000: 3.25-inch hail was reported near Okreek in northeastern Todd County.

1911 - The temperature at Painter, WY, dipped to 10 degrees to equal the record low for July for the continental U.S. (The Weather Channel)

1934 - The temperature reached 109 degrees at Cincinnati, OH, to cap their hottest summer of record. The state record for Ohio was established that day with a reading of 113 degrees near the town of Galipolis. (David Ludlum)

1975 - Six inches of rain fell across Mercer County, NJ, in just ten hours causing the worst flooding in twenty years. Assunpink Creek crested eleven feet above flood stage at Hamilton and Trenton, the highest level of record. Traffic was brought to a standstill, and railway service between New York City and Washington D.C. was cut off for two days. Flooding left 1000 persons homeless, and caused an estimated 25 million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1983: At Vostok Station in Antarctica, the temperature dropped to 128.6 degrees below zero. This reading is the coldest temperature ever recorded.

1987: An F4 tornado ravages the Teton Wilderness and Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. The tornado's violent winds destroy millions of trees on a 24.3-mile track that traverses the Continental Divide at an elevation of 10,170 feet.

1987 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from Utah to North Dakota, spawning a dozen tornadoes in North Dakota. Thunderstorms in North Dakota also produced baseball size hail at Clifford which caused four million dollars damage, and high winds which toppled a couple of eighty foot towers cutting off power to the town of Blanchard. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - While cool air invaded the central U.S., unseasonably hot weather continued over the western states. The temperature at Spring Valley, NV, soared from a morning low of 35 degrees to an afternoon high of 95 degrees. Fallon, NV, reported an all-time record high of 108 degrees, and Death Valley, CA, reported their sixth straight day of 120 degree heat. (The Weather Channel) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Afternoon thunderstorms over Florida produced wind gusts to 92 mph at Jacksonville, damaging thirteen light planes at Herlong Field. Five cities in Texas reported record low temperatures for the date. Corpus Christi, TX, equalled their record low for the date with a reading of 71 degrees, and then tied their record high for the date that afternoon with a reading of 97 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

Have you ever caught "lightning bugs" and placed them in a jar with vents in the lid so they could breathe? It was a favorite activity for children in our neighborhood when I was a child. We would "capture" them and then place them in a glass jar where their tiny bright "lights" would glow in the darkness of the night. After watching them go "on and off" for a while, we would "free" them, and they would fly off into the darkness fulfilling God's purpose for them.

Had they remained in the jar, they would have eventually died. God, however, intended for them to be free and happy and live the life He planned for them.

It's like that with us. God planned a unique life for everyone: a life of happiness and peace. But happiness can only come if we are free. Some think that happiness and pleasure are synonymous. They are not. Happiness is not derived from possessions nor destroyed by poverty. There is a story of a king who wanted the shirt "off the back" of the happiest man in his kingdom. When they found the man, he did not have a shirt - he only had a ragged cloak.

Happiness is not what happens to us - it is what happens within us. It is the by-product of what occurs in us if we live in agreement with the will of God. Life in His will brings us freedom from being "contaminated" by the things of the world. Happiness fills lives that are "regulated" by the Word of God. Following His Word and His way will bring pleasure and peace.

Psalm 1:1 promises "a blessed - or - a happy life" to those who delight in and obey His law. His law will set us free from being contained and controlled by worldly things that fade.

Prayer: Father, may we set our eyes on things that are permanent and not passing. May we discover the joy and peace and satisfaction that only comes from You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. Psalm 1:1

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 1 Days 17 Hrs 32 Mins
DRAW: 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.19.25

4 25 32 42 51 10

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,980,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 47 Mins 43
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.20.25

26 31 37 41 43 1

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 17 Hrs 2 Mins 43
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.19.25

6 8 15 30 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$63,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 2 Mins
DRAW: 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.19.25

6 29 38 43 67 16

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 31 Mins 43
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.19.25

28 48 51 61 69 20

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$308,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 31 Mins 44
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

007/25/2025 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

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SOUTH DAKOTA AMERICAN LEGION REGION 1B SR BRACKET

JULY 22-24, 2025

BREWSTER/GUNDERSON FIELD, SISSETON, SOUTH DAKOTA

Big Stone City Post 229

7/22
Game 1
4:00 PM
Webster Post 40

Groton Post 39

7/22
Game 2
6:00 PM
Sisseton Post 50

Loser Game 1
7/23
Game 4
5:00 PM
Loser Game 2

Winner Game 1

7/23

Game 3
2:00 PM

Winner Game 2

7/23

Game 5
7:00 PM

Winner Game 4

Loser Game 3

7/24

Game 6
2:00 PM

7/24



Game 7 (If Necessary)
7/24 4:00 PM

Champion

Loser Game 6 (if first loss)

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.

Jr. Teener Region Tournament

July 28 and 30

Only two teams in the region (Groton and Mt. Vernon/Plankinton) so the best of three games will advance to state.

Monday, July 28, 6 p.m. in Plankinton

Wednesday, July 30, 5 p.m. in Groton

If a third game is required it will be played after the game in Groton.

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Russia launches a major aerial attack on Kyiv hours before high-level talks on support for Ukraine

By EMMA BURROWS and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

Russia unleashed one of its largest aerial assaults on Ukraine in recent months, only hours before the U.K. and Germany are to chair a meeting to discuss U.S. President Donald Trump's plans for NATO allies to provide Ukraine with weapons.

The attack killed two people and wounded 15, including a 12-year-old, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.

In Kyiv's Shevchenkivskiy district, a drone struck the entrance to a subway station where people had taken cover. Videos posted on social media showed the station platform engulfed by smoke, with dozens of people inside. Kyiv Mayor Vitalii Klitschko said the station had to be ventilated in what he called an "enhanced mode."

The heaviest strikes hit Kyiv's Darnytskyi district, where a kindergarten, supermarket and warehouse facilities caught fire.

The hourslong drone and missile assault on Kyiv overnight into Monday underscored the urgency of Ukraine's need for further Western military aid, especially in air defense, a week after Trump said deliveries would arrive in Ukraine within days.

US defense chief and NATO leader to attend Ukraine meeting

The virtual meeting will be led by British Defense Secretary John Healey and his German counterpart Boris Pistorius. Healey said U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and NATO leader Mark Rutte, as well as NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich, will attend the meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group.

Moscow has intensified its long-range attacks on Ukrainian cities, and analysts say the barrages are likely to escalate as Russian drone production expands.

In a shift of tone toward Russia, the U.S. president last week gave Moscow a 50-day deadline to agree to a ceasefire or face tougher sanctions.

At Monday's meeting, Healey was expected to urge Ukraine's Western partners to launch a coincidental "50-day drive" to get Kyiv the weapons it needs to fight Russia's bigger army and force Russian President Vladimir Putin to the negotiating table, the U.K. government said in a statement.

Trump's arms plan, announced a week ago, involves European nations sending American weapons to Ukraine via NATO — either from existing stockpiles or buying and donating new ones. The U.S. president indicated discussions were partly focused on advanced Patriot air defense systems and said a week ago that deliveries would begin "within days."

But last week various senior officials suggested no transfers had yet taken place.

NATO's Grynkeiwich told The Associated Press on Thursday that "preparations are underway" for weapons transfers to Ukraine while U.S. Ambassador to NATO Matthew Whitaker said he couldn't give a time frame.

Ukraine wants American-made Patriot missile systems

Germany has said it offered to finance two new Patriot systems for Ukraine and raised the possibility of supplying systems it already owns and having them replaced by the U.S.

But delivery could take time, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz suggested, because "they have to be transported, they have to be set up; that is not a question of hours, it is a question of days, perhaps weeks."

Other Patriot systems could come thanks to Switzerland, whose defense ministry said Thursday it was informed by the U.S. Defense Department that it will "reprioritize the delivery" of five previously ordered systems to support Ukraine.

While Ukraine waits for Patriots, a senior NATO official said the alliance is still coordinating the delivery of other military aid — such as ammunition and artillery rounds — which includes aid from the U.S. that

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was briefly paused. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

Zelenskyy said Saturday that his officials have proposed a new round of peace talks this week. Russian state media on Sunday reported that no date has yet been set for the negotiations, but said that Istanbul would likely remain the host city. The Kremlin spokesman said Sunday that Russia is open to peace with Ukraine, but achieving its goals remains a priority.

Ukraine also fires drones at Moscow

The overnight Russian barrage of Kyiv began shortly after midnight and continued until around 6 a.m. Residents of the capital were kept awake by machine gun fire, buzzing drone engines, and multiple loud explosions.

It was the first major attack on Kyiv since Trump's special envoy to Ukraine, Keith Kellogg, arrived in the city last Monday. Russia halted strikes on Kyiv during his visit.

Ukraine's air force said Russia launched 426 Shahed and decoy drones overnight Monday, as well as 24 missiles of various types. It said 200 drones were intercepted with 203 more jammed or lost from radars.

Ukraine, meanwhile, continued to deploy its domestically produced long-range drones. Russia's Ministry of Defense said that its forces shot down 74 Ukrainian drones overnight, with almost a third of them destroyed close to the Russian capital. Twenty-three drones were shot down in the Moscow region, the ministry said, 15 of which were intercepted over the city itself.

Syrian government starts evacuating Bedouin families from Sweida in bid to end weeklong clashes

By GHAITH ALSAYED and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BUSRA AL-HARIR, Syria (AP) — The Syrian government on Monday started evacuating Bedouin families trapped inside the city of Sweida, where Druze militiamen and Bedouin fighters have clashed for over a week.

The clashes between militias of the Druze religious minority and the Sunni Muslim clans killed hundreds and threatened to unravel Syria's already fragile postwar transition. The clashes also led to a series of targeted sectarian attacks against the Druze community, followed by revenge attacks against the Bedouins. The U.N. International Organization for Migration said some 128,571 people were displaced in the hostilities that started with a series of tit-for-tat kidnappings and attacks a week ago.

Israel also launched dozens of airstrikes in the Druze-majority Sweida province, targeting government forces who had effectively sided with the Bedouins.

Syrian state media said early Sunday that the government had coordinated with some officials in Sweida to bring in buses to evacuate some 1,500 Bedouins in the city. Syrian Interior Minister Ahmad al-Dalati told SANA that the initiative will also allow displaced civilians from Sweida to return, as the fighting has largely stopped and efforts for a complete ceasefire are ongoing.

"We have imposed a security cordon in the vicinity of Sweida to keep it secure and to stop the fighting there," al-Dalati told the Syrian state-run news agency. "This will preserve the path that will lead to reconciliation and stability in the province."

Buses filled with Bedouin families were accompanied by Syrian Arab Red Crescent vehicles and ambulances. Some families left on trucks with their belongings.

Syrian authorities did not give further details about the evacuation and how it ties into the broader agreement, following failed talks for a hostage swap deal Saturday.

However, Britain-based war monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that as part of the agreement, the Bedouin fighters would have to release Druze women they were holding captive, and leave the province.

The Bedouin fighters had withdrawn from Sweida city Sunday, and alongside other tribesmen from other parts of the country stood on the outskirts while security forces cordoned off the area. An aid convoy of some 32 Red Crescent vehicles entered the city, though a government delegation with another aid convoy was turned away.

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After talks for a hostage swap fell through late Sunday, the Observatory and activist groups in Sweida reported hearing what they said were Israeli airstrikes and helicopters over villages where some skirmishes took place between the Bedouins and Druze militias.

The Israeli military said it was "not aware" of any overnight strikes in Syria.

Syrian interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa has tried to appeal to the Druze community while slamming the factions loyal to spiritual leader Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri who have been involved in the clashes. He promised to hold accountable perpetrators of targeted attacks and other violations.

The country's Druze community largely celebrated the downfall of the Assad family that ended decades of tyrannical rule. While they had concerns about Al-Sharaa's de facto Islamist rule, a large number wanted to approach matters diplomatically.

Al-Hijri and his supporters, though, have taken a more confrontational approach with Al-Sharaa, contrary to most other influential Druze figures. Critics also note al-Hijri's previous allegiance to Assad.

However, the numerous cases of sectarian attacks, which included killing Druze civilians and desecrating photos of religious notables, have made the Druze more skeptical of Al-Sharaa and less optimistic of peaceful coexistence.

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.

Ishiba's coalition loses majority in Japan's upper house election

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's ruling coalition failed Monday to secure a majority in the 248-seat upper house in a crucial parliamentary election, further shaking the stability of his government as Japan faces challenges such as rising prices and high U.S. tariffs.

Ishiba's Liberal Democratic Party and its junior coalition partner Komeito, which needed to win 50 seats on top of the 75 seats they already have to retain their majority, won 47 seats. It was three seats short of a majority and a retreat of 19 seats from before the vote.

The loss is another blow to Ishiba's coalition, making it a minority in both houses following its October defeat in the lower house election, and worsening Japan's political instability. It was the first time the LDP-led coalition has lost a majority in both houses of parliament since the party's formation in 1955.

Despite the loss, Ishiba expressed determination to stay on and not create a political vacuum to tackle challenges such as U.S. tariff threats, but he could face calls from within his party to step down or find another coalition partner.

"I will fulfill my responsibility as head of the No. 1 party and work for the country," he said.

Ishiba hoped for a simple majority but came up short.

Ishiba had set the bar low, wanting a simple majority of 125 seats, which means his LDP and its Buddhist-backed junior coalition partner Komeito needed to win 50 seats. Exit poll results released seconds after the ballots closed Sunday night mostly showed a major setback for Ishiba's coalition.

The LDP alone won 39 seats, better than most exit poll projections of 32, and still the No. 1 party in the parliament, known as the Diet. But Ishiba said the coalition's poor showing was because his government's measures to combat price increases had yet to reach many people.

"It's a tough situation. I take it humbly and sincerely," Ishiba told a live interview with NHK.

The poor performance in the election will not immediately trigger a change of government because the upper house lacks the power to file a no-confidence motion against a leader, but it will certainly deepen uncertainty over his fate and Japan's political stability. Ishiba could face calls from within the LDP party to step down or find another coalition partner.

Economic worries frustrate voters

Soaring prices, lagging incomes and burdensome social security payments are the top issues for frustrated, cash-strapped voters. Stricter measures targeting foreign residents and visitors also emerged as

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a key issue, with a surging right-wing populist party leading the campaign.

Sunday's vote comes after Ishiba's coalition lost a majority in the October lower house election, stung by past corruption scandals, and his unpopular government has since been forced into making concessions to the opposition to get legislation through parliament. It has been unable to quickly deliver effective measures to mitigate rising prices, including Japan's traditional staple of rice, and dwindling wages.

Trade talks with Washington

U.S. President Donald Trump has added to the pressure, complaining about a lack of progress in trade negotiations and the lack of sales of U.S. autos and American-grown rice to Japan despite a shortfall in domestic stocks of the grain. A 25% tariff due to take effect Aug. 1 has been another blow for Ishiba.

Ishiba resisted any compromise before the election, but the prospect of a breakthrough after the election is just as unclear because the minority government would have difficulty forming a consensus with the opposition.

Populism gains traction

Frustrated voters were rapidly turning to emerging populist parties. The eight main opposition groups, however, were too fractured to forge a common platform as a united front and gain voter support as a viable alternative.

The emerging populist party Sanseito stands out with the toughest anti-foreigner stance, with its "Japanese First" platform that proposes a new agency to handle policies related to foreigners. The party's populist platform also includes anti-vaccine, anti-globalism and favors traditional gender roles.

Conservative opposition groups, especially the DPP and Sanseito, gained significant ground at the Liberal Democrats' expense, while the centrist top opposition CDPJ was sluggish. The DPP quadrupled to 17 seats from four, according to interim results reported by Japanese media. Sanseito surged to 14 from just one.

Sanseito leader, former local assembly member and a Self-Defense Force reserve personnel, told NHK said he is open to cooperate with the ruling bloc on conservative policies while waiting to gain more seats in the other house in a next election and form a multi-party coalition as in Europe.

None of the opposition parties said that they were open to cooperating with the governing coalition. CDPJ leader Yoshihiko Noda told NHK that his priority is to form an alliance among the opposition. "Public opinion clearly said 'no' to the Ishiba government," Noda said.

The spread of xenophobic rhetoric in the election campaign and on social media triggered protests by human rights activists and alarmed foreign residents.

A choice between stability or change

The LDP has almost continuously dominated Japan's postwar politics, contributing to its political stability and social conformity. But voters are divided between stability and change, with some voicing concern about escalating xenophobia.

Yuko Tsuji, a 43-year-old consultant who came to a polling station inside a downtown Tokyo gymnasium with her husband, said they both support LDP for stability and unity. They voted "for candidates who won't fuel division."

"If the ruling party doesn't govern properly, the conservative base will drift toward extremes. So I voted with the hope that the ruling party would tighten things up," she said.

Self-employed Daiichi Nasu, 57, who came to vote with his dog, said he hopes for a change toward a more inclusive and diverse society, with more open immigration and gender policies such as allowing married couples to keep separate surnames.

"That's why I voted for the CDPJ," he said. "I want to see progress on those fronts."

'Superman' flexes its might in second weekend with \$57.3 million

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — James Gunn's "Superman" showed staying power in its second weekend at North American box offices, collecting \$57.3 million in ticket sales and remaining the No. 1 movie in cinemas, according to studio estimates Sunday.

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None of the week's new releases — "I Know What You Did Last Summer," "Smurfs," and "Eddington" — came close to touching Warner Bros. and DC Studios' superhero success. "Superman" dipped 54% from its domestic opening, an average decline for a big summer film.

In two weeks, "Superman" has grossed \$406.8 million worldwide, a good start for the movie DC Studios is banking on to restart its movie operations. A big test looms next weekend, when the Walt Disney Co. releases Marvel's "The Fantastic Four: First Steps."

Strong audience scores and good reviews should help propel the \$225 million-budgeted "Superman" toward profitability in the coming weeks. For Warner Bros. and DC Studios, "Superman" is key to kicking off a 10-year plan for the comic book adaptation studio. Co-heads Gunn and Peter Safran were tasked with rehabilitating the flagging operation. Next on tap are the films "Supergirl" and "Clayface" in 2026.

But "Superman" is far from flying solo in theaters right now. Universal Pictures' "Jurassic World: Rebirth" came in second this weekend, with \$23.4 million in its third week of release. The seventh "Jurassic" movie, this one starring Scarlett Johansson, held its own despite the competition from "Superman." In three weeks, it accrued \$648 million worldwide.

Apple Studios and Warner Bros.' "F1: The Movie" has also shown legs, especially internationally. In its fourth weekend, the Brad Pitt racing drama dipped just 26% domestically, bringing in \$9.6 million in North America, and another \$29.5 million overseas. Its global total stands at \$460.8 million.

But both of the biggest new releases — Sony Pictures' "I Know What You Did Last Summer" and Paramount Pictures' "Smurfs" — fell flat.

"I Know What You Did Last Summer" opened with \$13 million, a fair result for a movie budgeted at a modest \$18 million, but a disappointing opening for a well-known horror franchise. The film, directed by Jennifer Kaytin Robinson, is set 27 years after the 1997 original. Teenagers played by Madelyn Cline and Chase Sui Wonders are again haunted for covering up a car accident.

The movie's reviews (38% "fresh" on Rotten Tomatoes) were poor for "I Know What You Did Last Summer" and audiences graded it similarly. The film notched a "C+" on CinemaScore. The original collected \$72.6 million in its domestic run in 1997.

Paramount Pictures' "Smurfs" debuted in fourth place this weekend with \$11 million. The latest big-screen reboot for the woodland blue creatures prominently features Rihanna as the voice of Smurfette. But reviews (21% "fresh" on Rotten Tomatoes) were terrible. Audiences were kinder, giving it a "B+" on CinemaScore, but the \$58 million-budgeted release will depend largely on its international sales. In 56 overseas markets, "Smurfs" earned \$22.6 million.

Ari Aster's "Eddington" opened with \$4.2 million on 2,111 screens for A24. Since its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, "Eddington" has been particularly divisive. The pandemic-set Western features Joaquin Phoenix as the right-wing sheriff of a small New Mexico town who faces off with its liberal mayor (Pedro Pascal).

While Aster's first film, 2018's "Hereditary" (\$82.8 million worldwide against a \$10 million budget) helped establish A24 as an indie powerhouse, but the less-than-stellar launch of "Eddington" marks the second box-office disappointment for Aster. His 2023 film "Beau Is Afraid" cost \$35 million to make but collected just \$12.4 million worldwide. "Eddington" cost about \$25 million to produce. Audiences gave it a "C+" on CinemaScore. None of Aster's previous films have been graded higher.

Yet collectively, Hollywood is enjoying a very good summer. According to data firm Comscore, the 2025 summer box office is up 15.9% over the same period last year, with the year-to-date sales running 15% ahead of 2025. Summer ticket sales have amassed about \$2.6 billion domestically, according to Comscore.

Top 10 movies by domestic box office

With final domestic figures being released Monday, this list factors in the estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore:

1. "Superman," \$57.3 million.
2. "Jurassic World Rebirth," \$23.4 million.
3. "I Know What You Did Last Summer," \$13 million.
4. "Smurfs," \$11 million.

- 5, "F1: The Movie," \$9.6 million.
6. "How to Train Your Dragon," \$5.4 million.
7. "Eddington," \$4.3 million.
8. "Elio," \$2 million.
9. "Lilo & Stitch," \$1.5 million.
10. "28 Years Later," \$1.3 million.

Missing loved ones leave those left behind with 'ambiguous loss' — a form of frozen grief

By LAURIE KELLMAN, DMYTRO ZHYHINAS and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

Rachel Ganz's husband might be alive. But he might not be. More than three months after he was last seen near the Eleven Point River in Missouri amid severe flooding and evacuation orders, Jon Ganz is just ... missing.

That leaves Rachel, 45, in a limbo of sorrow and frustration, awakening "every morning to a reality I don't want to exist in." She dwells there in a liminal state, she wrote by email July 11, with a stream of questions running through her head: "Is he trapped by debris in the river? Is he in a tangled mass of debris on the riverbank? Did he wander off into the forested area instead?" And one that remains stubbornly unanswered: "Are they ever going to find him?"

"Obviously I want my husband returned alive," she wrote to The Associated Press, "though I am envious of those who have death certificates."

It's called 'ambiguous loss'

Like the families of the missing after the July 4 Texas floods experienced for much of this month, Ganz is suffering from what grief experts call ambiguous loss: the agony of living in the absence of a loved one whose fate is uncertain. Humans across borders, cultures and time unfortunately know it well. Ambiguous loss can be intimate, like Ganz' experience, or global, as in the cases of the missing from the Sept. 11 attacks, tsunamis in the Indian Ocean and Japan, the Turkey-Syria earthquake, the Israel-Hamas war and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The distinguishing feature, according to Pauline Boss, the researcher who coined the term in the 1970s, is the absence of ritual — a wake, a funeral, throwing dirt on a grave — to help the families left behind accept the loss. The only way forward, experts say, is learning to live with the uncertainty — a concept not well-tolerated in Western cultures.

"We're in a state of mind, a state of the nation, right now where you either win or you lose, it's either black or its white," said Boss, a professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota who has researched ambiguous loss globally over a half century. "You have to let go of the binary to get past it, and some never do. They are frozen. They are stuck."

Sarah Wayland, a social work professor from Central Queensland University in Sydney, says ambiguous loss is different from mourning because it's about "repetitive trauma exposure," from the 24-hour news cycle and social media. Then there is a devastating quiet that descends on the people left behind when interest has moved on to something else.

"They might be living in this space of dreading but also hoping at the same time," Wayland said. "And they are experiencing this loss both publicly and privately."

The uncertainty is like 'a knife constantly making new cuts'

Heavy rains drove a wall of water through Texas Hill Country in the middle of the night July 4, killing at least 132 people and leaving nearly 200 missing as of last week, though that number has dwindled as this week begins. Over just two hours, the Guadalupe River at Comfort, Texas, rose from hip-height to three stories tall, sending water weighing as much as the Empire State building downstream roughly every minute it remained at its crest.

Those without bodies to bury have been frozen in a specific state of numbness and horror — and uncertainty. "It's beyond human imagination to believe that a loved one is dead," Boss says.

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This feeling can come in any global circumstance. Lidiia Rudenko, 39, represents a group of families in Ukraine whose relatives are missing in action. Her husband, Sergey, 41, has been missing since June 24, 2024, when his marine brigade battled the Russian army near Krynky. He's one of tens of thousands of Ukrainians missing since the Russian invasion in 2022. And she is one of thousands in Ukraine left behind.

"Some people fall into grief and can no longer do anything, neither act nor think, while others start to act as quickly as possible and take the situation into their own hands, as I did," Rudenko said. "There are days when you can't get out of bed," she said. "Sometimes we call it 'getting sick. And we allow ourselves to get sick a little, cry it out, live through it, and fight again.'"

For nearly a decade, Leah Goldin was part of a very small number of people in Israel with the dubious distinction of being the family of a hostage.

Her son, Hadar Goldin, 23, a second lieutenant in the Israeli army, was killed, then his body taken on August 1, 2014. A blood-soaked shirt, prayer fringes and other evidence found in the tunnel where Goldin's body had been held led the Israeli army to determine he'd been killed, she said. His body has never been returned.

Her family's journey didn't dovetail with the regular oscillations of grief. They held what Leah Goldin now calls a "pseudo-funeral" including Goldin's shirt and fringes, at the urging of Israel's military rabbis. But the lingering uncertainty was like a "knife constantly making new cuts."

In the dizzying days after Hamas' attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, the Goldin family threw themselves into attempting to help hundreds of families of the 251 people Hamas had dragged into Gaza. But for a time, the Goldins found themselves shunned as advocacy for the Oct. 7 hostages surged.

"We were a symbol of failure," Leah Goldin said. "People said, 'We aren't like you. Our kids will come back soon.'" She understood their fear, but Goldin, who had spent a decade pushing for Hamas to release her son's body, was devastated by the implication. In time, the hostage families brought her more into the fold, learning from her experience.

Hamas still holds 50 Israeli hostages, fewer than half of whom are believed to be alive. In Gaza, Israel's offensive has killed nearly 59,000 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't say how many militants have been killed but says over half of the dead have been women and children. Thousands of the dead are believed to be buried under rubble throughout the enclave.

How to support families of the missing — and what's not helpful

Ganz, whose husband went missing in Missouri in April, said the sheriff's department and others searched far and wide at first. She posted fliers around the town where his car was found, and on social media. Then someone accused her of "grieving without proof," a remark that still makes her fume.

"One of my biggest frustrations has been people stating, 'If you need anything, please let me know,'" Ganz said. That puts the burden on her, and follow-through has been hard to come by, she said. "We already have enough ambiguity."

She's thinking about setting up a nonprofit organization in Jon's honor, dedicated to breaking the stigma against men getting therapy, to show "that it's not weak." That tracks with Goldin's thinking that taking action can help resolve loss — and with Rudenko's experience in Ukraine.

Boss recommends separate community meetings for families of the confirmed dead and those of the missing. For the latter, a specific acknowledgement is helpful: "You have to first say to the people, 'What you are experiencing is an ambiguous loss. It's one of the most difficult kinds of losses there is because there's no resolution. It's not your fault,'" Boss said.

In Ukraine, Rudenko said it helps to recognize that families of the missing and everyone else live in "two different worlds."

"Sometimes we don't need words, because people who have not been affected by ambiguous loss will never find the right words," she said. "Sometimes we just need to be hugged and left in silence."

Officials say 85 Palestinians seeking aid are killed in Gaza as Israel widens evacuation orders

By WAFAA SHURAF, FATMA KHALED, MELANIE LIDMAN and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press
DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Gaza saw its deadliest day yet for aid-seekers in over 21 months of war as at least 85 Palestinians were killed while trying to reach food on Sunday, the territory's Health Ministry said.

There was new alarm as Israel's military issued evacuation orders for parts of central Gaza, one of the few areas where it has rarely operated with ground troops and where many international organizations trying to distribute aid are located. One group said several offices were told to evacuate immediately. There was no immediate Israeli comment.

The largest death toll was in devastated northern Gaza, where living conditions are especially dire. At least 79 Palestinians were killed while trying to reach aid entering through the Zikim crossing with Israel, Zaher al-Waheidi, head of the Health Ministry's records department, told The Associated Press. The U.N. World Food Program said 25 trucks with aid had entered for "starving communities" when it encountered massive crowds.

A U.N. official, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not allowed to comment on the incident to the media, said Israeli forces opened fire toward crowds who tried to take food from the convoy. Footage taken by the U.N. and shared with the AP showed Palestinian men running as automatic gunfire was heard.

"Suddenly, tanks surrounded us and trapped us as gunshots and strikes rained down. We were trapped for around two hours," said Ehab Al-Zei, who had been waiting for flour and said he hadn't eaten bread in 15 days. He spoke over the din of people carrying the dead and wounded. "I will never go back again. Let us die of hunger, it's better."

Nafiz Al-Najjar, who was injured, said tanks and drones targeted people "randomly" and he saw his cousin and others shot dead.

Israel's military accuses Hamas of creating chaos

Israel's military said soldiers shot at a gathering of thousands of Palestinians in northern Gaza who posed a threat, and it was aware of some casualties. But it said the numbers reported by officials in Gaza were far higher than its initial investigation found. It accused Hamas militants of creating chaos.

More than 150 people were wounded, some in critical condition, hospitals said.

Al-Waheidi said Israeli gunfire killed another six Palestinians in the Shakoush area, hundreds of meters (yards) north of a hub of the recently created Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, a U.S.- and Israel-backed group, in the southern city of Rafah. The GHF said it was not aware of any incident near its site. Witnesses and health workers say several hundred people have been killed by Israeli fire while trying to access the group's aid distribution sites.

Separately, seven Palestinians were killed while sheltering in tents in Khan Younis in the south, including a 5-year-old boy, according to the Kuwait Specialized Field Hospital, which received the casualties.

Evacuation orders cut road across Gaza

The new evacuation orders cut access between the central city of Deir al-Balah and Rafah and Khan Younis in the narrow territory. The military also reiterated evacuation orders for northern Gaza.

Palestinians were startled to see the orders for parts of Deir al-Balah, a relative haven. "All of Rafah is under evacuation, and now you have decided that half of Deir al-Balah is under evacuation. Where will we move to?" asked resident Hassan Abu Azab, as others piled everything from bedding to live ducks onto carts and other vehicles. Smoke rose in the distance, with blasts and the sound of a siren.

The United Nations was in contact with Israeli authorities to clarify whether U.N. facilities in the southwestern part of Deir al-Balah are included in the order, according to a different U.N. official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak to the media. The official said that in previous instances, U.N. facilities were spared from such orders.

The Medical Aid for Palestinians group said several humanitarian organizations' offices and guesthouses

had been "ordered to evacuate immediately" and nine clinics, including the MAP one, had been forced to shut down. It was not immediately clear what other groups were affected.

Military spokesman Avichay Adraee called for people to head to Muwasi, a desolate tent camp with little infrastructure on Gaza's southern coast that Israel's military has designated a humanitarian zone.

The announcement came as Israel and Hamas have been holding ceasefire talks in Qatar. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly asserted that expanding Israel's military operations in Gaza will pressure Hamas in negotiations.

Earlier this month, Israel's military said it controlled more than 65% of Gaza.

Palestinian death toll nears 59,000

Gaza's population of more than 2 million Palestinians are in a catastrophic humanitarian crisis, now relying largely on the limited aid allowed into the territory. Many people have been displaced multiple times.

Ambulances in front of three major hospitals in Gaza sounded their alarms simultaneously Sunday in an urgent appeal as hunger grows. The Health Ministry posted pictures on social media of doctors holding signs about malnourished children and the lack of medication.

Hamas triggered the war when militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing around 1,200 people and taking 251 others hostage. Fifty remain in Gaza, but fewer than half are thought to be alive.

Israel's military offensive has killed more than 58,800 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't say how many militants have been killed but says over half of the dead have been women and children. The ministry is part of the Hamas government, but the U.N. and other international organizations see it as the most reliable source of data on casualties.

The Hostages Family Forum, a grassroots organization that represents many families of hostages, condemned the new evacuation order and demanded that Netanyahu and Israel's military explain what they hope to accomplish in central Gaza.

"Enough! The Israeli people overwhelmingly want an end to the fighting and a comprehensive agreement that will return all of the hostages," the forum said. On Saturday night, during a weekly protest, tens of thousands marched in Tel Aviv to the branch of the U.S. Embassy, demanding an end to the war.

Syria's armed Bedouins say they have withdrawn from Druze-majority city after weeklong fighting

By GHAITH ALSAYED and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

MAZRAA, Syria (AP) — Syria's armed Bedouin clans announced Sunday they had withdrawn from the Druze-majority city of Sweida following weeklong clashes and a U.S.-brokered ceasefire, as humanitarian aid convoys started to enter the battered southern city.

The clashes between militias of the Druze religious minority and the Sunni Muslim clans killed hundreds and threatened to unravel Syria's already fragile postwar transition. Israel also launched dozens of airstrikes in the Druze-majority Sweida province, targeting government forces who had effectively sided with the Bedouins.

The clashes also led to a series of targeted sectarian attacks against the Druze community, followed by revenge attacks against the Bedouins.

A series of tit-for-tat kidnappings sparked the clashes in various towns and villages in the province, which later spread to Sweida city, the provincial capital. Government forces were redeployed to halt renewed fighting that erupted Thursday, before withdrawing again.

Interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa, who has been perceived as more sympathetic to the Bedouins, had tried to appeal to the Druze community while remaining critical of the militias. He later urged the Bedouins to leave the city, saying that they "cannot replace the role of the state in handling the country's affairs and restoring security."

"We thank the Bedouins for their heroic stances but demand they fully commit to the ceasefire and comply with the state's orders," he said in an address broadcast Saturday.

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Dozens of armed Bedouin fighters alongside other clans from around the country who came to support them remained on the outskirts of the city and were cordoned off by government security forces and military police. They blame the clashes on the Druze factions loyal to spiritual leader Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri and accuse them of harming Bedouin families.

"We will not leave until he turns himself in alongside those with him who tried to stir sedition. And only then will we go home." Khaled al-Mohammad, who came to the southern province alongside other tribesmen from the eastern Deir al-Zour province, told The Associated Press.

Aid convoys enter Sweida but tensions persist

The Bedouins' withdrawal brought a cautious calm to the area, with humanitarian convoys on their way. The Syrian Red Crescent said Sunday it sent 32 trucks loaded with food, medicine, water, fuel and other aid, after the fighting left the province with power cuts and shortages.

Syria's state news agency SANA reported that the convoy entered Sweida on Sunday, but accused al-Hijri and his armed Druze supporters of turning back a government delegation that accompanied another convoy.

The Foreign Ministry in a statement said the convoy accompanying the delegation had two ambulances loaded with aid provided by local and international organizations.

Al-Hijri did not directly respond to the accusations but said in a statement that he welcomes any assistance for Sweida and slammed what he claims were distorted campaigns against him.

"We reaffirm that we have no dispute with anyone on any religious or ethnic basis," the statement read. "Shame and disgrace be upon all those who seek to sow discord and hatred in the minds of young people."

The U.N. International Organization for Migration said 128,571 people were displaced during the clashes, including 43,000 on Saturday alone.

US envoy appeals for an end to fighting

Washington's special envoy to Syria, Tom Barrack, said the clashes and atrocities "overshadowed" an initial cautious optimism about the country's post-war transition and the international community's lifting of sanctions.

"All factions must immediately lay down their arms, cease hostilities and abandon cycles of tribal vengeance," Barrack said on X. "Syria stands at a critical juncture — peace and dialogue must prevail — and prevail now."

Among those killed in the weeklong fighting were dozens of Druze civilians slain in a series of targeted attacks in the city at the hands of Bedouin fighters and government forces. Videos surfaced online of fighters destroying portraits of Druze religious officials and notables in homes, and shaving the mustaches of elderly Druze, seen as an insult to culture and tradition. Druze militias in return attacked Bedouin-majority areas in the outskirts of the province, forcing families to flee to neighboring Daraa province.

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.

Syria's Druze largely celebrated the downfall of the Assad family that ended decades of tyrannical rule. While they had concerns about Al-Sharaa's de facto Islamist rule, a large number wanted to approach matters diplomatically. Al-Hijri and his supporters, though, have taken a more confrontational approach with Al-Sharaa, contrary to most other influential Druze figures. Critics also note al-Hijri's previous allegiance to Assad.

However, the recent clashes and sectarian attacks on the minority community have made a growing number of Druze in the area more skeptical about Damascus' new leadership and more doubtful of peaceful coexistence.

Request to unseal Epstein grand jury transcripts likely to disappoint, ex-prosecutors say

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A Justice Department request to unseal grand jury transcripts in the prosecution of chronic sexual abuser Jeffrey Epstein and his former girlfriend is unlikely to produce much, if anything, to satisfy the public's appetite for new revelations about the financier's crimes, former federal prosecutors say.

Attorney Sarah Krissoff, an assistant U.S. attorney in Manhattan from 2008 to 2021, called the request in the prosecutions of Epstein and imprisoned British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell "a distraction."

"The president is trying to present himself as if he's doing something here and it really is nothing," Krissoff told The Associated Press in a weekend interview.

Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche made the request Friday, asking judges to unseal transcripts from grand jury proceedings that resulted in indictments against Epstein and Maxwell, saying "transparency to the American public is of the utmost importance to this Administration."

The request came as the administration sought to contain the firestorm that followed its announcement that it would not be releasing additional files from the Epstein probe despite previously promising that it would.

Epstein is dead while Maxwell serves a 20-year prison sentence

Epstein killed himself at age 66 in his federal jail cell in August 2019, a month after his arrest on sex trafficking charges, while Maxwell, 63, is serving a 20-year prison sentence imposed after her December 2021 sex trafficking conviction for luring girls to be sexually abused by Epstein.

Krissoff and Joshua Naftalis, a Manhattan federal prosecutor for 11 years before entering private practice in 2023, said grand jury presentations are purposely brief.

Naftalis said Southern District prosecutors present just enough to a grand jury to get an indictment but "it's not going to be everything the FBI and investigators have figured out about Maxwell and Epstein."

"People want the entire file from however long. That's just not what this is," he said, estimating that the transcripts, at most, probably amount to a few hundred pages.

"It's not going to be much," Krissoff said, estimating the length at as little as 60 pages "because the Southern District of New York's practice is to put as little information as possible into the grand jury."

"They basically spoon feed the indictment to the grand jury. That's what we're going to see," she said. "I just think it's not going to be that interesting. ... I don't think it's going to be anything new."

Ex-prosecutors say grand jury transcript unlikely to be long

Both ex-prosecutors said that grand jury witnesses in Manhattan are usually federal agents summarizing their witness interviews.

That practice might conflict with the public perception of some state and federal grand jury proceedings, where witnesses likely to testify at a trial are brought before grand juries during lengthy proceedings prior to indictments or when grand juries are used as an investigatory tool.

In Manhattan, federal prosecutors "are trying to get a particular result so they present the case very narrowly and inform the grand jury what they want them to do," Krissoff said.

Krissoff predicted that judges who presided over the Epstein and Maxwell cases will reject the government's request.

With Maxwell, a petition is before the U.S. Supreme Court so appeals have not been exhausted. With Epstein, the charges are related to the Maxwell case and the anonymity of scores of victims who have not gone public is at stake, although Blanche requested that victim identities be protected.

"This is not a 50-, 60-, 80-year-old case," Krissoff noted. "There's still someone in custody."

Appeals court's 1997 ruling might matter

She said citing "public intrigue, interest and excitement" about a case was likely not enough to convince a judge to release the transcripts despite a 1997 ruling by the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that said judges have wide discretion and that public interest alone can justify releasing grand jury information.

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Krissoff called it “mind-blowingly strange” that Washington Justice Department officials are increasingly directly filing requests and arguments in the Southern District of New York, where the prosecutor’s office has long been labeled the “Sovereign District of New York” for its independence from outside influence.

“To have the attorney general and deputy attorney general meddling in an SDNY case is unheard of,” she said.

Cheryl Bader, a former federal prosecutor and Fordham Law School criminal law professor, said judges who presided over the Epstein and Maxwell cases may take weeks or months to rule.

“Especially here where the case involved witnesses or victims of sexual abuse, many of which are underage, the judge is going to be very cautious about what the judge releases,” she said.

Tradition of grand jury secrecy might block release of transcripts

Bader said she didn’t see the government’s quest aimed at satisfying the public’s desire to explore conspiracy theories “trumping — pardon the pun — the well-established notions of protecting the secrecy of the grand jury process.”

“I’m sure that all the line prosecutors who really sort of appreciate the secrecy and special relationship they have with the grand jury are not happy that DOJ is asking the court to release these transcripts,” she added.

Mitchell Epner, a former federal prosecutor now in private practice, called Trump’s comments and influence in the Epstein matter “unprecedented” and “extraordinarily unusual” because he is a sitting president.

He said it was not surprising that some former prosecutors are alarmed that the request to unseal the grand jury materials came two days after the firing of Manhattan Assistant U.S. Attorney Maurene Comey, who worked on the Epstein and Maxwell cases.

“If federal prosecutors have to worry about the professional consequences of refusing to go along with the political or personal agenda of powerful people, then we are in a very different place than I’ve understood the federal Department of Justice to be in over the last 30 years of my career,” he said.

Krissoff said the uncertain environment that has current prosecutors feeling unsettled is shared by government employees she speaks with at other agencies as part of her work in private practice.

“The thing I hear most often is this is a strange time. Things aren’t working the way we’re used to them working,” she said.

Trump threatens to hold up stadium deal if Washington Commanders don’t switch back to Redskins

By JOE REEDY and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

CLEVELAND (AP) — President Donald Trump is threatening to hold up a new stadium deal for Washington’s NFL team if it does not restore its old name of the Redskins, which was considered offensive to Native Americans.

Trump also said Sunday that he wants Cleveland’s baseball team to revert to its former name, the Indians, saying there was a “big clamoring for this” as well.

The Washington Commanders and Cleveland Guardians have had their current names since the 2022 seasons and both have said they have no plans to change them back.

Trump said the Washington football team would be “much more valuable” if it restored its old name.

“I may put a restriction on them that if they don’t change the name back to the original ‘Washington Redskins,’ and get rid of the ridiculous moniker, ‘Washington Commanders,’ I won’t make a deal for them to build a Stadium in Washington,” Trump said on his social media site.

His latest interest in changing the name reflects his broader effort to roll back changes that followed a national debate on cultural sensitivity and racial justice. The team announced it would drop the Redskins name and the Indian head logo in 2020 during a broader reckoning with systemic racism and police brutality.

The Commanders and the District of Columbia government announced a deal earlier this year to build a new home for the football team at the site the old RFK Stadium, the place the franchise called home for more than three decades.

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Trump's ability to hold up the deal remains to be seen. President Joe Biden signed a bill in January that transferred the land from the federal government to the District of Columbia.

The provision was part of a short-term spending bill passed by Congress in December. While D.C. residents elect a mayor, a city council and commissioners to run day-to-day operations, Congress maintains control of the city's budget.

Josh Harris, whose group bought the Commanders from former owner Dan Snyder in 2023, said earlier this year the name was here to stay. Not long after taking over, Harris quieted speculation about going back to Redskins, saying that would not happen. The team did not immediately respond to a request for comment following Trump's statement.

The Washington team started in Boston as the Redskins in 1933 before moving to the nation's capital four years later.

The Cleveland Guardians' president of baseball operations, Chris Antonetti, indicated before Sunday's game against the Athletics that there weren't any plans to revisit the name change.

"We understand there are different perspectives on the decision we made a few years ago, but obviously it's a decision we made. We've got the opportunity to build a brand as the Guardians over the last four years and are excited about the future that's in front of us," he said.

Cleveland announced in December 2020 it would drop Indians. It announced the switch to Guardians in July 2021. In 2018, the team phased out "Chief Wahoo" as its primary logo.

The name changes had their share of supporters and critics as part of the national discussions about logos and names considered racist.

Trump posted Sunday afternoon that "The Owner of the Cleveland Baseball Team, Matt Dolan, who is very political, has lost three Elections in a row because of that ridiculous name change. What he doesn't understand is that if he changed the name back to the Cleveland Indians, he might actually win an Election. Indians are being treated very unfairly. MAKE INDIANS GREAT AGAIN (MIGA)!"

Matt Dolan, the son of the late Larry Dolan, no longer has a role with the Guardians. He ran the team's charity endeavors until 2016.

Matt Dolan was a candidate in the Ohio U.S. Senate elections in 2022 and '24, but lost.

Washington and Cleveland share another thing in common. David Blitzer is a member of Harris' ownership group with the Commanders and holds a minority stake in the Guardians.

Tech company CEO resigns after controversy over video captured at Coldplay concert

By ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writer

The IT company CEO captured in a widely circulated video showing him embracing an employee at a Coldplay concert has resigned.

Andy Byron resigned from his job as CEO of Cincinnati-based Astronomer Inc., according to a statement posted on LinkedIn by the company Saturday.

"Astronomer is committed to the values and culture that have guided us since our founding. Our leaders are expected to set the standard in both conduct and accountability, and recently, that standard was not met," the company said in its post on LinkedIn.

The move comes a day after the company said that Byron had been placed on leave and the board of directors had launched a formal investigation into the jumbotron incident, which went viral. A company spokesman later confirmed in a statement to AP that it was Byron and Astronomer chief people officer Kristin Cabot in the video.

The short video clip shows Byron and Cabot as captured on the jumbotron at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, Massachusetts, during a Coldplay concert on Wednesday.

Lead singer Chris Martin asked the cameras to scan the crowd for his "Jumbotron Song," when he sings a few lines about the people the camera lands on.

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"Either they're having an affair or they're just very shy," he joked.

Internet sleuths identified the man as the chief executive officer of a U.S.-based company and the woman as its chief people officer.

Pete DeJoy, Astronomer's cofounder and chief product officer, has been tapped as interim CEO while the company conducts a search for Byron's successor.

Most concert venues warn attendees that they can be filmed

It's easy to miss, but most concert venues have signs informing the audience that they could be filmed during the event. Look for them on the walls when you arrive and around the bar areas or toilets. It's common practice especially when bands like to use performances for music videos or concert films.

The venue in this case, Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, also has a privacy policy online which states: "When you visit our location or attend or participate in an event at our location, we may capture your image, voice and/or likeness, including through the use of CCTV cameras and/or when we film or photograph you in a public location."

Once captured, a moment can be shared widely

"They probably would have got away with it if they hadn't reacted," said Alison Taylor, a clinical associate professor at New York University's Stern School of Business. And by the time the alleged identities emerged on social media, it hit a classic nerve around "leaders acting like the rules don't apply to them," she added.

Still, Taylor and others stress how quickly such a video can lead to an internet search to find the people involved — and note that it's important to remember that such "doxing" isn't just reserved for famous people. Beyond someone simply spotting a familiar face and spreading the word, technological advances, such as the rising adoption of artificial intelligence, have made it easier and faster overall to find just about anyone in a viral video today.

"It's a little bit unsettling how easily we can be identified with biometrics, how our faces are online, how social media can track us — and how the internet has gone from being a place of interaction, to a gigantic surveillance system," said Mary Angela Bock, an associate professor in the University of Texas at Austin's School of Journalism and Media. "When you think about it, we are being surveilled by our social media. They're tracking us in exchange for entertaining us."

Scottie Scheffler dominates in British Open victory for his 2nd major title this year

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

PORTRUSH, Northern Ireland (AP) — The enormous yellow scoreboard above the 18th green at Royal Portrush perfectly illustrated the state of golf these days. Scottie Scheffler's name was at the top. No one was close.

That's how it was in the British Open on Sunday, when Scheffler never gave anyone a chance from the time his 9-iron settled a foot away for birdie on the first hole until he tapped in for a 3-under 68 and a four-shot victory over Harris English.

That's how it is in the sport, a level of dominance not seen since Tiger Woods.

"He is the bar that we're all trying to get to," Masters champion Rory McIlroy said. "In a historical context, you could argue that there's only maybe two or three players in the history of the game that have been on a run the one that Scottie's been on here for the last 24 to 36 months. Incredibly impressive."

Scheffler not only won his second major this year — and fourth in the last three years — he captured the third leg of the career Grand Slam, now missing only the U.S. Open.

He became the first player in more than a century to win his first fourth major title by at least three shots, and if not for his lone blunder from a bunker on the eighth hole when he had a seven-shot lead, he would have played bogey-free on the weekend.

"Being able to walk up 18 with the tournament in hand is a really tough thing to describe. It's a really

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cool feeling. I have a lot of gratitude towards being able to accomplish something like this," Scheffler said, the silver claret jug on the table next to him.

"It's taken a lot of work — not only a lot of work, but it takes a lot of patience," he said. "It's a high level of focus over 72 holes of a tournament. This was, I felt like, one of my best performances mentally."

The emotions he showed were telling.

Until he had his name etched on golf's oldest trophy, Scheffler had a week marked by his extraordinary insight on how he views winning. He said celebrations last only a few minutes. He has wondered, "What's the point?"

He loves the work required to be the best. He thrives on competition. But in terms of fulfillment, he often questions why he wants to win so badly when the thrill of winning is fleeting.

On the golf course, his biggest fist pump was for a par on the sixth hole. As he crouched to line up his birdie putt on the 18th, he rested his head on his hand with a slight smile of deep satisfaction. When he tapped in the final putt, he plucked the ball from the cup and put it in his pocket as if he had just won a regular PGA Tour event.

But when he finally found his family — wife Meredith, 15-month-old son Bennett, and his parents — Scheffler went crazy. He thrust both arms in the air, pumped both arms, screamed and threw his cap in the air. That's what it's all about for the 29-year-old from Texas.

"She's always the first person I want to celebrate with," he said. "She knows me better than anybody. That's my best friend. It takes a lot of work to be able to become good at this game, and I wouldn't be able to do it without her support."

McIlroy had referred to the outcome as "inevitable" when Scheffler built a four-shot lead going into the final round, and it was every bit of that.

The tap-in birdie on the first hole. A brilliant approach between two knobs to 7 feet for birdie on the fourth. A 15-foot birdie on No. 5. Most telling was his biggest celebration, a powerful fist pump when he made a 15-foot par putt on No. 6.

It was reminiscent of when Woods saved his biggest fist pump for a par on the 16th hole of his historic 15-shot victory at Pebble Beach in the 2000 U.S. Open, when it was clear Woods was competing mainly against himself.

That's what it felt like until Scheffler's one wobble a double bogey on No. 8 when it took two shots to get out of a fairway bunker.

That ended his streak of 32 consecutive holes without a bogey. The lead was down to four shots when Scottish Open winner Chris Gotterup birdied the ninth. And then Scheffler birdied the next hole. He played the back nine with eight pars and a birdie because that's all he needed. No one could catch him.

"I played with him the first two days, and honestly I thought he was going to birdie every hole. It was incredible to watch," Shane Lowry said. "If Scottie's feet stayed stable and his swing looked like Adam Scott's, we'd be talking about him in the same words as Tiger Woods. ... His bad shots are really good. That's when you know he's really good."

Scheffler, who finished at 17-under 267, won for the fourth time this year. He now has won 20 times worldwide in the last 30 months. This was the 11th straight time he turned a 54-hole lead into a victory.

"I don't think we thought the golfing world would see someone as dominant as Tiger come through so soon, and here's Scottie sort of taking that throne of dominance," said Xander Schauffele, the defending champion who tied for seventh.

"You can't even say he's on a run. He's just been killing it for over two years now," he said. "He's a tough man to beat, and when you see his name up on the leaderboard, it sucks for us."

English capped off a memorable two weeks in the United Kingdom. His caddie of eight years couldn't get a new travel visa because of a 10-year prison term he served two decades ago. English had a replacement last week at the Scottish Open and another this week.

It didn't stop him. English closed with a 66 and was runner-up in a major for the second time this year — both times to Scheffler — as he strengthened his case for the Ryder Cup team.

"The only guy to beat me at the PGA and this week. I'm playing some good golf," English said. "I wasn't

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playing professional golf when Tiger was at his peak. But it's pretty incredible, just how good of a front-runner he is."

Li Haotong of China (70), Matt Fitzpatrick (69) and Wyndham Clark (65) tied for fourth. That gets Li into the Masters next year.

As for McIlroy, there were few complaints. He needed an electric start like he had Saturday and was eight shots behind an hour into the final round. No matter. The Masters champion soaked up adulation across Royal Portrush, closing with a 69 to tie for seventh.

"I wish I had have been closer to Scottie going into today and been able to make a real push," McIlroy said. "But he's been on a different level all week and he's been on a different level for the last two years to the rest of us. He is the bar that we're all trying to get to at this point.

"But for me to be in front of everyone here at home and to get that reception up the last, absolutely incredible. I'll remember that for a long time."

The only stumble from Scheffler came from his 15-month-old son, who tried to walk up a slope to the 18th green toward his dad and the claret jug, only to face-plant.

"I don't think he's ever been up a hill that big before," Scheffler said with a laugh.

That also goes for players chasing Scheffler.

Russia insists on achieving Ukraine goals despite Trump's ultimatum

By The Associated Press undefined

Russia is open to peace with Ukraine, but achieving its goals remains a priority, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Sunday, days after U.S. President Donald Trump gave Moscow a 50-day deadline to agree to a ceasefire or face tougher sanctions.

Peskov and other Russian officials have repeatedly rejected accusations from Kyiv and its Western partners of stalling peace talks. Meanwhile, Moscow continues to intensify its long-range attacks on Ukrainian cities, launching more drones in a single night than it did during some entire months in 2024, and analysts say the barrages are likely to escalate.

Russian President Vladimir Putin "has repeatedly spoken of his desire to bring the Ukrainian settlement to a peaceful conclusion as soon as possible. This is a long process, it requires effort, and it is not easy," Peskov told state television in an interview.

"The main thing for us is to achieve our goals," he said. "Our goals are clear."

The Kremlin has insisted that any peace deal should see Ukraine withdraw from the four regions that Russia illegally annexed in September 2022, but never fully captured. It also wants Ukraine to renounce its bid to join NATO and accept strict limits on its armed forces — demands Kyiv and its Western allies have rejected.

In his nightly address on Saturday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that his officials have proposed a new round of peace talks this week. Russian state media on Sunday reported that no date has yet been set for the negotiations, but said that Istanbul would likely remain the host city.

Truce or sanctions

Trump threatened Russia on July 14 with steep tariffs and announced a rejuvenated pipeline for American weapons to reach Ukraine, hardening his stance toward Moscow after months of frustration following unsuccessful negotiations aimed at ending the war. The direct Russia-Ukraine negotiations in Istanbul resulted in several rounds of prisoner exchanges but little else.

The U.S. president said that he would implement "severe tariffs" unless a peace deal is reached within 50 days. He provided few details on how they would be implemented, but suggested they would target Russia's trading partners in an effort to isolate Moscow in the global economy.

In addition, Trump said that European allies would buy "billions and billions" of dollars of U.S. military equipment to be transferred to Ukraine, replenishing the besieged country's supplies of weapons. Included in the plan are Patriot air defense systems, a top priority for Ukraine as it fends off Russian drones and

missiles.

Doubts were recently raised about Trump's commitment to supply Ukraine when the Pentagon paused shipments over concerns that U.S. stockpiles were running low.

Drone strikes

Elsewhere, Ukraine's air force said that it shot down 18 of 57 Shahed-type and decoy drones launched by Russia overnight into Sunday, with seven more disappearing from radar.

Two women were wounded in Zaporizhzhia, a southern Ukrainian region partly occupied by Russia, when a drone struck their house, according to the regional military administration. Two more civilians were wounded in Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv province, after a drone slammed into a residential building, local Ukrainian officials said.

Later Sunday, drones struck a leafy square in the center of Sumy, wounding a woman and her 7-year-old son, officials said. The strike also damaged a power line, leaving around 100 households without electricity, according to Serhii Krivosheienko, of the municipal military administration.

Meanwhile, Russia's Defense Ministry said that its forces shot down 93 Ukrainian drones targeting Russian territory overnight, including at least 15 that appeared to head for Moscow. At least 13 more drones were downed on the approach to the capital on Sunday, Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said. One drone struck a residential building in Zelenograd, on the outskirts of Moscow, damaging an apartment, but caused no casualties, he said.

Arizona governor tours wildfire destruction along Grand Canyon's North Rim

By SEJAL GOVINDARAO Associated Press

GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK, Ariz. (AP) — Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs toured the destruction left by a wildfire along the Grand Canyon's North Rim, on Saturday, surveying what she described as devastating damage.

The governor, who has called for an investigation into how the blaze was handled, sought to gather information ahead of meetings with federal officials next week. She looked intently out the window as the Black Hawk helicopter she was riding snaked over the Grand Canyon.

White smoke emerged from the North Rim, and most of the Grand Canyon Lodge was reduced to a bare skeleton, though some of the building appeared intact from overhead. Some surrounding trees were no more than charred toothpicks on the ashen land, and whiffs of smoky air passed through the helicopter.

The wildfire was sparked by a lightning strike July 4. Four days later the National Park Service said it was being allowed to burn as part of a "confine and contain" strategy that the Grand Canyon National Park has leaned on for decades to clear dense vegetation, minimize future risk and make the ecosystem more resilient.

But a week after ignition, blustery winds, hot temperatures and lower humidity quickly intensified the flames, prompting officials to shift to aggressive suppression and order evacuations. The blaze has charred more than 18 square miles (46 square kilometers), and as of Saturday it was 8% contained, according to fire information officer Stefan La-Sky.

No injuries have been reported, but the Dragon Bravo fire on the canyon's less-frequented North Rim destroyed more than 70 structures, including a visitors' center, historic cabins and the nearly century-old Grand Canyon Lodge.

After touching ground, Hobbs visited the incident command post. Lined with trailers and dotted with yurts and tents, the fire camp currently houses more than 800 personnel who have come from various federal, state and local entities and independent contractors to help fire suppression efforts. The camp functions similar to a tiny town.

The governor shook hands with members of the crew in the mess hall and met with officials including those from Grand Canyon National Park, the Department of Interior and the National Park Service as well as the incident commander. She said she was encouraged to hear that mitigation is a priority for the

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federal government.

"This is federal jurisdiction, but fire doesn't know that boundary, and we all have to work together," Hobbs said.

The governor has called for an investigation into why the park service did not immediately put out the flames during the hottest and driest period of summer. Members of the state's congressional delegation also have raised questions.

Hobbs said she is not second-guessing the initial response. She said after the fire is managed, she is seeking answers to what went into the decision-making and whether there were missteps.

The park service has defended its actions.

Hobbs is set to meet this week with leadership in the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior about their decisions in managing the wildfire this upcoming week.

She said in a video statement Wednesday that she has not seen any indication that a lack of federal resources are to blame for the spread of the blaze.

Last month President Donald Trump ordered government officials to consolidate wildland firefighting into a single program, despite warnings from former federal officials that it could be costly and increase the risk of catastrophic blazes.

The North Rim is closed for the rest of the season along with a pair of campgrounds near the Colorado River at the bottom of the canyon.

Congo and rebels have committed to ending war in the east. Here's what to know

By CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Congo and Rwanda-backed rebels have signed a declaration of principles for a permanent ceasefire in eastern Congo, where ethnic tensions and quest for rich minerals have resulted in one of Africa's longest conflicts with thousands killed this year.

The African Union called Saturday's signing, facilitated by Qatar, a "major milestone" in peace efforts. Qatari authorities said it paves the way for "a comprehensive peace that addresses the deep-rooted causes of the conflict" in the Central African nation.

The conflict dates back to the Rwandan genocide

The conflict can be traced to the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide of 1994, when Hutu soldiers and militias killed between 500,000 and 1 million minority Tutsis as well as moderate Hutus and the Indigenous Twa. When Tutsi-led rebels stopped the genocide and ousted the Hutu government, nearly 2 million Hutus fled into neighboring Congo, fearing reprisals.

Rwandan authorities accused the authorities in Kinshasa of sheltering those responsible for the mass killings among the civilian refugees, most of whom had returned when Rwanda first invaded Congo in 1996. But Kigali said the remaining Hutu fighters in eastern Congo are still a threat to Rwanda's Tutsi population, and wants them neutralized.

At least 6 million people have been killed in the conflict since then, mostly characterized by on-and-off fighting but also famines and unchecked disease outbreaks.

Minerals hold key to the conflict

Analysts have said a lot of interests in the conflict in Congo are tied to the mostly untapped minerals in the east, estimated to be worth as much as \$24 trillion by the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The Trump administration has pushed to gain access to the minerals key to much of the world's technology. It is also to counter China, a key player in the region where the U.S. presence and influence have eroded. That is already playing out with KoBold Metals, a U.S. mining company that on Friday announced it has signed an agreement with Congo for "large-scale minerals exploration program" in the east.

Rwanda's interests are also tied to the conflict minerals, although it often says its involvement is to protect its territory and punish those connected to the 1994 genocide.

A team of U.N. experts said in a report in December that Rwanda was benefitting from minerals "fraudu-

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lently" exported from areas under the control of the M23. Rwanda denied this.

Although the M23 has touted itself as a group independent of Rwanda and capable of governing territories under its control, it still relies heavily on Kigali. U.N. experts estimate there are up to 4,000 Rwandan troops in eastern Congo.

Justice remains a major issue

The U.N. and rights groups have accused both sides of committing atrocities and possible war crimes since fighting escalated in January. It includes children being killed in summary executions, the rape and sexual abuse of thousands of children, attacks on hospitals, forced recruitments and disappearance of residents in rebel-held areas.

"We cannot build peace without justice and reparation," Goma resident Amani Muisa said.

Saturday's declaration is supposed to lead to a final peace deal

The declaration of principles was the first direct commitment by both sides since the rebels, supported by neighboring Rwanda, seized two key cities in eastern Congo in a major advance early this year.

The signing sets in motion negotiations for a final peace deal, to be signed no later than Aug. 18. It also reflects provisions of a U.S.-brokered peace deal signed between Congo and Rwanda on June 27.

However, the ink has barely dried on the document signed in Qatar before both sides appeared to contradict each other in interpreting a major highlight of the declaration on whether the rebels will withdraw from seized territories or not.

Indonesian passenger ferry catches fire at sea, killing at least 5

By GRACEY WAKARI Associated Press

MANADO, Indonesia (AP) — A passenger ferry carrying hundreds of people caught fire at sea on Sunday off Sulawesi island in Indonesia, killing at least five people, officials said. More than 280 people were rescued and evacuation efforts were ongoing.

The KM Barcelona 5 was headed to Manado, the capital of North Sulawesi province, from Talaud, an island district in the province when it caught fire in waters near Talise, said Vice Adm. Denih Hendrata, commander of the Indonesian Fleet Command.

He said that three navy ships had been deployed, and 284 passengers and crew members had been evacuated so far. The rescue operation included assistance from local fishermen, who saved some survivors wearing life jackets as they were drifting to nearby islands in the choppy waters.

Rescuers retrieved five bodies, including a pregnant woman.

There were no immediate reports of injuries, and no exact figures of passengers and crew members onboard the ferry.

"We are still focusing on evacuation efforts," Hendrata said, adding that the cause of the fire was being investigated.

Photos and videos released by the National Search and Rescue Agency showed terrified passengers, mostly wearing life jackets, jumping into the sea. Orange flames and black smoke billowed from the burning vessel.

Indonesia is an archipelago of more than 17,000 islands where ferries are a common method of travel. Disasters occur regularly, with weak safety enforcement often blamed.

Residents of Mentawai Islands found several people stranded on July 14 after a speedboat carrying 18 people capsized during a storm the day before, authorities said. All were in good condition.

A ferry sank near Indonesia's resort island of Bali early this month, leaving at least 19 dead and 16 others missing. A two-week search operation involved more than 1,000 rescuers, three navy ships, 15 boats, a helicopter and divers.

Less selection, higher prices: How tariffs are shaping the holiday shopping season

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO and MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — With summer in full swing in the United States, retail executives are sweating a different season. It's less than 22 weeks before Christmas, a time when businesses that make and sell consumer goods usually nail down their holiday orders and prices.

But President Donald Trump's vacillating trade policies, part of his effort to revive the nation's diminished manufacturing base and to reduce the U.S. deficit in exported goods, have complicated those end-of-year plans. Balsam Hill, which sells artificial trees and other decorations online, expects to publish fewer and thinner holiday catalogs because the featured products keep changing with the tariff — import tax — rates the president sets, postpones and revises.

"The uncertainty has led us to spend all our time trying to rejigger what we're ordering, where we're bringing it in, when it's going to get here," Mac Harman, CEO of Balsam Hill parent company Balsam Brands, said. "We don't know which items we're going to have to put in the catalog or not."

Months of confusion over which foreign countries' products may become more expensive to import has left a question mark over the holiday shopping season. U.S. retailers often begin planning for the winter holidays in January and typically finalize the bulk of their orders by the end of June. The seesawing tariffs already have factored into their calculations.

The consequences for consumers? Stores may not have the specific gift items customers want come November and December. Some retail suppliers and buyers scaled back their holiday lines rather than risking a hefty tax bill or expensive imports going unsold. Businesses still are setting prices but say shoppers can expect many things to cost more, though by how much depends partly on whether Trump's latest round of "reciprocal" tariffs kicks in next month.

The lack of clarity has been especially disruptive for the U.S. toy industry, which sources nearly 80% of its products from China. American toy makers usually ramp up production in April, a process delayed until late May this year after the president put a 145% tariff on Chinese goods, according to Greg Ahearn, president and CEO of the Toy Association, an industry trade group.

The U.S. tariff rate may have dropped significantly from its spring high — a truce in the U.S.-China trade war is set to expire on Aug. 12 — but continues to shape the forthcoming holiday period. Manufacturing activity is way down from a year ago for small- and medium-sized U.S. toy companies, Ahearn said.

The late start to factory work in China means holiday toys are only now arriving at U.S. warehouses, industry experts said. A big unknown is whether tariffs will keep stores from replenishing supplies of any breakout hit toys that emerge in September, said James Zahn, editor-in-chief of the trade publication Toy Book.

In the retail world, planning for Christmas in July usually involves mapping out seasonal marketing and promotion strategies. Dean Smith, who co-owns independent toy stores JaZams in Princeton, New Jersey, and Lahaska, Pennsylvania, said he recently spent an hour and a half running through pricing scenarios with a Canadian distributor because the wholesale cost of some products increased by 20%.

Increasing his own prices that much might turn off customers, Smith said, so he explored ways to "maintain a reasonable margin without raising prices beyond what consumers would accept." He ordered a lower cost Crazy Forts building set so he would have the toy on hand and left out the kids' edition of the Anomia card game because he didn't think customers would pay what he would have to charge.

"In the end, I had to eliminate half of the products that I normally buy," Smith said.

Hilary Key, owner of The Toy Chest in Nashville, Indiana, said she tries to get new games and toys in early most years to see which ones she should stock up on for the winter holidays. This year, she abandoned her product testing for fear any delayed orders would incur high import taxes.

Meanwhile, vendors of toys made in China and elsewhere bombarded Key with price increase notices. For example, Schylling, which makes Needoh, Care Bear collectibles and modern versions of nostalgic toys like My Little Pony, increased prices on orders by 20%, according to Key.

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All the price hikes are subject to change if the tariff situation changes again. Key worries her store won't have as compelling a product assortment as she prides herself on carrying.

"My concern is not that I'll have nothing, because I can bring in more books. I can bring in more gifts, or I can bring in just things that are manufactured in other places," she said. "But that doesn't mean I'm going to have the best stock for every developmental age, for every special need."

The retail industry may have to keep taking a whack-a-mole approach to navigating the White House's latest tariff ultimatums and temporary reprieves. Last week, the president again reset the rates on imports from Brazil, the European Union, Mexico, and other major trading partners but said they would not take effect until Aug. 1.

The brief pause should extend the window importers have to bring in seasonal merchandise at the current baseline tariff of 10%. The Port of Los Angeles had the busiest June in its 117-year history after companies raced to secure holiday shipments, and July imports look strong so far, according to Gene Seroka, the port's executive director.

"In my view, we're seeing a peak season push right now to bring in goods ahead of potentially higher tariffs later this summer," Seroka said Monday.

The pace of port activity so far this year reflects a "tariff whipsaw effect" — imports slowing when tariffs kick in and rebounding when they're paused, he said. "For us consumers, lower inventory levels, fewer selections and higher prices are likely as we head into the holidays."

Smith, who co-owns the two JaZams stores with his partner, Joanne Farrugia, said they started placing holiday orders two months earlier than usual for "certain items that we felt were essential for us to have at particular pricing." They doubled their warehouse space to store the stockpile. But some shoppers are trying to get ahead of higher prices just like businesses are, he said.

He's noticed customers snapping up items that will likely be popular during the holidays, like Jellycat plush toys and large stuffed unicorns and dogs. Any sales are welcome, but Smith and Farrugia are wary of having to restock at a higher cost.

"We're just trying to be as friendly as we can to the consumer and still have a product portfolio or profile that is gonna meet the needs of all of our various customers, which is getting more and more challenging by the day," Smith said.

Balsam Brands' Harman said he's had to resign himself to not having as robust a selection of ornaments and frosted trees to sell as in years' past. Soon, it will be too late to import meaningful additions to his range of products.

"Our purpose as a company is to create joy together, and we're going to do our very best to do that this year," Harman said. "We're just not going to have a bunch of the items that consumers want this year, and that's not a position we want to be in."

Texas Republicans aim to redraw House districts at Trump's urging, but there's a risk

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and NADIA LATHAN Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — U.S. Rep. Vicente Gonzalez, a Texas Democrat who represents a slice of the Rio Grande Valley along the border with Mexico, won his last congressional election by just over 5,000 votes.

That makes him a tempting target for Republicans, who are poised to redraw the state's congressional maps this coming week and devise five new winnable seats for the GOP that would help the party avoid losing House control in the 2026 elections. Adjusting the lines of Gonzalez's district to bring in a few thousand more Republican voters, while shifting some Democratic ones out, could flip his seat.

Gonzalez said he is not worried. Those Democratic voters will have to end up in one of the Republican districts that flank Gonzalez's current one, making those districts more competitive — possibly enough so it could flip the seats to Democrats.

"Get ready for some pickup opportunities," Gonzalez said, adding that his party is already recruiting challengers to Republicans whose districts they expect to be destabilized by the process. "We're talking

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to some veterans, we're talking to some former law enforcement."

Texas has 38 seats in the House. Republicans now hold 25 and Democrats 12, with one seat vacant after Democrat Sylvester Turner, a former Houston mayor, died in March.

Gonzalez's district — and what happens to the neighboring GOP-held ones — is at the crux of President Donald Trump's high-risk, high-reward push to get Texas Republicans to redraw their political map. Trump is seeking to avoid the traditional midterm letdown that most incumbent presidents endure and hold onto the House, which the GOP narrowly controls.

Trump's push comes as there are numerous political danger signs for his presidency, both in the recent turmoil over his administration's handling of the Jeffrey Epstein case and in new polling. Surveys from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research show most U.S. adults think his policies have not helped them and that his tax cut and spending bill will help the wealthy.

Republicans risk putting their own seats in jeopardy

The fear of accidentally creating unsafe seats is one reason Texas Republicans drew their lines cautiously in 2021, when the constitutionally mandated redistricting process kicked off in all 50 states. Mapmakers — in most states, it's the party that controls the legislature — must adjust congressional and state legislative lines after every 10-year census to ensure that districts have about the same number of residents.

That is a golden opportunity for one party to rig the map against the other, a tactic known as gerrymandering. But there is a term, too, for so aggressively redrawing a map that it puts that party's own seats at risk: a "dummymander."

The Texas GOP knows the risk. In the 2010s, the Republican-controlled Legislature drew political lines that helped pad the GOP's House majority. That lasted until 2018, when a backlash against Trump in his first term led Democrats to flip two seats in Texas that Republicans had thought safe.

In 2021, with Republicans still comfortably in charge of the Texas Statehouse, the party was cautious, opting for a map that mainly shored up their incumbents rather than targeted Democrats.

Still, plenty of Republicans believe their Texas counterparts can safely go on offense.

"Smart map-drawing can yield pickup opportunities while not putting our incumbents in jeopardy," said Adam Kincaid, executive director of the National Republican Redistricting Trust, which helps coordinate mapmaking for the party nationally.

Democrats contemplate a walkout

Republican Gov. Greg Abbott called a special session of the Legislature, which starts Monday, to comply with Trump's request to redraw the congressional maps and to address the flooding in Texas Hill Country that killed at least 135 people this month.

Democratic state lawmakers are talking about staying away from the Capitol to deny the Legislature the minimum number needed to convene. Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton posted that any Democrats who did that should be arrested.

Lawmakers can be fined up to \$500 a day for breaking a quorum after the House changed its rules when Democrats initiated a walkout in 2021. Despite the new penalties, state Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer, who led the walkout in 2021, left open the possibility of another.

"I don't think anybody should underestimate the will of Texas Democrats," he said.

Texas is not the only Republican state engaged in mid-decade redistricting. After staving off a ballot measure to expand the power of a mapmaking commission last election, Ohio Republicans hope to redraw their congressional map from a 10-5 one favoring the GOP to one as lopsided as 13-2, in a state Trump won last year with 55% of the vote.

GOP sees momentum after 2024 presidential election

Some Democratic leaders have suggested that states where their party is in control should counter the expected redraw in Texas. "We have to be absolutely ruthless about getting back in power," former Texas Rep. Beto O'Rourke said Sunday on CNN.

But Democrats have fewer options. More of the states the party controls do not allow elected partisans to draw maps and entrust independent commissions to draw fair lines.

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Among them is California, where Gov. Gavin Newsom has floated the long shot idea of working around the state's commission.

The few Democratic-controlled states that do allow elected officials to draw the lines, such as Illinois, have already seen Democrats max out their advantages.

Trump and his allies have been rallying Texas Republicans to ignore whatever fears they may and to go big.

On Tuesday, the president posted on his social media site a reminder of his record in the state last November: "Won by one and a half million Votes, and almost 14%. Also, won all of the Border Counties along Mexico, something which has never happened before. I keep hearing about Texas 'going Blue,' but it is just another Democrat LIE."

Texas has long been eyed as a state trending Democratic because of its growing nonwhite population. But those communities swung right last year and helped Trump expand his margin to 14 percentage points, a significant improvement on his 6-point win in 2020.

Michael Li, a Texas native and longtime watcher of the state at the Brennan Center for Justice in New York, said there's no way to know whether that trend will continue in next year's elections or whether the state will return to its blue-trending ways.

"Anyone who can tell you what the politics of Texas looks like for the balance of the decade has a better crystal ball than I do," Li said.

Aggressive redistricting also carries legal risks

One region of the state where Republican gains have been steady is the Rio Grande Valley, which runs from the Gulf of Mexico along much of the state's southern border. The heavily Hispanic region, where many Border Patrol officers live, has rallied around Trump's tough-on-immigration, populist message.

As a result, Gonzalez and the area's other Democratic congressman, Henry Cuellar, have seen their reelection campaigns get steadily tighter. They are widely speculated to be the two top targets of the new map.

The GOP is expected to look to the state's three biggest cities to find its other Democratic targets. If mapmakers scatter Democratic voters from districts in the Houston, Dallas and Austin areas, they could get to five additional seats.

But in doing so, Republicans face a legal risk on top of their electoral one: that they break up districts required by the Voting Rights Act to have a critical amount of certain minority groups. The goal of the federal law is to enable those communities to elect representatives of their choosing.

The Texas GOP already is facing a lawsuit from civil rights groups alleging its initial 2021 map did this. If this year's redistricting is too aggressive, it could trigger a second complaint.

"It's politically and legally risky," Li said of the redistricting strategy. "It's throwing caution to the winds."

Forest fire haze from Indonesia detected in Malaysia

PEKANBARU, Indonesia (AP) — Haze from forest and peatland fires in some parts of Indonesia's Sumatra island was detected in Malaysia on Sunday, officials said.

Forest and peat fires are an annual problem in Indonesia that strain relations with neighboring countries. In recent years, smoke from the fires has blanketed parts of Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and southern Thailand.

A number of areas in Indonesia's Riau province were still covered by thick haze, although choking smoke had not been registered in the provincial capital of Pekanbaru, said Riau deputy police chief Adrianto Jossy Kusumo.

He said more than 140 forest and peatland fires were reported in the province. Rokan Hilir and Rokan Hulu districts were the worst hit areas by fires that burned about 46 hectares in the two districts, resulting in heavy haze pollution across the area that reduced visibility to as low as one kilometer (half a mile).

The figure for fires was down from 294 hotspots on Saturday after authorities managed to extinguish the fire in several places, Kusumo said.

He said haze has caused the air quality in Riau to worsen, "but overall it has not disrupted people's lives

in other areas of the province.”

However, based on satellite imagery from the Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency in Pekanbaru, haze was detected moving northeastward and reaching Kemang Bay in Malaysia’s Negeri Sembilan state, said a forecaster on duty, Gita Dewi.

“It showed the haze was moving by the wind to cross Malaysia,” Dewi said. She said hotspots were also detected in other parts of West Sumatra and North Sumatra provinces, but Riau recorded the highest number of hotspots on the island of Sumatra.

Forest fires on Sumatra and Borneo islands often break out in the region during dry spells, smothering parts of nearby Singapore and Malaysia in haze.

In 2023, Indonesia which often sends apologies to its neighbors over the haze, denied that its fires were causing blankets of haze in Malaysia.

The Indonesian government usually blames plantation owners and traditional farmers for illegally setting the fires for land-clearing.

The 2026 Senate map is tough for Democrats, but Republicans have their own headaches

By THOMAS BEAUMONT and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans are encountering early headaches in Senate races viewed as pivotal to maintaining the party’s majority in next year’s midterm elections, with recruitment failures, open primaries, infighting and a president who has been sitting on the sidelines.

Democrats still face an uphill battle. They need to net four seats to retake the majority, and most of the 2026 contests are in states that Republican President Donald Trump easily won in November.

But Democrats see reasons for hope in Republicans’ challenges. They include a nasty primary in Texas that could jeopardize a seat Republicans have held for decades. In North Carolina and Georgia, the party lacks a clear field of candidates. Trump’s influence dials up the uncertainty in several states as he decides whether to flex his influential endorsement to stave off intraparty fights.

Republicans stress that it remains early in the cycle and say there is plenty of time left for candidates to establish themselves and Trump to wade in.

A look at what is happening in some key Senate races:

An ugly Texas brawl

Democrats have long dreamed of winning statewide office in this ruby red state. Could a nasty GOP primary be their ticket?

National Republicans and Senate strategists are worried that state Attorney General Ken Paxton, who is facing a bevy of personal and ethical questions, could beat Sen. John Cornyn for the nomination.

They fear Paxton would be a disastrous general election candidate, forcing Republicans to invest tens of millions of dollars they would rather spend elsewhere.

But Cornyn has had a cool relationship with Trump over the years, while Paxton long has been a loyal Trump ally. And Paxton raised more than three times as much as Cornyn in the second quarter, \$2.9 million compared with \$804,000, according to Federal Elections Commission reports.

Rep. Wesley Hunt of Texas is also weighing a run.

Will Trump be persuaded to endorse or will he choose to steer clear?

Will North Carolina have a Trump on the ballot?

The surprise retirement announcement by two-term Sen. Thom Tillis has set off a frenzied search for a replacement in a state widely seen as Democrats’ top pickup opportunity. He had repeatedly clashed with Trump, including over Medicaid changes in the tax cut bill, leading the president to threaten to back a primary challenger.

All eyes are now on Lara Trump, the president’s daughter-in-law, who is mulling whether to run in her home state as other potential candidates stand by.

Having a Trump on the ballot could boost a party that has struggled to motivate its most fervent base

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when Donald Trump is not running. But Lara Trump currently lives in Florida and has so far sounded muted on the prospect.

Others possible contenders include RNC chair Michael Whatley, who led North Carolina's GOP before taking the national job, and first-term Reps. Pat Harrigan and Brad Knott.

Democrats are waiting on a decision from former two-term Gov. Roy Cooper, seen as a formidable candidate by both parties in a state Trump carried by just 3.2 percentage points last year.

In Georgia, a pickup opportunity with no candidate yet

Republicans see Georgia and the seat held by Democrat Jon Ossoff as one of their top pickup opportunities next year. But the party remains in search of a well-known challenger after failing to persuade term-limited Gov. Brian Kemp to run.

A growing potential field includes Reps. Buddy Carter, Mike Collins and Rich McCormick, Insurance Commissioner John King and Derek Dooley, a former University of Tennessee football coach.

Ossoff took in more than \$10 million in the second quarter of the year, according to FEC filings, after raising \$11 million from January through March. He ended June with more than \$15.5 million cash on hand.

Michigan GOP waits on Trump

Republicans hope the retirement of Democratic Sen. Gary Peters and a crowded, expensive Democratic primary, will help them capture a seat that has eluded them for more than three decades. Here, too, all eyes are on Trump.

Republicans are rallying around former Rep. Mike Rogers, who came within 20,000 votes in 2024 of ending that losing streak. But other Republicans could complicate things. Rep. Bill Huizenga has said he is waiting for guidance from the president on whether he should run against Rogers.

Democrats have their own messy primary, with state Sen. Mallory McMorrow up against Rep. Haley Stevens, state Rep. Joe Tate, and former Wayne County Health Director Abdul El-Sayed.

They were pleased to see that, even without any declared challengers, Rogers' main campaign account raised just \$745,000 during the second fundraising quarter, lagging behind both Huizenga and several Democrats. (He brought in another nearly \$779,000 through a separate joint fundraising committee.) McMorrow, by comparison, raised more than \$2.1 million.

In Louisiana, another Trump antagonist faces voters

Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy has faced scrutiny from his party in Louisiana, in no small part for his 2021 vote to convict Trump after his second impeachment. Will Trump decide to seek retribution against the vulnerable two-term senator or ultimately back him?

Though Cassidy already faces two primary challengers, Louisiana is a reliably Republican state, which Trump won last year by 22 percentage points. Democrats are hoping a strong contender — potentially former Gov. John Bel Edwards, who has attracted Republican votes in the past — might mount a competitive challenge.

Republicans are awaiting word on whether Rep. Julia Letlow will run. In May, Gov. Jeff Landry and Trump privately discussed the two-term congresswoman entering the race.

The 2026 Senate map is tough for Democrats, but Republicans have their own headaches

By THOMAS BEAUMONT and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

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Democrats still face an uphill battle. They need to net four seats to retake the majority, and most of the 2026 contests are in states that Republican President Donald Trump easily won last November.

But Democrats see reasons for hope in Republicans' challenges. They include a nasty primary in Texas that could jeopardize a seat Republicans have held for decades. In North Carolina and Georgia, the GOP still lacks a clear field of candidates. Trump's influence dials up the uncertainty as he decides whether to

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flex his influential endorsement to stave off intraparty fights.

Republicans stress that it remains early in the election cycle and say there is still plenty of time for candidates to establish themselves and Trump to wade in. The president, said White House political director James Blair, has been working closely with Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D.

"I won't get ahead of the president but look, him and leader Thune have been very aligned. I expect them to be aligned and work closely," he said.

Trump's timing, allies say, also reflects the far more disciplined approach by him and his political operation, which are determined for Republicans to gain seats in both the Senate and the House.

Here's what's happening in some key Senate races:

An ugly Texas brawl

Democrats have long dreamed of winning statewide office in this ruby red state. Could a nasty GOP primary be their ticket?

National Republicans and GOP Senate strategists are ringing alarm bells amid concerns that state Attorney General Ken Paxton, who is facing a bevy of personal and ethical questions, could prevail over Sen. John Cornyn for the nomination.

They fear Paxton would be a disastrous general election candidate, forcing Republicans to invest tens of millions of dollars they believe would be better spent in other states.

Texans for a Conservative Majority, a super political action committee supporting Cornyn, a onetime Trump critic, began airing television ads this past week promoting his support for Trump's package of tax breaks and spending cuts.

Don't expect the upbeat tone from the pro-Cornyn super PAC to hold long. Paxton was acquitted after a Republican-led impeachment trial in 2023 over allegations of bribery and abuse of office, which also exposed an extramarital affair. His wife, Angela, filed for divorce on July 10, referring to "recent discoveries" in announcing her decision to end her marriage of 38 years "on biblical grounds."

"Ken Paxton has embarrassed himself, his family, and we look forward to exposing just how bad he's embarrassed our state in the coming months," said Aaron Whitehead, the super PAC's executive director. Trump adviser Chris LaCivita, who comanaged Trump's 2024 campaign, is advising the group.

But Cornyn has had a cool relationship with Trump over the years, while Paxton is a longtime Trump ally. And Paxton raised more than three times as much as Cornyn in the second quarter, \$2.9 million compared with \$804,000, according to Federal Elections Commission reports.

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All eyes are now on Lara Trump, the president's daughter-in-law, who is mulling whether to run in her home state as other potential candidates stand by.

A familiar national Republican face as co-chair of the Republican National Committee during Trump's 2024 campaign, Lara Trump is now a Fox News Channel host. She also had been a visible surrogate during previous campaigns, often promoting her North Carolina roots and the fact that she named her daughter Carolina.

Having a Trump on the ballot could boost a party that has struggled to motivate its most fervent base when Donald Trump is not running. But Lara Trump currently lives in Florida and has so far sounded muted on the prospect of a Senate run.

Other potential contenders include RNC chair Michael Whatley, who led North Carolina's GOP before taking the national reins and is considered a strong fundraiser and Trump loyalist, and first-term Reps. Pat Harrigan and Brad Knott. While Lara Trump and Whatley are better known nationally, Harrigan is a West Point graduate and Knott is a former federal prosecutor.

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Democrats are waiting on a decision from former two-term Gov. Roy Cooper, who is seen as a formidable candidate by both parties in a state Trump carried by just 3.2 percentage points last year. Former Rep. Wiley Nickel has entered the race, but it's unclear what he would do if Cooper ran.

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Republicans see Georgia and the seat held by Democrat Jon Ossoff as one of their best pickup opportunities. But the party remains in search of a well-known challenger after failing to persuade term-limited Gov. Brian Kemp to run.

A growing potential field includes Reps. Buddy Carter, Mike Collins and Rich McCormick, Insurance Commissioner John King and Derek Dooley, a former University of Tennessee football coach. The president is still meeting with possible candidates and is expected by many to wait to weigh in until his team has fully screened them and assessed their chances and after his budget priorities make their way through Congress.

Ossoff took in more than \$10 million in the second quarter of the year, according to federal filings, after raising \$11 million from January through March. He ended June with more than \$15.5 million cash on hand.

That money will matter in what is sure to be an expensive general election. The Senate races in 2020, when Ossoff and Raphael Warnock narrowly won and flipped control to Democrats, cost more than \$900 million combined.

Michigan GOP waits on Trump

Republicans hope the retirement of Democratic Sen. Gary Peters and a crowded, expensive Democratic primary will help them capture a seat that has eluded them for more than three decades. Here, too, all eyes are on Trump.

Republicans are rallying around former Rep. Mike Rogers, who came within 20,000 votes in 2024 against then-Rep. Elissa Slotkin and had Trump's endorsement. Rogers now appears to have momentum behind him, with the support of Thune, the National Republican Senatorial Committee and former Trump campaign veterans LaCivita and Tony Fabrizio.

But other Republicans could complicate things. Rep. Bill Huizenga has said he is waiting for guidance from the president on whether he should run.

"When people are asking why haven't you announced or what are you going to do, it's like, look, I want to get the man's input, all right?" Huizenga told reporters last month. A spokesperson for Huizenga added that the congressman has spoken to Trump on the phone multiple times and has yet to be told not to run.

Still, White House officials have on more than one occasion encouraged Huizenga to stay in the House, according to one person familiar with the conversations who was not authorized to publicly discuss the private discussions and spoke only on condition of anonymity.

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Republicans are awaiting word on whether Rep. Julia Letlow will run. In May, Gov. Jeff Landry and Trump privately discussed the two-term congresswoman entering the race.

Letlow and Landry appeared together at a congressional fundraiser for her in Lafayette, outside her

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northeast Louisiana district, on June 30, fueling speculation about her plans.

The governor's discussion with Trump of a new challenger to Cassidy reflects the Trump base's unease with Cassidy, not simply over the impeachment vote, but also Cassidy's concerns about installing Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as the nation's health secretary. Cassidy ultimately backed Kennedy, a move some saw as an effort to ease tensions.

Among Cassidy's Republican challengers so far are state Treasurer John Fleming and state Sen. Blake Miguez. Letlow, serving in the seat her husband held before he died of COVID-19, is considered a rising star in the Louisiana GOP.

A wavering incumbent in Iowa

Two-term Republican Sen. Joni Ernst has not said whether she plans to seek a third term.

Ernst would be expected to win in the state Trump carried by 13 percentage points last year. But she has come under some criticism from Iowa Republicans, including for saying she needed to hear more from Trump's pick for defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, before committing to support his nomination amid allegations of sexual assault that Hegseth denied.

The senator, a combat veteran and sexual assault survivor, eventually voted to confirm him.

Though a final decision awaits, Ernst has named a 2026 campaign manager and has scheduled her annual Iowa fundraiser for October.

Heavy rains in South Korea leave 17 dead and 11 others missing

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Torrential rains that slammed South Korea for five days have left 17 people dead and 11 others missing, the government said Sunday.

One person was killed on Sunday after their house collapsed during heavy rain and another person was found dead after being swept away by a swollen stream in Gapyeong, a town northeast of Seoul, the Interior and Safety Ministry said.

The ministry said 10 people were discovered dead and four others were reported missing in the southern town of Sacheon over the weekend after heavy downpours caused landslides, house collapses and flash floods there.

A ministry report said that one person died in the southern city of Gwangju. It said that seven others remain missing in Gwangju, Gapyeong and elsewhere.

Earlier last week, a person was also killed when their car was buried by soil and concrete after a retaining wall of an overpass collapsed in Osan, just south of Seoul, during heavy rain. Three others were found dead in a submerged car, a swollen stream and a flooded basement in southern South Chungcheong province.

As of 4 p.m. on Sunday, about 2,730 people remain evacuated from their homes, the ministry report said. The rain stopped in most of South Korea on Sunday, and heavy rain alerts have been subsequently lifted throughout the country, ministry officials said.

Since Wednesday, southern regions have received up to about 600-800 millimeters (24-31 inches) of rain, according to the ministry report.

President Lee Jae Myung expressed deep sympathy to those who lost their loved ones and suffered financial damage due to the heavy downpours. Lee said the government will push to designate areas hit hard by the downpours as special disaster zones. The designation would provide them with greater financial and other recovery support from the government.

3 people are still missing from deadly July 4 floods in Texas county, down from nearly 100

KERRVILLE, Texas (AP) — Just three people remain missing — down from nearly 100 at last count — since the Texas Hill Country was pounded by massive flooding on July 4, officials said Saturday.

Officials praised rescuers for the sharp reduction in the number of people on the missing list: Just days after the catastrophic flooding, more than 160 people were said to be unaccounted for in Kerr County alone.

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"This remarkable progress reflects countless hours of coordinated search and rescue operations, careful investigative work, and an unwavering commitment to bringing clarity and hope to families during an unimaginably difficult time," Kerrville City Manager Dalton Rice said in a statement.

The death toll in Kerr County, 107, held steady for much of this week even as the intensive search continued.

The flash floods killed at least 135 people in Texas over the holiday weekend, with most deaths along the Guadalupe River in Kerr County, about 60 miles (100 kilometers) northwest of San Antonio.

Just before daybreak on July 4, the destructive, fast-moving waters rose 26 feet (8 meters) on the Guadalupe, washing away homes and vehicles.

The floods laid waste to the Hill Country, a popular tourist destination where campers seek out spots along the river amid the rolling landscape. It is naturally prone to flash flooding because its dry, dirt-packed soil cannot soak up heavy rain.

Vacation cabins, youth camps campgrounds fill the riverbanks and hills of Kerr County, including Camp Mystic, a century-old Christian summer camp for girls. Located in a low-lying area of a region known as "flash flood alley," Camp Mystic lost at least 27 campers and counselors.

The flooding was far more severe than the 100-year event envisioned by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, experts said, and it moved so quickly in the middle of the night that it caught many off guard in a county that lacked a warning system.

In Kerrville, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) west of Austin, local officials have come under scrutiny over whether residents were adequately warned about the rising waters.

President Donald Trump and Texas Gov. Greg Abbott have pushed back aggressively against questions about how well local authorities responded to forecasts of heavy rain and the first reports of flash flooding.

Crews have been searching for victims using helicopters, boats and drones. Earlier efforts were hampered by rain forecasts, leading some crews to hold off or stop because of worries about more flooding.

Volunteers flock to immigration courts to support migrants arrested in the hallways

By MARTHA BELLISLE, CEDAR ATTANASIO and COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — After a Seattle immigration judge dismissed the deportation case against a Colombian man — exposing him to expedited removal — three people sat with him in the back of the courtroom, taking his car keys for safe-keeping, helping him memorize phone numbers and gathering the names of family members who needed to be notified.

When Judge Brett Parchert asked why they were doing that in court, the volunteers said Immigration and Custom Enforcement officers were outside the door, waiting to take the man into custody, so this was their only chance to help him get his things in order. "ICE is in the waiting room?" the judge asked.

As the mass deportation campaign of President Donald Trump focuses on cities and states led by Democrats and unleashes fear among asylum-seekers and immigrants, their legal defenders sued this week, seeking class-action protections against the arrests outside immigration court hearings. Meanwhile, these volunteers are taking action.

A diverse group — faith leaders, college students, grandmothers, retired lawyers and professors — has been showing up at immigration courts across the nation to escort immigrants at risk of being detained for deportation by masked ICE officials. They're giving families moral and logistical support, and bearing witness as the people are taken away.

The Northwest Immigrant Rights Project was inundated by so many community members wanting to help that they made a volunteer training video, created "Know Your Rights" sheets in several languages and started a Google sheet where people sign up for shifts, said Stephanie Gai, a staff attorney with the Seattle-based legal services non-profit.

"We could not do it without them," Gai said. "Some volunteers request time off work so they can come in and help."

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Robby Rohr, a retired non-profit director said she volunteers regularly.

"Being here makes people feel they are remembered and recognized," she said "It's such a bureaucratic and confusing process. We try to help them through it."

Recording videos of detentions to post online online

Volunteers and legal aid groups have long provided free legal orientation in immigration court but the arrests have posed new challenges. Since May, the government has been asking judges to dismiss deportation cases.

Once the judge agrees, ICE officials arrest them in the hallways and put them in fast-track deportation proceedings, no matter which legal immigration pathway they may have been pursuing. Once in custody, it's often harder to find or afford a lawyer. Immigration judges are executive branch employees, and while some have resisted Homeland Security lawyers' dismissal orders in some cases, many are granted.

Masked ICE agents grabbed the Colombian man and led him into the hallway. A volunteer took his backpack to give to his family as he was taken away. Other cases on the day's docket involved immigrants who didn't show up. Parchert granted "removal in absentia" orders, enabling ICE to arrest them later.

When asked about these arrests and the volunteers at immigration courts, a senior spokesperson with the Department of Homeland Security said ICE is once again implementing the rule of law by reversing "Biden's catch and release policy that allowed millions of unvetted illegal aliens to be let loose on American streets."

Some volunteers have recorded arrests in courtroom hallways, traumatic scenes that are proliferating online. How many similar scenes are happening nationwide remains unclear. The Executive Office for Immigration Review has not released numbers of cases dismissed or arrests made at or near immigration courts.

While most volunteers have done this work without incident, some have been arrested for interfering with ICE agents. New York City Comptroller and Democratic mayoral candidate Brad Lander was arrested after locking arms with a person in a failed attempt to prevent his detention. Lander's wife, attorney Meg Barnette, had just joined him in walking migrants from a courtroom to the elevator.

Helping families find their relatives as they disappear

The volunteers' act of witnessing has proven to be important as people disappear into a detention system that can seem chaotic, leaving families without any information about their whereabouts for days on end.

In a waiting room serving New York City immigration courtrooms, a Spanish-speaking woman with long dark curly hair was sitting anxiously with her daughter after she and her husband had separate hearings. Now he was nowhere to be found.

The Rev. Fabián Arias, a volunteer court observer, said the woman whose first name is Alva approached him asking "Where is my husband?" She showed him his photo.

"ICE detained him," Arias told her, and tried to comfort her as she trembled, later welling up with tears. A judge had not dismissed the husband's case, giving him until October to find a lawyer. But that didn't stop ICE agents from handcuffing him and taking him away as soon as he stepped out of court. The news sparked an outcry by immigration advocates, city officials and a congressman. At a news conference, she gave only her first name and asked that her daughter's be withheld.

Brianna Garcia, a college student in El Paso, Texas, said she's been attending immigration court hearings for weeks where she informs people of their rights and then records ICE agents taking people into custody.

"We escort people so they're not harassed and help people memorize important phone numbers, since their belongings are confiscated by ICE," she said.

Paris Thomas began volunteering at the Denver immigration court after hearing about the effort through a network of churches. Wearing a straw hat, he recently waited in the midday heat for people to arrive for afternoon hearings.

Thomas handed people a small paper flyer listing their rights in Spanish on one side and English on the other. One man walking with a woman told him "thank you. Thank you." Another man gave him a hug.

Denver volunteer Don Marsh said they offer to walk people to their cars after court appearances, so they can contact attorneys and family if ICE arrests them.

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Marsh said he's never done anything like this before, but wants to do something to preserve the nation's "rule of law" now that unidentifiable government agents are "snatching" people off the streets. "If we're not all safe, no one's safe," he said.

Bulgarian authorities seize a large amount of cocaine hidden in a van

SOFIA, Bulgaria (AP) — Bulgarian border authorities said Sunday they have seized one of the largest hauls of cocaine from a Belgian-plated van en route to Turkey.

According to customs officials, the nearly 206 kilograms (453 pounds) of cocaine was the largest seizure at Bulgaria's land border. A vehicle inspection led to the discovery of the drugs valued at 20 million euros (\$22 million). The drugs were hidden in 179 sealed bags stashed among personal belongings in five suitcases.

Haskovo District Prosecutor Ivan Stoyanov identified the three people attempting to cross the border into Turkey as a 40-year-old diplomat from the Democratic Republic of Congo accredited in Belgium, a 54-year-old Belgian citizen and a 43-year-old Bulgarian driver.

Stoyanov told reporters that they could face up to 20 years in prison if convicted on drug trafficking charges.

An investigation has been launched together with partner organizations in other EU countries into the origins of the cocaine and its final recipients.

Bulgaria, which has taken steps in recent years against drug trafficking, is considered a transit point on the Balkan drug-trafficking route, which is used to supply Western Europe with heroin from Asia and the Middle East, and with cocaine from Latin America.

Typhoon Wipha topples trees and causes major flight disruptions in Hong Kong and southern China

HONG KONG (AP) — Typhoon Wipha toppled trees and caused major flight disruptions Sunday in Hong Kong and at some nearby airports in China as it moved west off the southern coast of the country.

Airports in Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and the casino hub of Macao canceled or postponed flights for most of the day, according to their websites. Hong Kong grounded at least 400 flights, affecting around 80,000 passengers, broadcaster RTHK said. Some high-speed train services were also suspended.

The typhoon stayed just offshore until about 6 p.m., when it made landfall in a coastal area of Taishan city in Guangdong province, China's National Meteorological Center said. It then weakened to a severe tropical storm with maximum sustained winds of 108 kph (67 mph).

Earlier Sunday, the Hong Kong Observatory issued a hurricane signal No. 10, its highest warning. The eye of the storm passed just south of the city around midday with maximum sustained winds of 140 kph (87 mph), the observatory said.

The high winds brought down trees in Zhuhai and other cities on China's southern coast.

In Hong Kong, vehicles weaved around branches strewn on the streets. The government said that it had received more than 450 reports of fallen trees and that 26 people had sought medical treatment at public hospitals. A statement didn't provide details on any injuries.

More than 250 people had sought refuge in public shelters, the statement said. Hong Kong Disneyland and other amusement parks were closed.

The storm, which reached typhoon strength overnight, later passed off Macao and was forecast to make landfall on China's coast late Sunday. It is expected to reach Vietnam later this week.

Wipha, which is a Thai name, passed over the Philippines at tropical storm strength and drenched parts of Taiwan on Saturday. Names for typhoons in the western Pacific are chosen by the countries in the region.

In the Philippines, the storm intensified seasonal monsoon rains, leaving at least one villager dead in floodwaters in northern Cagayan province.

More than 370,000 people have been affected by days of stormy weather, including 43,000 who fled

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to government-run emergency shelters or homes of relatives because of flooding, landslides and fierce winds. More than 400 houses were damaged, officials said.

Elsewhere in Asia, five days of torrential rain in South Korea has left 14 people dead and 12 others missing, the government said Sunday.

Today in History: July 21, verdict reached in Scopes 'Monkey Trial'

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, July 21, the 202nd day of 2025. There are 163 days left in the year.

Today in History:

On July 21, 1925, the so-called 'Monkey Trial' ended in Dayton, Tennessee, with John T. Scopes found guilty of violating state law for teaching Darwin's Theory of Evolution. (The conviction was later overturned.)

Also on this date:

In 1861, during the Civil War, the first Battle of Bull Run was fought at Manassas, Virginia, resulting in a Confederate victory.

In 1944, American forces landed on Guam during World War II, capturing it from the Japanese some three weeks later.

In 1954, the Geneva Conference concluded with accords dividing Vietnam into northern and southern entities.

In 1969, Apollo 11 astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin blasted off from the moon aboard the ascent stage of the lunar module for docking with the command module.

In 1970, construction of the Aswan High Dam in Egypt was completed.

In 1972, the Irish Republican Army carried out 22 bombings in Belfast, Northern Ireland, killing nine people and injuring 130 in what became known as "Bloody Friday."

In 2002, Ernie Els won the British Open in the first sudden-death finish in the 142-year history of the tournament.

In 2008, former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic (RA'-doh-van KA'-ra-jich), one of the world's top war crimes fugitives, was arrested in a Belgrade suburb by Serbian security forces. (He was sentenced by a U.N. court in 2019 to life imprisonment after being convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.)

In 2011, the 30-year-old space shuttle program ends as Atlantis landed at Cape Canaveral, Florida, after the 135th shuttle flight.

In 2012, Erden Eruc became the first person to complete a solo, human-powered circumnavigation of the globe.

In 2023, the "Barbenheimer" buzz reached its peak as the films "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" opened in theaters; the critical and public acclaim for both films led to the fourth-largest weekend box office of all time.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Yusuf Islam (also known as Cat Stevens) is 77. Cartoonist Garry Trudeau is 77. Author Michael Connelly is 69. Comedian Jon Lovitz is 68. Retired soccer player Brandi Chastain is 57. Rock-soul singer Michael Fitzpatrick (Fitz and the Tantrums) is 55. Actor/singer Charlotte Gainsbourg is 54. Actor Justin Bartha is 47. Actor Josh Hartnett is 47. Reggae singer Damian Marley is 47. Basketball Hall of Famer Tamika Catchings is 46. Former MLB All-Star pitcher CC Sabathia (suh-BATH'-ee-uh) is 45. Singer Blake Lewis ("American Idol") is 44. Latin singer Romeo Santos is 44. Actor Betty Gilpin is 39. Actor Juno Temple is 36. Actor Rory Culkin is 36.